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T.J. Curriculum Project

English III

Thomas Jefferson, The Scarlet Letter, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Religious Freedom in  
America

### **Background**

The question asked continually in my American Literature classroom is: How does history effect literature and how does literature effect history? Prior to reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter students have studied the Declaration of Independence, excerpts from TJ Writings including letters and writings on slavery, religion and women. They have also read and studied famous quotes and his epitaph. Students have read, studied and analyzed symbols, themes and characters in The Scarlet Letter. Finally, they have also discussed the significance and experiences of Nathaniel Hawthorne in writing The Scarlet Letter. (I have attached a cited page with the significant family and life history of Hawthorne discussed in class. FYI) We have also developed a class procedure of brainstorming, discussing, and selecting paper/research topics.

### **Paper Guidelines**

All papers must follow traditional writing conventions in MLA format. They must also contain at least three well chosen, relevant direct quotes. Although I do not give specific page or paragraph guidelines, students are aware that they are expected to cover their chosen topic completely. (As I say: Your grade is directly proportional to the effort you put into it.) All papers must be critical essays/research.

### **Procedure**

1. Students will help me to create a timeline, by using notes on America, Jefferson, Hawthorne, and TSL. They will note significant events such as birth, publication, family history, and dates of important letters, including significant dates in the struggle of and for religious freedom as it pertains to the above areas.
2. We will then review and identify important letters from Jefferson on religion. (“Notes on the State of Va.,” pg. 283-287, “A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom,” pg.346-7, “I Have Sworn Upon the Alter of God,” pg. 1080-2, “Jesus, Socrates, and Others,” pg. 1120-2, “The Morals of Jesus,” pg 1122-6, “Never and Infidel, If Never a Priest,” pg. 1403-5, “Jesus and the Jews,” pg. 1435-40, “A Unitarian Creed,” pg. 1458-9, “Religion and the University,” pg. 1463-6, “The Homage of Reason,” pg. 900-5).
3. We will then identify notes on Hawthorne’s life, where religion and family history have had significant impact on literature. Finally, we will identify those passages and chapters in TSL which discuss religion.( I. The Prison Door, II. The Market Place, III. The Recognition, V. Hester at Her Needle, VIII. The Elf-Child and the Minister, X. The Leech and His Patient, XI. The Interior of a Heart, XII. The Minister’s Vigil, XIII Another View of Hester, XVI. A Forest Walk, XVII. The Pastor and His Parishioner, XVIII. A Flood of Sunshine, XX. The Minister in a Maze, XXI. The New England Holiday, XXII. The Procession, XXIII. The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter, XXIV. Conclusion)
4. We will then begin discussing the convergence of ideas about religion between all of these sources, in small groups, with attached question guide sheet.
5. We will meet back as a class and discuss and expand answers and sources with ideas from individual groups.

6. Groups will present essay topics, with discussion of each led by the teacher.
7. Students will choose essay topic and due date. ( I always let individual classes choose due dates, any day within two weeks of assignment of the paper.)

### **Conclusion**

Students will review how, in more general terms, the events in America in the 1850's and BEFORE, especially in New England, seem to have influenced Romantic Literature.