I have adapted this from *Levels of Understanding: The Scarlett Letter* by Jill Clare (Prestwick House, 2012).

You should do this as the last assignment. I have included a copy of the Bloom’s Taxonomy pyramid here so you can think about the types of information you are including in your notes. Primarily you should be writing analysis and evaluation with remembering (facts)/understanding to support your statements. Be sure you have EVIDENCE (from the text) to back up anything you say. However, I do expect you to think and draw conclusions. The only “wrong” answer is one that has no evidence!



**Comprehension (understanding)**—will ask the most basic questions to ascertain the students fundamental understanding of the text: plot facts, character identification, etc.

**Reader Response (applying)**—will ask the students to “respond” to the text by relating it to personal experience or by presenting an opinion on a character or event.

**Analysis (analyzing)**—will require students to study how various techniques and literary or theatrical devices (diction, symbolism, imagery, metaphors, asides, soliloquies etc.) function in the text. Analysis questions do not ask the student to merely identify or define a literary, theatrical, or rhetorical device.

**Synthesis (analyzing/evaluating)**—will bridge the gap between the analysis and evaluation questions, requiring students to look at other scenes in the text and draw conclusions about themes, motifs, or a writer’s style. Often, a synthesis question will require the student to draw on prior knowledge—what has been learned in class or through research—and/or information from sources other than the literary title being studied in order to arrive at a satisfactory answer.

**Evaluation**—will ask the student to make a qualitative judgment on the text and determine whether a particular aspect of it is effective or ineffective.

## Background Information

### A. Background on Puritan beliefs

he Puritan religion has its beginnings in the Protes-

T

tant movement, started in 1517 by a German monk named Martin Luther. Martin Luther effectively began the turbulent movement called the Protestant Reformation, which was a reaction to the doctrine and traditions of the Catholic Church. As the Protestant movement grew and spread, believers split into denomina- tions based on differences of opinion and belief. The Puritan movement grew from Calvinism, a Protestant branch that preached predestination and the total depravity of man.

The Puritans wholeheartedly ac- cepted these beliefs, especially man’s depravity. The belief in the total depravity of man is linked to the idea

the congregation. Because of the doctrine of the priest- hood of all believers, Puritans highly valued the ability to

read the Bible for themselves, rather than having it read to them. In fact, Puritans believed that the scriptures were the revealed word of God,

and that God revealed himself *only* through the scriptures, making the ability of the believer to read the Bible paramount. However, this em- phasis on literacy became a double- edged sword. As members of the congregation could read the scrip- tures for themselves, some members began to interpret the meaning of the scriptures for themselves as

well. These differing interpretations led to different beliefs and heresies, resulting in trials against heresy (as in Anne Hutchinson’s trial).

of Original Sin, the belief that men are

born with an irresistible tendency to

**John Calvin**

What distinguished the Puritans

of New England most from mem-

sin and defy the will of God. Even with the best of inten- tions, no man can lead a sinless life. In fact, in comparison to the ideal life of purity, every human being is depraved. In the light of this belief, Dimmesdale’s words to his con-

gregation are not shocking or even unusual. In Chapter 11, Dimmesdale tells his congregation how sinful and depraved he is. “He had told his hearers that he was altogether vile,

a viler companion of the vilest, the worst of sinners, an abomination, a thing of unimaginable iniquity; and that the only wonder was, that they did not see his wretched body shriveled up before their eyes, by the burning wrath of the Almighty!”

Puritans, in the Protestant tradition, adhered strongly to the belief known as “the priesthood of all believers.” At its core, this belief asserts that all members of the church share the same ability and responsibility to com- mune with God. Unlike Catholic tradition—to which the “priesthood of all believers” reacts—no priest or other

clergy member is required to act as an intermediary for the believer, according to this doctrine. Each believer may, and is encouraged to, pray to God himself, rather than requir- ing a clergyman to do so for him. However, this does not mean that Puritanism rejected the importance of the clergy. Rather, the clergy were a respected, revered group of men, well educated on the scriptures and in a position to help lead and counsel their congregations.

In the same vein, Puritans (along with members of other Protestant groups of the time), encouraged literacy among

bers of other Protestant denominations was the structure

of the congregations. Each congregation was autonomous, establishing power with local congregations rather than an ultimate hierarchy like the Catholic Church. Along with these self-governing congregations came a close-knit com- munity within the congregation, as the members of the semi-democratic system worked together to elect their own church officers Because the congregations were so tightly knit, both socially and by religious doctrine, any sin that threatened the cohesion of the community or the congrega- tion was punished in order to maintain stability.

