



The Scarlet Letter

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Scarlet Letter



- Author: Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)
- born in Salem, Massachusetts as Nathaniel Hathorne
- relative of Puritan Judge John Hathorne, a notorious judge in the Salem witch trials.
- because of guilt and fear of association with his ancestors, Hawthorne added a 'w' into his last name

The Scarlet Letter



- Author: Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)
- graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825
- wrote novels and short stories, but to supplement his income he worked as an inspector at the Boston Custom House
- married Sophia Peabody in 1842

The Scarlet Letter



- Author: Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)
 - served as Consul to England for a short time before his health started failing
 - died on May 18, 1864
 - today, Hawthorne stands as one of America's greatest writers

The Scarlet Letter



- About the novel:
 - Set in 17th century Boston
 - Strict Puritan belief system (think back to Lit. of Religion!)
 - Main characters: Hester Prynne, Pearl, Rev. Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth
 - Novel spans 7 years

The Scarlet Letter



- Like other Puritan settlements in New England, the local and colonial governments were theocracies
- A theocracy is a government where the civil laws are based (in whole or in part) on religious laws; civil leaders in theocracies are probably also important religious leaders
- Because Puritan Boston was a theocratic society, crime against church (or God) was the equivalent of a crime against another person or against “the State.”

The Scarlet Letter



- Background info:
 - Protagonist Hester Prynne gives birth to a baby girl, Pearl. Her husband, however, has been missing for many years.
 - The town punishes Hester for her adultery; she is sent to prison and then forced to wear a scarlet letter A on her clothes for the rest of her life.

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- Background info:
 - Hester refuses to identify the father of her baby
 - Her lover seems to escape punishment...but, will his internal suffering prove worse than public shame???

The Scarlet Letter



- Symbols (WRITE THESE DOWN!! – Back of Book)
- --see pg. 9-10
 - The scarlet letter
 - The prison
 - The scaffold
 - Nature
 - Sunlight
 - Color

The Scarlet Letter



- Themes (WRITE THESE DOWN!! – Back of book)

-Sin

-Revenge

-Hypocrisy

-Justice & Judgement

-Identity & Society

The Scarlet Letter



- Literary Elements (WRITE THESE DOWN!! – Back of book)

-Tone

-Mood

-Foreshadowing

-Imagery

-Suspense

-Characterization

****The essay at the end of the novel requires you to explore how Hawthorne uses a literary element throughout the novel! Pay attention & annotate as you read!!****

The Custom House



- The introductory chapter to *The Scarlet Letter* is called “The Custom House”.
- Nathaniel Hawthorne tells of his time as a clerk in the Salem, Mass. Government Custom House.
- He claims to have found a letter written by Hester Prynne (the novel’s main character) and an embroidered scarlet A. The letter tells of Hester’s experiences, which Hawthorne relates in the novel.
- The novel is NOT based in historical fact, but Hawthorne uses “The Custom House” to give his story credibility.