

Sin and Judgment
in
Puritan America



A unit of study designed for American Literature

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Unit Overview

“Sin and Judgment in Puritan America” is a comprehensive unit about sin and separation (from God and fellow man), law and justice, the good news of the gospel which offers forgiveness and salvation from guilt and broken relationships.

Grade Level

This unit has been planned for an eleventh grade American Literature class.

Length of Unit

Thirty-eight days if the teacher chooses to utilize all activities.

Student Objectives/Outcomes

Students will read *The Crucible* and several short stories and discover the significance of honor and integrity in the face of betrayal and injustice, the necessity for the acceptance of human frailty in all mankind, and the force of personal sacrifice for the good of the community and future generations.

Students will read *The Scarlet Letter* and

Trace the changes that occur in the characters of Roger Chillingworth, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Hester Prynne, understand how each character demonstrates the consequences of guilt and sin, recognize the dominant symbols in *The Scarlet Letter* and understand their development, understand the Puritan moral code and its effect on the major characters, conduct a trial to determine the moral culpability of Roger Chillingworth, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Hester Prynne.

Students will create a Bible study intended to bring the good news of the gospel to one of the guilt-ridden characters they encounter in their reading.

Resources

Printed Materials

- Copies of the short stories “The Minister’s Black Veil,” “A Piece of String,” “The Lottery,” and “Young Goodman Brown”
- Copies of *The Crucible* and *The Scarlet Letter*
- Handouts

Supplies

- Video: Witchcraft in America – Behind *The Crucible*
Educational Filmstrips, Huntsville, TX 77340
- An audio version of *The Crucible*

Internet Resources

http://www.k-state.edu/english/baker/english251/Symbol_MBV.htm

<http://www.salemweb.com/guide/roger.shtml>

<http://www.salemweb.com/witchhouse/>

<http://www.witchdungeon.com/witchdungeon.html>



<http://www.salemweb.com/memorial/>

Lesson 1 Sin and Separation

Description: This lesson introduces the Puritan community and its reaction to sin. As with most Hawthorne stories, there is a great deal of ambiguity. The reader will be forced to decide whether the Reverend Mr. Hooper has donned his veil to hide a terrible, secret sin or to demonstrate for his parishioners the fact that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to identify characteristics of the Puritan community.
2. Students will be able to identify a symbol (the veil) and be able to articulate what it symbolizes.
3. Students will write a short essay with specific support from the story.

Materials:

- Copies of the story [The Minister's Black Veil2.doc](#)

Lesson: Divide students into three groups to read the story. As they read, students should keep track of the encounters Reverend Hooper has with his parishioners and their reactions to his veil. When they finish, students should discuss why the minister has chosen to wear the veil and the results of his decision. They should notice that the veil (sin) separates the Reverend from his fellow men in the same way sin separates us from God. Both teachers and students alike may find the following article about symbolism interesting (http://www.k-state.edu/english/baker/english251/Symbol_MBV.htm).

Each group will be assigned a possible thesis statement to support in a short essay. Students can work together to plan the essays, but each student will write individually. Groups can elect spokespersons to share their thesis statements and essay plans with the full class.

1. Because of his sudden decision to wear the veil, Reverend Hooper is hiding a secret sin.
2. Although the concept of secret sin is discussed throughout the story, the intent is to make readers aware that everyone is hiding secret sins rather than to suggest that Reverend Hooper is hiding a dark and terrible sin.
3. Superstition and religion are at odds in “The Minister’s Black Veil.” The townspeople claim religion and yet they indulge in superstitious gossip about their minister and shun him almost immediately which creates a schism in the community.

Lesson 2 Witchcraft in America

Description: Before beginning to read *The Crucible*, students may find a quick familiarization with early American beliefs about witchcraft helpful.

Objectives:

1. Students will gain background information for the reading and study of Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible*.
2. Students will be able to discuss possible causes of the “witch hysteria” in Salem Village during the late 1600s.

