



## Example American Lit Essay Prompts

The following are actual prompts used in CenterForLit writing classes. Over the course of ten weeks, students complete five assignments leading up to a full-length essay in response to prompts like these. Individual assignments cover Thesis statement formation, source text development, outlining, mechanical issues and stylistic devices.

### Essay Project 1

*Freedom and bondage are recurrent themes in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. Several pairs of contrasting images in the story – the prison door and the rosebush, the scaffold and the forest, the Puritans' drab garments and Pearl's vivid dress – emphasize the conflict between these two themes. Additionally, the Scarlet Letter itself can be seen as a symbol of both freedom and bondage at various points in the story. You might even say that the struggle to escape from bondage into freedom is the main goal of the story's two protagonists, Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne.*

***According to Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, in what does freedom consist, and how can it be gained?***

### Essay Project 2

*Our recent discussion of The Red Badge of Courage centered around the growth and development of protagonist Henry Fleming. The story chart we created together depicts Henry's transformation from youth to maturity, from ignorance to knowledge, from naivete to a kind of wisdom.*

***In what specific ways does protagonist Henry Fleming “come of age” in The Red Badge of Courage? What can therefore be said about Stephen Crane's definition of maturity, knowledge and/or wisdom?***