The Scarlet Letter:
Debunking Hawthorne’s Puritan Myth

A Unit Plan for the AP English Language/ American Literature Classroom
NEH Picturing Early America Summer Institute 2010
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Essential Questions:

- How does an author use words to paint images?
- How is ethos established in works of fiction?
- What did the Puritan community look like?
- How did Puritan ideals effect Rationalist, Romantic, and Transcendental thought?
- What is our vision of Puritan America and how does it differ from Hawthorne’s?
Unit Outline:

Anticipatory Set: Is *The Scarlet Letter* still relevant?

Lessons:
- One: “The Prison Door” Close Reading
- Two: Examining 17th Century Material Culture
- Three: Exploring Puritan Gravestones
- Four: Characterization in *The Scarlet Letter*
- Five: Reading Images in *The Scarlet Letter*
- Six: Nature in *The Scarlet Letter*

Seminar: Is Elizabeth Pain Hawthorne’s Hester Pryne?

Research Assignment: “The Custom-House”
Scarlet Letter?
So What.

Is *The Scarlet Letter* alive today?
Is *The Scarlet Letter* alive today?

- [http://www.theintellectualdevotional.com/blog/2010/03/03/1097/](http://www.theintellectualdevotional.com/blog/2010/03/03/1097/)

Lesson One

“The Prison Door”
Close Reading
“The Prison Door”
Close Reading Assignment

1. Read your sentence. Twice!
2. Highlight in one color all instances of Diction- both connotative and denotative
3. Highlight in a second color all instances of Detail- extra facts like colors, numbers, descriptions
4. **Highlight** in a third color imagery- phrases that appeal to your senses
5. Highlight in a fourth color interesting/ unique syntax
6. Choose two to three words from the ML Diction/ Tone packet to describe the tone
7. Draw and color a picture that illustrates your sentence. All colors, people, images, etc. MUST DIRECTLY RELATE to your sentence.
8. Present!
Example:

Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass-plot, much overgrown with burdock, pig-weed, apple-peru, and such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison.

Remember: DICTION + DETAIL + IMAGERY = TONE!

Flowers Datura, Snowdrop & 2 sedums from The Duchess of Beaufort's Book. 1703.

Amaranthus retroflexus. 1885. Thomé, Otto Wilhelm.
Chapter 1: “The Prison Door”

A THRONG of bearded men, in sad-colored garments and gray, steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women, some wearing hoods, and others bareheaded, was assembled in front of a wooden edifice, the door of which was heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes.

The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison. In accordance with this rule, it may safely be assumed that the forefathers of Boston had built the first prison-house, somewhere in the vicinity of Cornhill, almost as seasonably as they marked out the first burial-ground, on Isaac Johnson’s lot, and round about his grave, which subsequently became the nucleus of all the congregated sepulchres in the old church-yard of King’s Chapel. Certain it is, that, some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age, which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front. The rust on the ponderous iron-work of its oaken door looked more antique than any thing else in the new world. Like all that pertains to crime, it seemed never to have known a youthful era. Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass-plot, much overgrown with burdock, pigweed, apple-peru, and such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison. But, on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him.

This rose-bush, by a strange chance, has been kept alive in history; but whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness, so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally overshadowed it,—or whether, as there is fair authority for believing, it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson, as she entered the prison-door,—we shall not take upon us to determine. Finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that inauspicious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers and present it to the reader. It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow.
Heywood, John B. *King’s Chapel (Views of Boston and Vicinity)*
1860?-1870?
King’s Chapel Burying Ground, Boston, MA.
tribes, which was only brought about by De Vries's urgent intercession, and hardly kept by the efforts of a few old chiefs, gave a partial respite, from March until midsummer. But the war broke out again in August, with renewed fierceness, among the tribes above the Hudson Highlands. Early in the month they attacked and plundered trading-boats upon the river, murdering many of the crews. By September the conflict was raging with full force. In the south a band of savages fell upon the quiet home of Ann Hutchinson, at "Annie's Hoeck," now known as Pelham Neck, near New Rochelle, and she and her family, excepting one granddaughter who was carried away captive, were murdered. Other plantations near at hand and on Long Island shared this fate; the Hackenacks and Navesinks fell upon the settle-

Massacre of Ann Hutcheson and Family. 1876-1881

Trial of Mrs. Hutcheson. 1876-1881.
John Winthrop’s Tomb, Died 1649, King’s Chapel Burying Ground, Boston, MA.
Hawthorne’s Puritan Myth?

- What happens to the colors as we move from sentence to sentence?
- What images are you using? Other groups? What tone do these images set?
- What TONE is Hawthorne setting about the Puritans?
- Do you think our collective image as Americans has been influenced by this book?
Lesson Two

17th Century Material Culture
Material Culture Assignment

- With your literary circles, complete the following about your image:
  - Identify your image
  - Look at details: think about colors, functions, use, etc.
  - What time period do you think this is from? How do you know?
  - How does this connect to The Scarlet Letter?
  - Find a quote from the book that describes the image.
  - Find a quote from the book that makes an inference, etc. about Puritan life.

