

# THE SCARLET LETTER SIMULATION

## ABSTRACT

*As an innovative approach to teaching the novel 'The Scarlet Letter' by Nathaniel Hawthorne, this web-based role play simulation engages students by placing them directly into the conflict of the story, thus increasing motivation. The story comes alive as students interact with one another via their personas. Through play, students gain insight into character portrayal by understanding the inherent motivation of characters to recognise real life psychological and sociological conditions of these otherwise fictional entities. Students benefit by acquiring a deeper understanding of character, theme, language and historical perspective.*

## KEYWORDS

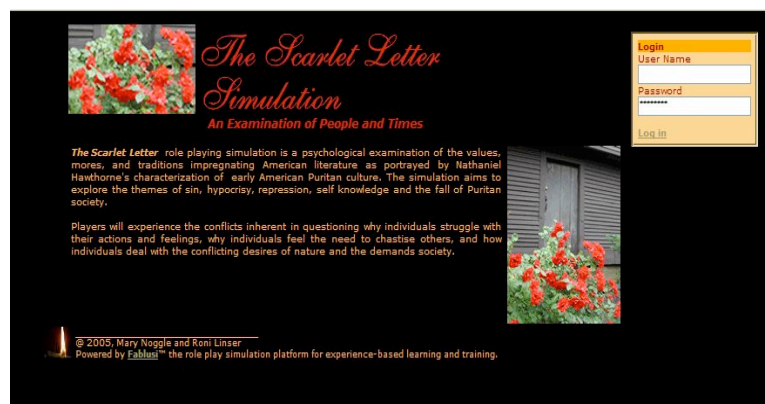
American literature; American Puritan culture; Blended learning; e-Learning; Reusability.

## CONTACT

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## DESCRIPTION

*The Scarlet Letter* online role play simulation is a psychological examination of the values, mores, and traditions impregnating American literature as portrayed by Nathaniel Hawthorne's characterization of early American Puritan culture. The simulation aims to explore the themes of sin, hypocrisy, repression, self knowledge and the fall of Puritan society. Players experience the conflicts inherent in questioning why individuals struggle with their actions and feelings, why individuals feel the need to chastise others, and how individuals deal with the conflicting desires of nature and the demands of society.



## AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

The Scarlet Letter simulation is part of a course in American Literature which emphasizes historical perspective, cultural context, and literary analysis.

As first run in 2005, participants were placed in teams of 2-3 players and assumed the identity of one of ten roles, totalling 20 – 30 students in a single world. The role play can be run simultaneously in parallel worlds and/or use smaller or larger teams to accommodate various cohort sizes.

## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The primary goal of this online role play simulation is for participants to be able to interpret, analyse, and respond to the novel with historical and cultural context. It assists in developing:

- Deeper skills in interpretive reading;
- Greater experience of the conflicts inherent in questioning human behaviour;
- Increased knowledge of the Puritan perspective.

## TIME AND SETTING

The role play is set within the historical framework of the novel (America in the mid 1600s) with first phase of the simulation beginning in 1649. The second phase advances the storyline fifteen years in order to incorporate events leading up to the Boston witch trials of 1665. Setting the second kick-start episode fifteen years later introduces students to other historical developments that will serve as background for later literary works, such as Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom* and Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*, also studied in the course.

*The Scarlet Letter* is embedded as a 4-week activity within an American Literature course at Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute, Hudson, North Carolina, USA.

## RESOURCES

The Scarlet Letter was designed using the Fablusi authoring guide available at <http://www.fablusi.com/corporate/requestDesignDoc.asp>. The Fablusi platform provides synchronous and asynchronous communication tools including interaction spaces, private communication among roles, chat and private discussions as requested by roles.

- Participants use NotePad as a work area for individual composition as well as sharing information with teammates
- Chats are scheduled among team performers or other characters
- A large portion of the communication is channelled through SimMail, in which each character has his or her signature stationery

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Interaction between characters is triggered by a kick-start episode projected from the events of the novel.

Interaction spaces (iSpaces) relate to spaces described in the novel. The forest scene, the governor's mansion, and the meeting house, among others, serve as areas to intermingle, further developing the plot. These spaces are designed for private reflection and public interaction.

Once roles are defined, the instructor assigns tasks.

- Research allocated role
- Write a role profile. Creating the profile gives participants a better understanding of the character and what motivates this character in action. Through students' preparing the role profiles, they acquire the concept of remaining in character throughout the simulation, characters they themselves have created.
- Interact with other participants in response to projected events in a way that faithfully represents the characters from the novel.

## ASSESSMENT

Tasks at different stages provide a structure and assessment opportunities.

All the assessment tasks for the course were built around the role play.

## REUSABILITY

The structure and methods of "The Scarlet Letter" are modeled on the highly successful and robust *role play simulation framework* implemented in Fablusi (<http://www.fablusi.com>). Several levels of reuse are currently available:

- re-run of the simulation with students self-selecting preferred roles pending final lecturer approval
- running of the simulation in multiple worlds simultaneously
- re-use of roles with a changed scenario
- use of the role play design for other novels or historical events.

## REFERENCE

Demonstration simulation available at [http://www.fablusi.com/renderer/launch.asp?simId=rps2\\_315ynp-1lgs](http://www.fablusi.com/renderer/launch.asp?simId=rps2_315ynp-1lgs)

Mary Noggle (2005) *A Novel Simulation for the Literature Classroom* available online at [http://www.simplay.net/LOW/papers05/novel\\_simulation.pdf](http://www.simplay.net/LOW/papers05/novel_simulation.pdf)