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Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The House of the Seven Gables

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. Identify and discuss the parts of a novel: characterization, tone, theme, plot, point of view, and setting.
2. Discuss Hawthorne's beliefs about the nature of sin.
3. Explain the use of symbolism in the novel, particularly the following:
 - A. the framed portrait of old Colonel Pyncheon
 - B. references to Eden
 - C. Maule's curse
 - D. flowers
4. Identify and understand examples of the following literary devices:
 - A. foreshadowing
 - B. irony
 - C. metaphor
 - D. personification
5. Discuss the philosophical ideas presented in the novel, such as
 - A. democracy vs. aristocracy
 - B. isolation vs. immersion in society
 - C. the idea of permanency
 - D. the idea of redemption
6. Interpret the main ideas, events, and themes of the novel.
7. Identify the role that each primary character plays in representing the themes of the novel.
8. Discuss the role and function of the omniscient narrator in the novel.
9. Understand and evaluate the novel as a statement on the nature of man and his role in society.
10. Discuss the religious overtones of the novel as they relate to the Puritan beliefs of the time.
11. Evaluate how the author uses humor to frame the story.
12. Examine how setting is used to highlight the themes of the novel, e.g., the parlor, the Garden, the shop, the street, the train.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Phoebe is often described as angelic and full of light. Describe the effect her presence has on the house and its occupants. Why is it important that she is a Pyncheon?
2. Holgrave, the daguerreotypist, does not reveal his family name until the end of the novel. How does his choice of occupation reflect on his role in the story? What clues do we have to explain his presence in the House of the Seven Gables?
3. How do Anti-Transcendentalist beliefs of Hawthorne's era affect the outcome of this novel. How?
4. Often the wisest person in the story is considered the most foolish. Describe how Uncle Venner plays this role and how the story would be different without this character.
5. Many characters in this romance are presented in contrast to one another and are used to explore major themes in the story. Select a pair of characters and a theme below to explore.

<u>Characters</u>	<u>Theme</u>
Hepzibah and Jaffrey	appearance vs. reality
Clifford and Holgrave	democracy vs. aristocracy
Phoebe and Holgrave	redemption
6. Explain how Hawthorne uses the narrator to draw the reader into the story.
7. Some critics say that Holgrave's conversion to conservatism at the end of the novel is hypocritical and weakens the plot. How would you support or refute this criticism?
8. Many of Hawthorne's characters live solitary and isolated lives. How does this contribute to the underlying theme of sin being passed down through the generations?
9. The narrator pauses much of the plot of the story by placing a character on the physical threshold of the next space. Discuss these scenes and how they impact the plot of the story.
10. Discuss the implications this story has for modern times. Are the themes relevant to readers today?
11. There are several humorous scenes in the novel. Discuss two and how they contribute to the story.
12. If, as some critics suggest, Phoebe represents the heart and Holgrave the head, how does the love between them add to the conclusion of the novel?

plausible - believable
plebeian - lower classes
ponderous - large
progenitor - ancestor
propinquity - family relationships
prudently - rightfully
punctilious - formal and proper
reputed - believed
sagacious - wise
scrupulousness - principles
specious - true but unbelievable
spiracles - vent; opening
stalwart - sturdy
surreptitious - not obviously taken
testator - one who leaves a will
throng - crowd
venerable - worthy
verdant - lush
vicissitudes - changes
zeal - great enthusiasm

1. How does the narrator use the House of the Seven Gables to introduce the story of the Old Pyncheon family?

2. Describe old Colonel Pyncheon.

3. Why are Colonel Pyncheon and Matthew Maule enemies?

3. What effect does Phoebe's presence have on the house?

4. Who is Clifford Pyncheon and what is Phoebe's impression of him?

5. What is the significance of Alice Pyncheon's harpsichord?

6. Phoebe seems alarmed about having the dissident Holgrave living in the house, but Hepzibah defends him. Compare the two women's responses to the daguerreotypist.

Chapter 9 – Clifford and Phoebe

VOCABULARY

facile - easy
imbibing - drinking in
interposition - interference
magnanimous - noble or generous
requital - repayment of
tempestuous - stormy

1. What qualities does Hepzibah possess that keep her from appearing pitiable?

2. Why does Hepzibah turn over much of Clifford's care to Phoebe?

3. Describe the relationship between Clifford and Phoebe. What does Phoebe represent to Clifford?

4. Phoebe is often compared to a flower. What literary term does the narrator employ when he says that, "her petals sometimes drooped a little?"

5. What does Phoebe think about Clifford's mental and physical state?

Chapter 16 - Clifford's Chamber

VOCABULARY

balm - healing ointment
grimalkin - an old cat
ignominy - disgraceful person or thing

1. Hepzibah experiences a sense of foreboding as she moves through the house to Clifford's chamber. What is the nature of her dread?

2. What images does the narrator use to convey Hepzibah's isolation in this chapter?

3. How does Hepzibah justify bringing Clifford to the Judge when she knows the meeting will destroy him?

4. What concerns Hepzibah when she realizes that Clifford is not in the house?
