



The House of the Seven Gables

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Teacher's Guide

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LIVING
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SERIES

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

The narrator begins by providing background information on the origins of the house of the seven gables. In the mid-seventeenth century, Matthew Maule, a farmer, built a small shack near a well in a growing Massachusetts town. Colonel Pyncheon, a successful and powerful resident, coveted the plot of land and attempted through various methods to acquire it. His lawsuits failing, Pyncheon accused Maule of witchcraft. Maule was tried, convicted, and executed. As the Colonel watched the execution, Maule pronounced a curse on the Colonel: "God will give him blood to drink!" After Maule's death, Pyncheon easily acquired the land and contracted Maule's son, Thomas, to build the seven-gabled house. On the day of its opening, Pyncheon was found dead in his study, blood coating his ruff and shirt. Successive generations were plagued by unsupportable aristocratic pretensions and a missing deed to a vast land grant in Maine, which would have guaranteed them wealth and power. Thirty years before the events of the novel, a Pyncheon is apparently murdered by his nephew, who is jailed. Another nephew, Judge Pyncheon, becomes successful. Over the years, the Maule line fades into obscurity.

Chapter 2

Hepzibah Pyncheon, the current resident of the house of the seven gables, has been driven to re-open a small shop in the house by financial difficulties. She is an aged spinster with aristocratic sensibilities and feels aggrieved by her circumstances. The narrator follows her as she prepares for the opening of the shop, becoming increasingly anxious.

Chapter 3

The shop's first customer is Holgrave, a daguerreotypist who boards in the house. He offers encouragement to Hepzibah, who freely gives him the biscuits he attempts to purchase. Shortly after he leaves, a boy, Ned Higgins, comes in to buy a cookie, which Hepzibah gives to him. He returns almost immediately for another and is disappointed that she charges him.

Chapter 4

Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, a relative, briefly appears in the shop window. "Uncle" Venner, an old man well known in the community, stops in the shop to encourage Hepzibah and ask if "he" will return shortly. At the end of the day, Phoebe Pyncheon, a country relative, arrives unexpectedly, the letter announcing her arrival having not been delivered. Hepzibah tells her that she can only stay the night.

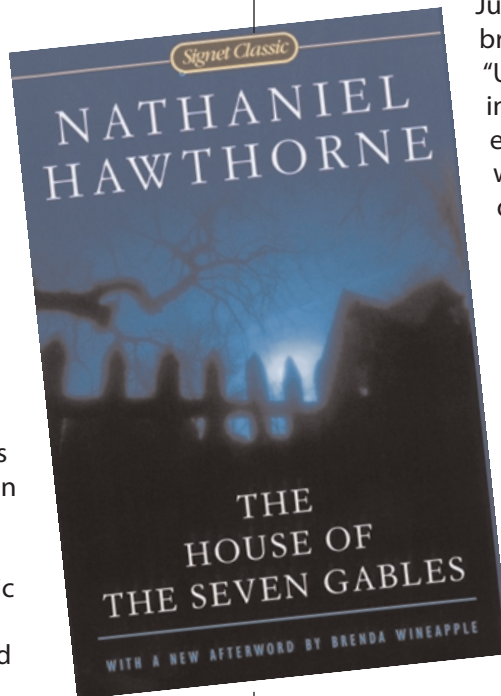
Chapter 5

Phoebe awakes in a dusty bedroom and is depressed by the gloomy appearance of the house. She redecorates the room and goes downstairs to cook breakfast. Hepzibah tells her that she can't stay in the house because Clifford, Hepzibah's brother, will be returning home, and Phoebe's presence would disturb him.

However, Phoebe impresses Hepzibah with her domestic skills and convinces her to let her stay longer. Hepzibah is most impressed with Phoebe's talent for running the small shop.

Chapter 6

Investigating the garden behind the house, Phoebe discovers a rooster, two hens, and a chick, dwarfed descendants of what was once a prized line. In the garden, she meets Holgrave. He shows her his daguerreotypes, which leave her unimpressed. She mistakes a picture of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon for one of Colonel Pyncheon, so similar are the two in appearance. Inside the house, she seems to hear someone moving around



the house and speaking with Hepzibah.

Chapter 7

In the morning, Phoebe is surprised to find Hepzibah cooking breakfast and three places set at the table. Clifford comes to breakfast, an old, delicate man. He is vague and easily distracted, but retains fine sensibilities. He takes much pleasure in the coffee and in Phoebe, but he finds Hepzibah's perpetual scowl disturbing. The shop bell announces a customer, and Hepzibah is forced to explain to Clifford that she has opened a small business.

Chapter 8

Judge Pyncheon comes to the shop and introduces himself to Phoebe, who recognizes him from Holgrave's daguerreotype. He tries to kiss her, but she draws back at the last instant and is embarrassed. The judge insists on being allowed to see Clifford, but Hepzibah interposes herself between him and the door and adamantly refuses him entry. There is evidence of an old feud in their demeanor.

Chapter 9

Phoebe becomes increasingly essential to the household. She runs the shop competently and cheers Clifford. Hepzibah, who had hoped to be Clifford's comfort, realizes that she is unable to affect him and entreats Phoebe to take the responsibility of caring for the old man.

Chapter 10

Phoebe and Clifford spend afternoons in the newly revitalized garden. She reads to him and listens to him talk. Holgrave discovered old seeds in a drawer, which have grown bean vines that have blossomed red flowers. Hummingbirds flock to the blossoms, and Clifford is delighted. On Sundays, Phoebe, Hepzibah, Holgrave, Clifford, and Uncle Venner have lunches.

Chapter 11

Phoebe and Clifford begin spending time at a large window, watching scenes on the street. He becomes excited and cheerful at things he recognizes and dismayed at new sights, unable to adjust his thinking. One day Clifford seems about to leap from the window, but is restrained by Phoebe and Hepzibah. On Sunday, they prepare to go to church, but Hepzibah and Clifford find themselves unable to stray far from the house.

Chapter 12

Phoebe has become friends with Holgrave, who is much closer to her age than Clifford and Hepzibah. He tells her of his varied life and sometimes shocks her with his radical views on life and politics. Often he asks her about Clifford, although his intentions remain veiled. While discussing the Maule curse, he mentions that he has written a story about it and offers to read it to her.

