

The Artios Home Companion Series Literature and Composition

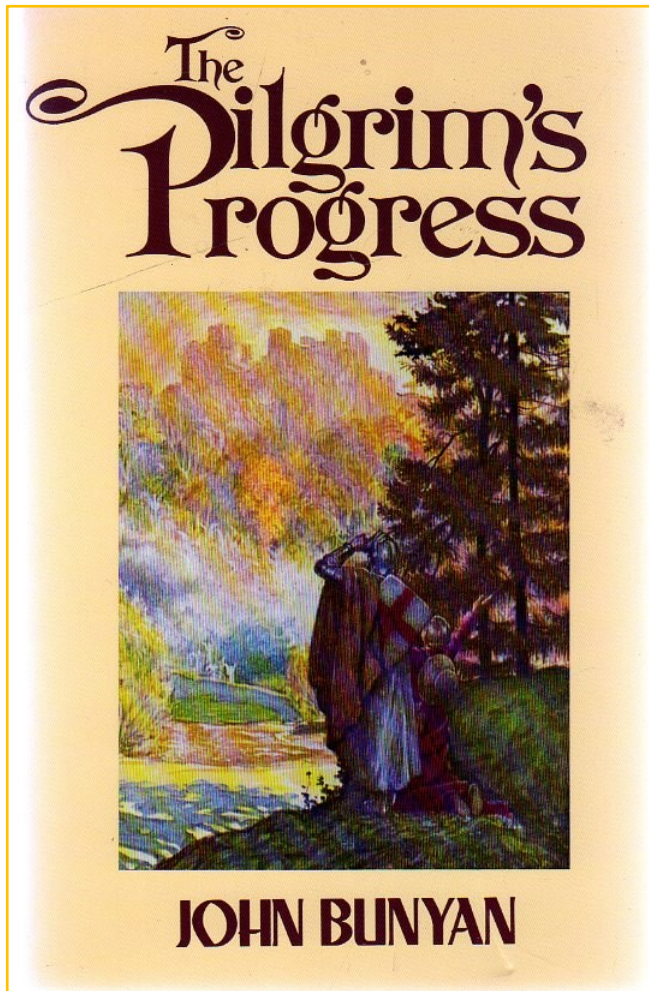
Units 1 – 6: Allegory and Literary Criticism *The Pilgrim's Progress*

by John Bunyan

Literature for Units 1-6

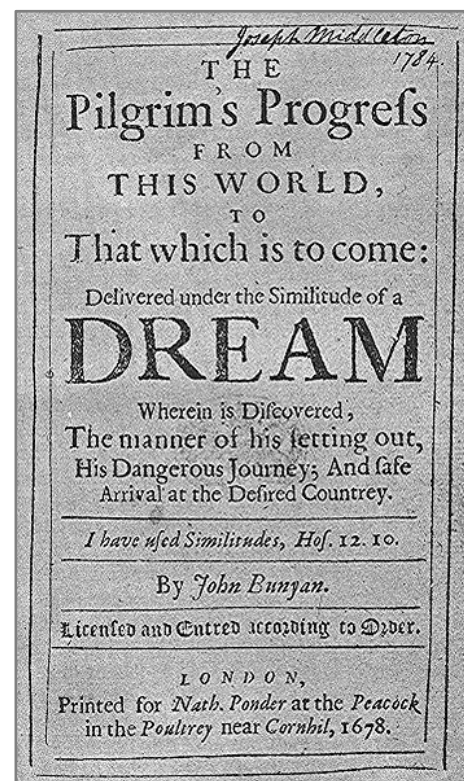
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/pilgrim.ii.html>

Middle School students might find it easier to read an abridged version of the text.



For these units, our focus is learning how to analyze a piece of literature based on how well it fits the genre (or type of literature). The genre focus for this unit is allegory. Similar to the parables in the Bible, allegorical works illustrate abstract concepts through concrete images. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory illustrating a Christian's journey to salvation.

As you study *The Pilgrim's Progress*, you will be answering questions to use to write a literary analysis essay to be completed at the end of Unit 6.



First Edition title page

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Unit 1 – Assignments

Literature

Activity While Reading: As you read the novel, you will conduct a literary analysis by writing the answers to the following questions in your journal. Note that all of the questions may not be applicable in each reading. Answer the ones which are applicable to this unit's reading assignment.

