

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

SCORE/GRADE:

WORLDVIEW: *The Scarlet Letter*

Study questions 2a. through 2f. in the Worldview Socratic List. Answer the questions with respect to this story in your own notes. Then, in the lines below, answer the following question in a single (paragraph/page), using the details of the story to support and explain your response. For page-length answers, attach a separate sheet if necessary.

***Do the story's answers to these questions
tell the truth as the author saw it?***

Socratic Question 2. What does the story say about human nature?

Preparation:

2.a. What is a human being?

-According to the story, a human being is a created being, called by the Creator God to obedience, but led by passion to transgress. (187 and 190-191)

2.b. Are human beings different from animals? In what ways?

-According to Hawthorne's depiction, human beings differ from animals in that they are capable of reason and self-government.

2.c. Are human beings created by some higher power, or is man his own god?

-In the story, the Puritan society of 17th c. Boston acknowledges a Creator God to whom they, both individually and corporately, owe obedience. Hester contemplates throwing off divine authority and judgment, as it is expressed by her community when she proposes to run away with Arthur and make a life among the heathens. (188)

2.d. Do human beings have souls? Eternal ones?

-Dimmesdale makes clear together with the other elect leaders of the theocracy of Boston that laws and judgments exist to guard the eternal souls of individuals and the Providential lot of the society in which they live. (71-73 and 238-239)

2.e. Do human beings exist for a purpose? What is it?

-Human beings exist to fulfill God's will and to live in obedience to His express laws. The judgment inflicted upon Hester and which torments Dimmesdale's conscience underscore the laws and the consequences associated with straying from them. The repentance that punishment exacts in time suggests the purpose of the law – to bring sinners to repentance and avail them of their merciful God. Likewise, Hester's life after repentance suggest that persons saved in this way become gifts to their communities, fostering fellowship in suffering.

2.f. What adjectives might be used to describe human nature as it is presented in the story?

-Hawthorne fleshes out the depravity of man in his various characters. Consider Hester's bitterness and rebellion, Dimmesdale's cowardice and hypocrisy, the good wives' venomous tongues, Chillingworth's vengeful duplicity...Each character offers a study in human nature. So too close attention to the main characters suggests a marred grandeur and sympathy in each. Dimmesdale's earnest piety and desire to do good to those in the congregation, Hester's compassion on other sufferers in her community, Chillingworth's acknowledgment of his own failures as a husband. Each of these belie a more nuanced appreciation of humanity.

2.g. Do the story's answers to these questions tell the truth as THE AUTHOR saw it?

-The author seems to speak with authenticity, rather than tongue in cheek in his story. His story frame, "The Custom House," provides context for the narrative that marries the severity of the Puritan government with his own forebearers. This association explains his exploration of their worldview and central interests. It also grants him license to criticize their excesses and augment their virtues. Moreover, his characterization of his ancestors simply humanizes them. His

exploration of law and judgment yield themes of depravity, forgiveness, and mercy. His characterization of these ring true.

In the after chapter, “Endicott and the Red Cross,” the author asserts that the strict censure of secret sins exposed to the general public by the Puritans is in keeping with the spirit of his own people and time. He would not allow his reader to separate themselves from his censure of human nature – to draw lines of separation and distinction between themselves and their Puritan counterparts. This, he seems to say, is the nature of all men in all times—unmerciful legalists all. Furthermore, in lauding Endicott for removing the English Red Cross from the flag of New England, thus resisting the crown’s authority to impose religion over conscience, Hawthorne suggests that the better part of the Puritans’ contribution lay in this seed. Suffering the bitter hardships imposed by leaving England and cutting a living out of the New England wilderness, they planted the free nation that would eventually safeguard the individual’s freedom of religion. That he closes his novel with this sentiment suggests his good faith treatment of his subject matter and his own identification with his themes.

2.h. Do the story’s answers to these questions tell the truth as YOU see it?

-Although I doubt the dramatic detail of Hawthorne’s dark portrait of the Puritans, I tend to agree with his understanding of human nature, both in its lawlessness and its legalism. Fear seems to undergird the legalism and lack of fear its transgression. I think Hawthorne accurately portrayed the effects of forced penitence in Hester, that is bitterness and unrepentance. In Dimmesdale, he likewise accurately portrays the effects of secret sin and hypocrisy. Finally, his answer to the problem of sin is indisputably Christian in nature. He throws his characters on the grace and mercy of a loving God, attributing even their chastisement to His mercy. Grace is a major theme in the story.

To complete the assignment proper, the student would draw from the notes he compiled in answer to the Socratic questions. (The addition of textual quotations may be required to support their argument.) This might yield an answer like the following:

The author seems to speak with authenticity, rather than tongue in cheek in his narrative. His story frame, “The Custom House,” provides context for the narrative that marries the severity of the Puritan government with his own forebearers. This association explains his exploration of the

Puritan's worldview and central interests. It also grants him license to criticize their excesses and augment their virtues. Moreover, his characterization of his ancestors simply humanizes them. Hawthorne fleshes out the depravity of man in his various characters. Consider Hester's bitterness and rebellion, Dimmesdale's cowardice and hypocrisy, the good wives' venomous tongues, and Chillingworth's vengeful duplicity. Each character offers a study in human nature. So too close attention to the main characters suggests a marred grandeur and sympathy in each. Dimmesdale's earnest piety and desire to do good to those in the congregation, Hester's compassion on other sufferers in her community, Chillingworth's acknowledgment of his own failures as a husband. Each of these belie a more nuanced appreciation of humanity.

His exploration of law and judgment yield themes of depravity, forgiveness, and mercy. His characterization of these ring true. In his story, human beings exist to fulfill God's will and to live in obedience to His express laws. Dimmesdale makes clear together with the other elect leaders of the theocracy of Boston that laws and judgments exist to guard the eternal souls of individuals and the Providential lot of the society in which they live. The judgment inflicted upon Hester and which torments Dimmesdale's conscience underscore the laws and the consequences associated with straying from them. The repentance that punishment exacts in time suggests the purpose of the law – to bring sinners to repentance and avail them of their merciful God. Likewise, Hester's life after repentance suggest that persons saved in this way become gifts to their communities, fostering fellowship in suffering.

In the after chapter, "Endicott and the Red Cross," the author asserts that the strict censure of secret sins exposed to the general public by the Puritans is in keeping with the spirit of his own people and time. He would not allow his reader to separate themselves from his censure of human nature – to draw lines of separation and distinction between themselves and their Puritan counterparts. This, he seems to say, is the nature of all men in all times—unmerciful legalists all. Furthermore, in lauding Endicott for removing the English Red Cross from the flag of New England, thus resisting the crown's authority to impose religion over conscience, Hawthorne suggests that the better part of the Puritans' contribution lay in this seed. Suffering the bitter hardships imposed by leaving England and cutting a living out of the New England wilderness, they planted the free nation that would eventually safeguard the individual's freedom

of religion. That he closes his novel with this sentiment suggests his good faith treatment of his subject matter and his own identification with his themes.