The Scarlet Letter
Research Paper Assignment

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne is “a tale of human frailty and sorrow.” Hester Prynne’s centuries-old story—her life—is “a sermon against sin.” As readers, it is important for us to make connections with what we are reading to people and events relevant to our own time period. With this in mind, your assignment is to research a modern public figure who has endured scandal, punishment, and ridicule much like Hester did.

You will write a well-developed compare and contrast research paper. We will spend time researching public figures in the library so that your compare and contrast points may be validated. The content and structure of your paper will be as follows:

**Introduction** – Provide general information regarding The Scarlet Letter, Hester Prynne, and the public figure that you will be comparing her to. The thesis statement will indicate that you are comparing the scandal, punishment, and ridicule of these two people.

**1st Body Paragraph** – Prove the similarities and differences of the scandal involving Hester and the public figure. Explain the crime or offense of both people in detail.

**2nd Body Paragraph** - Prove the similarities and differences of the punishment that Hester and the public figure suffered. Explain Hester’s punishment as well as the punishment of the public figure. His or her consequences are probably legal in nature, but remember that people are also punished by their families, friends, employers, etc.

**3rd Body Paragraph** – Prove the similarities and differences of the ridicule that Hester and the public figure must continue to endure. Explain the ways in which both people must suffer from or be reminded of the scandal long after their punishment is carried out.

**Conclusion** – Summarize the essay by restating the major points in different words. Generally express the importance of comparing a modern day person to a literary character.

In addition to writing a research paper, you will also give a speech to your class informing them of the person that you researched. Your speech will detail the similarities between that person and Hester Prynne. You will also create a visual aid to go along with your oral presentation.

**Speech:** Your speech will be 3-5 minutes in length. You will essentially outline your paper orally. However, you will NOT simply read your paper to the class. You must organize your speech so that you have an introduction, body, and conclusion. Follow the rubric for guidance.

**Visual Aid:** Come up with a letter that represents the person’s actions that are being frowned upon. Then create an elaborate picture of the letter that the person would have to wear if he or she lived in Puritan times. Just as Hester had to wear an “A” to symbolize ADULTERY, Mike Tyson may have to wear a “B” for BITER; or Dennis Rodman may have to wear a “D” for DIFFERENT.
Tips for Writing a Compare and Contrast Essay

Compare

• A comparison proves the similarities in two people, characters, events, stories, etc.
• Be sure that the comparisons you mention in your essay are substantial and significant.
  o You should be looking for similarities in Hester and your person’s circumstances. They do not have to be a perfect match, meaning they do not both have to have committed adultery to have something in common. The fact that they were both involved in a public scandal is the similarity.
  o Stay away from the obvious—there’s no need to point out that Hester Prynne and Britney Spears are both women, for example.

Contrast

• To contrast means to prove differences in two people, characters, events, stories, etc.
• Again, be sure that the contrasts you mention in your essay are substantial and significant.
  o Avoiding the obvious is a little harder to do with differences. Remember that there’s no need to point out that one person in your essay committed adultery while the other person embezzled money from the government. That’s actually a similarity because they were both involved in a public scandal.
  o Also, pointing out differences that are over-the-top obvious is insulting to the reader. I don’t need you to point out to me that one person lived in the mid 1600s while the other person is alive today.
• The truth is, the bulk of your paper will be about the comparisons between Hester and the public figure that you have chosen. You’ll write about contrasts when it is necessary for the reader to understand a major aspect of the modern person’s scandal, punishment, and ridicule.

General Writing Reminders

• MLA formatting: TNR, 12 pt. font, double spaced throughout, 1” margins (see the MLA handout for documentation guidelines)
• All paragraphs are 5-8 sentences; essay should be 3-5 pages (plus a works cited page)
• Begin paragraphs with general topic sentences, and end paragraphs with a conclusive sentence that helps transition into the next paragraph.
• NO contractions, abbreviations, informal language, 1st or 2nd person, or numbers (spell out all numbers under 100).
The Scarlet Letter
Oral Presentation

Rubric

Oral presentation: /40

Note card (with clear outline only) /5

Presentation /35

Performance /10

Remember to:

_____ make eye contact with students
_____ speak clearly
_____ dress appropriately (in dress code)
_____ speak loudly
_____ stand flat on your feet
_____ stand up straight

Avoid:

verbal stalls (qualifiers)

_______ like
_______ and stuff/and everything
_______ you know

nervous movements/posture problems

_______ fidgeting
_______ swaying/rocking
_______ hands in pockets
_______ crossed arms
_______ shifting weight
_______ leaning/sitting

_______ overuse of hand gestures
_______ connecting everything with “and”
_______ grammar errors:
_______ informal language:

Content /25

I. Introduction

_____ A. Basis of research paper
_____ B. Statement of who the public figure is

1. Occupation
2. World’s view of him/her

II. Body

_____ A. Scandal
_____ B. Punishment
_____ C. Ridicule

Visual aid: /10

Accuracy grade: /15

Approved on time /5

_______ read book in class /10

__________met signature deadline (-2 x ___ = - ___)

__________met sign-up deadline (-2 x ___ = - ___)

Total /65

- ___ (minutes under/over time limit) = /65