Questions to answer in a literary analysis:

- Who is the author of this work?
 - What is the intent of the author in writing this novel?
 - Who is the protagonist (main character of the story)?
 - What is the protagonist doing, or what is his/her goal?
 - What new characters were introduced in this section?
 - What do their names mean or represent?
 - What lesson can we learn from these characters?
 - What major events happened in this section?
 - What Christian beliefs or ideals are illustrated by these events?
- Read the Assignment Background below.
 - Read *The Pilgrim's Progress* from "The Author's Apology" through "Part I, Second Stage."

Unit 1 – Assignment Background

In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan presents the journey of Christian as he travels to find the Celestial City. John Bunyan uses many events and people in order to tell the story of the Christian journey and to present Christian ideals to his readers. Many Puritan parents would read *The Pilgrim's Progress* in order to teach these ideals to their children.

If you pay close attention to the names Bunyan gives the characters, you'll see that the characters in the novel represent the abstract concepts in the steps Christians take toward salvation. This unit will explain how Bunyan presents the abstract concept of salvation and how well the novel fits the genre of allegory.

Adapted for Middle School from:

Reading Allegory

A lecture *delivered by* Ian Johnston
of Malaspina University-College (now Vancouver Island University),
November 1998

Two questions at once arise when we begin to read allegory:

First, do I need to know the doctrine in order to understand the fiction? In the very simplest dramatic allegory, the fight between the good angel and the evil angel for the soul of Everyman as he contemplates the parade of the tempting seven deadly sins in front of him, if one has no immediate

knowledge of angels or of the Christian doctrine of temptation, sin, and damnation, then the entire story may seem somewhat puzzling, just as a person who has no knowledge whatsoever of North American history may find some old Western films set in a firmly allegorical framework rather odd in the ideas they present.

And second, what is the purpose of the

allegory if its meaning is already worked out elsewhere? The purpose of allegory should be clear enough. The purpose of the allegory is, first and foremost, to entertain and to engage the reader in the story. It is important to engage readers in order to convert them to the belief system presented in the story. Allegories provide a very powerful alternative to other forms of persuasion (like rational arguments or sermons) because fictional stories have a way of engaging people's attention more forcefully than other means of persuasion. For that reason, most belief systems (religious and otherwise) rely a great deal on allegorical fictions to persuade people of truths which would be too complex or arid to present in the form of rational arguments or sermons.



Burdened Christian flees from home,
Rachael Robinson Elmer, illustrator
Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

Unit 2 – Assignments

Literature

Activity While Reading: As you read the novel, you will conduct a literary analysis by writing the answers to the following questions in your journal. Note that all of the questions may not be applicable in each reading. Answer the ones which are applicable to this unit's reading assignment.

Questions to answer in a literary analysis:

- Who is the author of this work?
 - What is the intent of the author in writing this novel?
 - Who is the protagonist (main character of the story)?
 - What is the protagonist doing, or what is his/her goal?
 - What new characters were introduced in this section?
 - What do their names mean or represent?
 - What lesson can we learn from these characters?
 - What major events happened in this section?
 - What Christian beliefs or ideals are illustrated by these events?
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- Read the Assignment Background below.
 - Read *The Pilgrim's Progress* from "Part I, Third Stage" through "Part I, Fifth Stage."

Composition

- Begin your Literary Analysis Essay by writing a thesis statement.

Unit 2 – Assignment Background

Literary Analysis

The reason we write literary analyses is to convince our readers of certain aspects of a novel or other piece of literature. A literary analysis is not merely a summary of a novel, it is an argument describing the ideas the author is presenting in his work.

Elements of a Good Essay

Before you write an essay, it is important that you know the parts of an essay that are essential to writing a good essay. In this unit, we will focus on thesis statements.

The thesis statement is ONE statement that gives the main idea of your paper or that answers the question(s) asked in the essay prompt. Thesis statements typically make up the last sentence of the first paragraph. For your literary analysis, your thesis statement should answer one of the following questions:

- How does John Bunyan use the *names* of the characters to represent Christian ideals or to warn his readers against certain behaviors?
- How does John Bunyan use the *events* in the novel to represent Christian ideals or to warn his readers against certain behaviors?