Chapter 13

This chapter is Holgrave's story as read to Phoebe. Gervayse Pyncheon, the Colonel's grandson, summons Matthew Maule, grandson of the executed Matthew Maule, to the house. Pyncheon thinks that the Maules have hidden the deed granting a vast territory in Maine from the Pyncheons and demands that Maule reveal its location. Maule offers to reveal the deed's location in exchange for the house of the seven gables. Eventually Pyncheon agrees to Maule's terms, and he summons his daughter, Alice, to the study. Maule hypnotizes her to use her as a medium to contact the ghosts of Colonel Pyncheon and Matthew and Thomas Maule. Pyncheon's ghost seems about to disclose the document's location, but is restrained by the Maule ghosts. Matthew Maule tells Gervayse Pyncheon that the deed will not be revealed until it has become worthless and nullifies their agreement. However, he retains control over Alice. Over the years, he tortures her by influencing her emotions or dictating her physical movements. On his wedding night, he summons Alice to wait on his bride. Dressed poorly for the weather, Alice catches pneumonia and dies soon thereafter.

Chapter 14

Holgrave has mesmerized Phoebe with his telling of the story, much as Maule had mesmerized Alice. He briefly considers exercising his power over her, but breaks the spell instead. Phoebe, who had not originally planned such an extended stay at the house, returns to the country for a brief visit.

Chapter 15

The house becomes increasingly gloomy and Clifford increasingly despondent in Phoebe's absence. Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon appears and demands once again to see Clifford. Hepzibah balks, but eventually despairs of turning the Judge away. She goes to fetch Clifford while Jaffrey waits, sitting in a chair.

Chapter 16

Clifford is not in his room. Hepzibah finds him downstairs. He jubilantly exclaims that they are free and shows her Jaffrey's corpse seated in the chair where she left him. The cause of death is initially unapparent.

Chapter 17

Clifford and Hepzibah flee the house and board a train. Clifford seems enlivened and has an energetic conversation with a stranger on the train, in which he explains his theory of history and predicts a return to the nomadic lifestyle. When the conversation turns to telegraphs, Clifford expresses a dislike of them and sketches a scenario identical to his own flight. Shortly after, he and Hepzibah disembark at a deserted stop and Clifford becomes exhausted.

Chapter 18

The narrator alternately describes and addresses the corpse of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, detailing his itinerary for the day as each engagement passes unattended.

Chapter 19

Various people stop at the house, but find no signs of inhabitants. Phoebe returns from the country.

Chapter 20

Phoebe is pulled into the house by Holgrave, who informs her of the death of Judge Pyncheon. She wants to contact the authorities, but Holgrave is waiting for the return of Hepzibah and Clifford because their flight from the scene would implicate them in the death. He suddenly declares his love for Phoebe and demands a response. She is hesitant and doubtful, but admits that she loves Holgrave as well. After the declarations, Clifford and Hepzibah return to the house.

Chapter 21

The narrator relates the true story of Clifford's imprisonment. Jaffrey was rooting through their uncle's belongings in search of a hint to the location of the Maine property deed when their uncle discovered him and died of an apoplectic fit. Jaffrey arranged the scene to implicate Clifford in the death. The death of Judge Pyncheon passes relatively quietly in the town, and Clifford inherits the judge's wealth and property. Clifford, Phoebe, Hepzibah, Holgrave, and Uncle Venner move to the Judge's opulent country home. Holgrave relates that he is a descendent of Matthew Maule, and he and Clifford reveal that the mysterious deed is hidden behind a portrait of the Colonel.

Timeline

- 1804** July 4, Nathaniel Hawthorne born in Salem, MA, to Nathaniel Hawthorne and Elizabeth Clarke Manning Hawthorne.
- 1808** Hawthorne's father dies at sea of yellow fever.
- 1821** Hawthorne begins his studies at Bowdoin College in Maine. His classmates include Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Horatio Bridge, and Franklin Pierce.
- 1825** Hawthorne graduates from Bowdoin College.
- 1830** "Sights from a Steeple" appears in The Token; "The Hollow of the Three Hills" appears in The Salem Gazette.
- 1835** "Young Goodman Brown" appears in New England Magazine.
- 1837** March 6, Twice-Told Tales is published.
Nov. 11, Hawthorne meets Sophia Peabody.
- 1838** Hawthorne becomes engaged to Sophia Peabody.
- 1839** He becomes measurer of salt and coal in the Boston Custom House.
- 1840** He leaves his position at the Boston Custom House.
- 1841** Apr.-Nov., Hawthorne lives at Brook Farm, a utopian community.
- 1842** On July 9, Hawthorne marries Sophia Peabody. They move to Concord and rent a house from Ralph Waldo Emerson. Henry David Thoreau prepares their garden.
- 1844** Una Hawthorne is born.
- 1845** The Hawthornes move to Salem.
On July 4, Thoreau moves to Walden Pond.
- 1846** Hawthorne becomes Surveyor of the Port at the Salem Custom House.
June 5, Mosses from an Old Manse is published.
June 22, Julian Hawthorne is born.
U.S. begins war with Mexico.
- 1847** Sept. 6, Thoreau leaves Walden Pond.
Longfellow publishes Evangeline, which Hawthorne reviews.

- 1848** Hawthorne becomes manager of the Lyceum in Salem; invites Emerson and Thoreau as lecturers. Nov. 7, Zachary Taylor, a Whig, is elected president.
- 1849** Hawthorne loses position at the Salem Custom House. July 31, Hawthorne's mother dies.
- 1850** March 16, *The Scarlet Letter* is published. The Hawthornes move to Lenox, MA. Zachary Taylor dies; Millard Fillmore becomes president.
- 1851** In April, *The House of the Seven Gables* is published. May 20, Rose Hawthorne is born. The Hawthornes move to West Newton, MA. December, *The Snow-Image and Other Twice Told Tales* is published.
- 1852** July: *The Blithedale Romance*, based on his experience at Brook Farm, is published. Aug. 9, Franklin Pierce, friend and classmate of Hawthorne, is elected president.
- 1853** President Franklin Pierce appoints Hawthorne as Consul in Liverpool, England. In September, *Tanglewood Tales* is published.
- 1855** Whitman publishes *Leaves of Grass*. Longfellow publishes *The Song of Hiawatha*.
- 1857** Hawthorne leaves his position as Consul. The Dred Scott decision by the U.S. Supreme Court protects slavery.
- 1858** The Hawthornes travel in France; they settle in Rome and then Florence.
- 1859** The Hawthornes move to England. John Brown leads a raid on the arsenal in what is now Harpers Ferry, W. VA.
- 1860** Nov. 6, Abraham Lincoln is elected president.
- 1861** Feb. 9, The Confederate States of America is formed. Mar. 4, Abraham Lincoln is sworn in as president. Apr. 12, the U.S. Civil War begins.
- 1863** Jan. 1, the Emancipation

