

Spiritual Resource Ideas: American Literature

"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

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

9-12

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Oral and written analysis of literature

POTENTIAL JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE CONNECTIONS

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

RESOURCE IDEAS FOR TEACHING SPIRITUALITY

➤ **Content**

- Describe the historical context of "Sinners" and how it impacted audiences (weeping, throwing themselves on the floor, etc.)
- After reading the selected portion, students write a description of God as presented in the text

- Student can write a comparison/contrast essay in which they discuss the similarities/differences between Edwards' picture of God and theirs
- Discuss whether or not God gets angry like that; read selections of the Old Testament where God seems to be angry as portrayed in "Sinners."
- Other questions for discussion:
 - What are the different pictures of God presented throughout the Bible?
 - If God is presented in different ways, what does that say about God? What does it say about those who wrote about God?
 - How did you view God as a child, and how has that changed through the years (or has it?)?
 - When sharing the gospel and eternal options of life and death with others, what should be emphasized?
- For a light, meaningful activity, hand out pipe cleaners and have students create a symbol of what God has meant to them and then invite them to share with the rest of the class (eg. an "anchor" could show the student has experienced God as his/her anchor through the ups and downs of life, etc.)

➤ **Speech**

- Discuss the role of expression in public speaking about God (How much does it help in communicating the gospel? Why might it matter? What does expression reveal? Etc.)
- Ask students what preachers in the Bible they think must have used great expression when speaking publicly (and why).
- Generate on the board a list of elements of expression: tone, pausing, eye contact and body language, etc.
- Provide examples (video clips of great Adventist preachers, etc.) demonstrating the impact of vocal use.
- Have students experience the difference by having them say something with no expression at all; then saying it again, this time employing varied expression (variations: have students walk around the room speaking to each other in monotones; teacher teaches entire period prior to this lesson in monotone)
- Have students select 5 or more lines of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" to practice speaking with intentional expression and to eventually deliver to the class
- In order to get students out of their "comfort zone" in intentionally speaking with expression, have them deliver their lines to a partner in an extremely exaggerated expression, or yell out their lines all at once—

anything to get them into the mode of manipulating their voices in the presence of others

- Challenge students to give it all they've got!
- Partner students up and have them practice their lines with each other, giving each other feedback on expressive they are, and how effective it is
- For homework, students continue getting comfortable with their sermon lines and prepare to present to the class the following day

➤ **Doctrine**

- Have students read through the portion selected for study to identify doctrines Edwards seems to embrace.
- Which of those doctrines differ from Adventist doctrines?
- What does Edwards' doctrine about an eternal hell communicate about God's character?
- What does the Adventist view on eternal death communicate about God's character?
- A power point presentation of scriptures which teaches about what happens to those who reject God would be good at this point (students could be assigned to scriptures/to find scriptures on hell, death and the afterlife and create a presentation for the class)
- Conduct or present a word study on the Greek and Hebrew words for hell, grave, death; this is also a springboard into discussions related to translation and what is gained/lost in the process of manipulating language, and the difference between connotative and literal meaning