Materials:

- A copy of the filmstrip video *Witchcraft in America – Behind The Crucible*

Lesson:

Watch and discuss the video *Witchcraft in America – Behind The Crucible*.

Lesson 3
Act I of *The Crucible*

Description: Students will be reading or listening to Act I, meeting the characters, and forming opinions about them. These activities will probably take two days – one day to read or listen to Act I and one day to complete the activities associated with Act I. Of course, a day can be saved by requiring the students to read the act as homework, but the experience is richer when students can hear the emotions exhibited by professional readers, and listening is a way to engage reluctant learners, poor readers, or the speed readers who hurry along without savoring the text.

Objectives:

1. Students will understand the relationships between characters as presented in Act I and make predictions about how these relationships and conflicts will lead to the triumph of chaos or reason.
2. Students will form opinions about the major characters and support those opinions with textual references.

Materials:

- An audiotape or CD of *The Crucible*
- Admiration Scales
- Conflict Chart

Lesson:

Students will use the "Admiration Scales" to rate the characters after each act, with "1" being a low admiration rating and "5" being the highest.

The Crucible

Admiration Scales

Character	Act I	Why?	Act II	Why?
Rev. Parris				
John Proctor				
Abigail Williams				
Rev. John Hale				
Elizabeth Proctor				
Mary Warren				

Admiration Scale: 1=none, 2=very little, 3=some, 4=quite a bit, 5=a lot.

[Admiration Scales.doc](#)

Together, the class will discuss and fill in the blanks on the "Conflict" chart (Act I) as a reading check to be sure that everyone understands the divisions and conflicts that exist in the town.

[Conflict in The Crucible2.doc](#)



[Conflict in The Crucible2 \(Answers\).doc](#)

JOURNAL: Act I presents characters who exhibit some common human frailties (John Proctor—lust, Reverend Hale—pride, Reverend Parris—greed, Mrs. Putnam—revenge, Giles Corey—ignorance, the girls—self-indulgence, Abigail & Proctor & the girls—dishonesty. Cite specific lines from the play which show the characters exhibiting these traits.

Frequently in serious literature one character assumes the role of the *voice of reason*. In Act I of *The Crucible* that person is Rebecca Nurse. Examine the act for examples of her trying to apply reason to a situation which seems to be lurching out of control. Make a prediction—will reason or chaos eventually triumph? Why?

Lesson 4
Act II of *The Crucible*

Description: Students will be reading or listening to Act II. Again, the lesson will probably take two days – one day to read or listen and one day to complete the activities.

Objectives:

1. Students will explore the theme of human cruelty v. righteousness.

Lesson:

ACTIVITY: Admiration Scales for Act II. Conflict Chart, Act II.

JOURNAL: In Act I, Mary Warren is a timid, frightened girl who seems to have little confidence or self-esteem. Compare and contrast this image with the one we see in Act II. Cite *specific* dialogue and actions. What accounts for the change?

While exploring Mary Warren's changing role, look for quotations which would illustrate the theme of *human cruelty v. righteousness*. Which side seems to be winning at the moment? Which side will ultimately triumph?

Lesson 5
Act III of *The Crucible*

Description: Students will be reading or listening to Act III. Again, the lesson will probably take two days – one day to read or listen and one day to complete the activities.

Objectives:

1. Students will investigate the theme of *ignorance v. wisdom* and discuss this conflict with textual references.
2. Students revisit their opinions about the major characters and support any changes in those opinions with textual references.

Lesson:

ACTIVITY: Admiration Scales Act III

The Crucible
Admiration Scales



Character	Act III	Why?	Act IV	Why?
Rev. Parris				
John Proctor				
Abigail Williams				
Rev. John Hale				
Elizabeth Proctor				
Mary Warren				
Judge Danforth				

Admiration Scale: 1=none, 2=very little, 3=some, 4=quite a bit, 5=a lot.

