



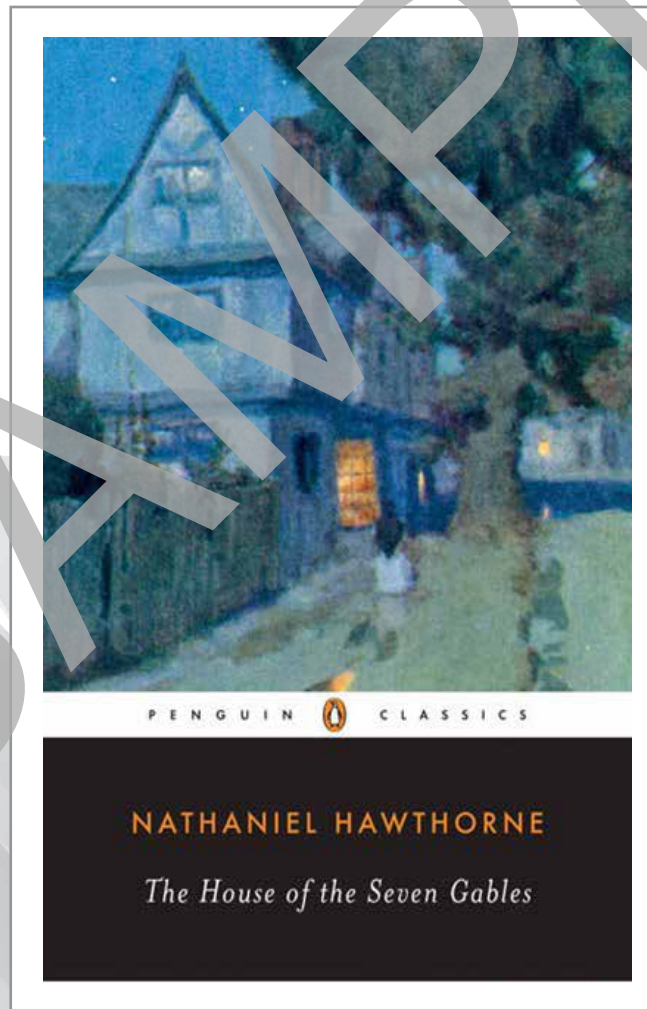
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The House of the Seven Gables

Nathaniel Hawthorne



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The House of the Seven Gables

Nathaniel Hawthorn

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Prediction, analysis,
evaluation, research,
inference, compare/contrast

Comprehension

Literary terms and
application

Listening/Speaking

Drama, personal experience,
discussion, presentations,
monologue

Writing

Description, compare/
contrast, diary and journal
writing, letter, poetry,
newspaper article,
application of principles,
book review

Fine Arts

Skit, art, collage, bookmark

History

Early Colonial America,
hypnotism

Genre: Hawthorne classified as romance; contains elements of mystery and horror

Setting: New England, nineteenth century (1850), Salem

Point of View: first-person omniscient observer

Themes: isolation, sin's consequences descending on future generations, class distinctions, effect of greed, appearance vs. reality

Conflict: person vs. person

Tone: sad, depressing, melancholy, dark

Date of First Publication: 1851

Summary

Hawthorne's second successful novel deals with themes similar to those in *The Scarlet Letter*. Both books discuss sin and its consequences, isolation, and Puritan heritage.

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Matthew Maule curses the Pyncheon family as he is hanged for witchcraft, and the succeeding generations suffer because of Colonel Pyncheon's part in Maule's death. Colonel Pyncheon builds a beautiful mansion, the House of the Seven Gables, on the very land that Maule owned. On the day of its grand opening, the Colonel dies in his office and never enjoys his home. The wealthy, respected Pyncheon family gradually deteriorates until Hepzibah Pyncheon, a great-granddaughter of the Colonel, must open a cent shop to make a living. Her brother Clifford returns from prison, and Judge Pyncheon, who had been instrumental in Clifford's conviction and imprisonment, comes to talk to Clifford about a lost deed that would bring the family more wealth. Judge Pyncheon himself dies in the same room as the Colonel. Other characters include Phoebe, a Pyncheon relative who is light and cheerful, unlike the rest of the family, and Holgrave, Hepzibah's boarder, who turns out to be a Maule relative. Unlike *The Scarlet Letter*, the Pyncheon relatives finally have a happy ending after the various mysteries are resolved.

