

# Nathaniel Hawthorne: Fame but No Fortune



Today, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* are familiar to many students assigned to read Nathaniel Hawthorne's work.

It was a different story during the author's lifetime, in the 19th century. Although he was well-known, his books enjoyed only a measure of popularity at the time.

Hawthorne's works never sold as well as some of his contemporaries. Consider that Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was selling like hotcakes at 300,000 copies its first year of publication, while Hawthorne probably sold less than 10,000 copies of his books while he was alive. Plagued by poverty, feeding his family was a constant struggle, according to one biographer.

A marketing guru might say that Hawthorne's lack of success in the 1800s was caused by the controversial content in his books, which hampered sales. The writer's subjects were considered taboo by New England standards.

But, based on the author's plot lines and family history, a student of psychology might argue that Hawthorne's financial problems, despite trappings of privilege, were rooted in his inability to escape the emotional legacy of his ancestry.

Hawthorne was a direct descendent of a hanging judge from the Salem witchcraft trials.

Takeaway: Unresolved traumatic family history can sometimes wreak havoc on one's ability to make wise choices and succeed in the working world.

#### Reference

[teacher.shop.pbs.ACorg/product/index.jsp?productId=3963825&cp=1397809.2883325&view=all&parentPage=family](http://teacher.shop.pbs.ACorg/product/index.jsp?productId=3963825&cp=1397809.2883325&view=all&parentPage=family)