Puritans were also strict in their allowances of celebra- tions. While not completely ascetic, the Puritans rejected

most religious celebrations that other denominations enjoyed.

Puritans, for instance, refused to celebrate Christmas, as

they found no scripture in the Bible justifying its celebration. Nonetheless, Puritans did enjoy occasional public festivals, such as the Election Day celebration in *The Scarlet Letter*.

*(By the way, I don’t know why there’s a huge space after apostrophes. Remember, I adapted the document. Some formatting thing…..Also, remember these are SUGGESTIONS for writing prompts. Notice that here I’m giving you bigger chunks of the text to address than with Gatsby. You can choose to do smaller chunks if that’s helpful. Use your own judgment and ideas. I am NOT expecting you to write essay answers for each of these, but you may want to think about all these questions. These are prompts to help you if you get stuck in the journal/notebook.)*

**Section One: The Custom-House: *Comprehension*, *Analysis***

Choose one of the officers of the Custom-House that the narrator describes. Analyze the narrator’s characterization of the officers you have selected and explain what this characterization reveals about the narrator’s attitude toward the Custom-House. Support your essay with references to the text, but avoid plot summary.

**Section Two: Chapter 1, 2, and 3: *Analysis*, *Synthesis***

Analyze how Chapters 1 and 2 of *The Scarlet Letter* begin to establish a contrast between nature and civilization, and then explain how this contrast develops a common Romantic theme (or themes) in the text. *(To do this, you’ll need to know what Romantic themes are. Look it up---you’re on a computer!)*

**Section Three: Chapters 4, 5 and 6: *Analysis*, *Synthesis***

The parable of the pearl is a well-known parable from the New Testament. It reads: *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46).* Analyze how Hester’s daughter is likened to the pearl of great price, and then explain how this comparison serves to develop her character.

**Section Four: Chapters 7, 8 and 9: *Analysis*, *Evaluation***

Examine the descriptions of the governor’s mansion and garden in these chapters. Then explain how these descriptions cast doubt upon the sincerity of the Puritan way of life and determine the extent to which the narrator effectively establishes this doubt. *(The Puritan way of life here reflects their idea of the American Dream, the target theme of our class and study.)*

**Section Five: Chapters 10, 11 and 12: *Comprehension*, *Analysis***

Dimmesdale’s mysterious illness is explored in depth in this section. First examine how the narrator conflates Dimmesdale’s illness with his hidden sin, then explain what this reveals about the narrator’s notion of the effects of sin and secrecy. *(You’ll need to understand the meaning of “conflates” as applied to literature.)*

**Section Six: Chapters 13, 14, and 15: *Analysis*, *Synthesis***

Analyze the conversation between Hester and Chillingworth in Chapter 14 and compare it to the conversation that takes place in Chapter 4. How has Hester’s tone and attitude toward Chillingworth changed? How is this indicative of the evolution of her character?

**Section Seven: Chapters 16, 17, and 18: *Comprehension*, *Analysis*, *Synthesis***

In Chapter 17, Dimmesdale speaks of his secret torment:

*“There is no substance in it! It is cold and dead, and can do nothing for me! Of penance I have had enough! Of penitence there has been none! Else, I should long ago have thrown off these garments of mock holiness, and have shown myself to mankind as they will see me at the judgment-seat. Happy* *are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret!”*

Analyze how Dimmesdale’s distinctions between penance and penitence and between openness and secrecy contribute to the theme of sin and its consequences. **Avoid plot summary.**

**Section Eight: Chapters 19, 20, and 21: *Comprehension*, *Analysis***

Analyze how the narrator characterizes the Puritans in the marketplace. How does he use their descendants and their ancestors to establish their characteristics? What does this characterization suggest about his attitude toward the Puritans as a whole?

**Section Nine: Chapters 22, 23, and 24: *Analysis*, *Synthesis*, *Evaluation***

Before Dimmesdale delivers his Election Sermon, Hester tells Pearl: “We must not always talk in the market-place of what happens to us in the forest.” Analyze the importance of the settings of the marketplace and the forest in the novel. How does the setting impact the choices the characters make?