About the Author

Personal: Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) was born, raised, and educated in the New England area. His family ties went back to early New England settlers, and his own ancestor was a judge at the Salem witch trials of 1692. His father, Nathaniel Hawthorne, was a sea captain who died at sea when Hawthorne was only four years old. Hawthorne's mother, Elizabeth Manning Hawthorne, became a recluse from her three children. As a child, Hawthorne broke his leg and lay on the couch or in bed for months while it healed. At that time he became a voracious reader.

Fortunately for Hawthorne, his uncles sent him to Bowdoin College where he became close friends with Franklin Pierce, a future President of the United States, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, another future writer. Hawthorne married at the age of 38. His marriage made him an extremely happy man and changed his life. Sophia Peabody Hawthorne and he had three children, whom he adored. Together they lived in what is known in his writing as the Old Manse. He went to England as United States Consul, and eventually he and his family also lived in Rome and Florence.

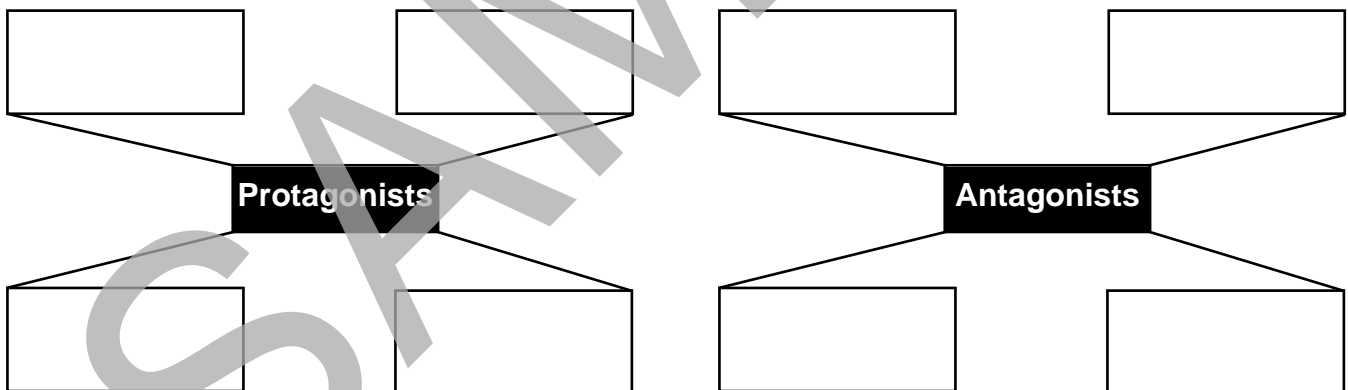
Protagonists and Antagonists

The main character in a story is called the **protagonist**. Sometimes we call the protagonist the hero or heroine (the "good" person). The character who opposes the hero in a story is called the **antagonist**. Sometimes we call the antagonist the villain (the "bad" person).

Directions: Think about stories you have read. Who were some of the protagonists (heroes/heroines) in these stories? Who were the antagonists (villains)? List some of the protagonists and antagonists and the stories in which they appeared.

Protagonists	Antagonists	Story

Complete the charts below by listing some common characteristics of protagonists and antagonists. For example, a protagonist is often brave. An antagonist may be cunning or cruel. Sometimes the antagonist is not just a person but a belief or custom.



As you read, decide who is the protagonist and who or what is the antagonist. Notice their characteristics and compare/contrast them to the characters you listed in the chart above.

Chapters I–III, pp. 1–54

Hawthorne lays the foundation for the novel in these chapters. The reader learns that Colonel Pyncheon, a prominent Salem resident, wrests land from Matthew Maule by encouraging Maule's execution for witchcraft. After building a mansion on Maule's land, Pyncheon dies suddenly on the day of its opening. Later, an innocent Clifford Pyncheon goes to jail for killing a relative. His sister Hepzibah closes herself in the family mansion, but at 60 years old, must open a cent shop to help support herself. Hawthorne introduces major symbols (the house, the mirror, the picture) and major themes in these first three chapters.

Vocabulary

vicissitudes (1)
verdant (2)
posterity (2)
laud (3)
acrimony (4)
brackish (6)
magnate (7)
plebeian (8)
eminent (9)
deportment (9)
extant (13)
progenitor (21)
presentment (22)
indecorum (27)
daguerreotype (27)
torpid (28)
pathos (38)
periwigged (40)
anathema (44)
obeisance (52)

