



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS

Literary Analysis

Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.7 Analyze, interpret, and evaluate an author's use of figurative ... language (e.g., symbolism)....

Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.8 Explain how ideas, values, and themes of a literary work often reflect the historical period in which it was written.

NOTABLE QUOTE

"Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!"

FYI

Did you know that Nathaniel Hawthorne ...

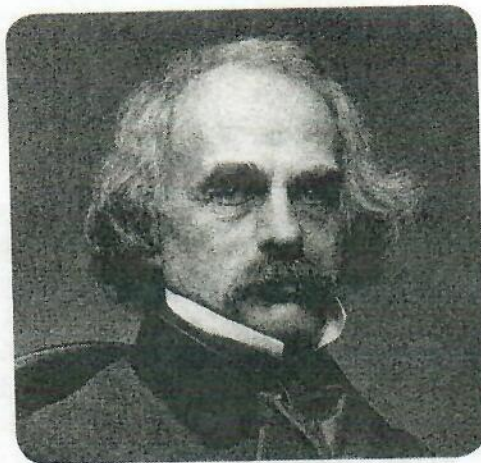
- achieved his first literary success writing stories for children?
- was a mentor to Herman Melville, who dedicated *Moby Dick* to him?
- wrote a campaign biography for his college friend Franklin Pierce, who became the 14th U.S. president?

AuthorOnline

For more on Nathaniel Hawthorne, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.

The Minister's Black Veil

Short Story by Nathaniel Hawthorne



Nathaniel Hawthorne

c. 1804–1864

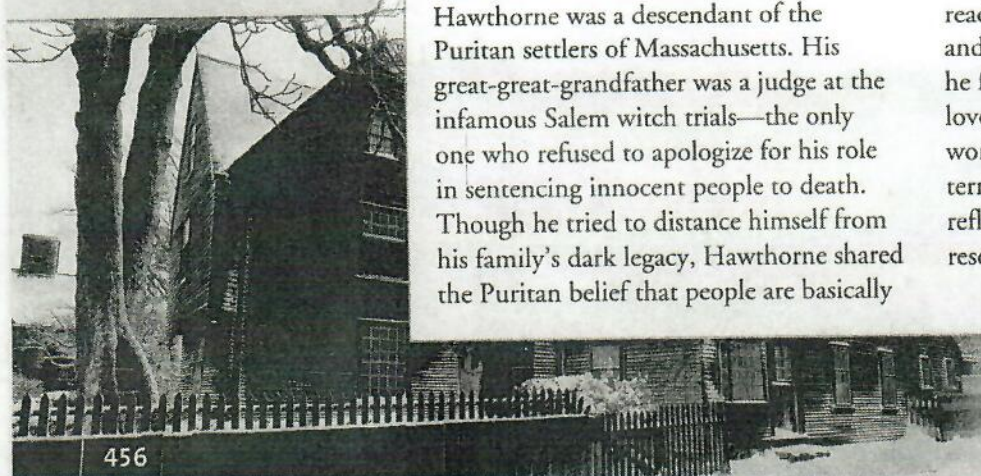
An intensely private man who allowed few to know him well, Nathaniel Hawthorne was fascinated by the dark secrets of human nature. In his greatest novels and short stories, including his masterpieces *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, he explored such themes as sin, hypocrisy, and guilt. One of the first American writers to explore his characters' hidden motivations, Hawthorne broke new ground in American literature with his morally complex characters.

Legacy of Guilt Born in Salem, Hawthorne was a descendant of the Puritan settlers of Massachusetts. His great-great-grandfather was a judge at the infamous Salem witch trials—the only one who refused to apologize for his role in sentencing innocent people to death. Though he tried to distance himself from his family's dark legacy, Hawthorne shared the Puritan belief that people are basically

sinful. But where Puritans believed that society could be purified by the actions of a righteous few, Hawthorne was more pessimistic: he believed that perfection was impossible and remained skeptical of all attempts to reform or improve society.

Difficult Compromises Throughout his life, Hawthorne was torn between his literary calling and his desire for a stable, respectable profession. By the time he left for Bowdoin College in 1821, Hawthorne knew he wanted to write. After graduation, he lived alone for 12 years, dedicated to building his literary career. By 1842, he had achieved some success and had married his great love, Sophia Peabody. Their otherwise happy marriage was constantly shadowed by financial woes. When times were tough, Hawthorne had well-connected friends set him up with government jobs, whose dull routines choked his imagination and limited his time to write. Although he never stopped writing, work, illness, and family duties dominated Hawthorne's later years. He died in 1864 of a sudden illness.

Challenging Questions One of Hawthorne's great talents was his mastery of symbolism. He often chose symbols whose meaning was ambiguous, forcing readers to think deeply about his characters and their conflicts. Despite his pessimism, he found hope in the redeeming power of love, a theme he developed in his mature works. Hawthorne's efforts to come to terms with his own past inspired profound reflections on American identity that still resonate today.





How does someone become a STRANGER?

KEY IDEA Your best friend suddenly doesn't like the things she's always liked. Your brother comes home from college with a new haircut, listening to strange new music. What happens when someone you thought you knew changes the way they act or look? Can you still recognize the person you knew, or do his or her new behaviors lead to **estrangement**?

QUICKWRITE Recall a time when someone close to you changed in a way that made him or her seem like a different person. Write a paragraph to describe the change. Explain why it made you see the person so differently.

LITERARY ANALYSIS: SYMBOL

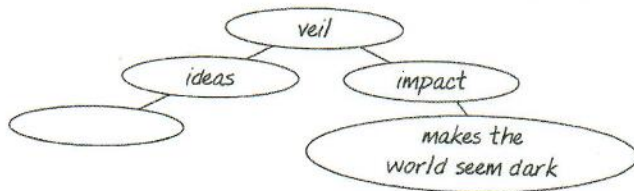
A **symbol** is something concrete—a person, a place, an object, or an action—used to stand for an abstract idea or feeling. In some works, symbols may be subtle and hard to identify. In this story, Hawthorne identifies his main symbol outright:

Know, then, this veil is a type and a symbol...

The challenge, then, is to decide what the symbol means. A rich symbol has many possible interpretations rather than a single precise meaning. To interpret a symbol, pay close attention to its context in the work, including

- what ideas and feelings are associated with it
- its impact on characters and events

As you read, use a concept map to note details about the minister's black veil, the main symbol in this story.



READING SKILL: IDENTIFY CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

The characters' reactions to the events of this story may not make sense to a modern reader. Keep in mind that the story is set in an 18th-century Puritan town. The parishioners' responses to their minister are meant to illustrate the traits that, in Hawthorne's eyes, define Puritan culture. As you read, think about the values, beliefs, and social constraints that are revealed by the parishioners' behavior.

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The boldfaced words helped Hawthorne tell his tale of Puritan life. Use context clues to write a definition of each.

1. messages filled with confusion and **ambiguity**
2. a **zealous** speaker whose eyes blazed intensely
3. a tale of sin and **iniquity**
4. an event so unusual that it seemed **preternatural**
5. an **ostentatious** costume that made people stare
6. **imbued** with great hopes for the future
7. her **tremulous** voice that revealed her nervousness
8. a sign that might **portend** trouble ahead

