American Literature
Mr. Myers

***The Scarlet Letter—*Notes**

Chapter 13

* Hester’s decision to help Dimmesdale
* The shift from Adulterous to Able in the public’s mind
* Hester’s coldness and austerity
* Hester as a free-thinker
* Struggle with doubt about the meaning and desirability of existence, especially as a woman; some suicidal thoughts
* The letter “had not done its office”
* Her resolve to combat Chillingworth and free Dimmesdale from him

Chapter 14 (pull names out of a hat to answer the various questions)

* What was wrong with what Chillingworth was doing to Dimmesdale?
* Why did the letter burn Hester when she noticed the terrible changes that had taken place in Chillingworth?
* Did Hester know that Chillingworth knew the identity of the father? When had she found this out?
* Look at Hester’s statement on 197 and Ch. Response on 198
* The word “forgives” shows up on 200…is Hester right about the ability of forgiveness to correct some of the problems in this situation?
* What could have happened for the various characters in this situation if forgiveness had been exercised all around?
* What was the root sin that had led to all of these additional sins?
* What does Ch.. mean with his statement on p. 201?

Chapter 15

* What do we learn about Hester’s marriage in this chapter?
* Snapshot of Pearl at the seaside—has she changed since she was a little girl?

Chapter 16

* What did the forest seem to represent to Hester?
* Line at the bottom of 213 and top of 214—is that what it takes to humanize a person?
* P. 215—does Hester mean Dimmesdale when she says Black Man?

Chapter 17

* Read selections from 222-223 together
* What does Hawthorne reveal about Hester’s relationship with Dimmesdale in this chapter?
* What is Hester’s solution to Dimmesdale’s plight?

Chapter 18

* What does the narrator say happens to the human heart when once a sin is committed?
* What is going on inside of Hester when she throws the letter off? What does the author mean to say with this scene?
* Are people able to just throw off guilt and shame by sheer willpower?

Chapter 19

* Pearl and the scarlet letter and the minister’s kiss

Chapter 20

* What was the schedule of ship at harbor?
* Why was Dimmesdale happy that the ship was not leaving for 4 days?
* Quote on the middle of p. 251—look at this!!
* How was the pastor tempted to relate to the people that he met?
* So what was the change that had taken place? Why?
* Did Chillingworth catch on that Dimmesdale had talked to Hester?
* What did Dimmesdale work on through the night?

Chapter 21

* What are your questions or comments on these “celebrations”?
* What does Hawthorne say about the Puritan celebration compared to what would have been in England?
* What is Chillingworth up to?

Chapter 22

* Look at the description of Puritan leaders on 277-278
* What was Hester’s reaction (in her thoughts) to Dimmesdale’s appearance in the parade?
* Who all does Mistress Hibbins claim kinship with?
* Humorous pictures of Pearl: wilder than Indian and sailor, conversation with the sailor (286-287)
* Hawthorne sets up this amazing contrast between Hester and Dimmesdale at the end of the chapter

Chapter 23

* Hawthorne’s description of Dimmesdale’s speech: a brilliant burst of eloquence
* What had Dimmesdale said that people liked so well? Or was not what but how? I’m reminded of what people said of Herod in the book of Acts after he made a speech: “it is the voice of god.”
* What was it do you think that finally gave Dimmesdale the strength to make known his sin?
* Why do you think that Dimmesdale gave up the plan to run away? Did he know that Chillingworth was going to follow them?
* What do you think was on his breast/chest?
* Was Hester glad that he was finally coming clean?
* What was the effect of Dimmesdale’s confession on Pearl?
* Do you understand why Chillingworth said that the scaffold was the only place that Dimmesdale could have escaped him?
* What was your reaction when you realized what Dimmesdale was going to do?
* Did Dimmesdale truly repent and find forgiveness from God?
* According to Dimmesdale, how had he experienced God’s mercy?

Chapter 24

* Three opinions about the letter on Dimmesdale and the few unbelievers
* What does Hawthorne say should be learned from Dimmesdale's life?  What does that mean to you?
* Chillingworth's demise and his last will and testament--why do you think that Chillingworth had anything for Pearl?
* Where do you think Hester and Pearl went?
* What does the chapter indicate happened to Pearl?
* Does it surprise you that Hester returned to New England?
* Did Hester ever repent?
* Who was she buried beside?
* How does the story make you feel?
* What are the themes of this book?
* Notice the structure of the book: three scaffold scenes beginning, middle, end; Where is the climax of the book?

Additional assignment: Write a paragraph explaining the significance of the main characters’ names