JOURNAL: Look for quotations in this act which illustrate the theme of *ignorance v. wisdom*. Make lists of characters who favor ignorance over knowledge and a list of characters who favor knowledge over ignorance. What conclusions can you draw from these lists? Include at least one quotation from the text to illustrate why each character belongs in the category you have chosen.

Lesson 6 Act IV of *The Crucible*

Description: Students will be reading or listening to Act IV. Again, the lesson will probably take two days – one day to read or listen and one day to complete the activities.

Objectives:

1. Students will create an attribute web with textual references to explore hypocrisy, evidence of witchcraft, or another topic from the play.
2. Students will explore the conflicts unity v. exclusion and order v. individual freedom in terms of the action in the play.

Materials:

- Attribute Web

[Attribute Web.doc](#)

Lesson:

ACTIVITY: Admiration Scale Act IV

Students will use an Attribute Web (bubble cluster) to list all the examples of hypocrisy in the play, the supposed "evidences" of witchcraft, or the characteristics of another category of your own choosing. They should fill the web and use page numbers beside the information, so that they will refer to *specific* incidents or examples that come from the play itself.

JOURNAL: Think in terms of **unity v. exclusion**. Who is part of the community of Salem? Who is excluded? How does the trial change the typical order of the community? What happens to the community when order is changed? Do these answers help you to understand or explain why the trials took place? How?

Now think in terms of **order v. individual freedom**. Why did the Puritans (Pilgrims) come to America? What level of individual freedom do you see in Salem? What level of order? What happens when one or the other gets out of balance? When does order become autocratic?



Lesson 7 Witch Trial Simulation

Description: If you can find it, taking a day to participate in the witch trial simulation is well worth the time. Students tend to take to their roles enthusiastically. When the trial is over, ask them to do a quick write about their experience as a (whatever their role was). What they say is always more powerful than any teacher comments, and they will understand how easy it is to get caught up in community hysteria.

Objectives:

1. Have students analyze how an ominous threat to a community can result in mass fear, irrational behavior, and hysteria,
2. Have students evaluate the effectiveness of the institutions Salem Village had available to them as they sought to deal with the threat by legal means,
3. Have students analyze the concepts of law and justice and be able to distinguish between the two,
4. Have students demonstrate that the events in Salem Village in 1692 were not unique to 17th century America but have existed in other times and places.

Lesson: Try to find a copy of “Witch Trials: Crisis in Fear,” a classroom simulation dealing with fear, mass hysteria, and irrational behavior in the community of Salem Village, by Mary Simpson Furlong and Louise Weinberg Jacobsen and follow the directions. Published by Greenhaven Press, Inc. 577 Shoreview Park Road, St. Paul, MN 55112. 1977.

JOURNAL: What factors were taken into account in determining the guilt or innocence of the accused? What "evidence" did the jury find most convincing? Do you agree with the verdicts? Support your opinion. If you do not believe the accused got a fair trial, what steps could have been taken to insure that they did? If you had been in Salem in 1692, would you have gotten a fair trial?

Arthur Miller would want you to understand that there is potential for "witch hunts" in every age and every situation where group hysteria replaces each individual's sense of reason and independence. What situations today have the potential to become "witch hunts"? How can society act to insure that such a hunt will not take hold?

Lesson 8 Related Stories

Description: If you have the time and the inclination, students will benefit from reading Guy de Maupassant’s story “The Piece of String” (sometimes called “The Piece of Yarn”), Shirley Jackson’s story “The Lottery,” and/or Nathaniel Hawthorne’s story “Young Goodman Brown.”

Objectives:

1. Students will compare characters and situations from short stories to the characters and themes presented in *The Crucible* while forming opinions about the nature of justice, guilt, and appearances.

Lesson: The students should read the stories, discuss them in groups or pairs, and continue to write in their journals.

Guy de Maupassant: [The Piece of String2.doc](#)

JOURNAL: Hauchecorne is obsessed with clearing his name. What are the reasons for his defeat? How is he like (or unlike) John Proctor of *The Crucible*? Compare and contrast the two men.



