

Character Study of Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: Literature

Lesson Duration: One class periods

Student Objectives

- Discover that the ending of a novel does not resolve all the questions that may occur to readers.
- Imagine characters living out their lives beyond the novel's ending.

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Great Books: The Scarlet Letter*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- Hester and Her Daughter, Pearl, Build a Life in Isolation
 - The Town Magistrate Tries to Take Pearl Away From Hester
 - Hester and Pearl Encounter Mistress Hibbons, A Witch
 - Chillingworth Confronts Dimmesdale; Pearl Confronts Hester
 - Hester and Pearl Encounter the Tormented Dimmesdale
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- *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Procedures

1. Point out to your students that very little information about Pearl is shared at the end of *The Scarlet Letter*. All we learn is that Roger Chillingworth leaves Pearl a great inheritance, making her "the richest heiress of her day, in the New World." Then Pearl leaves town, never to return. According to the novel, "None knew – nor ever learned, with the fullness of perfect certainty – whether the elf-child had gone thus untimely to a maiden grave, or whether her wild, rich nature had been softened and subdued, and made capable of a woman's gentle happiness." In this project, your students will use hints in the novel, their notions of romance and tragedy, and their knowledge of human behavior to propose a logical resolution to the question "What happens to Pearl?"
2. Establish what your students know from the novel about Pearl as a child. Ask them to describe Pearl based on how the author presented this character. Ask the following questions:

- What does Pearl's appearance tell readers?
 - What do we learn about Pearl from how she talks and acts?
 - What do we learn about Pearl from what other people (including the author) say or suggest about her?
3. Having established some sense of Pearl, ask your students to discuss the following questions that relate to her life beyond the end of the novel:
- How might Pearl's childhood experiences affect her emotions and her activities once she leaves New England?
 - What life skills will Pearl have to learn as a young woman?
 - Under what conditions might Pearl marry or have a child?
 - How likely is it that Pearl might take out her anger on people in her new community? What antisocial actions might she take?
 - How likely is it that Pearl would grow beyond her anger? How would Pearl display normality?
 - If Pearl survives, how much communication do you think she will have with her mother?
 - What role could Pearl play in another community? Might she be a witch, a religious leader who dispenses mercy and punishment, or a recluse?
 - If Pearl survives and has a child, what do you think she will tell the child about Hester, Dimmesdale, or Chillingworth? What will she say about her own childhood?
4. After the class discussion, give students the following options for writing their ideas.
- Write a short story with Pearl, age 18, as the main character.
 - Write a letter from Pearl, age 18, to her mother.
 - Write a scene between Pearl, age 18, and her mother, whom she goes to visit.
 - Write a doctor's report on the cause of Pearl's death at age 18.
5. Let each student share the written product with the class. Ask for comments on the credibility and authenticity of Pearl's portrayal in each piece.
6. Discuss the following: We may not be certain of an author's motives, but we can judge how an author's decision affects us as readers. How do you feel about how the novel ends in relation to Pearl? Explain your reasons.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussions; created a credible and authentic extension of the novel; wrote smooth prose or a natural-sounding first-person voice; made no errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics.

- **2 points:** Students somewhat participated in class discussions; created a credible and authentic extension of the novel; wrote mostly smooth and natural-sounding prose; and had some errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics.
- **1 point:** Students did not participate in class discussions; did not produce a credible and authentic extension of the novel or did not make a sincere effort to do so; wrote insufficiently smooth or unnatural-sounding prose; and made many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Vocabulary

hypocrisy

Definition: A feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not, especially the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion

Context: *The Scarlet Letter* is a slow, tortuous dance of guilt, hypocrisy, and vengeance that ends in tragedy.

illegitimate

Definition: Not recognized as lawful offspring; born of parents not married to each other

Context: Pearl, Hester's illegitimate child, grows into a lively and perceptive child.

imp

Definition: A small demon; a mischievous child

Context: Throughout the novel, Pearl is portrayed as sort of an imp who behaves rather badly.

retribution

Definition: Something given or exacted in recompense; punishment

Context: It was meant for retribution, too, a torture to be felt, a constant reminder in the midst of a troubled joy.

scaffold

Definition: A platform on which a criminal is executed or punished

Context: After Hester's appearance on the scaffold, she and Pearl are taken to prison.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts – Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing, Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions, Gathers and uses information for research purposes; Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts



The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

This lesson plan addresses the following NCTE standards:

- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, and vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>