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# Now for some original RE: Genesis refreshed



You think you know Genesis? **Mary Phil Korsak's** brilliant, fresh translation of Genesis is published as *At the Start: Genesis Made New* (Doubleday 1993). We have 20 copies to give away to the first 20 teachers who send us a piece of pupils' work connected to Genesis – in any way.

## Why do you think Genesis is a

### text worth reading 30 centuries on from its original oral forms?

Children love stories: stories that answer the questions: How? When? Where? Why? The Book of Genesis tells stories that answer these questions. How did the universe, with our world in it, come to be? Who were the first people on Earth? What happened to them? What do stories of the Garden of Eden, Noah's Ark or the Tower of Babel tell us?

### What kind of image of God surfaces from the text to you, as a translator?

The Book of Genesis is a Jewish book, written in Hebrew. There are many myths and legends about God/gods in other traditions. As a translator of Hebrew Genesis, I wanted to respect this particular tradition by maintaining the Hebrew name for God/gods, which is Elohim. You can compare Hebrew Elohim with the name Allah, meaning 'the One', in Muslim tradition. I also use the name YHWH. You cannot pronounce that name. This suggests that God is beyond our reach.

Two things can be said about Elohim/YHWH. He is the Creator god and the guide of human history. He is present as Creator in the first two chapters. As the book proceeds, he withdraws, leaving human history in human hands.

For girls, it is good to know that another aspect of the Godhead is the 'ruah', which I have translated as the 'breath' of Elohim (Genesis ch. 1, v. 2). Some translators prefer to speak of the 'Spirit of God'. The breath

or spirit of God is feminine. Without breath, there is no life.

The breath of Elohim is present at Creation (ch. 1, v. 2). It appears again only once, at the end of the book, where it is said to be present in Joseph (ch. 41, v. 38). This shows that we can discover God in the world around us and in ourselves, as Joseph does.

### What pleases you about the fact that British schoolchildren all study some stories from Genesis?

It is important for children to know these stories. They have contributed to form our society; our culture. They tell us about nature and about ourselves as human beings. They show that human beings are empowered to make choices. A bad choice is illustrated by Cain killing his own brother, Abel. A good choice is made by Joseph when he forgives his brothers, who tried to kill him.

### What advice do you give teachers of 5-11s or 11-14s when approaching Genesis?

Tell some of the stories in your own words, or choose a suitable passage from the book. Make sure the children have copies to refer to. Read it aloud. Look together at the difficult words, making sure they are well understood. Answer any questions. This may lead to discussion.

Read it aloud a second time. The text will have become familiar. Invite the children to come back to the text another day. They love things that become familiar through repetition. Invite children to act out the passage in front of the class.

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## From Genesis 2

YHWH Elohim said

'It is not good for the groundling to be alone

I will make for it a help, a counterpart  
YHWH Elohim formed out of the ground  
all the beasts of the field, all the fowls  
of the skies

And brought them to the groundling  
To see what it would call them  
Whatever the groundling called to each  
living soul, that is its name  
The groundling called names for all the  
cattle, for all the fowls of the skies, for  
all the beasts of the field.

But for a groundling it found no help  
as its counterpart

YHWH Elohim made a swoon fall upon  
the groundling. It slept. He took one  
of its sides and closed up the flesh in  
its place.

YHWH Elohim built the side he had  
taken from the groundling into woman.  
He brought her to the groundling  
The groundling said:

*'This one, this time  
Is bone from my bone  
Flesh from my flesh  
This one shall be called wo-man  
For from man she has been taken  
This one'*

So a man shall leave his father and his  
mother. He will cling to his wo-man and  
they will become one flesh

The two of them were naked  
The groundling and his wo-man  
They were not ashamed