

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SCORE/GRADE:**

**WORLDVIEW: *The Scarlet Letter***

On the first set of lines below, write a list of bullet points summarizing an argument in favor of the following debate resolution. On the second set of lines, write a list of bullet points summarizing an argument against the resolution:

***RESOLVED: The specific themes of this story are consistent with the author's worldview as revealed in the text.***

Argument FOR the resolution (bullet points):

In the text, Hawthorne depicts a Protestant Christian worldview characterized by: human depravity, salvation by grace through faith in the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and divine Law as tutor to bring sinners to Christ. His themes of human depravity, Bondage and Freedom, Law and Grace, and the fellowship of sufferers stem appropriately from this worldview.

-Hawthorne creates characters that reflect fallen man. The story's introductory circumstances concern the sin of adultery. The author depicts Hester Prynne's unrepentance and alienation from townspeople who pretend to be immune from the sin that marks her. Protestant doctrine teaches that fellowship develops between sinners as they confess their sin and walk in honesty with one another. In the absence of this humility, a theology of glory develops in which pious Christians must demonstrate progressive holiness (or as the Puritans termed it, visible sainthood) by sinning less and less. Hypocrisy and scapegoating are logical results of such doctrine. This is evident in the Puritan community of Hawthorne's novel.

-He depicts Reverend Dimmesdale's misery in connection with his hidden guilt and personal acts of penance. Convinced that honest confession of his sin would limit his usefulness to God in the community, he lies and plays the hypocrite.

-He depicts the implacability of the Law's demands. Hester suffers the consequences of her sin in her public humiliation. Dimmesdale suffers the continual effects of a troubled conscience. Likewise,

Chillingworth, functions as an extension of the law, working to expose what Arthur seeks to hide. His return to the colony underscores the certain consequences of sin. Fueled by an unquenchable desire for justice, Chillingworth hides his true identity and pursues revenge. Hawthorne characterizes him as an evil opponent, suggesting that even satanic adversaries are tools in the divine arsenal to ferret out sin and drive sinners to Christ.

- Hester and Arthur meet in the forest and plan to escape the Law by running away. They are thwarted by Chillingworth. Hester realizes that he will pursue them to the ends of the earth. In this commitment to expose the lawbreaker, Chillingworth embodies the inflexible exactitude of the Law, which exists even apart from Puritan society.

-In the forest scene, Hawthorne asserts and depicts the natural attitude of man and nature to sin: acquiescence. Nature seems to smile on their plans. This affirms the Christian doctrine of the Fall of Man: in Adam all creation fell.

-Hawthorne depicts freedom from conscience in connection with public, personal repentance, rather than social judgment and penitence. Although Hester's sin is exposed early, real penitence evades her. Social punishment only embitters her. Dimmesdale's public confession forms the climax of the story; the freedom that he wins from Chillingworth signifies the efficacy of the route he here takes.

-Hester's return to the colony and office in the community suggests her concurrence with Dimmesdale's teaching. So too her unprovoked decision to continue to wear the scarlet letter suggests that she has embraced and been transformed by her own sin. The fellowship that grows around her reinforces the doctrines of fellowship through mutual confession of sin and forgiveness.

Argument AGAINST the resolution (bullet points):

Hawthorne's novel presents Puritan society as an oppressive and misguided hegemony. He depicts the social mechanisms of law and justice as harsh, inhumane, and hypocritical. His authorial tone suggests sarcasm and social criticism. The action of his morality tale is intended as a smear



piece against Puritan society and Christian religion. He creates Hester Prynne as a proto-feminist voice and her lover Dimmesdale as ultimately impotent to affect deliverance for her, Pearl, or even himself. Thus, his story is a tragic account of star-crossed love. The story's themes include tragic love, the danger of the codification of religion, and patriarchal abuses of women.

-The scaffold scene at the story's conclusion forms the climactic moment, emphasizing the minister's failure to overcome social codes and enjoy love and freedom.

-The supernatural nature of the world Hawthorne creates does not support these themes. Mysterious stigmata, portentous omens in the night sky, and demonic forest trysts are inconsistent with themes of self-determination and amorality. Law and transgression are innate in a world animated by God.

-Hester's return and desire to wear the hateful symbol of her sin forever seem inconsistent with the feminist self-actualization and liberty she seems to represent.

-The author seems to be speaking out of both sides of his mouth in creating a theistic world and recommending atheistic, individualism as the greatest good.