American Literature
Mr. Myers

***The Scarlet Letter—*Notes**

Chapter 1

* What’s the first word in the book? Significant? Who knows…
* What kind of tone does the first sentence set for the book?
* What two things does the author say is needed in every civilization early on?
* The first chapter sets up two realities of our world: 1) there is a lot wrong in the world—there is sadness, ugliness, pain, prisons, and darkness 2) there exists goodness amidst the wrong—there is kindness, beauty, love in the middle of the problems
* Discuss symbols

Chapter 2

* What do you think the Puritan society hope to accomplish with their strict code of discipline?
* Why do you think the Puritan women were of a “coarser fibre” than their feminine descendants?
* Why do you think these women are so hard on Hester?
* What kind of person is Hester?
* Does she appear ashamed?
* Is she repentant?
* What do we learn of Hester’s background in this chapter?
* Look at new vocab throughout chapter

Chapter 3

* Simile of a snake when describing Chillingsworth’s expression
* Where had this interested stranger been?
* Why does the townsman say that Hester was not put to death by the magistrates for her sin?
* Why do you think the stranger is so insistent that the father of the baby be found out?
* Look at Dimesdale’s speech
* Hester says she would bear the shame and agony of the secret partner—why?
* What are some the questions or mysteries that come up in this chapter?

Chapter 4

* What was Hester's state of mind when she was taken back to the prison from the scaffold?
* Why did the jailer let the stranger in to see Hester?  Was he actually a physician?
* What was the stranger's name and what was his relation to Hester?
* Does Chillingworth want to hurt or harm Hester or the baby?
* Why had Hester and Chillingworth got married?
* Why did Chillingworth say that he wronged Hester first?
* Does Chillingworth want to hurt Hester?
* What does he say he is going to focus on?
* Does he want to be known as Hester's husband?

Chapter 5

* Why did Hester choose to stay in Salem?
* Describe the place where she lived
* What did Hester do to support herself financially?
* What was the only kind of garment that she never sewed?
* Did she grow calloused to the pain of the scarlet letter?
* What was the one time that she felt a bit of relief in the pain of the symbol?
* What sixth sense did the letter seem to give her?
* Difference between static and dynamic characters

Chapter 6

* Why did Hester name her child Pearl?
* What do you think of Pearl?  Would you want her for your child?
* Why was Hester afraid that Pearl would not turn out well?
* Consider how terribly hard it would have been for Hester to endure her child's mocking attitudes.  If there was any relationship in the world in which Hester should have been able to find comfort and joy, it should have been her daughter's, but even here, she faces rejection and distance.
* Pearl was a real cookie--note how she would play with the weeds in the garden.