

# Scarlet letter topics essay

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Hawthorne again went to work as a customs surveyor, this time, like the narrator of *The Scarlet Letter*, at a post in Salem. In 1850, after having lost the job, he published *The Scarlet Letter* to enthusiastic, if not widespread, acclaim. His other major novels include *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), and *The Marble Faun* (1860). In 1853 Hawthorne's college friend Franklin Pierce, for whom he had written a campaign biography and who had since become president, appointed Hawthorne a United States consul. The writer spent the next six years in Europe. He died in 1864, a few years after returning to America.

The majority of Hawthorne's work takes America's Puritan past as its subject, but *The Scarlet Letter* uses the material to greatest effect. The Puritans were a group of religious reformers who arrived in Massachusetts in the 1630s under the leadership of John Winthrop (whose death is recounted in the novel). The religious sect was known for its intolerance of dissenting ideas and lifestyles.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne uses the repressive, authoritarian Puritan society as an analogue for humankind in general. The Puritan setting also enables him to portray the human soul under extreme pressures. Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth, while unquestionably part of the Puritan society in which they live, also reflect universal experiences. Hawthorne speaks specifically to American issues, but he circumvents the aesthetic and thematic limitations that might accompany such a focus.

His universality and his dramatic flair have ensured his place in the literary canon.