Shirley Jackson: [The Lottery2.doc](#)

JOURNAL: What constitutes "guilt"? What sorts of things should people die for? What is the role of *tradition* in "The Lottery" and in *The Crucible*? Is stoning after a lottery any more or less reasonable than hanging for witchcraft? Which of the two stories upsets you the most? Why?

Nathaniel Hawthorne: [Young Goodman Brown2.doc](#)

JOURNAL: In *The Crucible*, townspeople can be convicted of witchcraft and sentenced to death on the basis of spectral evidence. Their accusers can claim that they were afflicted in some way by the "witch's" specter or ghost. In "Young Goodman Brown" the goodness of the town's most esteemed citizens appears to be spectral. This story as Hawthorne writes it is ambiguous open to interpretation. Answer Hawthorne's question: "Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting?" and comment on how your answer to this question affects your understanding of the events of *The Crucible*.

Lesson 9 Personal Poem

Description: The Personal Poem comes from the NCTE publication *Notes Plus* from some years back and is an engaging culminating activity for *The Crucible*.

Objectives:

1. Students will think symbolically about themselves and a major character in *The Crucible* by writing a Personal Poem.

Lesson:

The teacher should have the students get out paper and pencil/pen while s/he reads the prompts out loud. Students should write the first poem about themselves. Allow time for students to write following each prompt. Each response should be written in complete sentences – encourage more than one! – and should be separated from the previous one by a skipped line. Following the successful completion of the first poem, students should choose a major character from *The Crucible* or the main character from one of the short stories.

- Tell me your name.
- What is your *real* name – not necessarily the name you go by, but a name you wish were yours, or a name you feel is true for you?
- Name the animal inside you. Explain your choice.
- There is an object in your heart. What is it? Explain its significance.
- There is a word on your forehead. What is it? Explain.
- Tell me a sound you love. Tell me a smell you hate.
- What is your favorite time of day? Why?
- If your hands could speak, what would they say?
- Tell me something you remember from your childhood.
- Tell me a phrase or saying your mother/father/grandparents said to you often. This phrase can be in a language other than English.

[Personal Poem2.doc](#)



Lesson 10 Computer Activity for *The Crucible*

Description: Sign up for the computer lab and provide your students with a copy of the assignment. If you are really technologically savvy, make the file available to them so that students have only to click on the hyperlink to get to the sites they will be visiting. It's always a good idea to make sure the sites still exist before you go, so that chaos will not ensue.

Objectives:

1. Students will take a tour of historical Salem and compare the historical events with Arthur Miller's fictional play.

Lesson:

Today's activity is a virtual tour of historical Salem, including the Witch Trials Memorial. You will be using the information you discover to help you gain a true historical perspective and to compare history with the fictional play.

[Cyber Crucible Activity2.doc](#)

Lesson 11 Attitude Survey

Description: In preparation for reading *The Scarlet Letter*, students will be examining their beliefs and attitudes in an activity created by Lorainne Cella ("Reading the Complex World: Students Approach *The Scarlet Letter* from Multiple Perspectives." *English Journal* Jul. 2002: 77-82.).

Note to Teachers: Cella's article is worth a trip to the library to find because, in addition to the activity borrowed here, she describes how she utilizes literary criticism with her students, *and* she has a list of nine interesting projects which she calls "Creative Extension for *The Scarlet Letter*." There's an activity for every level of student.

Objectives:

1. Introduce the concepts to be explored in *The Scarlet Letter*,
2. Identify student attitudes and beliefs about unwed mothers, adultery, revenge, and hypocrisy,
3. To create interest in reading the novel.

Lesson: Ask the students:

- What, if anything have you heard about *The Scarlet Letter*?
- How would you react if anyone you knew had a child without being married to the father? Is it okay? Not okay? Acceptable at a certain age or under certain conditions? Why? What about your background, upbringing, and family values leads you to believe as you do?

