

# Learning English

**American Stories**

***The Birthmark***

***by Nathaniel Hawthorne***

Lesson Plan  
*by Jill Robbins, Ph.D.*

# Introduction

This lesson plan is to accompany the American Stories series episode, *The Birthmark* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

A transcript of the story is included at the end of this lesson to print so students can read as they listen. Teachers who cannot play the audio from the website can read the story aloud or have students read it.

This lesson plan is based on the CALLA Approach. See the end of the lesson for more information and resources on teaching with the CALLA approach. The following slide shows the five parts of this lesson plan.

# Lesson Elements

**Prepare**

**Present**

**Practice**

**Self-Evaluate**

**Expand**

# Prepare

Introduce the story. “Today we will read *The Birthmark*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne. It is a story about a young couple who have just married. What do you know or imagine about people in this situation? If you have been married, what was the time like just after you got married?”

Listen to students’ answers. Explain that most people who are just married are still learning about each other. They are often deeply in love.

Teach the vocabulary for the story.

# Vocabulary

**chemical** - *adj.* of or relating to chemistry

**chemicals** – *n.* elements found in nature or made by people;  
substances used in the science of chemistry

**imperfection** - *n.* a small flaw or bad part

**visible** - *adj.* able to be seen

**birthmark** - *n.* an unusual mark that is present on the skin from the  
time when someone is born

# Present

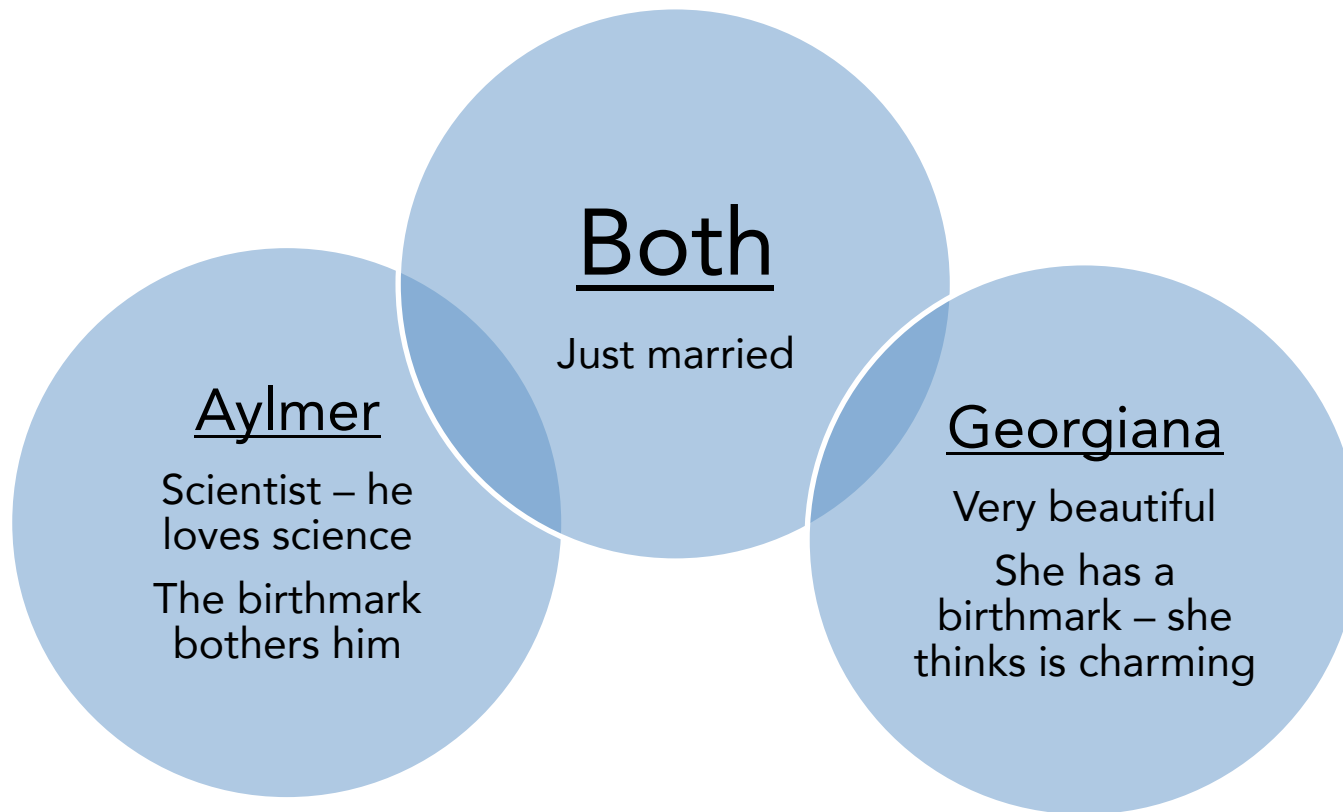
Introduce the task to students: “As we read the story today, we will practice the strategy *classify* to help us understand the story. I’m going to classify the things I learn about the young couple in the first part. I’ll show you how to do this.”