Unit 3 – Assignments

Literature and Composition

Activity While Reading: As you read the novel, you will conduct a literary analysis by writing the answers to the following questions in your journal. Note that all of the questions may not be applicable in each reading. Answer the ones which are applicable to this unit's reading assignment.

Questions to answer in a literary analysis:

- Who is the author of this work?
 - What is the intent of the author in writing this novel?
 - Who is the protagonist (main character of the story)?
 - What is the protagonist doing, or what is his/her goal?
 - What new characters were introduced in this section?
 - What do their names mean or represent?
 - What lesson can we learn from these characters?
 - What major events happened in this section?
 - What Christian beliefs or ideals are illustrated by these events?
- Read the Assignment Background below.
 - Read *The Pilgrim's Progress* from "Part I, Sixth Stage" through "Part I, Eighth Stage."
 - Remember to answer the applicable literary analysis questions in your reading journal.
 - Choose one of the following prompts and think of a good thesis statement that answers the question:
 - How does John Bunyan use the *names* of the characters to represent Christian ideals or to warn his readers against certain behaviors?
 - How does John Bunyan use the *events* in the novel to represent Christian ideals or to warn his readers against certain behaviors?

Unit 3 – Assignment Background

Elements of a Good Essay

Continuing our discussion from the previous unit, we will look at the remaining parts of an essay. In this unit, you will work on creating an outline for your essay. In Unit Four, we will look at research materials to add to your essay.

- **Introduction:** The introduction is the first paragraph of your essay and concludes with the thesis statement. The purpose of the introduction is to engage your reader and to present the topic of your paper. For a literary analysis, your introduction will introduce the title of the novel, the author of the novel, and a brief summary (2 -3 sentences) of the novel.
- **Body Paragraphs:** The body paragraphs make up the bulk of your essay. The purpose of the body paragraphs is to present your arguments and use examples from the novel to prove your argument. Each body paragraph (typically there are three) begins with a topic sentence that refers to your thesis statement and tells about the subject of your paragraph. If you choose to focus on the character names, an example topic sentence would be: “In *The Pilgrim’s Progress* John Bunyan names one of the characters Ignorance to show the ignorance of some Christians as they journey toward Heaven.” You will use the remainder of the paragraph to give examples or to provide quotes from the novel that help support this argument. One thing to note is that each topic sentence of each body paragraph should relate to your thesis statement. The usual format for a body paragraph is:

Topic Sentence

Quote or example to support your topic sentence

Explanation of quote or example

Another quote or example to support your topic sentence

Explanation of quote or example

- **Conclusion:** The conclusion is the last paragraph of your essay. The conclusion begins with a rewording of your thesis statement. The next three sentences should summarize the arguments made in each body paragraph. The final sentence will be a thought-provoking statement or question that encourages your reader to think about the ideas presented in your essay.



African version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* from 1902
Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

Unit 4 – Assignments

Literature and Composition

Activity While Reading: As you read the novel, you will conduct a literary analysis by writing the answers to the following questions in your journal. Note that all of the questions may not be applicable in each reading. Answer the ones which are applicable to this unit's reading assignment.

Questions to answer in a literary analysis:

- Who is the author of this work?
 - What is the reason or intent of the author in writing this novel?
 - Who is the protagonist (main character of the story)?
 - What is the protagonist doing, or what is his/her goal?
 - What new characters were introduced in this section?
 - What do their names mean or represent?
 - What lessons can we learn from these characters?
 - What major events happened in this section?
 - What Christian beliefs or ideals are illustrated by these events?
- Read the Assignment Background below.
 - Read *The Pilgrim's Progress* from "Part I, Ninth Stage" through "Part I, Conclusion."
 - Remember to answer the literary analysis questions in your reading journal.
 - Complete an outline for your essay. See the **Language Arts Resources** section of your **ArtiosHCS** curriculum website for more information on outlines and other resources you may need.

Unit 4 – Assignment Background

John Bunyan, *Pilgrim For God*

by Mary Elizabeth Hall, Christian fiction author and editor

John Bunyan's famous allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, tells the gripping story of a man who learns through great trials and adventures to trust and follow God. But it was only after traveling a long, dark path that Bunyan found the wisdom to write this great book. In his autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, he says he was a wretched sinner during his youth. But even as conviction of sin grew in his heart, doubt and confusion tormented him for many years before he became convinced by Scripture that he was accepted and loved by God. Through passages like Hebrews 12:22-24 and many others, Bunyan was assured of his salvation and felt called by God into preaching ministry.