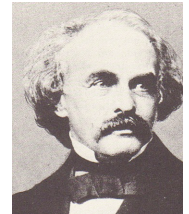
Proclamation takes effect. July 1, first day of the battle at Gettysburg.

1864 May 18/19 Nathaniel Hawthorne dies in his sleep in Plymouth, NH.

1865 Apr. 9, Robert E. Lee surrenders to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, VA.

Author Sketch

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on July 4, 1804. Four years later his father, Nathaniel Hawthorne, a descendant of one of the 1692 Salem witch trial judges, died at sea of yellow fever. Hawthorne was raised by his mother, Elizabeth Clarke Manning Hawthorne, and her family. He attended Bowdoin College from 1821-1824, where he met classmates Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Horatio Bridge, and Franklin Pierce.



After graduation, Hawthorne commenced his writing career. He published various stories and self-published his first novel, *Fanshawe*, in 1828. Ten years later, he became engaged to Sophia Peabody, whom he married in 1842. From 1837-1840, Hawthorne worked at the Boston Custom House. The family moved to Salem after the birth of their daughter, Una, in 1844, and Hawthorne became Surveyor of the Port at the Salem Custom House, a political appointment. He was fired in 1849, after a change in the presidency.

The next year, *The Scarlet Letter* was published and became a critical and popular success. In these productive years, Hawthorne also published *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853). It was at this time that he established a friendship with Herman Melville.

After his friend Franklin Pierce was elected president in 1853, Hawthorne was appointed consul in Liverpool, England. He resigned from the post in 1857, expecting to lose the position once Pierce lost office. The Hawthornes lives in Italy for the next year and a half, where Nathaniel wrote his last completed novel, *The Marble Faun*. He died on May 19, 1864, while on a trip with Franklin Pierce.

Critic's Corner

The House of the Seven Gables represents a slight change from *The Scarlet Letter*, which was published

one year earlier. Nathaniel Hawthorne retained his interest in American history, social mores, sin, and the Puritans, but he hoped the ending of *The House of the Seven Gables* would be happier, hence his terming it a "Romance." Indeed, the novel ends with a fortuitous turn of events, but its main interest lies in the mechanism of misery.

The novel revolves around the "cursed" Pyncheon family and follows their slow decline through the generations. Having inherited the sin of their ancestor, the novel's characters, age-stricken and gloomy, move slowly through the equally decrepit house. That the curse is finally lifted by joining in marriage their line with that of their malefactor's does not detract from the novel's essential interest in how the "curse" operates. Combining psychology, sociology, and the mystical, *The House of the Seven Gables* serves as a portrait of the heavy hand of the past on present generations.

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Other Works by Nathaniel Hawthorne

NOVELS

Fanshawe, 1828
The Devil in Manuscript, 1835
The Gray Champion, 1835
The White Old Maid, 1835
Dr. Heidegger's Experiment, 1837
Grandfather's Chair, 1841
The Birthmark, 1843
The Artist of the Beautiful, 1844
Earth's Holocaust, 1844
Rappaccini's Daughter, 1844
The Scarlet Letter, 1850
Ethan Brand, 1850
The Blithedale Romance, 1852
Feathertop, 1852
Puritan Passions, 1853
The Marble Faun, 1860
Septimius: A Romance, 1872
The Ancestral Footstep, 1882
Dr. Grimshaw's Secret: A Romance, 1883

COLLECTIONS

Twice-Told Tales, 1837
Mosses from an Old Manse, 1846
The Snow-Image: And Other Twice-Told Tales, 1852
A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys, 1852
Our Old Home: A Series of English Sketches, 1863
The Dolliver Romance: and Other Pieces, 1876
The Great Stone Face: and Other Tales from the White Mountains, 1889
Tanglewood Tales, 1906
Tales from a Wonder Book, 1927
The Celestial Railroad: And Other Stories, 1969
The Popular Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1971
Tales and Sketches, 1982
Young Goodman Brown: and Other Short Stories, 1992

MEDIA VERSIONS

Audiocassette

The House of the Seven Gables, New Millennium Audio, 2002

CD

The House of the Seven Gables, Brilliance Audio, 2006

Large Print

The House of the Seven Gables, G.K. Hall Large Print Book Series

VHS

The House of the Seven Gables, MCA Home Video, 1940

Objectives

General Objectives

1. To read a Nathaniel Hawthorne novel
2. To investigate the influence of the past upon the present
3. To develop a familiarity with American Romantic literature
4. To identify symbols
5. To track extended metaphors
6. To navigate difficult prose
7. To expand vocabulary
8. To develop critical reading skills
9. To develop analytical writing skills
10. To differentiate between a narrator and an author

Specific Objectives

1. To place *The House of the Seven Gables* within the context of American literature
2. To contrast Colonel/Judge with Clifford/Hepzibah
3. To compare Alice/Matthew with Phoebe/Holgrave
4. To discuss the role of the house itself as a setting, symbol, and character
5. To decode Hawthorne's network of symbols
6. To analyze the narrator's position towards the narrative
7. To discuss the Maule Curse at the literal and figurative levels
8. To critique Hawthorne's depiction of women
9. To evaluate the novel's understanding of historical influence
10. To appreciate Hawthorne's literary style

Literary Terms and Applications

Narrator: the voice of the person telling the story in a work of fiction. The narrator is not the author. The author writes a work of fiction, while the narrator is the voice the author assumes. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne's narrator is self-conscious, occasionally remarking on his narrative skills. Holgrave serves as a secondary narrator in Chapter XIII.