Play or read aloud to “The birthmark would come and go with the emotions in her heart.”

Model the strategy: “The first part of the story introduces the couple. We meet the husband, Aylmer. He is a scientist. I’m going to *classify* this information by writing it in the circle under Aylmer’s name.”

Make a Venn diagram like the one on the next slide. Explain how to classify the information by writing in the circles. Tell students that the information on both will go in the center circle. The information on Aylmer is on the left side and on Georgiana on the right side.

# Classify





# Practice

Prepare students for the next part, “Now it’s your turn. Let’s listen to some more of the story. As we listen, think about each person. What do you learn about them? Take out a piece of paper. Write a chart with three circles – one for the husband, one for the wife, and the other for both. Get ready to *classify* the information that you learn about each character. Write it in the circles.

Play or read aloud to “Aylmer felt guilty remembering the dream.”

After reading, have students sit with a classmate and say aloud what they wrote about each character.

Give students time to discuss how they classified the information.

Ask several students to share and write the information they classified on the board or screen as on the following slide.

# Classify (2)

## Both

Just married  
They are not happy  
together

## Aylmer

Scientist – he loves  
science  
The birthmark bothers  
him  
He dreams about  
cutting out the mark

## Georgiana

Very beautiful  
She has a birthmark – she  
thinks it is charming  
The birthmark looks like a  
red hand  
She begins to fear his look

Ask students to listen again. “As we read the rest of the story, think about the new information the author reveals about Aylmer and Georgiana. Is he really a brilliant scientist? Does she still think her birthmark is cute?”

**Play or read aloud to the end of the story.**

Ask students to share their notes with their classmates. Ask students, “Now that you have classified the information, think about the point of the story. What is Hawthorne telling us?”

**Lead a discussion about the danger of trying to change another person, and the impossibility of finding perfection.**

# Classify (2)

## Both

Just married

They are not happy together

They will no longer be together

They are foolish

## Aylmer

Scientist – he loves science

The birthmark bothers him

He dreams about cutting out the mark

He is not really successful

He is nervous about his work

He kills his wife by trying to make her perfect

## Georgiana

Very beautiful

She has a birthmark – she thinks it is charming

The birthmark looks like a red hand

She begins to fear his look

She agrees to the experiments

She wants to please Aylmer

She dies from the experiment

# Self-Evaluate

Ask, “Now I’d like to ask – what do you think about using this strategy, *classify*, when you read? Did it help you understand the two characters in the story? Write a sentence or two on your paper to turn in about how *classifying* helped you today.”

# Expand

Ask students, “Are there other times when you can *classify*?”

Listen to students’ responses.

Continue, “This strategy is helpful in both reading and listening. Classifying is also important in studying science. Since this story is about a scientist, that is appropriate. We classify many types of things when we study biology, chemistry, and earth science. Try using this strategy tonight when you do your homework, or in your next class. Let me know how it goes!”

