

LEADER'S GUIDE
FOR
*Mountains
of the Moon*

STORIES
ABOUT
SOCIAL
JUSTICE

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Introduction: Using the Stories

When young people look at issues such as homelessness, hunger, and prejudice, they can feel overwhelmed, afraid, and even hopeless. Often they don't know where to begin, and it is all too easy for them (and for us) to slip into cynicism or apathy.

You, as teacher or catechist, will be helping young people grapple with these issues in the context of a class or group studying Christian justice. *Mountains of the Moon: Stories About Social Justice* is meant to help you in that process. These stories present the big issues in microcosm. They deliver a personal message and, it is hoped, will elicit a personal response. The collection focuses on themes of chapters in the high school religion textbook *Christian Justice: Sharing God's Goodness*, for eleventh and twelfth graders, and this leader's guide refers to pages in that text. The stories can also be appreciated independently of the text as reflection and discussion starters.

Of course the stories cannot possibly cover all the issues raised in each chapter of *Christian Justice*, but they can connect students to the individual choices they make every day, to see how they can live the abundant life that Jesus promises.

I recommend that you *not* simply read to the class or group the questions in this guide. Rather, use the questions to prepare for leading the discussion, but allow it to flow organically. Begin with open-ended questions, such as these:

- What message did this story have for you?
- What did you like or dislike about the characters?
- What would you do differently in this situation?
- Have you had an experience similar to the one in the story?

The questions in this guide are by no means exhaustive. Feel free to take the discussion in another direction, especially because you know your students and may want to address issues specific to them. Occasionally, commentary for your

benefit is provided in brackets and italics, but it is not meant to restrict answers. This guide is intended to be a springboard for discussion, journal writing, personal sharing, group activities, and even action.

The guide for each story, as you will see, mentions the faith-based principles of justice described on page 27 of the student text, to help focus the discussion and illuminate the subject. In addition, three relevant scriptural passages are cited to highlight different aspects of each story. If you read all three passages ahead of time, you will be able to use one or more of these references at appropriate points in the discussion.

These short stories raise many more questions than they answer. The endings of some stories are ambiguous, leaving the situation hanging. Many of the questions in the guide do not have easy answers—if they have any answers at all. As the group leader, how should you handle this? Bravely guide your group right into the thick of the questions. Help your students think critically about Christian justice and how it connects to their individual lives. You will not answer all their questions, but you may open doors for them to find the answers.

Before you begin each class, I recommend that you read these words of Vincent Harding, which are quoted more fully on page 279 of *Christian Justice*. They are a wonderful reminder of the overall goal of Christian justice, to bring to fulfillment the Reign of God:

Living in faith is knowing that even though our little work, our little seed, our little brick, our little block may not make the whole thing, the whole thing exists in the mind of God. . . .

That's how your soul gets rested.

Guide for “A Shard of Glass,”

by Carole Duncan Buckman

Theme. Chapter 1, “Envisioning a World of Justice”

Background

This story is about a young man who has been deeply hurt by his parents’ divorce. That fact is almost as important for Rob as the fact that he is attacked on the trail.

Like Rob, all of us experience the pain of broken relationships in one way or another, and we have important personal choices to make about how we respond. This experience is played out on a larger scale in society and the world. In Northern Ireland, for example, the bitterness and mistrust between Protestants and Catholics goes back hundreds of years. In both cases, people can choose to close off, become bitter, and believe that brokenness is the norm. Or, with grace, they can be reconciled.

Questions and Notes

Sin leads to more sin. Divorce happens for many reasons. It is a failure, but it can be done without “waging war.” Unfortunately Rob is a casualty in this “war.” What are some of the ways this is true?

Sin as the norm. Rob’s anger and hurt are a normal reaction to this situation, but he’s stalled in his hurt and has become bitter. What signs do you see that Rob’s negative attitudes are becoming a norm for him, making him increasingly self-centered? Where else would you expect to see the effects of this hurt?

The Christian vision. The priest speaks of Rob pressing the shard of glass into his heart. What do you think this means? If Rob chooses not to forgive, what does this suggest for his family relationships and his relationship with God?

Transforming love. What transforms Rob in this dire situation?

Survival needs and thrival needs. María’s brother says to her, “You’re always seeing God.” How is this true?

María and her family meet Rob’s survival needs, even though they risk detection to do so. In what ways do you think María also meets Rob’s thrival needs?

Paschal mystery. On page 19 the student text says, “When love overcomes sin, life overcomes death.” Do you believe that Rob is more alive at the beginning of the story or at the end? Write more of Rob’s story. Imagine what happens to Rob at the hospital. Will Rob try to help María and people like her? What changes can you see happening in Rob’s relationships? If Rob is permanently paralyzed, can you still picture him “thriving”?

Faith-based principles. Read the faith-based principles on page 27 of the student text and see how they apply to this story. Inclusiveness might apply both to how Rob is received within María’s family group and to the situation of María and her family as illegal immigrants. Peace-seeking through justice might apply to Rob’s attitudes toward illegal immigrants, spurring him to work on immigration issues.

Scripture Connections

- Deuteronomy 30:11–12,19–20 (I offer you death or life.)
- Mark 12:41–44 (The widow’s mite.)
- Luke 10:29–37 (The good Samaritan.)