



FLORIDA

### SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS

#### Literary Analysis

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.2** Use information from the text to answer questions or to state the main idea or provide relevant details.

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.4** Identify and analyze the characteristics of a variety of types of text....

#### NOTABLE QUOTE

*"[I wish] to lie low before God, as in the dust; that I might be nothing, and that God might be all, that I might become as a little child."*

#### FYI

Did you know that Jonathan Edwards ...

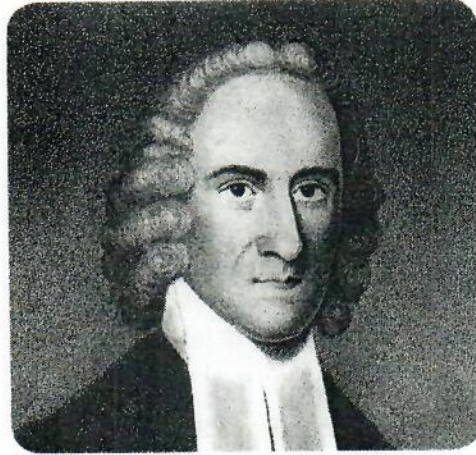
- wrote a paper on spiders at age 11?
- died as a result of a smallpox inoculation?
- was the grandfather of Aaron Burr, vice-president under Thomas Jefferson?

### AuthorOnline

For more on Jonathan Edwards, visit the Literature Center at [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com).

## from *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

Sermon by Jonathan Edwards



### Jonathan Edwards

1703–1758

When Jonathan Edwards delivered a sermon, with its fiery descriptions of hell and eternal damnation, people listened. Edwards believed that religion should be rooted in emotion rather than reason. Although 19th-century editors tried to tone down his style, Edwards is recognized today as a masterful preacher. In fact, he is considered by many to be America's greatest religious thinker.

**A Spiritual Calling** Born in East Windsor, Connecticut, Edwards was a child prodigy and entered what is now Yale University at the age of 12. While a graduate student there, Edwards experienced a spiritual crisis that led to what he later described as "religious joy." He came to believe that such an intense religious experience was an important step toward salvation.

In 1722, after finishing his education, Edwards followed the path of his father and grandfather and became a Puritan minister. In 1726, Edwards began assisting

his grandfather, who was the minister at the parish church in Northampton, Massachusetts. When his grandfather died three years later, Edwards became the church's pastor.

**Religious Revivalist** Edwards soon became an effective preacher. In 1734 and 1735, he delivered a series of sermons that resulted in a great number of conversions. The converts believed they had felt God's grace and were "born again" when they accepted Jesus Christ.

Edwards's sermons helped trigger the Great Awakening, a religious revival that swept through New England from 1734 to 1750. The movement grew out of a sense among some Puritan ministers that their congregations had grown too self-satisfied. Delivered at the height of the Great Awakening, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" is the most famous of Edwards's nearly 1,200 sermons.

**Last Years** Although Edwards inspired thousands, his church dismissed him in 1750 because he wanted to limit membership to those who had undergone conversion. A year later, Edwards went to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he became a missionary in a Native American settlement. In 1757, he accepted an appointment as president of what is now Princeton University.

By the time of Edwards's death the following year, the extremism of the Great Awakening had been rejected. However, his vision of humanity suspended, like a spider, over the burning pit of hell still maintains its emotional impact.

## What keeps you IN LINE?

**KEY IDEA** A sense of **morality** probably keeps you from cheating on a test. In other words, you know cheating is wrong. But there are other reasons for behaving morally. Some people are anxious to please. Others fear the consequences of breaking the rules. Jonathan Edwards uses fear to get his point across in the sermon you're about to read. Is fear the best motivator?

**ROLE-PLAY** With a partner, take turns role-playing a conversation with a child who has been stealing. Your mission is to persuade him or her to stop. Before you begin, consider how best to keep the child in line. For example, you might frighten or shame the child or appeal to his or her pride.

### LITERARY ANALYSIS: SERMON

A **sermon** is a form of religious persuasion in which a speaker exhorts listeners to behave in a more spiritual and moral fashion. Like all sermons, Jonathan Edwards's is shaped by

- **purpose**—why Edwards delivers the sermon
- **audience**—whom Edwards is addressing
- **context**—when and where Edwards delivers the sermon

As you read Edwards's sermon, look for passages that reveal his purpose, his audience, and the context for his delivery.

### READING SKILL: ANALYZE EMOTIONAL APPEALS

**Emotional appeals** are messages designed to persuade an audience by creating strong feelings rather than by providing facts and evidence. Writers often use **tone**, **imagery**, and **figurative language** to make these types of emotional appeals:

- **appeal to fear**, which taps into people's fear of losing their safety or security
- **appeal to pity**, which takes advantage of people's sympathy and compassion for others
- **appeal to vanity**, which relies on people's desire to feel good about themselves

As you read, use a chart like the one shown to record examples of language used to appeal to the audience's emotions.