*Our story today is called "The Birthmark." It was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Here is Barbara Klein with the story.*

A long time ago, there lived a skillful scientist who had experienced a spiritual reaction more striking than any **chemical** one.

He had left his laboratory in the care of his assistant, washed the **chemicals** from his hands and asked a beautiful woman to become his wife. In those days new scientific discoveries such as electricity seemed to open paths into the area of miracles. It was not unusual for the love of science to compete with the love of a woman.

The scientist's name was Aylmer. He had so totally given himself to scientific studies that he could not be weakened by a second love. His love for his young wife could only be the stronger of the two if it could link itself with his love of science.

Such a union did take place with truly remarkable results. But one day, very soon after their marriage, Aylmer looked at his wife with a troubled expression.

"Georgiana," he said, "have you ever considered that the mark upon your cheek might be removed"?

"No," she said smiling. But seeing the seriousness of his question, she said, "The mark has so often been called a charm that I was simple enough to imagine it might be so."

"On another face it might," answered her husband, "but not on yours. No dear, Nature made you so perfectly that this small defect shocks me as being a sign of earthly **imperfection.**"

"Shocks you!" cried Georgiana, deeply hurt. Her face reddened and she burst into tears. "Then why did you marry me? You cannot love what shocks you!"

We must explain that in the center of Georgiana's left cheek there was a mark, deep in her skin. The mark was usually a deep red color. When Georgiana blushed, the mark became less **visible**. But when she turned pale, there was the mark, like a red stain upon snow. The **birthmark** would come and go with the emotions in her heart.



The mark was shaped like a very small human hand. Georgiana's past lovers used to say that the hand of a magical fairy had touched her face when she was born. Many a gentleman would have risked his life for the honor of kissing that mysterious hand.

But other people had different opinions. Some women said the red hand quite destroyed the effect of Georgiana's beauty.

Male observers who did not praise the mark simply wished it away so that they did not see it. After his marriage, Aylmer discovered that this was the case with himself.

Had Georgiana been less beautiful, he might have felt his love increased by the prettiness of that little hand. But because she was otherwise so perfect, he found the mark had become unbearable.

Aylmer saw the mark as a sign of his wife's eventual sadness, sickness and death. Soon, the birthmark caused him more pain than Georgiana's beauty had ever given him pleasure.

During a period that should have been their happiest, Aylmer could only think of this disastrous subject. With the morning light, Aylmer opened his eyes upon his wife's face and recognized the sign of imperfection. When they sat together in the evening near the fire, he would look at the mark.

Georgiana soon began to fear his look. His expression would make her face go pale. And the birthmark would stand out like a red jewel on white stone.

"Do you remember, dear Aylmer, about the dream you had last night about this hateful mark?" she asked with a weak smile.

"None! None whatever!" answered Aylmer, surprised.

The mind is in a sad state when sleep cannot control its ghosts and allows them to break free with their secrets. Aylmer now remembered his dream. He had imagined himself with his assistant Aminadab trying to remove the birthmark with an operation. But the deeper his knife went, the deeper the small hand sank until it had caught hold of Georgiana's heart.

Aylmer felt guilty remembering the dream.

"Aylmer," said Georgiana, "I do not know what the cost would be to both of us to remove this birthmark. Removing it could deform my face or damage my health."

"Dearest Georgiana, I have spent much thought on the subject," said Aylmer. "I am sure it can be removed."

"Then let the attempt be made at any risk," said Georgiana. "Life is not worth living while this hateful mark makes me the object of your horror. You have deep science and have made great discoveries. Remove this little mark for the sake of your peace and my own."

"Dearest wife," cried Aylmer. "Do not doubt my power. I am ready to make this cheek as perfect as its pair."

Her husband gently kissed her right cheek, the one without the red hand.

The next day the couple went to Aylmer's laboratory where he had made all his famous discoveries. Georgiana would live in a beautiful room he had prepared nearby, while he worked tirelessly in his lab. One by one, Aylmer tried a series of powerful experiments on his wife. But the mark remained.

