American Literature
Mr. Myers

***The Scarlet Letter—*Notes**

“The Custom House”

* Discuss the terms “customs” and “custom house” (in any airport or port…)
* Hawthorne’s belief that an author should not “spill his guts” to the reader but rather maintain a sense of reserve even as he talks about himself
* Commentary about the character of the American nation—image of the eagle
* Description of custom house officers—humorous and uses allusion to Matthew as well
* Reference to himself in the custom house—what does he say happened to him?
* Hawthorne’s connection to Salem, his home town
* Notice how he describes his ancestors
* Note how Hawthorne believes that he would have been perceived by his Puritan forefathers (a good example of self-deprecation, being able to make light of oneself)
* What occupation had many of Hawthorne’s ancestors been involved in?
* Hawthorne talks about his deep roots in a place and says that 1 or 2 generations at one place doesn’t compare to many, many generations—do you identify with this? Does he think that it is healthy to stay at one place for a long time? What did he do about it?
* What position did Hawthorne take at the Custom House?
* What was the chief characteristic of the other men who worked at the Custom House?
* What does the paragraph on the bottom of p. 12/top of p. 13 mean?
* Comments on the corruption of the old men-bottom of p. 14
* The Old Inspector and his love for food
* The Old General’s character—Hawthorne has an extraordinary ability to get at a person’s character and soul with his descriptions and comparisons
* Talk about the statement found on p. 24—relating to different kinds of people as a good
* How was this setting a contrast, a distinct change of pace for Hawthorne?
* Where was the one place that Hawthorne went to satisfy his literary interests?
* What did Hawthorne find in the attic that was of interest to him?
* Note the marvelous description of Pue’s remains on the top of 31
* Describe what Hawthorne finds wrapped up in the package? What does he do with it?
* Why does Hawthorne supposedly decide to write the story of Hester Prynne?
* How much of this is fictional?
* Why was Hawthorne unable to write as long as he was Surveyor of the Custom House?
* What does Hawthorne say happens to people who hold public office for an extended period of time?
* Who is the Uncle mentioned in this discussion?
* What does he compare his loss of a job to?
* What does Hawthorne turn his energies to once he has lost his job?