Theme: the dominant idea or meaning in a literary work. The main theme of *The House of the Seven Gables* is the relation between past and present generations. The house itself serves as a symbol of the past's weight

on the present, and both Clifford and Holgrave express a desire to be free from past generations.

Cross-Curricular Sources

DVD and Video

The Crucible, 20th Century Fox, 1996
Moby Dick, Hallmark, 1998
Moby Dick, MGM, 1956
The Scarlet Letter, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 1995
The Scarlet Letter, WGBH Boston, 1979
The Scarlet Letter, Alpha Video, 1934

Nonfiction

Frederick Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*
 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*
 Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*
 Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*
 Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses"
 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Literature

James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*
 Juliana and Stephen Glantz, *A Tanglewood Tale*
 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*
 Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*
 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Poetry

William Cullen Bryant, "Thanatopsis"
 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "My Aunt"
 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline*
 James Russell Lowell, "Nathaniel Hawthorne"
 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*
 John Greenleaf Whittier, "Massachusetts to Virginia"

Short Fiction

Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book*
 Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street."
 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Tell-Tale Heart"

Internet

"Nathaniel Hawthorne" (Full text versions of novels and short fiction)
 <<http://www.online-literature.com/hawthorne/>>

"Nathaniel Hawthorne Society"
 <<http://asweb.artsci.uc.edu/english/HawthorneSociety>

/nh.html>

"Nathaniel Hawthorne: Teacher's Resource File"
 <<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/hawthorne.htm>>

"Salem Witchcraft Trials 1692"
 <<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SALEM.HTM>>

Themes and Motifs

Themes

- family legacies
- aging
- decay
- class
- gender
- death
- greed
- subterfuge
- historical continuity
- progress

Motifs

- mesmerism
- recurring physical features
- hidden objects and knowledge
- images of decay
- ghosts
- authorial insertions of skepticism

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Explain each. Page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. Not to be deficient in this particular, the author has provided himself with a moral—the truth, namely, that the wrongdoing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncomfortable mischief. . . . (p. viii)
(In the Preface, Hawthorne states that his primary purpose in writing The House of the Seven Gables is to illustrate a point, not to tell a story within the constraints of historical accuracy or plausibility. The "moral" of the novel, that generations inherit their predecessor's wrongdoings, lies at the heart of the novel. The house itself, decrepit and haunted, is a physical symbol of the idea.)

2. God will give him blood to drink! (p. 14)
(At his execution, Matthew Maule pronounces this curse upon Colonel Pyncheon. It appears to come true in the manner of the Colonel's death and is echoed in Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's death. The "gurgling" in the throat of male Pyncheons recurs throughout the novel. On the literal level, Maule knew about a genetic predilection in the Pyncheon line and matched his curse to appear to predict it. On the figurative level, the curse highlights the novel's interest in the weight of the past upon the present.)
3. ... (which the writer never did hear, and therefore cannot describe)... (p. 113)
(Phoebe hears a gurgling in Judge Pyncheon's throat and is reminded of the Maule curse. The author pauses to distance himself from the phenomenon, saying that he has never heard the Pyncheon gurgling and thus is unable to adequately describe it. This is one of many passages in which the author consciously distances himself from the narrative. The narrator of the novel is skeptical and self-conscious. He often expresses doubt about both events he describes and his own descriptive abilities.)
4. Shall we never, never get rid of this Past? (p. 162)
(Speaking with Phoebe, Holgrave expresses his distaste for the influence of the past upon the present. Although it echoes the novel's theme of inherited evil, Holgrave's focus is wider. He sees the hand of the past on every facet of present life: social, medical, political, personal, technological. He thinks that every person should live divorced from the past, that every generation should begin anew.)
5. A very aged woman, recently dead, had often used the metaphorical expression, in her fire-side talk, that miles and miles of the Pyncheon lands had been shovelled into Maule's grave; which, by the bye, was but a very shallow nook, between two rocks, near the summit of Gallows Hill. (p. 174)
(Matthew Maule, before his execution, conspired to have the deed granting extensive territories to the Pyncheons hidden. Colonel Pyncheon succeeded in usurping Maule's land by accusing him of witchcraft, but the family
lost claim to a vast tract of land. This exchange is the bulk of Maule's "curse." The Pyncheon descendents, raised with aristocratic pretensions, failed to pursue their own means and lives because they expected to inherit the Maine land grant.)
6. So Alice put woman's might against man's might; a match not often equal on the part of woman (p. 180).
(In Holgrave's story, Alice Pyncheon tests her will against Matthew Maule's (grandson), ultimately resulting in her enslavement to him. This line is indicative of the novel's general view of women. Women are depicted as physically and spiritually weaker than men. They are also portrayed as essentially private, domestic, and irrational. A useful discussion topic would be to investigate whether this attitude towards women is representative of Hawthorne's contemporary thinking or a product of personal prejudice.)
7. You are aware, my dear sir,—you must have observed it in your own experience,—that all human progress is in a circle; or, to use a more accurate and beautiful figure, in an ascending spiral curve. (p. 227)
(On the train, Clifford engages in a discussion with a stranger about technological innovation and its effects on society. He predicts that the locomotive will bring about a return to nomadic society. The "spiral" metaphor of history includes both a cyclical and linear view of time. Events and circumstances repeat themselves over a linear timeframe, so that there is both progress and repetition.)
8. Death is so genuine a fact that it excludes falsehood . . . (p. 270)
(After Judge Pyncheon's death, Clifford is exonerated from implication in the deaths of both Judge and their uncle. This line, as many of the authorial insertions are, is phrased as a general formula. The narrator uses the aftermath of the judge's death to illustrate a general point about death and truth—that death as an absolute brings out absolute truth. This idea stands in marked contrast to the vagueness resulting from the deaths of Matthew Maule and Colonel Pyncheon.)
9. I do believe it; ... not as a superstition, however, but as proved by unquestionable facts, and

as exemplifying a theory. (p. 164)
(Holgrave is expressing to Phoebe his belief in the Maule curse. His rejection of "superstition" in favor of "facts" foreshadows the revelation that he is a Maule descendent and privy to details about the Maule and Pyncheon families. He does not believe that the curse is magical, however. Instead, he thinks that it exemplifies a natural progression, that families kept aloof from society will inevitably deteriorate.)

