

Lesson 5

A World of Meaning: Allegory in "Young Goodman Brown"

Objectives

- To establish analogies between personal imaginative experiences and those reflected in literature
- To examine the use of imagery as a vehicle for intermediate (symbolic) and total (allegorical) literary structures

Notes to the Teacher

Once a student has carefully read "Young Goodman Brown" on the literal level, the allegorical level will be more obvious. Based on the assumption that students have already analyzed literature in terms of imagery, figurative language, and symbolism, their understanding of the allegory will be facilitated by a consideration of archetypal symbols. Since students have already been assigned research on background information (**Handout 11**, Lesson 4), have read the story, and have been asked to record phrases and quotes from the story which they wish to discuss (**Handout 12**, Lesson 4), the major part of this lesson will focus on the story as allegory.

Procedure

1. Allow students three to five minutes to consult with the members of their research team in order to complete **Handout 11**. Collect the handouts without further discussion, indicating that the material will be incorporated into today's quiz and discussion.
2. Administer the quiz based on "Young Goodman Brown," **Handout 13**. The tombstone at the top of the quiz contains a space for each student's name and a "hopeful verse," should he/she be declared a winner of "Puritan Pursuit." A winner needs a total of twenty points in any combination:

- research questions (one point each) fifteen points
- reading quiz (one point each) ten points
- tie breaker—most creative "Letter to Faith" one point

The awards can be "inscribed" after the components have been totaled. A possible inscription could be "Keep the Faith."

Suggested Responses:

1. 3; 2. 4; 3. 5; 4. 1; 5. 2; 6. c; 7. c; 8. b; 9. b; 10. d

3. Review the timeline, on **Handout 14**, that contains essential historical information. Ask students how we arrive at the date of Goodman Brown's journey on the basis of evidence from the story.

Their answer should indicate that King Philip's war, the reign of King William, and the governorship of Sir William Phips suggest that the events occur by 1692. The Salem witch trials (1692) are also alluded to. The "Night" of the year could be Halloween, when witches were reputed to roam the earth.

4. Review **Handout 12** (Lesson 4). Use it as the basis for inductively approaching the allegorical elements in the story. Most non-literal concerns will be reflected in this handout. The most important passages will be those you will elaborate on in today's lesson.
5. Distribute **Handout 15** and review with students the techniques of imagery, figure, and symbol, using examples provided from the story. Discuss the example provided, clarifying the concept of tenor and vehicle as one of the basic structures of literary com-

munication. As time allows, review the passages provided or ask students to complete them as a follow-up activity.

Suggested Responses:

1. (a) *tenor*—impatience; urgency; sense of authority
vehicle—the imperative words (“come”; “take”); symbols (“journey”; “staff”)
 - (b) *tenor*—conviction; resolution
vehicle—Goodman Brown’s state of mind is emphasized by an exclamation, yet his belief that “Faith below” will help him “stand firm” is about to be shattered in the following lines when he hears Faith’s voice in the forest and sees one of her pink ribbons. He then “set forth again” because, at that climactic point in the story, he cannot stay firm in his resolution. “My Faith is gone . . . there is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given.”
 - (c) *tenor*—serious, solemn
vehicle—Although the narrator indicates the tone of the passage (solemn), what the speaker says reinforces the feeling. This fallen angel’s sermon on evil is in terms of human nature’s history of deceiving itself. So that positive qualities associated with hearts and virtue and happiness are not what they appeared to be; they were a dream. “Evil must be your only happiness.” Consequently, a participation in evil allows for the religious ritual parallels throughout the story, and in this passage is suggested by both the rhetorical situation (a sermon) and the reference to a “communion.”
2. (a) Answers should include the following:
path/journey—life itself
light/darkness—good/evil
fire/water—both destruction and purification
characters/names—Faith (religious belief); Young Goodman Brown (represents all who are young,

good, and innocent; common surname suggests an “Everyman”)
various ritual acts—a parody of religious worship (baptism, communion)
snakes: evil—temptation; fertility
trees—life, especially the evergreen; life’s cycle of regeneration
village/forest—reversal of usual association by Romantic writers, who associate society with corruption and nature with goodness and innocence
dreams/awakened state—illusion and reality

- (b) allegorical summary—Students should incorporate the major symbols they have discovered in the section above into a coherent synthesis of the allegorical level of the story.
- (c) statement of theme—On the most elementary level, the story concerns itself with the theme of appearance vs. reality. This also points to other levels of meaning pertaining to the psychological and religious levels of interpretation. Since Goodman Brown cannot accept the fact that human nature reflects both evil and good, he rejects faith, hope (he despairs), and the love of and for his fellow mortals.

Evaluation/Enrichment Activities

Writing/Journal Assignments

1. Do a comparative study of “Young Goodman Brown” with one of the following literary sources listed.
2. In a journal entry or a well-developed essay, respond to any quote you select from the story or the quote sheet (**Handout 10**, Lesson 4) and relate it to “Young Goodman Brown.”
3. In an analytical essay, apply the theory of allegory to another short story, e.g., Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Masque of the Red Death.”
4. Research Hawthorne’s life and report on how the subject matter of this story reflects his own background and outlooks.
5. Based on your careful reading of the story, support the interpretation that suggests that Goodman Brown’s initial innocence is really ignorance of the ways of the world. And since he blames others for his ignorance rather

than himself, he cannot be reconciled with the imperfections of human nature. He wants divine knowledge.

Reading

1. Drama
 - a. *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller
 - b. *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, Christopher Marlowe

2. Fiction
 - a. "The Devil and Tom Walker," Washington Irving
 - b. "The Devil and Daniel Webster," Stephen Vincent Benét
 - c. *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad
 - d. *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding
 - e. *The Old Man and the Sea*, Ernest Hemingway
 - f. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde
 - g. *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne

Fine Arts

1. Music

"Sympathy for the Devil", The Rolling Stones
(from *Beggars' Banquet*)

2. Video

Young Goodman Brown (30 minutes, VHS, Pyramid)