Finding himself in disagreement with the local Quakers on certain doctrinal matters, he preached according to English Puritan theology. The Puritans desired to "purify" the Church of England of practices it derived from the Roman Catholic Church. Often unfairly characterized by outsiders as overly strict, intolerant of others, and harshly repressive, Puritans actually encouraged deep love for God, enjoyed rich fellowship, and were generous to the poor.

Demanding reforms, the Puritans insisted that the affairs of church and civil government were to be carried out under the authority of the Bible. Parliament responded to these demands by enacting laws such as the Conventicle Act of 1664,

which outlawed the assembly of more than five people for religious purposes outside of the Church of England. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, written at least partly while Bunyan was imprisoned for violating this law, portrays many elements of Protestant theology, such as salvation by the grace of God, the authority of Scripture, and the need for dependence on God alone through times of trial.

Although John Bunyan was from a poor

family and had little education, he was an excellent writer. Combining Scripture with familiar happenings from everyday life, he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* making skillful use of humor, poetry, and adventure to proclaim that Christianity is the only way to heaven and perfect joy. The story has never been out of print, has been translated into hundreds of languages, and has been a favorite in Protestant homes and schools for centuries.

Unit 5 – Assignments

Literature and Composition

- Read the Assignment Background below.
- If you have not completed the reading assignment from Unit 4, do so.
- Using the answers in your reading journal and the outline you made in Unit 4, write a rough draft of your essay. You may choose to include information and quotes from the lectures from Ian Johnston. If so, be sure to cite your sources correctly.
- See the **Language Arts Resources** of your **ArtiosHCS** curriculum website for more information on in-text citations, and analysis essays.

Unit 5 – Assignment Background

Adapted for Middle School from:

Bunyan's Style

A lecture *delivered by* Ian Johnston
of Malaspina University-College (now Vancouver Island University),
November 1998

The details of Bunyan's allegory, the shaping ideas in this vision of experience, are, I take it, clear enough from the attention Bunyan gives to them during the course of the story. Of more immediate concern to us now is the question of Bunyan's style: What has he done here to make his belief so compelling to so many people? How is it, in other words, that Bunyan's tale is not just an allegory but a great work?

There are a number of answers to that, and in the time remaining I would like quickly to review some of the most

important.

The first quality of this work which makes it so popular is undoubtedly the prose style. Bunyan writes in the language of the working people. Many of those most influenced by this book were probably unable to read, but having the book read to them was enough. The prose is colloquial, energetic, and instantly comprehensible. In that respect, it is the most accessible text we have read, rivaled only in this respect by the King James Version of the Bible. One could cite many examples here (Bunyan's imagery derived from the experience of country folk

and expressed in a language familiar to them, for instance), but the point does not need much elaboration. One has only to contrast Bunyan's style with the style of, say, *Paradise Lost*, to see the difference. Or, to make a better comparison, one can compare the effect and influence of *Pilgrim's Progress* with the effect and influence of *Gulliver's Travels*, another spiritual pilgrimage, but one written for a much more sophisticated audience in a style far less accessible (hence, *Gulliver's Travels*, particularly the first two books, has often had to be adapted for popular entertainment, particularly for children; something which *Pilgrim's Progress* does not require).

A second factor contributing to the vitality of this allegory is its intensely dramatic nature. Bunyan sets up a conventional form for exploring spiritual development, namely, a physical journey. But this journey pays very little attention to all the various things a writer might have introduced and instead focuses almost exclusively upon dramatic interchanges. What matters here is not the rich sensuousness or independent existence of nature but the human response to experience filtered through the narrow gate of the Puritan spirit concerned with salvation. The result is an extraordinary urgency in the narrative. Christian's soul is at stake in every encounter.

Bunyan achieves this urgency by his constant personification of the trials and tribulations which Christian must face. Sometimes these are recognizable figures from the world around us, but often they are personifications of his own doubts and weaknesses. Hence, throughout *Pilgrim's Progress* the central metaphor of life as a battle is always present, and the encounters are delivered with an energy and vividness which transform doctrine into unforgettable incidents.