10. All his life long, he had been learning to be wretched, as one learns a foreign tongue . . . (p. 134)
(The narrator is commenting on Clifford's inability to adapt to the newfound happiness he finds in Phoebe's company. The particular phrasing of the line is rich in implication. That his wretchedness is like a "foreign tongue" indicates that he is not naturally inclined towards unhappiness, that his misery is externally imposed. In Clifford's case, the external agency responsible for his travails is primarily Judge Pyncheon, who framed Clifford for the murder of their uncle. That Clifford has been "learning" to be unhappy implies some sense of self-determination—that he is partially responsible for his unhappiness because he has actively "learned" it.)

Comprehension Study

Character

1. Contrast Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon with Clifford Pyncheon.
(Judge Pyncheon most closely resembles Colonel Pyncheon, both physically and in mannerisms. He is physically robust and strong-willed. Clifford is physically and mentally weak. He is "age-stricken" and overly sensitive to sense stimuli. Also, Judge Pyncheon is duplicitous, while Clifford is sincere. Ironically, the judge is wealthy and possesses luxuries that he fails to appreciate, while Clifford is poor but highly appreciative of luxuries.)

Author Method

2. Discuss the narrator's attitude towards his narrative.
(The narrator is self-conscious, modest, and skeptical of mere fantastic elements of the story. Often he pauses to insert doubts as to the efficacy of language, his own narrative ability, or the veracity of his narrative. While he appears to consider most of the narrative as plausible,

he explicitly distances himself from a literal reading of the Maule curse or any aspect of the story related to the supernatural.)

Conflict

3. What is the origin of the feud between the Pyncheon and Maule families?
(Colonel Pyncheon accused Matthew Maule (grandfather) of witchcraft in order to usurp his land to build the house of the seven gables. As Pyncheon watched Maule's execution, Maule pronounced his curse on him: "God will give him blood to drink!" Thomas Maule, Matthew Maule's son, built the Pyncheon house, and while doing so hid a deed granting the Pyncheons a vast territory in Maine.)

Interpretation

4. Compare the Maule curse at the literal and figurative levels.
(At the literal level, the Maule curse is foresighted illusion. Matthew Maule, knowing of a hereditary inclination towards apoplexy, formulated a curse that would appear to come true. Although not stated in the curse itself, the concealment of the deed is a significant element in Maule's revenge. Pyncheon descendents, enthralled by the prospect of a huge land grant that they thought would make them rich, fell into decline. At the figurative level, Maule's curse illustrates two points. Most importantly, Hawthorne is interested in illustrating a kind of original sin, a transgression that is passed through lineage. Also, the decline of the Pyncheon line is an argument against aristocratic pretense.)

Setting

5. How is the house of the seven gables a symbol of the Pyncheon family?
(The house mirrors the decline of the family. It is a vessel of sorts. It contains decrepit reminders of ancestors, such as Alice's harpsichord and the Colonel's portrait. Its slow decline parallels the family's, and its condition in the main narrative is analogous to Clifford and Hepzibah's: old, moldy, gloomy.)

Character Development

6. How does her stay with Hepzibah and Clifford change Phoebe?
(Over the course of the novel, Phoebe becomes

progressively more serious and mature. She is no longer constantly gay, and she becomes prone to introspection. She does not lose her cheerful disposition altogether; it becomes tempered with a sympathetic understanding of Clifford's moroseness. She also undergoes a slight physical transformation. Her eyes become "larger, darker, and deeper.")

Unity

7. What is the significance of the marriage between Holgrave and Phoebe?
(Their marriage performs two functions. First, it seals the rift between the Maule and Pyncheon families, presumably dispelling any lingering traces of the "curse." Second, it provides an alternative to the relationship between Matthew Maule (grandson) and Alice Pyncheon. Just as Matthew Maule mesmerized Alice, Holgrave mesmerizes Phoebe. However, instead of exercising his control over her as Matthew did with Alice, Holgrave releases Phoebe. Their relationship is a correction of previous errors.)

Motivation

8. Why does Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon pursue Clifford throughout the novel, and why does Hepzibah oppose his attempts?
(Judge Pyncheon suspects that Clifford knows the location of the deed to the Maine land grant because of an offhand remark Clifford made in his youth. Hepzibah despises Judge Pyncheon because he framed Clifford for the murder of their uncles, while maintaining a façade of benevolent concern. She prevents him from seeing Clifford because of their sordid history and because Jaffrey's imposing presence would be unbearable to Clifford's delicate sensibilities.)

Structure

9. How is chapter XIII, "Alice Pyncheon," different from other chapters?
(Chapter XIII is the text of the story Holgrave narrates to Phoebe. It is thus a story within the story. Although Holgrave's style is indistinguishable from the main narrator's, the switch in narrator affects the authority of the chapter. While the main narrator is clear that much of his story is speculative or hearsay, Chapter XIII is one step further removed; it is a narration of a narration.)

Style

10. How is chapter XVIII, "Governor Pyncheon," a stylistic deviation from the rest of the novel?
(In Chapter XVIII, the narrator's style changes dramatically. He directly addresses the corpse of Judge Pyncheon and switches between description of the corpse and events that he should be attending. The narrator directly addresses characters in other chapters, but no other chapter makes such extensive use of direct address. Also, the chapter includes the ghost scene, the narrator's most involved supernatural speculation.)

How Language Works

1. The narrator's skepticism concerning the supernatural elements of the story is apparent in his disavowal of the ghost scene after Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's death: "The fantastic scene just hinted at must by no means be considered as forming an actual portion of our story. ..."
2. Holgrave's description of the house of the seven gables to Phoebe sums its thematic importance to the novel: "old home, rendered poisonous by one's defunct forefathers. ..."
3. Hawthorne describes Holgrave's youthful enthusiasm in a general statement: "Man's own youth is the world's youth . . ." The narrator's propensity for generalizations based on the characters distances the reader from the narrative. It makes the characters universals, examples of types.
4. Of Hepzibah's dislike for Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, Hawthorne writes, "were they founded in any just perception of his character, or merely the offspring of a woman's unreasonable prejudice, deduced from nothing?" That the narrator questions her motives for disliking the man who, it is later revealed, engineered her brother's imprisonment preserves the tension and mystery surrounding the characters, their pasts, and their relationships. The "woman's unreasonable prejudice" is another example of the author's unflattering portrayal of women.
5. The narrator characterizes Judge Pyncheon by deploying a set of descriptors that contrast sharply with those applied to Clifford.