Discussion Questions

1. How do New England Puritanism and witchcraft contribute to Hawthorne's story? *(The view of Puritans as restrictive and legalistic contributes to the story. The Salem witch trials were an ideal scenario for false accusations that led to unjustified executions. The darkness and gloom that surrounds Puritanism, whether justified or not, is a suitable backdrop for the dark/light contrast in the novel. Also, the Puritan ancestry explains some of the beliefs and character traits of the family.)*
2. Describe Colonel Pyncheon, the prominent Pyncheon family member who builds the House of the Seven Gables. *(The residents of Salem know the Colonel as a prominent, wealthy man with rank and power. As a magistrate and Colonel, he stands firm in his beliefs. He has great energy and strength of character. He demands absolute obedience from his servants and is known as the "stalwart Puritan" [p. 5]. He is also known for his courtesy in his own home. Colonel Pyncheon gets what he wants—just as he wanted Maule's land. Very few people questioned his actions in regard to Matthew Maule. pp. 3–15)*
3. Explain the omen of the soured spring. *(When Matthew Maule owned the land, there was a fresh spring running through it with refreshing, clean, pure water. Once Colonel Pyncheon owns the land, the spring goes bad and the water is rancid and unusable. It is as if Maule's curse is actually coming true. The rancid spring foreshadows other Pyncheon catastrophes. pp. 2, 6)*
4. What does the House symbolize in the first chapters of the novel? *(Initially, the House is referred to as a person. The narrator refers to it as "affect[ing him] like a human countenance" [p. 1]. He even refers to it as having "mortal life" [p. 1]. Later, he says the timbers were "oozy, as with the moisture of a heart" [p. 24], and he says the House is like a "great human heart, with a life of its own, and full of rich and somber" memories [p. 24]. The author also mentions that the House had a "meditative look" and holds secrets, just as a person would. It has a towering and larger-than-life presence in the story. The House is the entire setting of the novel except for a short scene outside Salem. pp. 1, 24, 29)*
5. What strengths does Hawthorne have as a writer? *(Hawthorne's sentences are long and complex; however, each word has a real and significant meaning. He is very descriptive, allowing the reader to see each detail. Symbols and themes become very clear in the novel. The vocabulary, story line, and style present intellectual challenges. The novel is a mixture of mystery and Gothicism, creating interest for the reader.)*

6. What is unusual about Hawthorne's point of view in the novel? *(He writes in first-person observer with an added twist of omniscience, which is unusual. Usually the observer is someone in the story, but not a major character. For example, in The Great Gatsby, the newspaperman Nick Carraway is telling the story and is actually part of the action from time to time. The narrator of The House of the Seven Gables is not a character in the story, but he writes in the first person. Also, the narrator is omniscient—he knows what is going on inside the heart and mind of each character. Hawthorne has combined two viewpoints into one.)*
7. What contrast exists between Hepzibah's outward appearance (her scowling face) and her inward appearance (her heart)? *(Hepzibah's face is far from pleasant. She scowls because she is near-sighted and wrinkles her face to see better; consequently, the people of the town think she is a reclusive old maid who is mean and unpleasant. The truth is that she has a warm, sensitive, and loving heart, as seen in her affection for her imprisoned brother. Also, she is kind to the poor people who come to her cent shop by not charging them for items. The saying "Do not judge a book by its cover" is fitting for Hepzibah. pp. 31, 41)*
8. Explain why Hepzibah's cent shop is such torture for her. *(Hepzibah was born and raised a lady, and in her day, ladies did not work. In fact, she has never had to work to support herself. Beginning to work at this stage in her life is a terrible wound to her pride. At the age of 60, Hepzibah finds working quite a shock. Besides, she is a recluse who has not and does not want to associate with people. She is wounded by the rudeness of some of her customers, which adds to the torture of working. pp. 38, 40, 42, 46, 52)*
9. **Prediction:** How will the curse affect the Pyncheon family?

Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Devices: Make a list of literary devices from the novel as you read. Examples will be given in most sections. **Personification:** "Death stepped across the...House" (p. 12); "many such sunrises as [the House] had witnessed" (p. 29); **Simile:** "oozy, as with the moisture of a heart" (p. 24); **Allusions:** "from the nether fires of Tophet" (p. 33); "her breast was a very cave of Aeolus that morning" (p. 33)
2. Research: Write a paragraph about the history of New England homes. Homes were built certain ways to accommodate the work, weather, and lifestyle of the New Englander.
3. Art: Create a 3-D model of Maule's garden, spring, and small home.
4. Brainstorming: List possible reasons why Colonel Pyncheon directs in his will not to remove his portrait.
5. Newspaper Article: Using the graphic organizer on page 8 of this guide, write an article about either the hanging of Matthew Maule or the trial and sentencing of Clifford Pyncheon.
6. Obituary: Write a eulogy/obituary for Colonel Pyncheon using what you read in Chapter I.