- Be prepared to present your findings to the class!
In silent night when rest I took,
For sorrow neer I did not look,
I waken'd was with thundring nois
And Piteous shreiks of dreadfull voice.
That fearfull sound of fire and fire,
Let no man know is my Desire.
I, starting up, the light did spy,
And to my God my heart did cry
To strengthen me in my Distresse
And not to leave me succourlesse.
Then coming out beheld a space,
The flame consume my dwelling place.

And, when I could no longer look,
I blest his Name that gave and took,
That layd my goods now in the dust:
Yea so it was, and so 'twas just.
It was his own: it was not mine;
Far be it that I should repine.

He might of All justly bereft,
But yet sufficient for us left.
When by the Ruines oft I past,
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,
And here and there the places spye
Where oft I sate, and long did lye.

Here stood that Trunk, and there that chest;
There lay that store I counted best:
My pleasant things in ashes lye,
And them behold no more shall I.
Under thy roof no guest shall sitt,
Nor at thy Table eat a bitt.

No pleasant tale shall 'ere be told,
Nor things recounted done of old.
No Candle 'ere shall shine in Thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice ere heard shall bee.
In silence ever shalt thou lye;
Adieu, Adeiu; All's vanity.

Then streight I gin my heart to chide,
And didst thy wealth on earth abide?
Didst fix thy hope on mouldring dust,
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the skye
That dunghill mists away may flie.
Thou hast an house on high erect
Fram'd by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnished,
Stands permanent tho' this bee fled.
It's purchased, and paid for too
By him who hath enough to doe.

A Prise so vast as is unknown,
Yet, by his Gift, is made thine own.
Ther's wealth enough, I need no more;
Farewell my Pelf, farewell my Store.
The world no longer let me Love,
My hope and Treasure lyes Above.

Text notes:
Line 5: fire and fire, Fire! and Fire!
Line 11: beheld a space, watched for a time
Line 14: I blest his name that gave and took, see Job 1:21
Line 24: Sathe, sat
Line 40: Arm of flesh, see 2 Chron. 32:8; Isa. 9:18-20; Jer. 17:4-7
Line 42: Dunghill mists, see Ezra 6:9-12.
Line 43: House on high erect, see 2 Cor. 5:1; Heb. 11:10
Line 48: Enough to doe, ie. enough to do it
Line 52: Pelf, property, possessions
Line 54: Treasure lyes Above, see Luke 12:34
Hawthorne’s Puritan Myth?

- Were you surprised by how the Puritans lived?
- Do you think Hawthorne is presenting an accurate picture in his novel?
- How does looking at the material culture help us understand the Puritans better?
- Think about Anne Bradstreet’s poem “Upon the Burning of Our House”. How does looking at the material culture of the 17th century change or solidify our understanding of this poem?
Lesson Three

Exploring Puritan Gravestones
Puritan Gravestones

With your literature circles:

- Each group will receive 5-6 images from headstones from various New England burying grounds from the 17th and 18th centuries.
- As a group, discuss: common images, iconography, epitaphs
- As a group, consider the public argument stones are attempting to convey and consider SOAPstone (Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, tone) for each image
- As a group, consider what you know about Puritan society based on your reading of The Scarlet Letter, Ann Bradstreet’s “Upon the Burning of our House” and Jonathan Edward’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”. Do these images help or hinder those images of Puritan society?
Puritan Gravestones

Individually:

Choose a character from *The Scarlet Letter* and create a headstone for him or her.

Include:

- Epitaph (the short text honoring the deceased person)
- Images (go beyond visual!)
- Argument (how do you want other Puritans to feel about this character?)

On the back of your gravestone, explain the choices you made for your epitaph, images, and argument.

Include at least one quotation for each (with correct MLA citation!!!)
John Nutting
gravestone, died 1790
Salem, MA

Here Lyes the
Remains of
John Nutting
Esq. who died
May 20th A.D. 1790
in the 97th Year
of his Age.
Detail of the Right Border of the Isaac Spofford Gravestone, 1786, Beverly, Massachusetts. Slate.
Detail of the Polly Harris Gravestone, 1787, Charlestown, Massachusetts.
Detail of the Joseph Tapping Gravestone, 1678, King's Chapel Burial Ground, Boston.
Detail of the Susanna Jayne Gravestone, Slate, 1776, Burial Hill, Marblehead.
Characterization in
The Scarlet Letter
Protestants Had Ideas of Portraits When They Arrived...

van Dyck, Anthony. *Charles I*. 1632-1637. Portraitgalerie, Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck, Austria


The Freake-Gibbs Painter: Debunking the Puritan Myth?