Bunyan's success in this regard can be measured in part by the extent to which his

metaphorical personifications have entered the public vocabulary, providing a shared sense of what life is all about: encounters with the Slough of Despond, with Apollyon, Giant Despair, and Ignorance. By making this series of encounters dramatically exciting in the form of an easily accessible narrative, Bunyan allows people to shape their own lives in accordance with his vision. If you like, he provides them with a vocabulary and a topography according to which they can think about and plan their own spiritual lives. Depression, for example, is a concept difficult to grasp and almost impossible to resolve through thought; Giant Despair, on the other hand, is a sharply etched character who is my enemy and whom I must, as a true believer, fight as best I can. There is no doubt about which understanding of spiritual gloom is more effective psychologically.

If we remember that the majority of those who found Bunyan's vision so congenial often led desperately poor material lives in subsistence conditions, we can perhaps better understand the popularity of his vision of life as a struggle against the obstacles which threaten the spirit. To give up to despair or to relax one's faith in the granting of grace is to forget the nature of the test: such a vision, especially given in a wonderful story, can be a constant source of inspiration in difficult times.

And this vision has always been appealing to those who see that their inner light, their spiritual sense of themselves, their responsibility for the salvation of their souls is more important than the prevailing values of society. Bunyan's most vigorous attacks through his dramatic presentations direct themselves against conventional wisdom: Worldly Wiseman, Formalist, Hypocrisy, Civility, and Legality. As George Bernard Shaw has pointed out, Bunyan is not concerned so much here with anything like the seven deadly sins as he is with any compromise with existing social customs. And to present life as a series of battles

against such monsters, and one's spiritual duty the assertion of one's will in the face of them has a powerful appeal which goes well beyond the doctrines of grace, salvation, and faith (or at least is fully comprehensible without them). This aspect of Bunyan's vision makes it easy to see why such Protestantism is such an active promoter of democracy.

It may be the case that, because of this intensely and urgently dramatic structure, the real achievement of this allegory is not so much to convey the details of the belief system (although these are clearly given) as to convey a certain attitude to life as an assertion of one's will in opposition to what presents itself as given by society and our fellow human beings. But Bunyan takes the trouble to get his doctrinal points across, and there is no doubt that the goal of the pilgrimage for Christian, the entry into the Celestial City and the union with God, is worth all the effort it takes to get there. If this story stresses the importance of the individual will shaping life in direct contravention of social norms, it is nonetheless a very Christian vision which justifies that defiance.

In that sense, Bunyan's allegory owes much of its success to more than just the urgency of his prose and the sense he conveys of the deceitfulness of the world. Complementing this is the joy Christian feels when he is in touch with his spiritual certainties. Life for the pilgrim may be lived in the constant presence of reminders of death and destruction, but the compensating joy in the glories of the rewards for the elect are delivered in a passionate prose which conveys the absolute certainty of Christian's convictions.

To get a sense of this, one need only compare Milton's description of heaven in

Book III of *Paradise Lost* with Bunyan's vision of the Celestial City. The fact that Bunyan focuses on the emotions felt in the breast of the believer rather than on any direct description of the glories of God and the heavenly host may be one reason why Bunyan manages to avoid some of the difficulties Milton gets himself into, but the passionate sincerity of the prose carries a conviction that Milton's style in Book III cannot manage:

