

Discussion Questions for *A Student's Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne* by MaryAnn Diorio, PhD

1. What is the value of studying an author's life and work? How does doing so contribute to one's understanding of a culture? Of one's own life?
2. What, in your opinion, was Nathaniel Hawthorne's chief contribution to American Literature? Why?
3. To what degree do you think an author's work reflects his culture? Do you think Hawthorne's work accurately reflects the culture of America at the time? In your opinion, how much is an author's work reflective of his own life as opposed to his culture?
4. Hawthorne was humiliated by the decisions of his great-great-grandfather, a judge during the Salem Witch Trials. As a result, Hawthorne disassociated himself from his ancestor by changing the spelling of his last name. Have you ever been humiliated by a family member? An ancestor, or someone alive during your lifetime? How did you handle the situation?
5. Hawthorne lost his father at an early age. His father's death profoundly grieved Hawthorne's mother, to the point that she never recovered. Her sorrow greatly affected her son Nathaniel. Is there a proper way to grieve? What can it mean when a person never recovers from grief? What steps can one take to move through grief in a healthful manner?
6. The artistic temperament tends to be more sensitive than the non-artistic. Which one are you? If artistic, do you find that you feel things very deeply or to the extreme? How has this helped or hindered you? If you are not of an artistic temperament, do you find that you can let things easily roll off your back? How has this helped or hindered you?
7. How important do you think it is to understand an author's life and background while reading his or her work? In your opinion, does it make a great deal of difference, only a little, or none at all?

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