

Great Awakening Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
Why was George Whitefield so popular?

Materials:

- United Streaming Video Excerpt: Great Awakening (from Africans in America: Revolution: 1750-1805):
<http://player.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?guidAssetId=E72CE5C9-B428-48B7-B09B-FCF3E0515C98>
- Great Awakening Powerpoint
- Transparency Great Awakening Documents A and B
- Copies of Great Awakening Documents A-C
- Copies of Great Awakening Graphic Organizer

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction: Show United Streaming video segment: [NOTE: This link might take you to the segment “All Men are Created Equal;” if so, scroll down the segments in the side bar to find “The Great Awakening”).

Great Awakening (from Africans in America: Revolution: 1750-1805):
<http://player.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?guidAssetId=E72CE5C9-B428-48B7-B09B-FCF3E0515C98>

Elicit from students: According to the video, what was the Great Awakening? What was appealing about the religious messages that were spreading in the early 1700s?

2. Mini-lecture: Powerpoint lecture. Introduce central historical question: *Why was George Whitefield so popular?*
3. Cognitive modeling: Hand out Document A and put transparency on overhead. Begin modeling SOURCING AND CONTEXTUALIZATION.

The first thing we want to do is source the document to see what I can find about the author’s perspective. I see that this was written in 1793, over 50 years after the Great Awakening, so I’m not sure how reliable this is. Maybe Franklin’s memory of hearing Whitefield differs from what actually happened. I know that memory is often inaccurate. It’s hard to predict what Franklin will say about Whitefield: on the one hand, they’re friends, so he probably won’t say bad things. On the other hand, I know that Ben Franklin really believed in Enlightenment ideas and reason, so I don’t think he would have bought into the whole revival aspect of the Great Awakening. I don’t really know what to predict at this point.

*Now I'm going to read the document carefully and **contextualize**. That means I'm going to try to picture what was happening at the time—what was different? How did people act?*

[Read through document].

I can learn a few things about the context of the time by reading this document. First, Franklin says that Whitefield preached throughout the colonies and that he tried to raise money for orphans in Georgia. I wonder why there were so many orphans in Georgia? I remember hearing that Georgia was settled by debtors and poor people, so maybe they died young and left many orphans? I don't know.

Second, I see that Whitefield was a very effective speaker. He convinced Franklin to empty his pockets, and Ben Franklin didn't even agree with Whitefield's religious views.

Finally, I see that Whitefield was super popular and had a really loud voice and that his audience was completely quiet. That's almost impossible for me to imagine. One man's voice heard by 30,000 people? It's amazing to think about that. . .

Based on this document, I would say that George Whitefield was popular for a few reasons: he was a really convincing speaker (and raised money for important charities) and he had a loud voice.

Instruct students to fill in the Graphic Organizer for Document A.

4. Hand out Document B and walk students through a Guided Practice:

Sourcing: Who wrote this and why?

There's not a lot of sourcing information for Document B, but students should predict that since Cole was born-again, he's going to speak favorably of Whitefield.

Contextualization: What was it like to be alive at the time?

There's a lot in this document that gives us an idea of how intense these talks were for people. This man dropped his tool and jumped on his horse; there were thousands of people riding to go hear Whitfield.

He believed the horses knew that their riders wanted to save their souls. He also thought that Whitefield looked angelic. But he also became terrified that he was not saved.

Instruct students to fill in the Graphic Organizer for Document B including Hypothesis 2.

Elicit hypotheses: *Students could answer that George Whitefield was popular because it was so exciting to be among so many people. Or they could write that Whitefield made people realize that they wanted religious salvation.*

5. Hand out Document C and have students complete Graphic Organizer for Document C.

Their hypotheses should include the idea that Whitefield was popular because he challenged the established churches. Everyone likes a rebel.

6. Discussion:

- Why was George Whitefield so popular?
- Do you think he was dangerous, like Henchman claimed?
- Franklin calls Whitefield 'benevolent' and Henchman calls him 'dangerous.' Who do you trust more, Franklin or Henchman? Why?
- Do you think something like the Great Awakening could happen today? Why or why not?