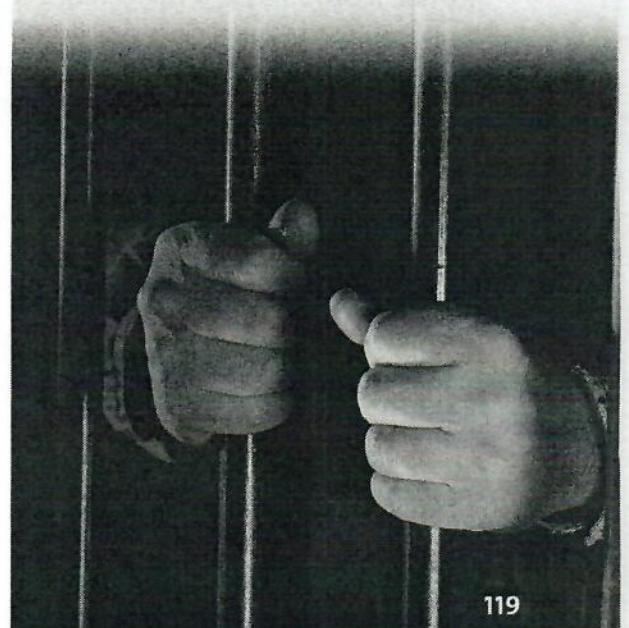
Examples	Emotional Appeals
"arrows of death fly unseen"	appeals to fear by creating anxiety, unease

### VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Jonathan Edwards uses the listed words to help convey his spiritual message. Choose a word from the list that is a synonym for each of the numbered words.

<b>WORD LIST</b>	abhor	deliverance	mitigation
	abominable	discern	whet
	appease	incense	
	ascribe	induce	

- detest
- easing
- sharpened
- anger greatly
- attribute



# *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

Jonathan Edwards

**BACKGROUND** Jonathan Edwards delivered his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” in 1741 to a congregation in Enfield, Connecticut. Edwards read the sermon, as he always did, in a composed style, with few gestures or movements. However, the sermon had a dramatic effect on his parishioners, many of whom wept and moaned. Some even considered suicide.

We find it easy to tread on and crush a worm that we see crawling on the earth; so it is easy for us to cut or singe a slender thread that any thing hangs by; thus easy is it for God when he pleases to cast his enemies down to hell. . . .

They<sup>1</sup> are now the objects of that very same *anger* and wrath of God, that is expressed in the torments of hell. And the reason why they do not go down to hell at each moment, is not because God, in whose power they are, is not then very angry with them; as angry as he is with many miserable creatures now tormented in hell, who there feel and bear the fierceness of his wrath. Yea, God is a great deal more angry with great numbers that are now on earth; yea, doubtless, with many  
10 that are now in this congregation, who it may be are at ease, than he is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell. **A**

## **ANALYZE VISUALS**

This painting by Italian artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo presents an **allegory** of fire. What lesson or message does the painting seem to suggest about the meaning of fire?

## **A SERMON**

Reread lines 8–11. Notice that Edwards **directly** addresses his **audience** in these lines. How do you imagine the audience responded to these words?

1. **they:** Earlier in the sermon, Edwards refers to all “unconverted men,” whom he considers God’s enemies. Unconverted men are people who have not been “born again,” meaning that they have not accepted Jesus Christ.

*Fire, allegory* (1566), Giuseppe Arcimboldo. Painted for Emperor Maximilian II. Limewood, 66.5 cm × 51 cm. Inv. 1585. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.

So that it is not because God is unmindful of their wickedness, and does not resent it, that he does not let loose his hand and cut them off. God is not altogether such an one as themselves, though they may imagine him to be so. The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is **whet**, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them. . . . **B**

Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are  
20 innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noonday; the sharpest sight cannot **discern** them. God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to make it appear, that God had need to be at the expense of a miracle, or go out of the ordinary course of his providence, to destroy any wicked man, at any moment. . . .

So that, thus it is that natural men<sup>2</sup> are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, his anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually  
30 suffering the executions of the fierceness of his wrath in hell; and they have done nothing in the least to **appease** or abate that anger, neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment; the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would fain<sup>3</sup> lay hold on them, and swallow them up; the fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out: and they have no interest in any Mediator,<sup>4</sup> there are no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of. . . . **C**

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but  
40 the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. Thus all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin, to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced light and life, are in the hands of an angry God. However you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious affections, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets,<sup>5</sup> and in the house of God, it is nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction. . . . **D**

50 The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, **abhors** you, and is dreadfully provoked: his

**whet** (hwĕt) *adj.*  
sharpened **whet** *v.*

**B EMOTIONAL APPEALS**  
Reread lines 14–18. What **imagery** does Edwards use to appeal to fear in these lines?

**discern** (dĭ-sŭrn') *v.* to perceive or recognize something

**appease** (ə-pĕz') *v.* to bring peace, quiet, or calm to; to soothe

**C EMOTIONAL APPEALS**  
**Loaded language**, or words with strong emotional associations, can be used to influence an audience's attitude. What examples of loaded language do you see in lines 27–30?

