



12TH GRADE REQUIRED SUMMER READING

Please purchase the specific edition listed below (publisher, year, and ISBN):

The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings by Nathaniel Hawthorne
Second Norton Critical Edition, 2017 ISBN: 9780393264890

ASSIGNMENT:

- Read and complete the Pre-Reading Activities to *The Scarlet Letter*
- Read “The Custom-House”: Introductory to *The Scarlet Letter*, including the many very helpful footnotes.
(pp. 7-33)
 - Annotate and Underline. **It is less than 27 pages**, so read s-l-o-w-l-y for understanding.
 - Write 3 quotes that stand out to you, and explain why you chose those quotes.
 - Complete the Vocabulary section
 - Answer the Questions section in complete sentences.
 - This will be due upon return to school on **Monday, August 17, 2026**.

Pre-Reading Activities:

Nineteenth century Romantic American writing typically possesses some or all of the following:

- Long sentences and dashes
- Flowery diction
- Litotes
- Other stylistic devices including, but not limited to, oxymoron, rhetorical questions, exclamatory sentences, loose sentences, periodic sentences and parallel structure.

Nathaniel Hawthorne uses all of the above in *The Scarlet Letter*, but perhaps the most challenging aspect to his work is the language. Once you get used to his style, and learn the vocabulary, he’s much easier to read!

* Hawthorne titles all his chapters. This too is typical of nineteenth century literature. Reading the title of the chapter then the first and last paragraphs of the chapter, will give you good idea what you are to derive from the rest of the chapter.

* DO NOT SKIP OVER WORDS YOU DON’T KNOW! While it can be tedious, taking the time to look up a word unfamiliar to you will help with your comprehension.

* Read aloud and pay attention to punctuation.

* Reread what you do not understand the first time. Be willing to do the hard work.

I. SIMPLIFY AND PARAPHRASE FLOWERY DICTION AND PHRASES

Practice simplifying and paraphrasing passages. Read the original text then “translate” into modern language. The first two have been done for you as examples.

- A. Original style

“though disinclined to talk overmuch of myself and my affairs at the fireside, and to my personal friends...”

Modern style

“though not inclined to talk very much about myself or what I do by a fire or with my friends.”

B. Original style

“an autobiographical impulse should twice in my life have taken possession of me”

Modern style

“twice I’ve had an urge to write about myself.”

C. Original style

“Finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative...”

Modern style

D. Original style

“It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself.”

Modern style

II. LOOKING FOR LITOTES

A litotes is an understatement in which an affirmative is expressed through negative words, as in “That’s not bad at all!”

Read the following passage (litotes in bold), then read the translation.

“The age had not so much refinement, that any sense of impropriety restrained the wearers of petticoat and farthing gale from stepping forth in to the public ways, and wedging their **not unsubstantial persons**, if occasion were, into the throng nearest to the scaffold at an execution.”

(The age was unrefined, so no sense of propriety kept hefty women from going into the streets and pushing right to the front near the scaffold to watch an execution.)

Now read the next passage and try to translate the entire passage yourself.

“The women who were now standing about the prison-door stood within less than half a century of the period when the man-like Elizabeth had been the **not altogether unsuitable representative** of the sex.”

Your translation:

III. IDENTIFYING THE ANTECEDENT AND REFERENCES

An antecedent is an earlier clause, phrase or word to which a pronoun, another word or a noun refers back.

Example: "But **Arthur Dimmesdale!** Were such a man once more to fall, what plea could be urged in extenuation of **his** crime? Here, Arthur Dimmesdale is the antecedent to "his." Clear identification of an antecedent can change or muddle the meaning of an entire passage. Practice identifying the antecedents and their replacements by filling in the correct antecedent/reference in the blanks. The first couple have been done for you.

- A. "A revelation, he [Roger Chillingworth] could almost say, had been granted to him [Roger Chillingworth]. It [] mattered little for his object, whether celestial or from what other region. By its [] aid, in all the subsequent relations betwixt him and Mr. Dimmesdale, not merely the external presence, but the very inmost soul of the latter [], seem to be brought out before his [] eyes, so that he [] could see and comprehend its [] every movement.
- B. "Had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he [] might have seen in the beautiful woman, [Hester Prynne] so picturesque in her [] attire and mien, and with the infant at her [] bosom, an object to remind him [] of the image of Divine Maternity, which so many illustrious painters have vied with one another to represent; something which should remind him, [] indeed, but only by contrast of that sacred image [] of sinless motherhood, whose infant [] was to redeem the world.

IV. LONG SENTENCES AND DASHES

Compare the two versions of the same sentences to see how Hawthorne uses dashes.

"It is a little remarkable, that--through disinclination to talk overmuch of myself and of my affairs at the fireside, and to my personal friends--an autobiographical impulse should twice in my life have taken possession of me, in addressing the public. The first time was three or four years since, when I favored the reader--inexcusably, and for no earthly reason, that either the indulgent reader or the intrusive author could imagine--with a description of my way of life in the deep quietude of an Old Manse. And now--because, beyond my deserts, I was happy enough to find a listener or two on the former occasion--I again seize the public by the button, and talk of my three years' experience in the Custom-House."

