

## ABSTRACT

CYNTHIA SUSAN POTTER. “Bringing *The Scarlet Letter* to Life for Modern Students”  
(Under the direction of Professor Carmine Prioli.)

The first work I taught to high school students was *Cyrano de Bergerac*. The students—a rowdy group of tenth graders—were not impressed with the novel upon our first in-class reading. They found it boring and unintelligible and didn’t hesitate to tell me, a first-time teacher, what they thought. In order to survive the semester, I knew I would have to somehow bring the book to life for them, and for me, because, truth be told, I found it rather boring myself, and my students could tell. I read the book and kept a journal of my thoughts as I read. I asked myself what was truly interesting about the story and what was at the heart of it. I came to find that the truly interesting things weren’t the history or the language but the story of a man desperate for love and approval despite his shortcomings. I knew that was a story that I could relate to and that my students could relate to, so that’s what we focused on. My students wrote about their own insecurities and how they let those insecurities hold them back, just as Cyrano let his nose hold him back. We created collages focused on “ideal beauty” and talked about why such a standard was dangerous and unattainable. We acted out scenes from the play in modern language, and we wrote love letters as other people, just as Cyrano did for Christian. By the end of the unit, my students loved *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and so did I, and it’s because we worked hard to find the parts of it that were still relatable today. I learned a lot in teaching that work, but the biggest takeaway was that students need to relate what they read to their own lives. I think *The Scarlet Letter*, which many students dread reading due to the “stuffy” language and the seemingly antiquated puritan lifestyles presented therein, can benefit from the same treatment I gave

*Cyrano de Bergerac*, which is what I have tried to do through the lesson plans, tests, projects, and activities featured here.