Hawthorne uses substantial words for the Judge: “iron, bulk, animal, resolute purpose, red fire, iron-banded, fellness of purpose.” Clifford is described with unsubstantial words: “vegetative, gaunt, weak, tremulous, helpless, pale, emaciated, age-stricken.”

- Hawthorne describes Clifford as an “abortive lover of the beautiful.” The core of his character lies in the tension between his sybaritic inclinations and his stricken condition.

Across the Curriculum

Drama

- In groups, assign characters and act out improvisational situations among the group. Profile your characters and respond to the situation as you think they would.
- Gathering details from the novel, script and act out the scene of Matthew Maule’s execution.
- A student taking the part of the narrator and each character, read aloud Chapter XIII, “Alice Pyncheon.” Discuss how your oral and textual experienced differed.

Art

- Using any combination of sculptural materials, make a model of the Pyncheon house.
- Draw portraits of the main characters. Explain your artistic decisions with references to the novel.
- Using visual aids, make an oral report on nineteenth century American Romantic painting. Note thematic similarities to the novel.
- Sketch a storyboard for what you consider to be the most important moment in the novel. Include key characters, objects, dialogue, and setting. Present your storyboard in class and discuss your choices.
- Make a web page explaining daguerreotypes. Include a technical explanation of the process, a short history, and sample images.

Psychology

- Research agoraphobia. Stage a formal debate in which one side argues that Hepzibah is agora-

phobic and the other argues that she is not.

- Research and make a presentation on the psychology of superstition.

Geography

- Gathering details from the novel, approximate on a map the location of the territory included in the Pyncheon land grant.
- Make a historical atlas of New England. Include the founding of colonies and cities, major events, westward expansion, and the early United States.

History

- In a chalk talk, explain the events and historical context of the Salem witch trials of 1692. Include a chronology, a list of relevant people, background, historical influence, and subsequent literary and artist representations.
- Make an oral report on Hawthorne’s friendship with President Franklin Pierce. When and where did they meet? How did Pierce’s presidency benefit Hawthorne? What significant events occurred during his presidency?

Technology

- In an oral report, explain the technological anachronisms depicted in the novel. Include: the water cart, train, daguerreotype, omnibus, taxi, telegraph, etc.
- Discuss the role of technology in the novel. What effect would substituting contemporary technology have on the novel’s plot and themes? ex: airplane for train, e-mail for telegraph, tap for well, gas over for wood-burning oven, digital photography for daguerreotypes, bus for omnibus, street cleaner for water cart.

Gender Studies

- Analyze the narrator’s comments about women. Are women stereotyped? How are they portrayed in comparison to men? Do you think that the author’s comments about women are representative of the time period or idiosyncratic?
- Break into groups, each group selecting one character from the novel and listing the adjectives

used to describe him or her. Compare lists. Do patterns of description emerge along gender lines? What can be surmised about gender roles from the language ascribed to the characters?

Journalism

1. Write an obituary for Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon. Note the manner of death and its similarity to other Pyncheon deaths, but strive for journalistic objectivity.
2. Write a classifieds advertisement for the Pyncheon house. Use standard classifieds abbreviations.
3. Compose a short newspaper article announcing the opening of Hepzibah's cent shop.
4. Write a review of *The House of the Seven Gables*. Include a short synopsis, brief author biography, comments on the book's influence, and a judgment of its literary merit.
5. Compile a list of questions for the Pyncheon's neighbors about their perceptions of the house, the family's history, the Maule curse, Phoebe, Hepzibah, Judge, and Clifford.
6. Write a wedding announcement for Phoebe and Holgrave.

Language

1. Analyze and list the novel's major stylistic characteristics. Include sentence structure and length, word choice, point of view, structure, and authorial insertions.
2. In "Substance and Shadow: Language and Meaning in *The House of the Seven Gables*," Clark Griffith argues that Pyncheon descendants fall into one of two categories, "Substance" or "Shadow," with matching descriptive language. List "Substance" and "Shadow" descriptors for each Pyncheon descendent and decide to which category s/he belongs.
3. Choose a significant paragraph and rewrite it in your own words. Discuss how your writing style differs from Hawthorne's? What is lost in the conversion? What is gained?

4. Compile a list of the narrator's comments about his own narration. In what way is this a reluctant or self-conscious narrator?

Composition

1. Compose a short story in as close an approximation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's style as possible. Include such features as extended sentence structures, formal diction, and authorial commentary.
2. Write a journal entry from Phoebe's perspective concerning her first impressions of Hepzibah, the house, Holgrave, and Clifford.
3. Examine your own dwelling as a vessel for family history. Choose a selection of objects or locations and write short passages about their significance to your family.
4. Write an essay in which you argue that Maule's curse is primarily literal or figurative. Support your arguments with quotations from the novel. Use MLA citations for your quotations.

Literature

1. Make an oral report on American Romantic Literature. Include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau.
2. Read Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher." Compare and contrast the authors' treatment of a house as both a setting and a character.
3. Chapter XIII, "Alice Pyncheon," is a story narrated by Holgrave. Compare this chapter to the rest of the novel. Is the shift in narrator apparent in the chapter's language, style, or perspective?
4. Make a web site about the relationship between Hawthorne and Herman Melville. Include brief biographies, lists of major works, and an essay about their mutual influence.
5. List and explain the novel's literary references. Include Aeolus, Ixion, Pope, Dryden, Aeneas, the Sibyl, Hamlet, Jonah, Phoebus, Gil Blas, Comus, and Moll Pitcher.

- Choose what you consider to be the novel's most important line or paragraph and write an essay explaining its significance.
- Choose what you consider to be the novel's most interesting line or paragraph and write an essay explaining its significance.

