



Yale-New Haven  
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1978 Volume I: Language and Writing

---

## Interpreting Ideas in American Literature

Guide for Curriculum Unit 78.01.10  
by Jessie O. Sizemore

Divided into three sections, this unit is a summary of the yearlong curriculum for English 3—American Literature—in New Haven. First, an explanation of the four major themes in “great literature” is tied to historical experiences and reactions of the earliest settlers. The themes include: innocence, tradition, salvation, industrialism and loss of innocence. This first section includes an overview of all essential reading and composition projects as well as suggestions for enhancing the lessons with creative visual aids. The second section deals exclusively with Nathaniel Hawthorne and the short story. Biographical information about Hawthorne can be reproduced for students and/or presented as is to the class. Hawthorne’s theme of “unpardonable sin” and his use of symbolism are discussed in conjunction with a structured lesson on the story, “The Ambitious Guest.” A variety of extension activities for the English and History class is offered that could easily be adapted to other classrooms and/or genres. Finally, the unit returns to a general statement about heightening students’ awareness of aspects of the literacy process (e.g., plot and characterization) through the study of the major literary genres. The last pages emphasize the need to teach sentence structure in order to facilitate reading comprehension.

### **Key Words**

*Hawthorne Nathaniel Literature American*

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University  
For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>