Organizational Patterns: The text is divided into twenty-four chapters. Each chapter has a title that prefaces events as they occur. The story begins with Hester Prynne coming out of the prison door and into the market place. Her daughter, Pearl, is in her arms along with the Scarlet Letter embroidered upon her bosom. Pearl is three months old at the beginning of the story. The text spans about seven years, and Pearl is seven at the end. The last chapter entitled “Conclusion” sums up both Hester and Pearl’s separate lives. It is unclear how many years have passed. Because so many different options for their lives are brought up, the reader is left to decide for himself what happened to Hester and Pearl.

Issues related to the study of Literature:

Theme: This story relates the life changing “sin” of Hester and Arthur Dimmesdale. It contains several themes.

1. God: “God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her [Hester] a lovely child…” (25)
2. Revenge: “Never did mortal suffer what this man has suffered. And all, all, in the sight of his worst enemy!” (73)
3. Man’s Inner Struggle: “I, your pastor, whom you so reverence and trust, am utterly a pollution and a lie!” (57)

Setting: This story takes place in Boston. The narrator repeats throughout the tale that the events occurred 200 years ago in Puritan times.

Foreshadowing: Foreshadowing takes place throughout the novel.

1. Hester is released from prison and is publicly humiliated. (p. 8)
2. Hester refuses to name her “partner in crime.” (p. 13)
3. Hester’s husband arrives in town calling himself Chillingsworth. (p. 14)
4. Dimmesdale covers his heart with his hand. (p. 57)
5. Pearl wants Dimmesdale to kiss her in public. (p. 97)

Point of View, Narrative Voice: This story is told from the narrator’s perspective in a third person narrative voice. The reader is addressed throughout the novel and reminded that this tale occurred 200 years ago.

Tone: The tone of this novel is serious and intellectual. Hawthorne uses many difficult vocabulary words throughout the story. The story progresses rather slowly due to the vast amount of description supplied by Hawthorne.
Irony: The ironic twist of the novel is the fact that Reverend Dimmesdale is practically viewed as a saint by the people when he should be wearing the scarlet letter above his heart like Hester. Roger Chillingsworth also proves to be an ironic character because he is a physician who helps Dimmesdale’s health deteriorate. Chillingsworth was Hester’s ex-husband.

Affective issues related to the work:
- Students may be able to relate to the Puritan beliefs due to their own religious beliefs. What do they agree with? What do they disagree with? Do they feel what Hester and Dimmesdale did was wrong? Why or why not?
- Students can compare Puritan Boston with the town they currently reside in. What are some similarities and differences?
- Have the students ever been embarrassed publicly like Hester Prynne? How did it feel to have people staring and whispering?

Vocabulary issues:
This novel is replete with difficult vocabulary words. The reader must understand certain words because Hawthorne uses them repeatedly throughout the novel. Some examples of the words I refer to include: mien (p. 11), ignominy (p. 29), calamity (p. 67), languor (p. 106), and lurid (p. 121).

Major Concepts:
- There are two major concepts contained in the novel. First, there is the battle of man versus himself. It is an inner battle that goes on in the psyche of all major characters. Man must decide what is good and what is evil, and it is difficult for him to decide. Second, there is the issue of man versus God. Who is guiltier in God’s eyes, Hester, Dimmesdale, or Chillingsworth?

Background Knowledge:
It might be helpful to do some background research on the Puritans during the 1600’s. Understanding the minister’s position in society would provide a better understanding of the significance of Dimmesdale’s final decision to identify himself as a sinner.

Implications for students of diversity:
Students of diversity may be particularly interested in how Hester felt inside. They might relate to how other people’s prejudices and comments cause an immediate reaction. They are likely to be able to relate to Hester and how she felt wearing the scarlet letter.

Gender issues:
This book contains a significant gender issue. Would the public’s ridicule have been the same if Dimmesdale wore the scarlet letter instead of Hester? Would Dimmesdale be sentenced to wear the scarlet letter above his bosom like Hester had to? Would the novel have been as interesting if the only sinner was Dimmesdale?
The Central Question/Enduring Issue:
I am planning to utilize this text in order to provide concepts that will be touched upon repeatedly during the yearlong curriculum. The central questions are: What do I believe to be right and wrong? How do I want society to see me? These questions will help students discover themselves and identify what they believe in.
1. The love/hate triangle between Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingsworth. What do I believe to be right and wrong?
2. The Boston Puritans viewed Hester as sinful and Dimmesdale as saintly. How do I want society to see me?
3. The idea of hypocrisy. Dimmesdale and Chillingworth are both prime examples of hiding their true deeds and intentions.
4. Pride versus honesty dealing with Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth. Who is honest? Who is prideful?

Research Issues/Project Ideas:
1. Research the Puritans of the 1600’s: their beliefs, their way of life, their history, how they dressed, etc.
   Project: Construct Puritan Boston in the classroom. Have the class get into groups and dress up. The groups will present what they were assigned (beliefs, way of life, history, etc.).
   Project: Write a three page research paper explaining England’s influence over Boston in the 1600’s.
3. Personal reflection paper on how you judge people. Think about those around you. What makes a person a friend? How do you judge them? Would you have judged Hester? Would you have judged Dimmesdale? Why or why not?
4. Create a mock trial for Hester and/or Dimmesdale. Pick class members to play the role of judge, lawyers, jury, etc. Are Hester and Dimmesdale guilty? If so, what should be their sentence or punishment?

Informational/Functional Texts:
2. Research the Constitution of the United States. What are the laws of the land?
3. Magazines that depict how we judge people. The class could cut out articles and pictures that stereotype different groups in our society.