Citations:

Benjamin Franklin, *The Private Life of the Late Benjamin Franklin, LL.D. Originally Written By Himself, And Now Translated From The French*, London, 1793. Chapter 10. <http://www.earlyamerica.com/lives/franklin/chapt10/>

George Leon Walker, *Some Aspects of the Religious Life of New England* (New York: Silver, Burnett, and Company, 1897), 89–92. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5711>

Boston Evening-Post, 15 July 1745, in David A. Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers: Primary Documents on Events of the Period*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000, p. 115.

Great Awakening Document A (Modified)

Mr. Whitefield went preaching all the way through the colonies to Georgia, where there were many helpless children unprovided for. The sight of their miserable situation inspired the benevolent heart of Mr. Whitefield with the idea of building an Orphan House there, in which they might be supported and educated. Returning northward, he preached up this charity, and made large collections.

I happened to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I realized he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently decided he should get nothing from me [Franklin thought the Orphan House should be built in Philadelphia], I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pieces in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and I decided to give the silver; and he finished so admirably, that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all.

He had a loud and clear voice, and articulated his words and sentences so perfectly, that he might be heard and understood at a great distance, especially as his audiences, however numerous, were completely silent. He preached one evening and I computed that he might well be heard by more than thirty thousand.

Vocabulary

Benevolent: kind

Oratory: speech

Source: The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, 1793. Ben Franklin was a good friend of George Whitefield, though he did not agree with his religious beliefs.

Great Awakening Document B (Modified)

I was born Feb 15th 1711 and born again October 1741—

When I heard that Mr. Whitefield was coming to preach in Middletown, I was in my field at work. I dropped my tool and ran home to my wife and told her to hurry. My wife and I rode my horse as fast as I thought the horse could bear . . .

When we neared Middletown, I heard a noise like a low rumbling thunder and soon saw it was the noise of horses' feet. As I came closer it seemed like a steady stream of horses and their riders, all of a lather and foam with sweat, their breath rolling out of their nostrils with every jump; every horse seemed to go with all his might to carry his rider to hear news from heaven for the saving of souls, it made me tremble to see the sight, how the world was in a struggle.

When we got to the meeting house there were 3 or 4000 people assembled. I turned and looked back and the land and banks of the river looked black with people and horses all along the 12 miles.

When I saw Mr. Whitfield he looked almost angelic; a young, slim, slender, youth. And hearing how God was with him everywhere put me into a trembling fear. I saw that my righteousness would not save me . . .

Source: Nathan Cole was a farmer from Middletown, Connecticut, who heard George Whitefield preach in 1741. The experience convinced Cole to find salvation and become born-again. The excerpt above is from his personal account (undated).

Great Awakening Document C (Modified)

Boston Evening-Post, July 15, 1745

To George Whitefield,

You have sown the harmful seeds of separation and disorder among us. By supporting the new churches, by claiming that our Ministers are unacquainted with Christ, you have stopped the spread of the Gospel, and hurt the Peace and good Order. You have hurt the very being of our Churches.

I ask you not to preach in this parish. . .

I do not expect that you will pay attention to what I have written, but I still choose to declare that you are a dangerous man, harmful to the religion of Jesus Christ.

Nathanael Henchman, Pastor of the first Church in Lynn.

Source: Nathanael Henchman was a minister in Lynn, Massachusetts. He blamed George Whitefield for breaking up all of New England's churches. The document above is a letter to the newspaper in which he addresses Whitefield.

Name _____

Why was George Whitefield so popular?

Document A Ben Franklin	Source: author, type of document, date	Summarize: main idea
Hypothesis 1: According to Document A, why was George Whitefield so popular?		
Document B Nathan Cole	Source: author, type of document, date	Summarize: main idea
Hypothesis 2: According to Document B, why was George Whitefield so popular?		
Document C Nathanael Henschman	Source: author, type of document, date	Summarize: main idea
Hypothesis 3: According to Document C, why was George Whitefield so popular?		