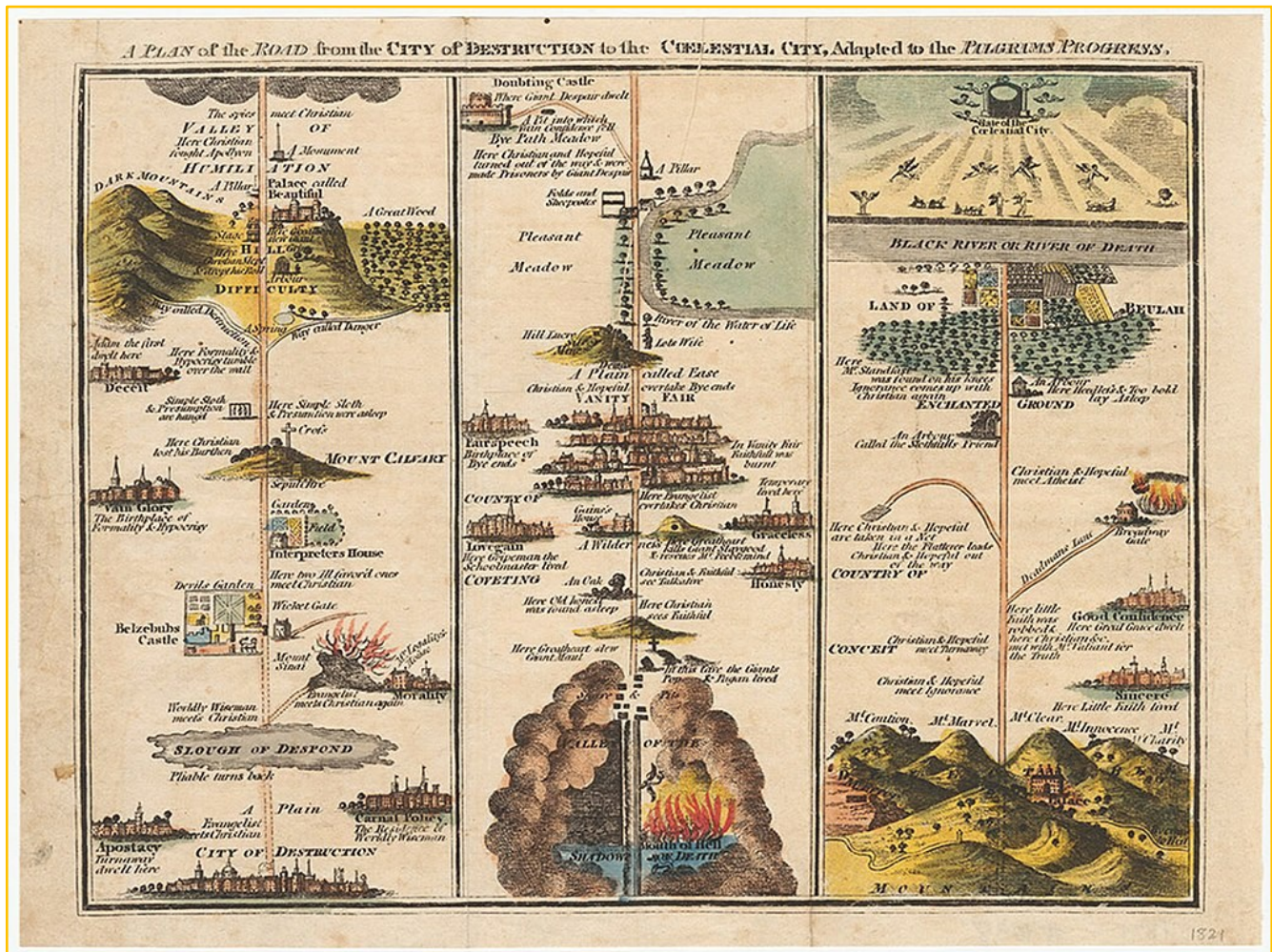
Now, as they walked in this land, they had more rejoicing than in parts more remote from the kingdom to which they were bound; and drawing near to the city, they had yet a more perfect view thereof: It was builded of pearls and precious stones, also the streets thereof were paved with gold; so that, by reason of the natural glory of the city, and the reflection of the sunbeams upon it, Christian with desire fell sick; Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same disease: wherefore here they lay by it a while, crying out because of their pangs, "If you see my Beloved, tell him that I am sick of love."

And yet this glorious celebration is, as always, accompanied by an ominous sense of the alternative, for the very last detail of this story is the sight of Ignorance being turned away from the gates of Heaven. Ignorance is unfit because, although he shares much the same faith as Christian and Hopeful, he does not share their total self-abasement, their sense of their own complete unworthiness: he has made the slightest of concessions to life and, although he has completed almost the entire journey, he is still not worthy: "Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction."

Unit 6 – Assignments

Literature and Composition

- Use the links found on your [ArtiosHCS](#) curriculum website and read the some of the essays. Note the information they include in their analysis.
- Read the rough draft of your essay aloud and make note of sentences that do not make sense or should be changed.
- Look at your original sources and make note of phrases or sentences that are similar to your original source material— place quotation marks around these and cite your source using MLA format. There are links in the [Language Arts Resources](#) section of your [ArtiosHCS](#) curriculum website about the MLA format.
- Review your rough draft, then complete a final draft using the rubric in the [Language Arts Resources](#) section of your [ArtiosHCS](#) curriculum website to check your work.



A Plan of the Road From the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, adapted to *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
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