**D SERMON**  
Note that Edwards reveals the **purpose** of his sermon in lines 42–46. Why is he delivering this sermon?

**abhor** (ăb-hŏr') *v.* to regard with disgust

2. **natural men**: people who have not been born again.

3. **would fain**: would rather.

4. **Mediator**: Jesus Christ, who mediates, or is the means of bringing about, salvation.

5. **closets**: private rooms for meditation.



*Babylon Burning.* From the *Apocalypse of Saint John* (Revelations 18). Luther Bible, First Edition. 1530. Private collection. Photo © Art Resource, New York.

wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more **abominable** in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be **ascribed** to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you was suffered<sup>6</sup> to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be  
 60 given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship.

**abominable**  
 (ə-bŏm'ə-nə-bəl) *adj.*  
 thoroughly detestable

**ascribe** (ə-skrīb') *v.* to  
 attribute to a specified  
 cause or source

6. you was suffered: you were permitted.

Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell. **E**

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and **incensed** as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the  
70 flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder;<sup>7</sup> and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to **induce** God to spare you one moment. . . .

It is *everlasting* wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite<sup>8</sup> horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your

**E EMOTIONAL APPEALS**

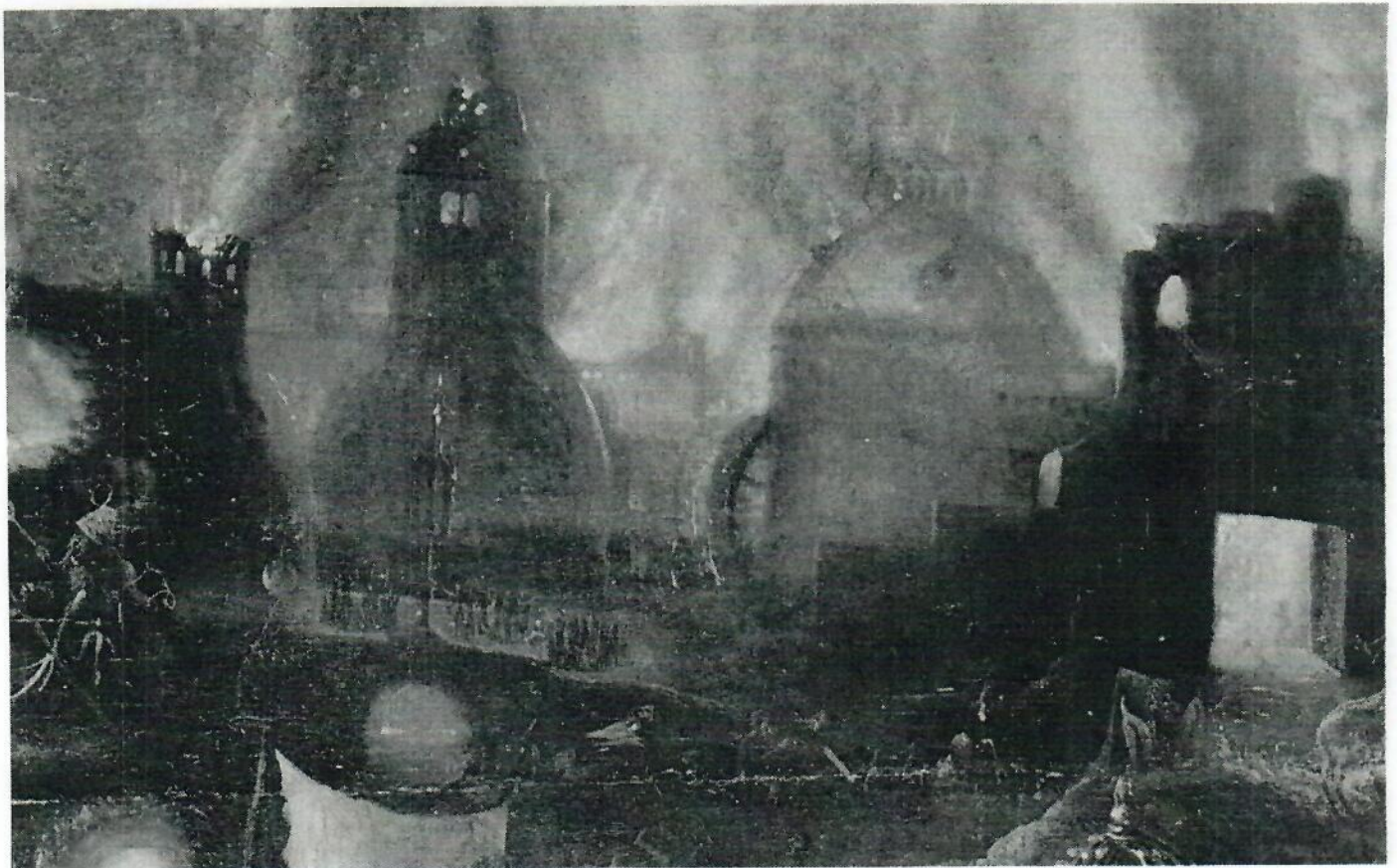
Notice the use of the **simile**, or comparison, in lines 50–65. In what way does comparing the audience to a spider appeal to both fear and vanity?