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Vocabulary: Write definitions (**the author's intended meaning in context**) for the words in bold.

1. It is scarcely **decorous**, however, to speak all, even where we speak impersonally.
2. This, in fact — a desire to put myself in my true position as editor, or very little more, of the most **prolix** among the tales that make up my volume — this, and no other, is my true reason for assuming a personal relation with the public.
3. “she appears by the fierceness of her beak and eye, and the general **truculency** of her attitude, to threaten mischief to the inoffensive community”
4. a certain **venerable** personage
5. “The **besom** of reform hath swept him out of office”
6. mingle his dust with the **natal** earth
7. Spent a **tempestuous** manhood
8. Oyster-like **tenacity**

9. *it was chiefly this strange, **indolent**, unjoyous attachment for my native town*
10. *For upwards of twenty years before this epoch, the independent position of the Collector had kept the Salem Custom-House out of the whirlpool of political **vicissitude**, which makes the tenure of office generally so fragile.*
11. *They were allowed, on my representation, to rest from their **arduous** labours, and soon afterwards...withdrew to a better world.*
12. *after a **torpid** winter, would creep out into the warm sunshine of May or June”*
13. ***Sagaciously**, under their spectacles, did they peep*
14. *the **obtuse**ness that allowed greater ones to slip between their fingers*
15. *...nothing could exceed the **vigilance** and **alacrity** with which they proceeded to lock, and double-lock, and secure with tape and sealing-wax, all the avenues of the delinquent vessel.*
16. *“the case seemed rather to require an **eulogium** on their praiseworthy caution after the mischief had happened”*

17. the **phosphorescent** glow of a **mouldering** trunk

18. To represent all my excellent old friends as in their **dotage**

19. With his **florid** cheek, his compact figure, smartly arrayed in a bright-buttoned blue coat...

20. "so shallow, so delusive, so **impalpable**, such an absolute nonentity, in every other"

21. "His **gourmandism** was a highly agreeable trait; and to hear him talk of roast-meat was as appetizing as a pickle or an oyster"

22. neither sacrificed nor **vitiating** any spiritual endowment

23. it always pleased and satisfied me to hear him **expatiate** on fish, poultry, and butcher's meat

24. ...and of benevolence which, fiercely as he led the bayonets on at Chippewa or Fort Erie, I take to be of quite as genuine a stamp as what actuates any or all the **polemical** philanthropists of the age.

25. Burdened with infirmities which even the **martial** music of his own spirit-stirring recollections...

26. All merely graceful attributes are usually the most **evanescent**;

27. ...after growing **fastidious** by sympathy with the classic refinement of Hillard's culture; after becoming **imbued** with poetic sentiment at Longfellow's hearthstone...

28. The merchants valued him not less than we, his **esoteric** friends

29. It might be true, indeed, that this was a life which could not, with **impunity**, be lived too long;

30. Prior to the Revolution there is a **dearth** of records; the earlier documents and archives of the Custom-House having, probably, been carried off to Halifax...

31. taking upon herself, likewise, to give advice in all matters, especially those of the heart, by which means — as a person of such **propensities** inevitably must — she gained from many people the reverence due to an angel, but, I should imagine, was looked upon by others as an intruder and a nuisance.

32. my **filial** duty

33. It throws its **unobtrusive tinge** throughout the room...

34. *only because I had not **fathomed** its deeper import*

35. *"the **enervating** magic of place do not operate too long upon him, his forfeited powers may be redeemable"*

36. *...nor is it their custom **ignominiously** to kick the head which they have just struck off.*

37. *If, heretofore, I had been none of the warmest of partisans I began now, at this season of peril and adversity, to be pretty acutely sensible with which party my **predilections** lay;*

38. *"the obscurely seen, but majestic, figure had imparted to me the scarlet symbol and the little roll of explanatory manuscript... to bring his mouldy and moth-eaten **lucubrations** before the public"*

39. *I recall the figures and **appellations** of these few*

Questions:

1. What do you learn about the narrator from the opening paragraphs? What is the setting? (time, place, environment)

2. What is the symbolic significance of the eagle above the entrance of the Custom-House? How is it an apt metaphor for the narrator's own experience?

3. Briefly describe each of the other employees at the Custom-House and their general characteristics.

4. The narrator describes several people who work at the Custom-House in some detail. Based on his descriptions of the Inspector, the General, and the Collector, what are the qualities you think the narrator most admires? What qualities does he not respect?

5. What does the narrator find in the old papers on the second floor of the Custom-House?

6. What does the narrator do with what he finds, and how does he react? In what way is his reaction an example of foreshadowing?

7. The narrator states, "There are few uglier traits of human nature than this tendency . . . to grow cruel merely because they possessed the power of inflicting harm." To what is he referring?

8. What happens to the narrator as a result of the election? How does the narrator react?

9. For what reasons does Hawthorne write "The Custom-House" introductory to *The Scarlet Letter*?