Divide students into groups of four, preferably groups of two guys and two girls, and pass out today's handout. Have the students discuss the questions on their handout in gender pairs and then as a group. After it appears that the conversation is drifting off onto other topics, reconvene the class and have the groups report the results of their conversations. You may want to keep track of how the entire class ranked the items under "Everyone" and revisit the poll after the class has finished reading the novel.

[Attitude Survey2.doc](#)



Lesson 12 The Custom House

Description: Your job is to read *The Custom House* before class begins because you will be reading the pertinent parts to your students. The important thing is to set the stage for reading the novel without losing the students before they even begin. *The Custom House* is not exactly scintillating reading, but it does tie Hawthorne to his stern Puritan forbears and provide a fictitious provenance for the story the students are about to read.

Objectives:

1. Familiarize students with some details about Hawthorne's life and his claim for the derivation of the story he will relate in *The Scarlet Letter*.

The Lesson: Read the important parts of *The Custom House* to/with your students.

Lesson 13 Storywriting

Description: This optional lesson gives students the opportunity to write creatively and tell a story of crime and punishment and design a letter of their own to illustrate their story.

Objectives:

1. Students will write a fictional narrative with concrete sensory details and a clear sequence of events and be able to communicate the significance of these events to the reader.
2. Students will understand the concept of a letter which symbolizes a crime and its punishment.

The Lesson:

Give students a copy of the prompt and engage them in appropriate pre-writing activities to ensure their eventual success with the assignment.

[SL Story2.doc](#)

Lesson 14 Introducing *The Scarlet Letter* and the Grand Plan

Description: Pace the reading according to the abilities of your students and the amount of time available. The reading is difficult even for the best of students, so two chapters per day are more than enough for the average student. What helps them the most is for you, the teacher, to read with energy and emotion the parts you want to be sure they don't miss. Your commentary and explanations will help your students, but just *hearing* the words with a little emotion and the correct pronunciation will go a long way toward increasing understanding and interest.

Make sure the students understand the trial format and what will be expected of them. Everyone is expected to participate, but each team needs an anchor or two to keep the group from floundering. Jurors should be students who are capable of critical listening, quick but thoughtful writing, and enough courage to read their opinions out loud in front of class the day following the trial.



The reading guide is a good idea because it is an equal opportunity (for all teams) ammunition-for-trial-gathering-device. The page numbers are for the Penguin version of the book (ISBN 0-14-039019-7). It is not a good idea to use the Reading Guide with another publisher's book unless you change the page numbers first.

Objectives:

1. Students will understand the trial format and their eventual role in a successful prosecution and defense.

The Lesson: Give students a reading schedule, the instructions for the trial, their legal team assignments, and the Reading Guide if you plan to use it. Get started on the first two chapters.

[Instructions for the Trial2.doc](#)
[Scarlet Letter Reading Guide2.doc](#)

Lessons 15-26
The Scarlet Letter Reading

Directions: Each day, teacher and students will investigate the chapters assigned for reading, checking for understanding, and reading portions out loud, if necessary. Teachers can also use class periods for legal teams to meet to plan preliminary strategies, but this only works if the majority of students are caught up in their reading and understand the plot well enough to hold strategic conversations.

Objectives:

1. Students will read critically, looking for textual support for their client's exoneration.
2. Students will read critically, looking for textual support for the successful prosecution of the other team's client.

The Lesson:

Seriously consider reading aloud to your students daily from the chapters they were assigned to complete for the day. This especially helps the lower level students and ensures that everyone has a basic knowledge of the plot. Try not to dishearten any of the legal teams by preaching too specifically on the shortcomings of the various characters. Leave room for the students to bring these out at trial. You can also use the opportunity to point out stylistic devices and teach students how to handle Hawthorne's lengthy sentences.

Lesson 27
Preparation for the Trial

Directions: If your students haven't figured it out yet, introduce them to the notion that the best defense is a good offense. It's also a *very good* idea to remind them that there are more sins in the novel than adultery. Try not to belabor this point unduly, but trials where the students can't move past the sex out of wedlock tend to be boring. In any case, each team needs to think of ways to rehabilitate their character in the eyes of the court while pointing out very specifically the shortcomings of the other team's clients. A helpful technique is to give students organizers for each character (See the sample below.) on which they will list their client's strengths and decide how to maximize them while recognizing their client's weaknesses and decide how to minimize them. For the opponents, students will try to maximize the weaknesses while minimizing the strengths.

