

Understanding the Enemy and Surviving Adolescence: A Workshop Proposal



Workshop Title: Understanding the Enemy: A Spiritual Battle Plan for Today’s Teens

Workshop Facilitators: Susan Nadathur, MA and Sita Nadathur, MA

Statement of Need: Today’s teens are facing serious psychological, emotional, and spiritual challenges that are growing every day more severe. In Susan’s work as an author of young adult literature, and Sita’s work as a clinical therapist, we have interacted with hundreds of young people. And sadly, we have encountered one persistent and universal theme: self-harm and/or the occult as a way of dealing with the painful realities of being young. Many teens today are going to dark places to find meaning and control in their often-tumultuous lives. But, they are not talking about it. Why would they? What teen wants to share what is happening in their world with adults who might, despite all good intentions, offer advice, quote the Bible, and/or tell them what to do?

Workshop Premise: Perhaps an alternative to talking with young people about the life challenges they face is to talk about the struggles others face—in life and literature. Then discussions can evolve into “what would you do if you were in that position?” Or, “how has Satan infiltrated this young person’s life, without him even knowing it?”

Satan knows God created our children with promise and a purpose. Therefore, he is doing all he can to defeat, distract, and deceive them from fulfilling their objective. Our children are in a spiritual battle and it is our responsibility as their educators to give them the tools they need to stand victorious against Satan and his insidious attacks.

Many Christian educators are afraid that talking about spiritual warfare will frighten—or worse, entrap our young people. But they are already exposed to it by watching and reading things like Harry Potter, the Avengers, and Star Wars. Being honest about spiritual warfare isn’t just necessary, it makes all the sense in the world. They get it; they just need help in understanding how important and intimate this battle really is. We can help them by grounding them in the gospel, and by teaching them how to control their thoughts.

Workshop Strategy: We can help young people to understand the spiritual, emotional and psychological challenges they face through the safety net of literature. Through books and story, young people can perceive how others have encountered and resolved problems that cause sadness, stress, fear and uncertainty. Through literature, they can understand that they are not alone in encountering heartache, rejection, loneliness and fear. Books can do so much more than support reading comprehension and model good writing. They can help students relate to their world and consider the complexities of the human experience. Once a teen sees himself represented in a book, his experience is validated. Feeling part of something bigger, something universal, can be a powerful tool in combating spiritual confusion, suicidal thoughts, and negative emotional impulses.

Workshop Objective: By the end of this presentation, students will feel more comfortable in talking about themselves and their problems by identifying with the challenges and struggles of others as presented through relevant young adult literature, the works of renowned Christian writers (C.S. Lewis) and therapeutic, arts-based activities that inspire character building, creativity, peace, and harmony. Students will be better able to look inside themselves to find their personal resources, challenge their intellect, inspire their imagination, and empower their emotions.

Workshop Description: Using the platform of young adult and Christian literature to navigate the challenges of being young, this workshop is designed to understand and talk about the chain of events that often leads to a young person wanting to either self-harm or to dabble in the dark arts. But unlike other workshops which focus on understanding how and why a young person makes a destructive choice, “Understanding the Enemy” offers a way out of the darkness, a road map that can be used to escape the strongholds of relationship stress, poverty, low self-esteem, the occult and self-harm.

Learning Outcomes: After participating in this presentation, students can expect to 1) learn to look inside themselves for the tools they need to grow; 2) identify coping strategies that work for them; and 3) rely on the power of story to be heard and understood.

How this Workshop is Unique: This workshop probes into the vulnerable corners of young adulthood and offers the opportunity to talk about messy struggles over relationships, body image, bullying, suicidal ideation and—more daringly—the occult. Many young people, looking for meaning in their lives, gravitate toward the occult through one of its major attractions: curiosity. This workshop does not shy away from the controversy and fear of talking about the occult with those who are most attracted to it. The connection between the occult and suicide is often ignored, but there is an innate human attraction to the mysterious, the secret and the unknown—especially for a young person who is contemplating ending his life. Why not meet young people where they are, with an open discussion on the occult and its connection to suicide? With their natural curiosity for the morbid, young people will gravitate to a discussion of death that is free from adult “teachable moments”—or so they think. By capturing their attention with what naturally fascinates them, help can come in the most unexpected way.

Workshop Dynamics: Through selected readings from respected Christian writers and carefully chosen therapeutic activities, this workshop tackles the weighty issues of spiritual warfare, self-

harm, and fascination with the occult. Ultimately, this workshop offers hope by not being afraid to delve into the dark corners where unhealthy thoughts often grow into tragic decisions.

Selected Readings From: *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, *The Halls of Abaddon* by Susan Nadathur

Sample Worksheets/Activities: Self-Confidence Worksheet, Self-Esteem Worksheet, Facing Death with Life Group Activity, The Art of Living (art, drama, and other creative activities)

Post Workshop Follow-up: After the workshop, students will be invited to connect with a network of past participants who will serve as peer-to-peer spiritual mentors known as “Abaddon’s Angels.”

Timeframe: Between four to six hours a week over a period of four weeks

Target Students: Grades 7-12 (ages 13-18)

Supplies Required: Photocopies of selected readings, worksheets, and interactive activities

AV Equipment Required: PowerPoint Projector, screen, sound system

Facilitators Fee: The sharing of the talents and skills that God bestowed upon us is our gift to the world. For this reason, we have no specific monetary charge. Any donation is at your own discretion and may include either a modest honorarium, or simply the cost of providing accommodation, local transportation, and meals for the duration of the time we spend with you.

Instructor Bio: Susan Nadathur is a young adult author whose work focuses on the vulnerable corners of young adulthood. She is actively involved in book therapy and teen suicide prevention programs which incorporate books, stories and the creative arts. Susan lives and works in Lajas, Puerto Rico, but divides her time between the island and her second home in Connecticut. For more information about Susan and her work, you may link to www.SusanNadathur.com.

Instructor Bio: Sita Nadathur is a doctoral candidate at the University of Hartford in Hartford, Connecticut. Originally from Puerto Rico, Sita now resides in the United States, where she provides therapy and neuropsychological testing to culturally diverse clients. Her research and speaking interests focus on the exploration of cultural and spiritual values, and the incorporation of those values as therapeutic interventions enhancing both engagement and treatment adherence.

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Our children are born into a war zone, but they don't have to be casualties. Not if we, their attending soldiers, keep our eyes on our commanding officer and follow His battle plan.