

Spiritual Resource Ideas: American Literature

The Crucible by Arthur Miller

RATIONALE

Jonathan Edwards' hell and brimstone sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," has become a classic in the study of American literature. This sermon, among others, played a role in the Great Awakening – a spiritual revival that swept across America during the 18th century. As such, it is an excellent selection for using in the language arts classroom.

GRADE LEVEL

10-12

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Oral and written analysis of literature

POTENTIAL JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE CONNECTIONS

- ✓ Acceptance of God
- ✓ Commitment to the Church
- ✓ Interpersonal Relationships
- ✓ Responsible Citizen
- ✓ Intellectual Development
- ✓ Communication Skill
- ✓ Aesthetic Appreciation

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND PROJECT IDEAS

➤ **Act One (An Overture)**

- Review the Adventist teaching of the Great Controversy. This lays the foundation for understanding the forces behind day-to-day events.

- Some believe that witchcraft is an imaginary phenomenon. What does the Bible teach? (Power point of biblical teaching on witchcraft)
- Read 1 Samuel 28:3-25, the story of Saul going to the witch of Endor. What can we learn about witchcraft from this story?
- In many countries witchcraft is common. Stories of demon-possession and casting spells abound. Read a story that involves witchcraft and the power of God to overcome and “shut down” these manifestations.
- The very word *satan* in the Hebrew language means *accuser*. In Genesis 3 Satan is introduced in the form of a crafty, clever, deceptive serpent. Throughout the biblical stories and teachings, Satan acts to accuse and deceive in various ways. In America, we don't hear so much about witchcraft. It seems as though Satan shows up in different ways here. What might those other ways be?
- Nowadays, witches are not despised and feared as they were in the Salem witch trial days. Why do you think that is?
- Tell/Read the story of Moses Hull, well known Adventist minister and debater who fell under the influence of the spiritualists while debating them. Discussion questions:
 - What are some things directly related to spiritualism that youth are tempted to engage in?
 - What about TV shows and movies that contain spiritualism and other forms of witchcraft in subtle or direct forms? Are they dangerous to watch? How might Satan be using them to accomplish his purposes—even in the lives Christians?

➤ Act Two

- In Act Two, we begin to understand the trouble in John and Elizabeth Proctor's marriage. John has been unfaithful, and Elizabeth has been cold and unforgiving. When a Christian marriage is in trouble and trust has been broken, what could be done, or what is necessary to bring resolution and healing? (A story of a restored marriage would be good here.)
- The Bible is clear about adultery being wrong. Should the spouse of the unfaithful forgive and continue in the marriage? Why or why not?
- In Act Two, we see gossip and accusations increasing and intensifying. Research verses in the Bible that speak against slander and false accusations against others and present findings. Why do you think the Bible is so strong about those who slander and bear false witness?

(Story illustrating the damaging effects of false witness and/or gossip would be effective.)

- Research what voodoo is and where it is still practiced today.

➤ **Act Three**

- Our actions are driven by motivating factors. List an action of each of the following characters and the motivating factors driving those actions: Reverend Parris, Abigail, Tituba, Putnam, and Danforth.
- A major motivating factor in the play is fear. Fear of losing one's reputation, of being caught for doing wrong, of being falsely accused, of being hanged, etc. The overriding fear that spawned the witch hunts in the first place was the fear of witchcraft itself. This fear drives the mass hysteria, and the townspeople no longer seek truth and justice and freedom. They, along with the legal system, seek to control and contain. As a result, the innocent suffer. How might this same scenario play out in the end times?
- In Act Three, it appears that Putnam's false and contrived accusations against Goody Corey may be related to his desire to acquire land currently in the possession of Giles Corey. How do we see this same greed driving people to make destructive decision in today's society?

➤ **Act Four**

- In the end, Reverend Hale realizes the accused are innocent, and the court won't give in for fear of losing it's reputation. Disillusioned and angry that the court itself has proven to be dishonorable, untruthful and unjust, he tries to persuade the innocent prisoners to lie in order to save their lives, arguing that in these cases it is not wrong. Are there times when it is okay to lie? Explain.
- Is it wise to confess to a crime you didn't commit in order to save your life?
- Research a legal case of someone being falsely accused. How did it happen?
- If you were the judge and the court's reputation was at stake for being mistaken, how would you handle John Proctor and the others?
- Attend a court hearing and carefully observe the testimonies and cross examining. What do you notice?
- How can you, an Adventist Christian, do to work towards creating a safer, more just world?

- Choose a specific cause against injustice and cruelty that you feel is especially important. What could you do to help this cause?
- For a long time, Proctor has a difficult time forgiving himself for his unfaithfulness. Often others forgive us, and we know that God does, too, but we don't forgive ourselves. How does this hurt us? Can we really enjoy God's forgiveness if we ourselves have not forgiven ourselves?
- How does not forgiving yourself affect your relationships with others?
- In the end, through unjust events and suffering, John Proctor "comes clean" and is willing to stand for the truth though he be hanged. His wife forgives him, and he chooses to the "high road." He has been put in the "crucible," and has been purified. Through the ages, suffering has often brought out the best in Christians. As Oswald Chambers puts it, "We either find ourselves or lose ourselves in the fires of sorrow."
 - Does this kind of growth and goodness always require suffering?
 - What is an example of someone who has "been through fires" and has come out "shining like gold"?
 - What is something you have gone through that was difficult, but made you a better person?
 - How can Christ's suffering and death be a source of great comfort and promise to those going through hard times?