Georgiana waited in her room. She read through his notebooks of scientific observations. She could not help see that many of his experiments had ended in failure. She decided to see for herself the scientist at work.

The first thing that struck Georgiana when entering the laboratory was the hot furnace. From the amount of soot above it, it seemed to have been burning for ages. She saw machines, tubes, cylinders and other containers for chemical experiments. What most drew her attention was Aylmer himself. He was nervous and pale as death as he worked on preparing a liquid.

Georgiana realized that her husband had been hiding his tension and fear.

"Think not so little of me that you cannot be honest about the risks we are taking," she said. "I will drink whatever you make for me, even if it is a poison."

"My dear, nothing shall be hidden," Aylmer said. "I have already given you chemicals powerful enough to change your entire physical system. Only one thing remains to be tried and if that fails, we are ruined!"

He led her back to her room where she waited once more, alone with her thoughts. She hoped that for just one moment she could satisfy her husband's highest ideals. But she realized then that his mind would forever be on the march, always requiring something newer, better and more perfect.

Hours later, Aylmer returned carrying a crystal glass with a colorless liquid.

"The chemical process went perfectly," he said. "Unless all my science has tricked me, it cannot fail."

To test the liquid, he placed a drop in the soil of a dying flower growing in a pot in the room. In a few moments, the plant became healthy and green once more.

"I do not need proof," Georgiana said quietly. "Give me the glass. I am happy to put my life in your hands." She drank the liquid and immediately fell asleep.

Aylmer sat next to his wife, observing her and taking notes. He noted everything -- her breathing, the movement of an eyelid. He stared at the birthmark. And slowly, with every breath that came and went, it lost some of its brightness.

"By Heaven! It is nearly gone," said Aylmer. "Success! Success!"

He opened the window coverings to see her face in daylight. She was so pale. Georgiana opened her eyes and looked into the mirror her husband held. She tried to smile as she saw the barely visible mark.

"My poor Aylmer," she said gently. "You have aimed so high. With so high and pure a feeling, you have rejected the best the Earth could offer. I am dying, dearest."

It was true. The hand on her face had been her link to life. As the last trace of color disappeared from her cheek, she gave her last breath.

Blinded by a meaningless imperfection and an impossible goal, Aylmer had thrown away her life and with it his chance for happiness. In trying to improve his lovely wife, he had failed to realize she had been perfect all along.

*"The Birthmark" was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. It was adapted and produced by Dana Demange. Your storyteller was Barbara Klein.*

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### **Words in This Story**

**chemical** - *adj.* of or relating to chemistry

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**birthmark** - *n.* an unusual mark that is present on the skin from the time when someone is born

*Now it's your turn. Do you know of anyone who tries to make other people 'perfect?' Write to us in the comments section.*

# About the CALLA Approach

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) is an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research.





CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies for academic tasks.

The goals of CALLA are for students to learn essential academic content and language and to become independent and self-regulated learners through their increasing command over a variety of strategies for learning in school. CALLA can be used in ESL, EFL, bilingual, foreign language, and general education classrooms.






CALLA was developed by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O'Malley, and is being implemented in approximately 30 school districts in the United States as well as in several other countries.

See a list of language learning strategies below.







# Metacognitive Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES</b>		
Plan / Organize	 <p>Planner</p>	<p>Before beginning a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Set goals.</li> <li>-Plan the task or content sequence.</li> <li>-Plan how to accomplish the task (choose strategies).</li> <li>-Preview a text.</li> </ul>
Monitor / Identify Problems	 <p>Check</p>	<p>While working on a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Check your progress on the task.</li> <li>-Check your comprehension as you use the language. Do you understand? If not, what is the problem?</li> <li>-Check your production as you use the language. Are you making sense? If not, what is the problem?</li> </ul>
Evaluate	 <p>I did it!</p>	<p>After completing a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Assess how well you have accomplished the learning task.</li> <li>-Assess how well you have used learning strategies.</li> <li>-Decide how effective the strategies were.</li> <li>-Identify changes you will make the next time you have a similar task to do.</li> </ul>
Manage Your Own Learning	 <p>Pace Yourself</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Determine how you learn best.</li> <li>-Arrange conditions that help you learn.</li> <li>-Seek opportunities for practice.</li> <li>-Focus your attention on the task.</li> </ul>

