

Approved for use in English III

Summary of the Work:

Set in 17th Century Boston, *The Scarlet Letter* delves into the psychological and sociological ramifications of such timeless issues as sin, shame, punishment, guilt, remorse, revenge and hypocrisy in a theocratic Puritan society. Hester Prynne, a young abandoned wife must for the remainder of her life wear a symbol of her adultery, while her partner in sin is revered by the same judgmental, intolerant townspeople. She deals with the shame of trying to raise her illegitimate daughter, her returned husband's vengeance, and her onerous guilt for her part in transforming her husband into a fiend, her lover into a tortured shell of a man, and her daughter into an otherworldly sprite.

Rationale:

The Scarlet Letter has long been deemed a literary standard for introducing students to Puritan literature and theocratic tenets. As a period piece, it explores and reflects the culture of early American society. It dovetails well with eleventh graders' concurrent study of American history. Written in the 19th Century, set in the 17th Century, students gain exposure to themes and events of one century, and the flowery period prose of another. The universal themes contained in the novel provide fertile ground for thought, discussion, and writing. The overarching theme of "Be true, be true, be true..." parallels many timeless historical and contemporary issues.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

- Carpenter, Frederic L. "Scarlet A Minus," *English Journal*, XXXIII, January, 1944, pp. 7-14.
- Josephs, Lois. "One Approach to the Puritans," *English Journal*, L, March, 1961, pp. 449-458.
- Marcus, Fred H. "*The Scarlet Letter*: The Power of Ambiguity," *English Journal* LI, October, 1962, pp. 449-458.

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 1420
- Readability Level:

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Although the novel deals with the topic of adultery, Hawthorne never once mentions the word, and skirts around the issue with lofty 18th Century propriety.

Connection to the Curriculum:

This novel fulfills the requirements of a chronological approach to American Literature proscribed by the eleventh grade curriculum.

The nineteenth century language, syntax, and sentence structure enriches students' exposure to a variety of literary styles.

Hawthorne's use of recurring motifs and symbolism is also noteworthy for students to study.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

This novel has long been considered an American classic in the literature canon, and is included in numerous college preparatory reading lists. It also contains a wealth of PSAT/SAT vocabulary.