The Scarlet Letter: The Puritan and the Other

**WebQuest Description:** The webquest is designed to be an independent study for advanced level 11th and 12th grade students reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. Students will gain a deeper understanding of the author and the historical context of the writing, and the influence of both on themes conveyed in the text.

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Curriculum:** English / Language Arts

**Keywords:** The Scarlet Letter, Puritan society, gender issues, religion, literary themes, novel studies, early America

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**Introduction**

"The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not to tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers—stern and wild ones—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss." -Nathaniel Hawthorne

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**Tasks**

Students will utilize many resources and synthesize information they find to create a comprehensive presentation of Puritan ideals, beliefs, and societal structures, while making thoughtful connections to Hawthorne's and The Scarlet Letter, chapters 1-10. Each student is expected to design a technology rich presentation that is both informative and engaging.

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**Process**

Step 1: Follow the link labeled "Hawthorne in Salem" and peruse the information available regarding Hawthorne's background. Think about the significance of his lineage to the story line of The Scarlet Letter. You should also consider the geographical location and historical time period of his writing. Are they important? Is there any influence evident in the text? Can you support your ideas with evidence? Step 2: Follow the links labeled "Puritan Beliefs" and "PBS: God in America" to gain knowledge about Puritan beliefs, values, societal roles, and ideals. You should continue to take notes on information you find important to the text. You should pay attention to details about the Puritans that could influence Hawthorne's tone, diction, and characterization. Think of how the trajectory of the story is affected by the Puritan social hierarchy. Finally, watch the lecture labeled "Puritan Reformers and the Massachusetts Bay Colony". The viewing will take about 50 minutes. Consider the information conveyed during the lecture. How might it relate to the text? Is there any information that holds particular significance to the plot or characters? Consider themes that have emerged in the text and motifs that support those themes. How can you connect the information relayed during the lecture to those themes and motifs? Are they reinforced or refuted? Step 3: Follow the link "The Custom House: An Overview" and watch the video provided. Read the "Custom House" section of the text again. Is this portion of the text important? When considering the question, imagine reading the text without the addition of the introduction. How might the text be different? Remember to consider tone, theme, motif, author's purpose, or any other LRD you find significant. Step 4: Open the PDF file titled Understanding Puritan Womanhood in Feminist American and read the analysis paper provided. Consider the argument and evidence provided. Can you make connections between the author's claims and Hawthorne's text? Is the analysis valuable and worth further consideration? Make claims and synthesize your previous research to support those claims. 

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**Evaluation**

Each student will create a presentation that demonstrates what he/she learned during the process section. Remember to focus your attentions on the guiding questions asked at each step. The ultimate goal of your presentation is to analyze Hawthorne's novel The Scarlet Letter and synthesize outside information to create meaning for your audience. What was Hawthorne trying to convey to an audience through The Scarlet Letter? Remember to focus your arguments to the first ten chapters of the text. Are there any central themes evident? As you ask yourself the guiding questions in the process section of this WebQuest, think about the information you have read in the linked resources. What could you tell an audience about this story as it relates to your new additional knowledge? Are there any new questions that arise? Once you have an answer for these questions, you have a focus for your presentation. Create a presentation that incorporates text, images, sounds, etc that are relevant to your topic. You may use PowerPoint, Prezi, Animo or any other Web 2.0 tool to create your presentation. However, do not create a paper based product. Identify symbols, motifs, language, etc within the text that emphasize a central theme, and then use your
research from the resources provided to make relevant connections that resonate in today's society. Each student will be expected to present their piece to their peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and Score</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puritan ideals, beliefs, and societal structures are presented, while making thoughtful connections to Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter, chapters 1-10</td>
<td>Puritan ideals, beliefs, and societal structures are discussed in presentation.</td>
<td>Puritan ideals, beliefs, and societal structures are discussed but connections are not made to text.</td>
<td>Puritan ideals, beliefs, and societal structures are discussed and connections to text are made.</td>
<td>Puritan ideals, beliefs, and societal structures are discussed and meaningful and engaging connections to text are made.</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary and Rhetorical devices are identified and their support of theme is analyzed.</td>
<td>Literary and Rhetorical devices are not identified but theme is analyzed.</td>
<td>Literary and Rhetorical devices are identified but their support of theme is not analyzed.</td>
<td>Literary and Rhetorical devices are identified with some analysis of thematic support.</td>
<td>Literary and Rhetorical devices are identified and their support of theme is thoroughly analyzed.</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students use synthesize their new knowledge of Puritan society along with textual evidence to make predictions regarding the outcome of the text.</td>
<td>No predictions are made.</td>
<td>Predictions regarding the outcome of the text are made, but without synthesis of new knowledge.</td>
<td>Predictions regarding the outcome of the text are made, with minimal synthesis from new knowledge.</td>
<td>Students synthesize their new knowledge of Puritan society along with textual evidence to make supported predictions regarding the outcome of the text.</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used text, images, and sounds to create technology rich presentation</td>
<td>Did not create technology rich presentation</td>
<td>Technology rich presentation but with text only</td>
<td>Technology rich presentation with text and images relevant to topic</td>
<td>Technology rich presentation with text, images, and sound relevant to topic</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Score 100%

Conclusion

Understanding author's purpose is key to analyzing a text thoroughly. However, gaining background knowledge about the social, political, religious, and gender constructs normed during the writing of a text can work to inform the reader further. Think of how you might apply this view of textual analysis to future readings. Consider how you might interact with a text differently when an understanding of historical context is achieved.

Teacher Page

Focus: This WebQuest focuses on Puritan society. The research completed here, coupled with the reading of The Scarlet Letter helps students to understand Hawthorne’s purpose for writing.

Objectives/Goals: This project should work in tandem with chapters 1-10 of the text. Providing the students with some background knowledge should facilitate further analysis through this project. Students will learn about the author’s life and career Students will discover Puritan society Students will come to understand that individuals may be influenced by environment Students will assess and analyze theme Students will analyze author’s style.

Resources: Prerequisite Skills: Comfort level with the Internet, PowerPoint, Web 2.0 tools, familiarity with the text, familiarity with close reading strategy.

Time Required: 5 days total. 3 days for reading and research, 2 days for presentation creation, 1 day for presentations.

Technology Needs/Materials Needed: Computers for each student, this webquest is designed as an individual project. However, if utilized in groups, only one computer per group is necessary.

Standards

Credits
Pictures from morguefile.com

Other