

House of seven
gables, chapter 1-4
summary essay



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Chapter 1 In the 1600s, Matthew Maule builds a house next to a clear spring in what will become a small Massachusetts town. A local landowner named Colonel Pyncheon, who wants the land for himself, accuses Maule of witchcraft at a time of fear against witches. Maule is convicted and hanged, but before he dies, he warns that God will give Pyncheon blood to drink. Unaffected by this curse, Colonel Pyncheon builds a house with seven gables. Maule's own son helps design and build the house, and on the day of its opening, a feast is held.

When Pyncheon fails to greet his guests, they charge into one of his rooms, and find him sitting dead at his desk. There is no evidence of murder, but no one knows how he died. It is said that a mysterious figure was seen fleeing the scene. Future generations of the Pyncheon family continue to live in the house over the next years, but they are never able to claim one of the Colonel's final acquisitions, a piece of land in Maine. Generations of the family are raised thinking the land is rightfully theirs, and they make unsuccessful tries to obtain it.

The area where the Pyncheon house was built gets old. Thirty years before the novel is set, a wealthy Pyncheon is murdered by one of his nephews, another Pyncheon. The killer is convicted and jailed for life, but the dead man's other nephew is successful and builds a large house. The sister of the jailed Pyncheon continues to live alone in the house of the seven gables. The Maules are not as aware of the curse. Many of them are not even aware that they are of Maule's relatives. Even though some are believed by people to have inherited powers from their ancestor.

Chapter 2 Hepzibah Pyncheon, the old woman who lives in the house of the seven gables, wakes up. She spends a lot of time on her appearance. As the sun rises, Hepzibah grows increasingly agitated. She heads downstairs, where we find out that her own money problems have led her to reopen the shop with the door cut into the front gable. The shop-opening hurts her pride as a member of the rich Pyncheon family, but it is the only option she has: she is too blind to sew and not educated enough to teach.

She has filled the little shop with many goods, such as gingerbread men, children's toys, and foodstuffs, but she's old, and she knocks stuff over as she sets up. Hepzibah delays opening the shop as long as she can, but as the day goes on she can put it off no longer. She opens the store window and quickly runs into the living room of the house. Chapter 3 The shop's first visitor is Holgrave, a young man who claims that in their modern world the title of " lady" is more of a restriction than a privilege.

Holgrave asks for some biscuits, which makes him Hepzibah's first customer. Hepzibah overhears a conversation between two workers. They are surprised to see her shop open and discuss her business prospects in front of her. One points out that better shops can be found on every street corner, while the other adds that his own wife actually lost money by trying to start a shop. As they walk off, Hepzibah worries over their thoughts that she will probably fail. Hepzibah is even more concerned with the casual way that the workmen discuss her painful fall from riches.

She finds their conversation about the events of her fall embarrassing, and she is especially offended by the way that what is so important to her is just

a joke to the two men. The shop bell rings again, and in walks a small boy, he asks for a gingerbread man. Hepzibah thinks its wrong to take a child's money for a piece of stale bread, so she gives him the cookie for free. Five minutes later, however, the small boy returns for another cookie. This time Hepzibah takes his money. Now that her day has begun to pick up, Hepzibah begins to feel better about opening up her shop.

Through the day, she experience brief happy moments, and things begin to look better. Several more customers come through, and most of them are grouchy. Unable to keep up her good mood, Hepzibah begins to worry again that the shop will ruin her. When a wealthy woman walks by, Hepzibah wonders what use those people serve, then instantly feels guilty about her bitter feelings. Chapter 4 As the day wears on, an old man walks by the house. The man looks into the newly reopened shop window and frowns. When he sees Hepzibah, the man smiles, nods at her, and moves on.

She recognizes the man as Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon. Hepzibah is visited by "Uncle Venner," a man who is known around the neighborhood as a character. Uncle Venner is pleased to see that Hepzibah is working, and he stops to offer her advice on shop-keeping. He assures her that the days of minding a store will probably only be temporary and that something still better will turn up for her. The statement inspires Hepzibah to dream up many fantasies of sudden wealth. Venner also asks whether an unnamed "he" will return soon, and says that everyone in the village has been speaking of "him. After Venner leaves, the rest of the day does not go really good for Hepzibah. She has trouble concentrating on helping her customers and getting the specific items they want. Just as she closes her shop, an omnibus

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arrives and stops in front of the house. A girl hops out and knocks on the door, and Hepzibah realizes that it is Phoebe, a young Pyncheon family offshoot who has come to visit, unaware that her letter, sent in advance, never arrived. Hepzibah decides to let her in, but tells her that she can only stay one night because she might disturb Clifford.