Alternate Assessment

- Make a character list, noting distinguishing characteristics of each character and changes in personality and behavior over the course of the novel.
- Watch the 1940 film adaptation of *The House of the Seven Gables* (Universal). How does the film capture the spirit of the house? What significant changes are made to the plot? How accurately are the characterizations?
- Compose a short story set after the events of the novel in which you depict the life of Phoebe, Holgrave, Hepzibah, Clifford, and Uncle Venner together at Judge Pyncheon's country house.
- Read *The Scarlet Letter*, which was published one year before *The House of the Seven Gables*. Are the styles consistent? What themes recur? Is one more oriented towards popular fiction than the other? Which do you prefer? Why?
- Write an essay in which you explain Hawthorne's decision to term the novel "a Romance." Has the term since shifted in meaning? What does the term tell us about Hawthorne's intentions?

Standardized Assessment Preparation

Vocabulary

- Keep a vocabulary journal while you read the novel. Note and least five words in each chapter that you do not know, look them up, and write their definitions.
- Make a glossary, choosing twenty of these words: *prudent, quaint, verdant, obsolete, obliterate, acquaintance, invidious, acrimony, specious, punctilious, deportment, ponderous,*

extant, frugal, propinquity, patrimony, spurious, interloper, torpid, mutational, ludicrous, inauspicious, recondite, sordid, desultory, vicissitudes, portentous, recompense, alacrity, hackneyed, preposterous, contumaciously, pertinacious, chagrin, ostentatious, torrid, obeisance, innocuous, penitent, portly, dilapidated, opulent, sepulchral, judicious, decrepit, destitution, impel, vexation, inscrutable, precipice, supernumerary, impede, morbid, squalid, lugubrious, esculent, plebian, contiguous, olfactory, vouch, inchoate, voracity, ethereal, quaff, sybarite, odious, piquancy, gallinaceous, sagacious, inert, obstreperous, fastidious, tumult, tremulous, haggard, estranged, pestilent, inveterate, promulgate, incumbent, diminution, stipulation, scruples, inordinate, abased, compel, ascend, defunct, demesne, oblivion, eulogy, mourning, contingency, alleviate, abode, saunter.

Grammar and Mechanics

- Choose and outline two sentences from each chapter. At least one of each pair should be a compound or complex sentence.
- There are seven ways to use a comma in the English language. Find and copy down an example of each usage from the novel.

Writing

- Compose an essay on the relationship between the past and present in *The House of the Seven Gables*. You should have an introductory paragraph with a thesis statement, a body with at least three main ideas and a topic sentence in each paragraph, and a conclusion.
- Select a character from *The House of the Seven Gables*. In five minutes, do a quick brainstorm on everything you know about that character. Then organize your notes into a rough outlines of a paper on that character. Trade outlines with a partner and discuss possible improvements in the structure of your outlines.

Vocabulary Test

1. innocuous
 - a) producing immunity to a disease or feeling
 - b) pale and liquid
 - c) characteristic of old buildings
 - d) harmless, inoffensive
2. odious
 - a) producing a pungent odor
 - b) repugnant or disagreeable
 - c) possessing a strong sense of smell
 - d) inclined to oratory
3. antipathy
 - a) obsolete medical practices
 - b) mutual attraction
 - c) settled enmity
 - d) uncommon wisdom
4. quaff
 - a) to extinguish
 - b) to drink
 - c) to wear
 - d) to open
5. specious
 - a) having a false appearance of truth
 - b) roomy, open
 - c) long and pointed
 - d) inclined to introspection
6. precipice
 - a) entreaty, request for assistance
 - b) poultice applied to flesh wounds
 - c) old age
 - d) cliff or steep place
7. haggard
 - a) uneven cut or splice
 - b) worn in appearance
 - c) mismatched
 - d) hungry, gluttonous
8. inveterate
 - a) spineless, lacking force of will
 - b) limp, lacking physical rigidity
 - c) habitual
 - d) upside down
9. hackneyed
 - a) dilapidated in appearance
 - b) socially important
 - c) clichéd, trite
 - d) difficult or unpleasant
10. asperity
 - a) harshness in manner
 - b) crispness in flavor or texture
 - c) dullness in color
 - d) sluggishness of thought
11. propinquity
 - a) the state of being socially acceptable
 - b) the difference between past and present
 - c) an inheritance of wealth or property
 - d) closeness in space, time, or relation
12. sepulchral
 - a) quickly traveled
 - b) resembling a grave
 - c) brittle
 - d) aristocratic in manner
13. recondite
 - a) falsely apologetic
 - b) severe in religious convictions
 - c) obscure or concealed
 - d) wild, savage
14. destitution
 - a) extreme poverty
 - b) fine paid in recompense for a petty crime
 - c) document demonstrating property ownership
 - d) madness, senility
15. sagacious
 - a) shrewd
 - b) savory
 - c) shadowy
 - d) ill-tempered

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Character Identification (30 Points)

Name the character(s) who fit these descriptions.

- _____ 1. curses the Pyncheons
- _____ 2. takes a daguerreotype of Judge Pyncheon
- _____ 3. opens a cent store
- _____ 4. plans to retire to the workhouse
- _____ 5. plays the harpsichord
- _____ 6. visits Hepzibah from the country
- _____ 7. seizes the land on which the house is built
- _____ 8. is unjustly imprisoned
- _____ 9. favors cookies
- _____ 10. is the literal builder of the house
- _____ 11. brings flower seeds from Europe
- _____ 12. dies with a watch in his hand
- _____ 13. accidentally discovers the secret compartment
- _____ 14. flee on a train
- _____ 15. watches the execution of the wizard

Part II: Fact or Opinion (20 points)

Mark the following statements T for true, F for False, or O for Opinion.

- _____ 1. Matthew Maule was a wizard.
- _____ 2. Phoebe Pyncheon is an excellent shop keeper.
- _____ 3. Colonel Pyncheon poisoned the house's well.
- _____ 4. Holgrave kills Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon.
- _____ 5. Phoebe's company comforts Clifford.
- _____ 6. One of the house's gables collapses upon the death of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon.
- _____ 7. Colonel Pyncheon was murdered.
- _____ 8. Hepzibah is known for her scowl.
- _____ 9. Phoebe refuses to let Judge Pyncheon kiss her.
- _____ 10. Thomas Maule hypnotizes Alice Pyncheon.