After looking at these portraits (the earliest known portraits painted in America), discuss the following:

- Is the artist using a 3-dimensional or flat linear style?
- Why might he use this style?
- What social class are the subjects of the paintings? How can you tell?
- Why might there be limited background in the portraits?
- Do these portraits change your image of the Puritans? Why or why not?
“Why Why should I the World be minding therein a World of Evils Finding

Then Farewell World: Farewell thy Jarres thy Joies thy Toies thy Wiles thy Warrs

Truth Sounds Retreat: I am not sorye.

The Eternal Drawes to him my heart By Faith (which can thy Force Subvert)

To Crowne me (after Grace) with Glory.”
Assignment:

Choose a character from *The Scarlet Letter* and create a portrait for them.

Be sure to keep in mind the conventions of 17th century portraiture- think about clothing, posture, props, etc.

Like Thomas Smith, be sure to include a poem explaining your character.

Include a quotation that connects to your character (you can write it on the back of your portrait).

You may choose your medium, but it must be in color!

Be prepared to present your portrait to the class!
Lesson Five

Reading Images in
The Scarlet Letter
Reading Art

- The following terms are associated with painting. As you observe the selected painting, notice how these terms are used in describing the painting. Formulate definitions for these terms as they apply to art. Also consider and discuss the questions about technique and effect.
  - Nuance
  - Chiaroscuro
  - Hue
  - Tint
  - Contrast
  - Value
  - Shading
As you study the picture, consider the following questions.

- How does Trumbull use lighting to draw your attention to various people or objects in the painting?
- How does he use darkness to accentuate other aspects of the painting?
- What is the overall impression you get about the tonal quality of the painting from the colors and light and dark mixtures of the painting?
- Does the light come from a source within or outside the painting? How does this affect your perception of the painting?
The road, after the two wayfarers had crossed from the peninsula to the mainland, was no other than a footpath. It straggled onward into the mystery of the primeval forest. This hemmed it in so narrowly, and stood so black and dense on either side, and disclosed such imperfect glimpses of the sky above, that, to Hester’s mind, it imagined not amiss the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering. The day was chill and somber. Overhead was a gray expanse of cloud, slightly stirred, however, by a breeze, so that a gleam of the flickering sunshine might now and then be seen at its solitary play along the path. This flitting cheerfulness was always at the further extremity of some long vista through the forest. The sportive sunlight – feebly sportive, at best, in the predominant pensiveness of the day and scene – withdrew itself as they came nigh, and left the spots where it had danced the drearier, because they had hoped to find them bright.
Annotation
Guiding Questions

Part I:
- Underline any words or phrases that suggest the tonal qualities you found in the Trumbull painting.
- Draw circles around any words or phrases that correspond with the art terms on the preceding page.
- What musical instrument best describes this scene?
- What cloth or material best describes this scene?
- What one sound best describes this scene?
Annotation Guide

Part II

- How does Hawthorne paint this scene using words instead of paint?
- How do the questions about the picture help you to visualize this scene?
- What feeling does Hawthorne evoke in you as you read this scene?
- How does he use contrast of light and dark in this scene? How is this similar to Trumbull’s use of light and dark?
Lesson Six

Nature in

The Scarlet Letter
The Forest Scene

“The situation... moment of crucial choice; an invitation to the lost Emersonian, the thunder-struck Adam, to make up his mind- whether to accept the world he had fallen into, or whether to flee it, taking his chances in the allegedly free wilderness to the west.” (Lewis)

“For Hawthorne, the forest scene was neither the proper home of the admirable Adam, nor was it the hideout of the malevolent adversary. It was the ambiguous setting of moral choice, the scene of reversal and discovery in his characteristic tragic drama. The forest was the pivot in Hawthorne’s grand recurring pattern of escape and return.” (Lewis)
Picturing “A Forest Walk”

Part I

- Your literary circle will receive a passage from either “A Forest Walk”, “The Pastor and His Parishioner”, “A Flood of Sunshine”, or “The Child at the Brook-Side”.
- First, read your passage. Highlight and annotate for the following:
  - Tone- look at diction, detail, imagery
  - Connections to comments from Lewis
  - Words that illustrate the Romantic view of nature
Part II

As a group, look at landscape paintings from the following landscape painters:
- Salvator Rosa
- Claude Lorrain
- Washington Allston
- William Gilpin
- Frederic Edwin Church
- Thomas Cole
- Thomas Moran
- Albert Bierstadt

Choose a painting that you feel embodies the tone, mood, and images of your passage. Also, keep in mind the comments from the Lewis literary criticism and our discussion of Romantic traits.

Pair your passage with your painting.

Be prepared to present and defend your choice!

