Objectives

1. Engage students in the plot, characters, themes, setting, and language of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* so that they are prepared to discuss and write about the excerpt and/or the entire novel.

2. Practice and reinforce the following Grade 9-10 ELA Common Core Standards for reading literature, writing, and speaking and listening:
   - **READING: LITERATURE** - RL.9-10.1-5, 10
   - **WRITING** - W.9-10.1-6, 9, 10
   - **SPEAKING AND LISTENING** - SL.9-10.1-6

Time

160 minutes (with up to an additional 120 minutes of extension possibilities)

Materials

SyncTV Premium Lesson on Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

Overview

This excerpt, taken from chapter two of *The Scarlet Letter*, introduces the novel's characters, setting, and conflict for readers. In addition, several complex issues in the excerpt provide rich topics for discussion. Close examination of this excerpt will prepare students to read the entire novel, and to write thoughtful, informed, and textually-rooted responses, consistent with the ELA Common Core Standards for the high school grades.

Background (10 minutes)

1. **Watch the Preview** (*SL.9-10.1-2*). As a group, watch the video preview of the premium lesson. Use the following questions to spur discussion following the preview:
   - a. What do you already know about the time period in which this story takes place? What historical information do you need to know in order to understand the story better?
b. What image or images stand out for you and why? What words come to mind after seeing the images in the preview?

c. Based on these images, what do you think is important to the characters in the story? What inferences can you make based on these images?

Extension (additional 10 minutes)

d. **Describe** (*W.11-12.3-6*). The preview says Hester Prynne must face the prejudice of small-minded townspeople. What does prejudice mean? What do small-minded people see and think? Ask students to make a list of five or more examples for each question. Discuss student opinions as a class.

Engaging the Text (150 minutes)

2. **Read the Text (30 minutes)**

   a. **Read and Annotate** (*RL.9-10.1-5, 10*). Have students read and annotate the introduction and excerpt from *The Scarlet Letter*. If students are completing as a homework assignment, ask them to write any questions they have into the annotation tool—these questions are visible to you after the students submit their writing assignments or beforehand if you use the "Mimic" function to access the students' accounts.

   b. **Discuss** (*SL.9-10.1, 3*). Have students get into small groups or pairs and briefly discuss the questions and inferences they had while reading. As a class, discuss the following: How did the images in the preview affect your understanding of the text? What other images came to mind as you read the excerpt? What words were uncommon to you? What meanings did you infer?

Extension (additional 45 minutes)

   c. **Listen and Discuss** (*SL.9-10.1-2*). As a class, listen to the audio reading of the text. Ask students to share how their understanding of the text changed after listening. What additional images came to mind? What words did the author use to develop the setting?

   d. **Interpret** (*RL.9-10.4, 10 and W.9-10.3-4 and SL.9-10.4-6* (ELL)). In small groups, have students rewrite the excerpt as a screenplay using modern language. Have groups act out their plays for the class. This activity will also help ELL students understand and discuss the excerpt more confidently.

   e. **Comprehend** (*RL.9-10.1-4*). Have students complete the multiple-choice questions individually. Collect papers or discuss answers as a class.

3. **Watch SyncTV (30 minutes)**

   a. **Watch**. Either watch the SyncTV discussion associated with *The Scarlet Letter* as a class or ask students to watch it on their individual computers.

   b. **Focus** (*RL.9-10.2*). Re-watch the portion of the SyncTV episode from 1:30-2:10. In this section, the characters Troy and Taylor, working off one another's ideas, home in details about the townspeople ("hard-featured dame" and "the ugliest and most pitiless of these self constituted judges") that they believe typify Hawthorne's central theme in the text. Pause here to show students how Troy and Taylor work backward from Hawthorne's specific details to begin talking about the reasons behind the strict structures of Puritan society.
c. **Focus (RL.9-10.3).** To focus on how the SyncTV students analyze a specific character, re-watch from 8:03-8:55. Here we see all three students detailing Hester Prynne's interactions with her society. Again, be sure to have students pay particular attention to the moments when students use specific language from the text (e.g., when Ashley reads, "with natural dignity and force of character...") to reinforce and/or develop their ideas about *The Scarlet Letter.*

d. **Discuss (SL.9-10.1-5).** After watching the model discussion, have a conversation with the class about the ideas discussed in the SyncTV episode. What new thoughts do they have after hearing the students' discussion? Next, divide students into small groups (3-4 students). Move around the room monitoring groups as students follow the SyncTV episode as a model to discuss some of the following questions:

   i. In this Puritan colony, religion and law are almost identical. Does religion still play a part in our law today? How? Why?

   ii. When the group of women discuss Hester’s punishment, the young wife says "let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart." If her views represent the other women her age, what could that say about the future of colony?

   iii. The students in the SyncTV episode discuss the importance of the Puritans playing by their own set of rules. What rules do we play by today and why?

   iv. Do you think Hester's punishment is harsh or did she get off easy? Explain your answer with examples from the text and from real life.

   v. How will the people of the colony feel about Hester's scarlet letter "A" and her actions in a year? In five years? Do you think those who believe she did wrong will forgive Hester?

   vi. Describe Hester’s character. Why do you think Hester acts the way she does when she is released from prison?

**Extension (additional 45 minutes)**

e. **Write (W.9-10.1, 4-6, 9-10).** Use the StudySync assignment creation tool to create a "Writing" assignment that asks students to address the following prompt:

   i. Oftentimes it is easy for one to look back into history and make judgments about a society's lifestyle and decisions. Think about how people of the future might view our society as a whole. What would they say about our lifestyles or decisions? Write an essay using your opinions and examples from the text to support your ideas. Be prepared to share your ideas with the class.