Part III: Location/Object Identification (20 points)

Name the place/object to which the description applies.

- _____ 1. once sweet, is now brackish
- _____ 2. inspires Clifford to predict a return to the nomadic lifestyle
- _____ 3. original building on the Pyncheon land
- _____ 4. Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's

obsession

- _____ 5. seemingly impossible to detach from the wall
- _____ 6. suppresses dust on the street
- _____ 7. Clifford, Hepzibah, and Phoebe eventually move here
- _____ 8. the Italian street performer finds it on the doorstep
- _____ 9. alerts Hepzibah of potential customers
- _____ 10. Phoebe mistakes it for a representation of Colonel Pyncheon

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Compare the Pyncheon house with its inhabitants.
- 2. Discuss the symbolism of the marriage between Phoebe and Holgrave.
- 3. Characterize the novel's narrator.
- 4. Argue that Maule's curse is figurative instead of literal.
- 5. Discuss Hawthorne's depiction of women.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

Identify speakers of the quotations.

- _____ 1. I shall think of putting aside business and retiring to my farm, ... the workhouse.
- _____ 2. Phoebe, this house of mine is but a melancholy place for a young person.
- _____ 3. Why should we live in this dismal house at all?
- _____ 4. Come at once to my house. The country air ... will do wonders for [Clifford].
- _____ 5. God will give him blood to drink!
- _____ 6. Among the multitude of my marvelous gifts I have that of writing stories.
- _____ 7. How can you love a simple girl like me?
- _____ 8. All human progress is in a circle.
- _____ 9. You shall see that I am as nice a little saleswoman as I am a housewife!
- _____ 10. Your daughter! Why, she is fairly mine!
- _____ 11. Had I taken that plunge, and survived it, methinks it would have made me another man!
- _____ 12. The house is a berry [sic] good house.
- _____ 13. It is my purpose to see Clifford before I leave this house.
- _____ 14. I suppose he has a law of his own!
- _____ 15. I certainly shall entertain no manner of apprehension, with my father at hand

Part II: Short Answer (20 Points)

Provide an answer to each of these questions.

- _____ 1. What story does Holgrave tell Phoebe?
- _____ 2. Why was Matthew Maule's (elder) grave exhumed?
- _____ 3. Why does Judge Pyncheon pursue Clifford?
- _____ 4. What does Matthew Maule (younger) do to Alice?
- _____ 5. How does Holgrave explain Maule's curse?
- _____ 6. Why does Hepzibah go into business?

- _____ 7. Why does Hepzibah despise Judge Pyncheon?
- _____ 8. How is Colonel Pyncheon's corpse discovered.
- _____ 9. Why does Holgrave not immediately announce Judge Pyncheon's death?
- _____ 10. How is Matthew Maule (elder) executed?

Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

Fill in the words that complete each statement.

- 1. Holgrave describes the Pyncheon chickens as _____ in manner, despite their diminutive _____.
- 2. The marriage between _____ and _____ ends the acrimony between their families.
- 3. The narrator contrasts the "animal" _____ with his "vegetative" cousin, _____.
- 4. Holgrave warns Phoebe not to _____ or _____ in Maule's well.
- 5. The townspeople initially predict that Hepzibah's _____ will _____.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Contrast Clifford with Judge Pyncheon.
- 2. Compare the relationship between Matthew Maule and Alice Pyncheon with the one between Holgrave and Phoebe.
- 3. List events, circumstances, and characteristics that repeat throughout the Pyncheons' history.
- 4. Why does Nathaniel Hawthorne term *The House of the Seven Gables* a "Romance?"
- 5. Discuss the importance of setting to the novel.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

1. D
2. B
3. C
4. B
5. A
6. D
7. B
8. C
9. C
10. A
11. D
12. B
13. C
14. A
15. A

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 Points)

1. Matthew Maule
2. Holgrave
3. Hepzibah Pyncheon
4. Uncle Venner
5. Alice Pyncheon
6. Phoebe Pyncheon
7. Colonel Pyncheon
8. Clifford Pyncheon
9. Ned Higgins
10. Thomas Maule
11. Alice Pyncheon
12. Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon
13. Clifford Pyncheon
14. Clifford and Hepzibah Pyncheon
15. Colonel Pyncheon

Part II: Fact or Opinion (20 points)

1. O
2. T
3. F
4. F
5. T
6. F
7. O
8. T
9. T
10. F

Part III: Location/Object Identification (20 points)

1. the well
2. train
3. Matthew Maule's shack

4. the Maine land deed
5. portrait of Colonel Pyncheon
6. water cart
7. Judge Pyncheon's country home
8. Judge Pyncheon's itinerary card
9. shop bell
10. daguerreotype of Judge Pyncheon

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

1. Uncle Venner
2. Hepzibah Pyncheon
3. Clifford Pyncheon
4. Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon
5. Matthew Maule (grandfather)
6. Holgrave
7. Phoebe Pyncheon
8. Clifford Pyncheon
9. Phoebe Pyncheon
10. Matthew Maule (grandson)
11. Clifford Pyncheon
12. Scipio
13. Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon
14. Hepzibah Pyncheon
15. Alice Pyncheon

Part II: Short Answer (20 Points)

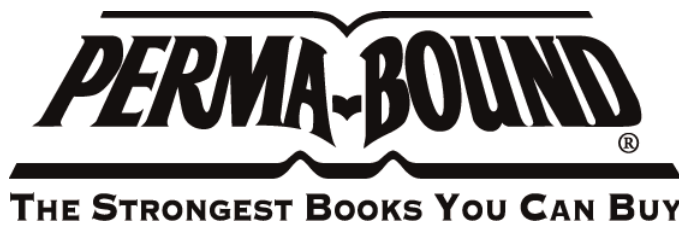
1. Tale of Alice Pyncheon and Matthew Maule
2. In search of the Maine land deed
3. He thinks that Clifford knows the location of the deed
4. Mesmerizes her
5. Hereditary ailment
6. To support herself
7. He engineered her brother's imprisonment
8. Sitting in a chair, blood on his ruff
9. To avoid incriminating Clifford and Hepzibah
10. Hanged

Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

1. aristocratic/size
2. Holgrave/Phoebe
3. Judge/Clifford
4. drink/wash
5. cent-shop/fail

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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