Objectives:

1. Students will identify the strengths and weaknesses of each character.
2. Students will write opening and closing statements to present in court.
3. Students will prepare questions for the cross examination of their opponents' clients and anticipate what questions will be asked of their client, so that they can prepare plausible text-based responses.

The Lesson: Review the format for the trial with the students. Stress that each student needs to participate. Give students simple organizers to help them plan. For each team's client:

Your Client's Strengths:	Your Client's Weaknesses:
How to Maximize:	How to Minimize:

For each team's opponents:

Their Client's Strengths:	Their Client's Weaknesses:
How to Minimize:	How to Maximize:

Lesson 28
The Trial

Directions: Organize your room so that the jurors are seated in front and each team is seated in a group with an open area with a podium for the "lawyers" to use while speaking. The jurors generally do nothing but listen, take notes, and (one might assume) form judgments about the strength of each team's case. The teacher's job is to take notes, notice who is participating, and (most importantly) keep time. The times can be adjusted depending on whether the questions and responses are meaningful or whether they have sadly devolved into "Did not . . .," "Did too!"

Objective:

1. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the text by clear opening statements with specific textual references, the strength of their questions for the opposing legal teams, their ability to refute charges made against their client, and their closing statements.
2. Jurors will demonstrate their critical listening ability by ruling in favor of the team who most successfully defended their client and their understanding of the text by citing references and correcting any unfounded reasoning presented in court by the legal teams.

Lesson:

Follow the trial procedures described in the handout the students have had in their possession since the first day of *The Scarlet Letter* portion of the unit. Jurors should be instructed to come to class (tomorrow) with their opinions ready to present to the legal teams. Jurors may feel more encouraged if you give them a sample frame for their opinions. Collect each team's materials and each student's Reading Guide for grading.



[Instructions for the Trial2.doc](#)
[Instructions for Jurors2.doc](#)

Lesson 29 The Verdict

Directions: Let the jurors read their opinions to the class. More often than not they agree on the verdict, but if they do not, today is a fine day for a discussion. If it doesn't come up naturally, ask the students which character they think Hawthorne found most sinful and why. If you saved the results of the preliminary attitude survey, now is a good time to revisit these attitudes to see if any have changed.

Objectives:

1. Jurors will present verdicts to the legal teams.
2. Students will evaluate how well their legal teams functioned and give their teacher insight into the division of labor.
3. Teachers will share their insights about the questions of guilt, innocence, and forgiveness.

Lesson:

Discuss the juror's findings, the success of yesterday's trial, and any change of heart on questions of the original attitude survey after the reading and trial. Give each student a Team Evaluation. This will allow students the opportunity to participate in the grading for the trial and allow the teacher an opportunity to discover that a student who did not appear to participate in the trial actually wrote the brilliant opening statement delivered by his/her more outgoing classmate.

[Team Evaluation2.doc](#)

Lesson 30 Bible Study

Description: Perhaps you, too, have wished to reach into the pages of Arthur Miller's play or Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel and grab his characters by the lapels, provide them with the relief and comfort that the gospel promises, and save them from their guilt and misery. This lesson offers that chance to you and your students. First, find a Bible study template which seems logical and allow you to show your students just what you have in mind for their eventual product. There is a description of two possible models, but neither may be suitable for visualization without a sample.

Objectives:

1. Students will compare Puritan religious beliefs with their own and design a Bible study to bring the good news of forgiveness and salvation to John Proctor or Arthur Dimmesdale.

Lesson:

Give your students a Bible study template and show examples. Group them in pairs or by threes with the template and Bibles and give them suitable time to create their Bible studies. Share with the group if time permits.

[Bible Study.doc](#)