As a class, we will create a landscape gallery on myisd
It was strange, the way in which Pearl stood, looking so stedfastly at them through the dim medium of the forest-gloom; herself, meanwhile, all glorified with a ray of sunshine, that was attracted thitherward as by a certain sympathy. In the brook beneath stood another child,—another and the same,—with likewise its ray of golden light. Hester felt herself, in some indistinct and tantalizing manner, estranged from Pearl; as if the child, in her lonely ramble through the forest, had strayed out of the sphere in which she and her mother dwelt together, and was now vainly seeking to return to it (Hawthorne 133).
Debunking the Puritan Myth?

- How does Hawthorne use the American landscape to convey feelings of national pride to his audience?
- Based on our studies so far, does Hawthorne’s view of nature correspond with the Puritan view of nature?
- Why might this be important as we look at how the Puritans and the Romantics viewed nature? What does that tell us about their society?
Is Elizabeth Pain Hawthorne’s Hester Pryne?
Assignment:
- Literary critics claim that the gravestone of Elizabeth Pain, found in King’s Chapel burying grounds in Boston, is the gravestone Hawthorne used as inspiration for the final paragraph of The Scarlet Letter.
- Research Elizabeth Pain’s history AND the argument behind why critics believe her gravestone inspired Hawthorne.
- Write a 1-2 page written response that defends, challenges, or qualifies the following statement: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “engraved escutcheon” was inspired by the gravestone of Elizabeth Pain. You must refer to the visual gravestone and any primary or secondary sources.
- Prepare for a seminar over the above statement.
Yes or No: Elizabeth Pain is Hester Pryne

So said Hester Prynne, and glanced her sad eyes downward at the scarlet letter. And, after many, many years, a new grave was delved, near an old and sunken one, in that burial-ground beside which King’s Chapel has since been built. It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tomb-stone served for both. All around, there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate—as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport—there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald’s wording of which may serve for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so sombre is it, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow:—“ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES” (Hawthorne 166).
HERE LYES THE BODY OF ELIZABETH PAIN WIFE TO SAMUEL PAIN AGED NEAR 52 YEARS, DEPARED THIS LIFE NOVEMB. Y. 26 1704
“The Custom-House” Visual Brainstorming and Research Assignment
Topic: The Custom House as a symbol of new American civic identity/The Custom House and Federal-style architecture
Topic: The Power of the Federal Government in the 1840s-1850s
Topic: Hawthorne’s Political Career in the Salem Custom House
Foreseeing political death for the Democrats in the election, the artist imagines a funeral of the party's standard-bearers with a procession of the faithful. Democratic senators (left to right) Sam Houston of Texas, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, (obscured unidentified man), and South Carolina's John Calhoun carry a litter bearing the bodies of Van Buren, as a fox, and Lewis Cass, as a gas balloon (an unflattering play on his last name). Cass expels clouds of gas from his mouth. Benton carries a slip of paper with the words, "Last of the Family Reign." Calhoun carries an iron collar or manacle labeled "Slavery." They are followed by a second group of pallbearers: Ohio Senator William Allen, former Van Buren advisor Amos Kendall, New Hampshire Democratic leader Levi Woodbury, and former general William Worth, who carry a stretcher bearing retiring President Polk (with cloven hoofs and a devil's tail). Kendall also carries a document labeled "Latest Despatch" while Worth holds his "Military Comi--[Commission?]," possibly alluding to his role in the Scott-Pillow controversy. (See "Self-Inflating Pillow," no. 1848-2.) An empty "Sub Treasury" box lies open next to Polk on the stretcher. The Independent or "Sub Treasury" bill was a widely criticized measure passed by the Polk administration in August 1846. All of the mourners wear clerical robes. A tombstone for the newspaper "Washington Union" is at left and a monument "To the Memory of Democracy" at right.

Topic: Hawthorne’s Motives for Writing The Scarlet Letter
Topic: Hawthorne’s use of Salem landmarks to establish credibility

Saunders, Jonathan Peele. *Plan of the town of Salem in the commonwealth of Massachusetts, from actual surveys, made in the years 1796 & 1804; with the improvements and alterations since that period as surveyed.* 1820. Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston, MA.
“The Custom-House” Research Assignment

- After brainstorming topics, complete the following for your research assignment:
  - Think about Hawthorne’s arguments in “The Custom-House” as it relates to your topic. Be sure to focus on the three Aristotelian appeals (ethos, logos, pathos)
  - Explore how the topic relates to your primary source (“The Custom-House” AND the rest of The Scarlet Letter) and a secondary source (EBSCOHost or Gale literary criticism)
  - Create a presentation using Prezi
  - Write a 1 ½ -2 page reflection explaining how your image evokes your topic
Works Cited


- *Flowers Datura, Snowdrop & 2 sedums from The Duchess of Beaufort’s Book*. 1703.


- Heywood, John B. *King’s Chapel (Views of Boston and Vicinity) 1860?-1870?*


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