

Questions for Careful Readers

Patricia Dutcher-Walls provides some very helpful “questions for careful readers” in chapters 2–3 of her Reading the Historical Books: A Student’s Guide to Engaging the Biblical Text (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014). I’ve listed them below so you may have them on hand as you read Samuel.

Where are the beginning and end of the narrative?

How are these marked?

Is the narrative part of a larger story or ongoing story line?

What events/scenes take place?

Who is in each scene?

What are the transitions between scenes?

What is the problem or conflict driving the plot?

What complications are introduced as the plot is worked out?

Where is the crisis or turning point (or points)?

What happens in the resolution phase?

Are expectations that are set up by the story fulfilled, broken, changed?

Does repetition occur at any level within the story—words, phrases, events, scenes?

Are there any “command-enactment-report” sequences in the narrative?

If so, does the repeated element confirm, change, contradict, or comment on the previous speech/event/element?

What direct description of characters is given by the narrator?

How do actions by characters aid in their characterization?

Do the actions give a depiction of the type of person?

How does dialogue add to the characterization of the main characters?

Who speaks in the story? Who does not speak?

Are a character’s words reliable, confirmed by others, by the narrator, by events?

Through whose eyes are we seeing each scene?

Within an all-knowing narrator’s viewpoint, do we see any other points of view?

Do we hear the inner thoughts of any character?

Is the point of view of any character consistently denied to the reader?

How are events related in the sequencing of the story?

Are there indications of simultaneous events, use of the past, or indications of the future?

Where does time move slowly or quickly in the story?

Does time jump in transitions between scenes?

What words, phrases, and ideas are brought forward by the ways the text makes them present to the reader?

What is emphasized by the text or across texts, particularly by the repetition of words, phrases, and ideas?

What characters have authority in the story, or in what ways are certain figures made the focus of authority arguments so that they function with influence in subsequent chapters?

How do characters then use their authority to affect or shape the actions and ideas of others?

How is repetition used to craft a persuasive argument or make a point or idea more evident and forceful in the text?

Where do you see repetition working across adjacent texts, and where does it work across lengthy spans of chapters?

What analogies are created between accounts, in which two figures or events are shaped so that they resonate with each other and thus inform the reader about the characteristics of both ends of the analogy?

What direct evaluation is included in the text?

How is it expressed, and what values, judgments, and ideals does it convey?

What patterns are set up in the text, and in particular, across texts? What are the elements of the pattern in each case?

How do direct evaluation and pattern setting work together to convey judgments across stories?

What does the omission of an established pattern communicate about a figure, event, or idea?

What figures are set up as models for other characters in the historical books?

What values and ideas does the model express, and how do those values and ideas transfer to the other figures who follow the model?

How does the story create dramatic impact through strong words, dramatic language, vivid scenes, and powerful characters?

What does the dramatic impact tell you about where the story focuses its interests?

What details are included in the text?

Where does the flow of the story in the text slow down to include extra attention to particulars, including formats like lists and extended description?