

Activities: “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

Learning Goals

Students will demonstrate their understanding of:

- the visual and persuasive nature of powerful imagery;
- effective use of figurative language;
- the importance of context;
- how the author’s purpose impacts the text;
- how to ascertain the meaning of a word through the text;
- how authors use diction to create tone;
- the effective use of repetition;
- the effects and punctuation of appositives;
- the nature of Aristotelian appeals;
- differences between argumentative and persuasive texts;
- differences between spoken and written texts.

Directions: Provide an answer to the first question and then read the text completely before answering the rest. Define terms in bold in your vocabulary log.

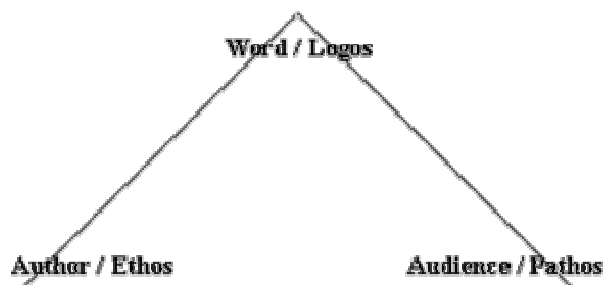


Figure 1: The Rhetorical Triangle

1. Jonathan Edwards is one of the leaders of the “Great Awakening.” Before reading the text, determine the historical context through online research. In one or two sentences, briefly define the historical context of Edwards’ speech. What does Edwards hope to accomplish with this sermon? Define his purpose.
2. What does Edwards mean by “natural men”? How do you know? Describe his primary audience.
3. In the first paragraph, “appease” means “to pacify”; using this definition as a contextual clue, approximate the meaning of “abate.”
4. In the second paragraph, Edwards begins three clauses with “there is.” This technique is **anaphora**. Why does he use this repetitive structure?

5. Consider the italicized clause in the following sentence: “That world of misery, *that lake of burning brimstone*, is extended abroad under you.” The italicized clause is an **appositive**. Notice that it is surrounded by commas. Appositives can also be set off with semicolons, parenthesis, and dashes. What purpose does the clause serve in the sentence? Can you find other appositives in the sermon?
6. Consider the following clause: “...you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, *and* your healthy constitution, *and* your own care and prudence, *and* best contrivance, *and* all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell...” As Edwards lists items, he uses the conjunction “and” before each one. The technique of repeating conjunctions in close succession is **polysyndeton**. What is the rhetorical effect?
7. Consider the following sentence: “Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it; the creation groans with you; the creature is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, *not willingly*; the sun does *not willingly* shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan; the earth does *not willingly* yield her increase to satisfy your lusts; nor is it *willingly* a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon; the air does *not willingly* serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies.” Why do you think Edwards uses semicolons to connect the series of independent clauses rather than dividing them into separate sentences? Why does he repeat “not willingly”?
8. How does he develop the **simile** in paragraph 5? Discuss the power of the **imagery**. Why does he use it?
9. Describe the **figurative language** and images in the subsequent three paragraphs. Do you notice a progression? What point is he making through this imagery?
10. Figure 1 is a model of the Aristotelian appeals, the “Rhetorical Triangle.” According to Aristotle, effective tests appeal to **logos** (the logic of the text), **ethos** (the credibility of the author or appeals to authority) and **pathos** (the emotions of the audience). Describe the nature of the appeals Edwards employs.
11. **Tone** is the technique by which the author conveys his attitude toward his subject. Describe Edwards’ tone. List some words or phrases that help create the tone. Does the tone change? Where? How do you know?
12. Edwards’ intended his sermon, a speech, be heard rather than read. What do you notice about texts meant to be heard? Contrast them to texts meant to be read.
13. Edwards’ sermon is persuasive. Although he conveys an argument, how is his text persuasive? Is it effective? How do you define a persuasive text?
14. Many in his congregation were said to have fainted and cried out as he delivered his sermon. What parts of the sermon do you believe might have evoked such a response? Why?
15. In your groups, draw and color a picture of the image your group considers most powerful and effective. Be prepared to elaborate on your decision.