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Literature
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Classic American Short Stories

(Ed.) Paul D. Moliken

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Classic American Short Stories

All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics edition of *Classic American Short Stories*, copyright 2007.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, students will be able to:

1. analyze the use of literary conventions and devices to develop character and point of view in the short stories.
2. define the following literary elements and point out examples of each: allusion, atmosphere, imagery, irony, metaphor, mood, narrator, personification, setting, simile, theme, and tone.
3. recognize an allegory within a short story.
4. define the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
5. understand the theme of charity as it relates to “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”
6. understand how the theme of “corporate discontent” in “Bartleby, the Scrivener” can be applied to modern society.
7. discuss the central ideas of a short story and relate them to their own experiences and to the world.
8. compare short stories on the basis of thematic issues, characters, plot, setting, and style.
9. understand the use of foreshadowing, flashbacks, and non-sequential time order within a short story.
10. explain the significance of the title and its relationship to the short story.
11. explain the use of figurative language and rhetorical techniques within the text and how they function.
12. characterize the main characters within the short story, and explain their purpose in the story.
13. offer a close reading of the short story and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text.

Classic American Short Stories

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. An allegory is an extended metaphor. “Young Goodman Brown” can be considered a moral allegory in that the story represents something else. The reader can read the story as a story of a young man who journeys into the forest to meet the devil, or the reader can find a more symbolic meaning behind the events. What lessons do you believe Hawthorne is trying to reveal through this short story? Explain.
2. “Young Goodman Brown” ends with a question from the narrator that speculates as to the nature of the story. Do you believe that Goodman Brown experiences what the narrator describes, or is what happens a figment of his imagination? Use passages from the text to support your answer.
3. Much of the story “Bartleby, the Scrivener” uses food imagery: the characters’ names, Bartleby’s odd eating habits, and the effect of food on the conclusion of the story. Explain the ways in which food or the lack of food is used throughout the story. Then, evaluate how eating and food help reinforce the story’s themes.
4. Think about the narrator in “Bartleby, the Scrivener.” Describe the narrator and what the reader learns about him throughout the story. Would you consider the narrator reliable or unreliable? Why? Why do you believe that Melville chose to tell the story from the point of view of an unnamed lawyer on Wall Street? How would the story have changed if it was told from Bartleby’s perspective?
5. Explain how the story “Bartleby, the Scrivener” could be seen as a precursor to existentialism and absurdist literature.
6. “Young Goodman Brown” and “Bartleby, the Scrivener” are centered around characters who withdraw from life. The protagonists in both stories share many similarities and differences. Use passages from both short stories to explain the reasons why both men have withdrawn from life. Then, explain the ways in which they withdraw, and what happens as a result. Be sure to focus on the similarities and differences between the two characters.
7. Edgar Allan Poe’s theory of the short story surrounded the idea that everything in the short story must create a unity of effect. How does the story “The Cask of Amontillado” follow these expectations?
8. How does the setting contribute to the overall theme in “The Cask of Amontillado”?
9. Compare the purpose of the narrators in “Bartleby, the Scrivener” and “The Cask of Amontillado.” Both can be considered unreliable narrators. Explain the effect that the narration has on each story, and discuss the differences between the purposes of each.

“Young Goodman Brown” – Nathaniel Hawthorne

Vocabulary

abashed – embarrassed, uncomfortable
anathema – a curse or punishment; something abhorrent
anointed – placing oil on a person's skin in a ceremony
basin – a bowl used to hold liquids
benignantly – showing kindness to others
boughs – the branches of a tree
catechism – part of religious education
cognizance – the ability to use and judge information
covenant – a verbal contract, agreement
deacons – church officials
eventide – evening
exhorted – strongly recommended
firmament – heaven
forsooth – absolutely
hoary-bearded – having a grey beard
husbandman – a farmer
impious – without holiness
lamentations – loud cries of grief and concern
lattice – crossed wooden strips with openings in between
lurid – reddish
reverenced – respected
sanctity – holiness, purity of religious life
selectmen – town officers
similitude – similar in appearance
smote – struck
steeds – horses
thither – towards something
unconcerted – separated
verily – honestly
vexed – irritated, annoyed
wanton – inconsiderate, careless
zenith – the point in the sky directly above the observer

1. Describe the setting at the beginning of the story. Which characters are introduced and how are they related? How does the setting seem important in understanding what the story may be about?

39. Read the following passage from the story:

And, maddened with despair, so that he laughed loud and long, did Goodman Brown grasp his staff and set forth again, at such a rate that he seemed to fly along the forest path* rather than to walk or run. The road grew wilder and drearier and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil. The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds—the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians; while sometimes the wind tolled like a distant church bell, and sometimes gave a broad roar around the traveler, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn.

Describe the rhetorical techniques that Hawthorne uses in order to maintain the tone of the passage.

40. Why do you think Young Goodman Brown does not turn back like he resolved to do? Do you think that he knows what is going to happen when he gets to the meeting? What clues is he given?

41. What does the narrator mean when he describes Brown as “the chief horror of the scene”?

42. Describe Goodman Brown’s character at this point in the story. Cite examples from the text. What hints at the beginning of the story is the reader given that there is or is not any indication that he will sink to such depths?

43. Describe the devil’s service; pay particular attention to how Hawthorne has altered the natural setting.

superfluous – more than needed
thither – toward a place
thwarting – attempting to stop
trifling – of little importance
turnkey – a prison guard
unwonted – out of the ordinary
upbraided – criticized
usurpation – the seizing of power
veering – changing directions
vexing – annoying
vintner – a wine maker
visage – a face
vouchsafed – gave permission
waive – to put aside
wane – to lessen

1. Describe the narrator.

2. Who is Bartleby, and why does the narrator want to write about him?

3. How does Melville create a disconnect between the narrator and the subject of the story? How should the reader interpret the story that the narrator tells of Bartleby?

4. Read the following passage, and explain what the reader should learn about the narrator based on it.

Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my *employees*, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented.