**incense** (ɪn-səns') v. to cause to be extremely angry

**induce** (ɪn-doo's') v. to succeed in persuading someone to do something

7. **burn it asunder** (ə-sūn'dər): burn it into separate parts or pieces.

8. **exquisite** (ɛk'skwɪ-zɪt): intensely felt.




Detail of *Hell*. Hendrik mer de Bles, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.

thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having  
80 any **deliverance**, any end, any **mitigation**, any rest at all. You will know certainly  
that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and  
conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then when you have so  
done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will  
know that all is but a point to what remains. So that your punishment will indeed  
be infinite. Oh, who can express what the state of a soul in such circumstances is!  
All that we can possibly say about it, gives but a very feeble, faint representation  
of it; it is inexpressible and inconceivable: For “who knows the power of God’s  
anger?”<sup>9</sup>

How dreadful is the state of those that are daily and hourly in the danger of  
90 this great wrath and infinite misery! But this is the dismal case of every soul in this  
congregation that has not been born again, however moral and strict, sober and  
religious, they may otherwise be. . . . **F**

And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has  
thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands in the door calling and crying  
with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to him, and  
pressing into the kingdom of God. Many are daily coming<sup>10</sup> from the east, west,  
north, and south; many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that  
you are in, are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love to him who  
has loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and rejoicing  
100 in hope of the glory of God. How awful is it to be left behind at such a day! To  
see so many others feasting, while you are pining and perishing! To see so many  
rejoicing and singing for joy of heart, while you have cause to mourn for sorrow  
of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit! How can you rest one moment in such a  
condition? . . . **G**

Therefore, let every one that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath  
to come. . . . 

**deliverance** (dĭ-lĭv'ər-əns)  
*n.* rescue from danger

**mitigation** (mĭt-ĭ-gā'shən)  
*n.* lessening of something  
that causes suffering

**F SERMON**

Keep in mind that Edwards delivers his sermon in the **context** of his own time and place. In lines 90–92, in what way does he acknowledge the Puritan heritage of his listeners?

**G EMOTIONAL APPEALS**

Reread lines 93–104 and note the change in **tone**. How might the change in tone appeal to the audience’s pity and vanity?

9. “who knows . . . anger?": an allusion to Psalm 90:11 in the Bible—“Who knoweth the power of thine anger?”

10. **Many . . . coming**: a reference to the hundreds of people who were being converted during the Great Awakening.



**SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD**  
**Literary Analysis**  
**Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.4** Identify and analyze the characteristics of a variety of types of text (e.g., primary source historical documents).

## Comprehension

- Recall** According to Jonathan Edwards's sermon, what is a constant threat to all human beings?
- Clarify** In Edwards's view, what must sinners do to save themselves?
- Summarize** What key image does Edwards use to frighten his audience?

## Literary Analysis

- Analyze Emotional Appeals** Review the examples of words, phrases, and images you recorded as you read. How does this language effectively appeal to the audience's emotions and get Edwards's message across?
- Analyze the Sermon** Why do you think Edwards felt it was necessary to terrify his Puritan **audience** into action?
- Draw Conclusions** How would you describe Jonathan Edwards's view of the following? Cite specific examples for each.
  - God • Christ • humanity
- Make Judgments** Do you believe that Edwards's sermon resulted in improving the **morality** of his congregation? Explain why or why not.
- Compare Literary Works** Use a chart like the one shown to compare some of Jonathan Edwards's and Anne Bradstreet's attitudes and beliefs. Cite specific details from their writings to support your ideas.

	<i>Edwards</i>	<i>Bradstreet</i>
<i>Eternal Life</i>		
<i>God's Relation to People</i>		
<i>Religious Beliefs</i>		
<i>Human Frailty</i>		

## Literary Criticism

- Historical Context** In the 18th century, many people died at a much younger age than they do today. How might awareness of the fragility of life have affected people's receptiveness to Edwards's sermon?