



Name \_\_\_\_\_

responsible for how his forefathers acted during the Salem witch trials. He also used many symbols in his novels and short stories. He polished his work endlessly so that it was easy for the reader to understand. He said, "Easy reading is...hard writing."

Nathaniel Hawthorne died peacefully on May 19, 1864. He was one of the greatest American writers. Even his critics admired his clear, pure style. And if you had to give Hawthorne a letter grade for his work, it would definitely be an "A."

Nathaniel Hawthorne

### Questions

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Which historical event influenced Hawthorne's writing?
  - A. the Civil War
  - B. the American Revolution
  - C. the Salem witch trials
  - D. none of the above
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What color was the letter in Hawthorne's famous novel?
  - A. orange
  - B. yellow
  - C. forest green
  - D. scarlet
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Who paid for Hawthorne's college education?
  - A. his uncle
  - B. his brother
  - C. his father
  - D. his grandfather

- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What word best describes Hawthorne's reaction to the popularity of *The Scarlet Letter*?
  - A. disturbed
  - B. disappointment
  - C. anger
  - D. surprise

- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Who led the Transcendentalists?
  - A. Franklin Pierce
  - B. Nathaniel Hawthorne
  - C. Ralph Waldo Emerson
  - D. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Which word is used to describe Hawthorne's style?
  - A. romantic
  - B. impressionistic
  - C. classical
  - D. modern

- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Nathaniel Hawthorne felt that it was easy to write well.
  - A. False
  - B. True

- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Which famous writer was Hawthorne's friend in college?
  - A. Plato
  - B. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
  - C. Aesop
  - D. Emily Dickinson

Do you think it is strange for someone who committed a crime to wear a scarlet letter on their clothing? Why, or why not?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_



## Nathaniel Hawthorne

By Colleen Messina

Colorful letters usually are associated with preschool alphabet lessons, but one author became famous for a colorful letter. Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, *The Scarlet Letter*, was a 19th-century best seller.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts. The town had been settled by the Puritans in the 1600s. The Puritans, including Hawthorne's ancestors, were part of the Salem witch trials. They treated people accused of being witches cruelly, and many people lost their lives needlessly. Nathaniel Hawthorne felt guilty about how his ancestors acted, and it influenced his short stories and novels.



Nathaniel's young life was a mixture of sadness and luck. He lost his father, who was a sea captain, when he was only four years old. Fortunately, he had a rich uncle who wanted to take care of the boy's future. His uncle paid for his college education because his relatives thought that the boy had literary abilities.

Nathaniel had some famous friends at college. He knew the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Franklin Pierce, the future president. These friends also helped Nathaniel later in different ways. Hawthorne later wrote a biography about Pierce for his campaign. President Pierce later gave his friend the position of consul in Liverpool for his help.

After he graduated from Bowdoin College, Nathaniel got a job at the Boston Custom House. He married an illustrator named Sophia Peabody in 1842 and continued to write stories. He didn't like his first stories too much. Later, he withdrew them because he thought they were not good enough. The Hawthornes spent some time traveling in England, France, and Italy. They were both people who liked to stay by themselves, and one of their favorite activities was to go on long walks. Sophia always thought that her husband's writing

had a "miraculous wealth of thoughts."

Sophia and Nathaniel Hawthorne had three children. Nathaniel was a devoted father and filled many notebooks with stories about his children. According to one story, his son, Julian, had an odd experience because of his father's famous novel. Someone once confused Julian with his famous father. The lady raved about how much she had enjoyed *The Scarlet Letter*. The lady became even more confused when Julian said that the story was written when he was only four...he never explained that it was written by his father!

Nathaniel Hawthorne was influenced by the ideas of a group of writers and philosophers called the Transcendentalists. Ralph Waldo Emerson led the Transcendentalists' group. They believed that our lives transcended our physical world. They believed that everyone is responsible for his or her life. People must make their own choices about their lives. His novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, conveyed these ideas.

*The Scarlet Letter* became a classic. Hawthorne used concise descriptions in this novel. In the story, a woman had to wear a scarlet letter "A" because of a crime she committed. This is how the letter was described: "On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A." Many of Hawthorne's friends wrote excellent reviews about this novel. It became a success right away, which surprised the author. He never expected his book to become popular.

The first edition of *The Scarlet Letter* was printed in March 1850. The books ran out in ten days. A second and third edition came out the same year. Everyone in the United States wanted to read this new story. Over time, critics have called it one of the ten greatest classics of American literature. It has been called the first great psychological novel, which means that it described people's deepest thoughts and feelings in a new way. Hawthorne didn't want to write in a formal style. This kind of writing was called Romantic, but this doesn't mean the kind of romance people celebrate on Valentine's Day. Romantic writers believed that people should be free to express their thoughts and feelings.

Nathaniel Hawthorne had some ideas that showed up often in his writings. His main character was often in trouble because of something that he or she did. This person often tried to solve the problem because he or she felt guilty about it. Many stories were set in Puritan New England, maybe because Hawthorne's ancestors lived there. Hawthorne may have written about guilt because he felt