

Learning Life Skills through Literary Analysis

Using the complex text of Nathaniel Hawthorne's
The Scarlet Letter to teach close reading.

The Scarlet
Letter



Using Literature to help students understand how to analyze text and support personal opinions, students will read the The Custom-House essay of the novel *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. They will be asked to reflect upon it and articulate how this is a reflection of the American experience today. Inherent will be a request for students to think about, analyze, and use text as support for the significance that this classic literary work holds for their lives, and that of others. After a brief introduction, students will work in their Lit Circles on text-dependent questions as they analyze the passage. They will be asked to stand and present their answers.

Over a subsequent four weeks following the start of this lesson, students continue to read *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne in its entirety and then either (a) write an argumentative essay defending their point of view of one of the characters, or (b) argue the point of view of a character they are assigned regardless of their personal opinion.

WARM UP

Silence is golden. Students enter room and get their journals (spiral bound notebooks), and get to work. Questions for the day are posted on the SMART Board, and there are typically three.

1. *Tell me what you want me to know.* This is an opportunity for students to share what's going on in their lives. It helps, for example, to know that if they had a rough night working at the fast food restaurant, had to close the store late and they did not have the energy to do a homework assignment. This helps to better understand their situation and work on new strategies for success.
2. *Correct this sentence.* This is an opportunity to continue working on grammar as they continue to advance. The Custom-House essay of *the Scarlet Letter* is used by Nathaniel Hawthorne to give the reader some history regarding the authors purpose in writing this novel.
3. *Write a brief paragraph* describing how you marked the text given to you last Friday. After they finish writing have them work in small groups to read what they wrote to each other. Reading the words are important as it then helps them to hear their own choices of words and expressions.

LESSON

Students read The Custom-House essay in *The Scarlet Letter* and mark the text with information they find interesting and that relates to the **text-dependent** questions provided at the start of class which were as follows:

1. Why does Hawthorne use the phrase “but one idle rainy day...?” What types of novels and stories often begin with such descriptions?
2. The unopened documents Hawthorne describes are part of the fiction he creates. What detail does he include to persuade his reader that he is describing actual, historical documents?
3. In the paragraph describing the scarlet letter, Hawthorne combines concrete descriptive details with a concluding sentence focusing on the strange feeling the letter evokes for him. What effect is created by this combination of concrete and mystical language?
4. What does Hawthorne mean to signify by his account of the “burning heat” of the letter? How does this detail affect his pose as a historian presenting an account of an actual event?

APPLICATION

Students will use their marked passages to collaboratively answer teacher provided question:

Is punishment necessary to maintain an orderly society?

Students are asked to compare their views with Hawthorne's using evidence from the text. This allows them to also reflect upon the relevance of this literary work to their lives today.

Lesson Objectives

- a. Students will read critically and support interpretations of the novel using close reading of the text.
- b. Students will be able to identify romantic elements in a novel.
- c. Students will demonstrate an understanding of vocabulary in the novel using context clues and research.
- d. Students will recognize the first person narrative technique used in the introduction.
- e. Students will be able to write a preliminary thesis statement for an argumentative essay.

Resource Links (click to open)

[Achieve the Core](#)

[National Math and Science Initiative CoLab](#)

[The National Writing Project](#)

[Discovery Education](#)

[SAS Curriculum Pathways](#)

Materials

- *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.
- Spiral bound notebooks
- Highlighters/pens

Classroom Tips

- Set up the room in order for students to work in teams of 4-5
- Use smart board to post daily journal and text-dependent questions

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Special message to teachers, parents and interested others: *This lesson was designed to shed light as to what the actual standards are and how they are being used by teachers all across the country to help all of our children – no matter the zip code – learn to think most strategically, critically and collaboratively. We hope the lesson demonstrates the simplicity and high level of expectations teachers and state leaders have agreed to as most important to help prepare our youth for the workplace. Let’s know the facts, then join hands and help our teachers implement these standards in how we reinforce them in our homes and throughout our community.*

The Common Core State Standards www.corestandards.org

Mission Statement: The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (“the Standards”) are the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school.

The present work, led by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), builds on the foundation laid by states in their decades-long work on crafting high-quality education standards. The Standards also draw on the most important international models as well as research and input from numerous sources, including state departments of education, scholars, assessment developers, professional organizations, educators from kindergarten through college, and parents, students, and other members of the public. In their design and content, refined through successive drafts and numerous rounds of feedback, the Standards represent a synthesis of the best elements of standards-related work to date and an important advance over that previous work.

As specified by CCSSO and NGA, the Standards are (1) research and evidence based, (2) aligned with college and work expectations, (3) rigorous, and (4) internationally benchmarked. A particular standard was included in the document only when the best available evidence indicated that its mastery was essential for college and career readiness in a twenty-first-century, globally competitive society. The Standards are intended to be a living work: as new and better evidence emerges, the Standards will be revised accordingly.

Click here for easy reference to the specific standards referenced below in this lesson:

Reading Standards for Literature – Grades 11-12 students

Key Ideas and Details

- RL.1112.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- RL.1112.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RL.1112.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Craft and Structure

- RL.1112.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
- RL.1112.5 Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- RL.1112.6 Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

The activities included in this Ignite Curriculum Guide are provided to inspire and equip educators to implement the lesson as seen on The Ignite Show. The intent is not to necessarily imply mastery of the standards, but to offer alignment to a sampling of standards.

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