4. **Think (10 minutes)**

   a. **Respond (W.9-10.1, 4, 9).** Ask students to read the "Think" questions, watch the corresponding video clips, and respond to the questions, either in class or for homework.

5. **Write (60 minutes)**

   a. **Discuss (SL.9-10.1).** Read the prompt you have chosen for students, and then
solicit questions regarding the prompt or the assignment expectations. Whichever prompt you have chosen, make sure you are clear about the assignment expectations and the rubric by which you and the other students will be evaluating them.

b. **Organize** *(RL.11-12.1-5, 10 and W.11-12.1-2, 5)*. Ask students to go back and annotate the text with the prompt in mind. They should be organizing their thoughts and the points they’ll address in their writing as they make annotations. If you’ve worked on outlining or other organizational tools for writing, this is a good place to apply them.

c. **Write** *(W.11-12.1-2, 4-6, 9-10)*. Have students go through the writing process of planning, revising, editing, and publishing their writing responses.

d. **Review** *(W.11-12.4-6)*. Use the StudySync “Review” feature to have students complete one to two evaluations of their peers’ work based on your chosen review rubric. Have the students look at and reflect upon the peer evaluations of their own writing. What might you do differently in a revision? How might you strengthen the writing and the ideas?

Extension (additional 30 minutes)

e. **Write Creatively** *(W.9-10.3-6)*. Ask students to write a short story about Hester Prynne’s baby. What might her life be like growing up under the shadow of her mother’s public shame?
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Key Vocabulary

1. **rigidity (adj.)** - the quality of being inflexible, strict, or severe.
2. **severity (n.)** - harshness, sternness, or rigor.
3. **solemnity (n.)** - the state or character of being deeply serious and sober.
4. **dignity (n.)** - bearing, conduct, or speech indicative of self-respect or appreciation of the formality or gravity of an occasion or situation.
5. **haughty (adj.)** - disdainfully proud; snobbish; scornfully arrogant; supercilious.
6. **abashed (adj.)** - ashamed or embarrassed.
7. **sumptuary (adj.)** - intended to influence personal habits for moral or religious reasons.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What do most of the women in the excerpt think about Hester?
   a. Her punishment was not harsh enough.
   b. She should have been put to death for her actions.
   c. No matter what the punishment is, she will always live with her shame.
   d. Her punishment was appropriate for her crime.

2. Which best describes Hester in this excerpt?
   a. angry
   b. defiant
   c. remorseful
   d. hurt

3. How long has Hester most likely been in prison?
   a. a few days
   b. around three months
   c. at least one year
   d. there is not enough information in the text to know

4. Why does Hester hold her baby close when she is first released from the prison?
   a. She doesn't want the crowd to see her baby.
   b. She is trying to protect her baby.
   c. It was an impulse.
   d. She is trying to cover the "A" on her dress.

5. What does the man in the crowd mean when he says to the women: "Is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows?"
   a. Do women only do what is right for fear of being put to death?
   b. Are all women capable of committing adultery?
   c. Shouldn't Hester have been put to death because of her crime?
   d. Aren't the women just as bad as Hester for gossiping?
6. Which of the following could be considered themes of the excerpt?
   a. judgment
   b. conformity
   c. rebellion
   d. all of the above

7. Where does this excerpt take place?
   a. England
   b. Boston
   c. Puritan New England
   d. Salem

8. Based on this excerpt, what is likely true about the people in this colony?
   a. They are tolerant of differences.
   b. They are quick to forgive.
   c. They often witness public discipline.
   d. Both b and c

9. What is important to the people of this colony?
   a. religion
   b. laws
   c. obedience
   d. all of the above

10. Which of these are likely considered equals in the eyes of the colonists?
    a. Puritans and Quakers
    b. Men and women
    c. Minor and severe disobedience
    d. There is not enough information in the text to know.

Answer Key

1. A
2. B
3. B
4. D
5. D
6. D
7. C
8. A
9. A
10. C
Further Assignments

1. After reading the book, have students look back at the excerpt and discuss the role it plays in the story. This exercise can be completed as an oral discussion in class or even as an assessment at the conclusion of the entire novel. How does this passage add to the overall tone of the book? In what ways does it represent the major themes of the book? In what ways does the story change, and how, after this early passage? (RL.9-10.5)

2. Have students create a Venn diagram comparing Hester Prynne to a strong character from another work of literature. For a printable version of a Venn diagram, use this link: http://www.literacylane.org/pdfs/venndiagram_character.pdf (W.9-10.4, 7)

3. Ask students to design their own "scarlet letter" for the modern age. What would it look like? Who would be assigned to wear it and for what crimes? Allow students to display their scarlet letters around your classroom and to make short presentations explaining the reasoning behind their work. (SL.9-10.4-5)

4. One of the author's ancestors was the only judge in the Salem witch trials who did not apologize for his actions. Hawthorne changed the spelling of his name, possibly to hide his relation to this ancestor. Ask students to use this fact, in combination with The Scarlet Letter, to infer Nathaniel Hawthorne's beliefs about the Puritan societies. (RL.9-10.1)

5. Nathaniel Hawthorne is considered an author of "dark romanticism." Have students compare his writing in The Scarlet Letter to the writing of another author of dark romanticism (e.g., Edgar Allen Poe, Herman Melville, Mary Shelley). How do the writings compare? What makes them both works of this genre? (RL.10.1, 5)

6. Ask students to adapt the The Scarlet Letter into a children's story. The themes and overall story of the book should remain intact, but the writing and language should be altered to make it easily readable for children in 1st or 2nd grade. Explain to students that they'll be evaluated both on their grammatical correctness and their ability to succinctly capture the entire novel in a shorter format. (ELL)