# Task-Based Strategies


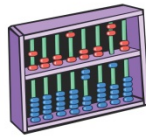
CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
		
Use Background Knowledge	 I know.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Think about and use what you already know to help you do the task.</li> <li>- Make associations between new information and your prior knowledge.</li> <li>-Use new information to clarify or modify your prior knowledge.</li> </ul>
Make Inferences	 Use Clues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use context and what you know to figure out meaning.</li> <li>-Read and listen between the lines.</li> <li>-Go beyond the text to understand its meaning.</li> </ul>
Make Predictions	 Crystal Ball	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Anticipate information to come.</li> <li>-Make logical guesses about what will happen in a written or oral text.</li> <li>-Make an estimate (math).</li> <li>-Make a hypothesis (science).</li> </ul>
Personalize	 Me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Relate new concepts to your own life, to your experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.</li> </ul>

# Task-Based Strategies


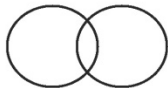


CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
Transfer / Use Cognates	 Coffee/Café	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Apply your linguistic knowledge of other languages (including your native language) to the target language.</li> <li>-Recognize cognates.</li> </ul>
Substitute / Paraphrase	 Make it work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use a synonym or descriptive phrase for unknown words or expressions.</li> </ul>
		
<b>USE YOUR SENSES</b>		
Use Images	 See it in your mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use or create an actual or mental image to understand and/or represent information.</li> <li>-Use or draw a picture or diagram.</li> </ul>
Use Sounds	 Sound Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Say or read aloud a word, sentence, or paragraph to help your understanding.</li> <li>-Sound out/vocalize.</li> <li>- Use your "mental tape recorder" to remember sounds, words, phrases, and/or conversations.</li> </ul>








# Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
Use Your Kinesthetic Sense		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--Act out a role, for example, in Readers' Theater, or imagine yourself in different roles in the target language.</li> <li>-Use real objects to help you remember words, sentences, or content information.</li> </ul>
  <b>USE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS</b>		
Find/Apply Patterns	 abacus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Apply a rule.</li> <li>-Make a rule.</li> <li>-Recognize and apply letter/sound, grammar, discourse, or register rules.</li> <li>-Identify patterns in literature (genre).</li> <li>-Identify patterns in math, science, and social studies.</li> </ul>
Classify/Sequence	 Life cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Categorize words or ideas according to attributes.</li> <li>-Classify living things; identify natural cycles.</li> <li>-Identify order and sequences in math, science, and social studies.</li> <li>-Sequence events in history.</li> </ul>

# Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
Take Notes	 <p>PDA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Write down important words and ideas while listening or reading.</li> <li>-List ideas or words to include in speaking or writing..</li> </ul>
Use Graphic Organizers	 <p>A Venn diagram</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, time lines, webs, and charts) of important relationships between concepts.</li> </ul>
Summarize	 <p>Main Idea</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Create a mental, oral, or written summary of information.</li> </ul>
Use Selective Attention	 <p>Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Focus on specific information, structures, key words, phrases, or ideas.</li> </ul>

# Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
<b>TASK-BASED STRATEGIES</b>		
 		
<b>USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES</b>		
<p>Access Information Sources</p>	 <p>Look it up!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use the dictionary, the internet, and other reference materials.</li> <li>-Seek out and use sources of information.</li> <li>-Follow a model</li> <li>-Ask questions</li> </ul>
<p>Cooperate</p>	 <p>Together</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Work with others to complete tasks, build confidence, and give and receive feedback.</li> </ul>
<p>Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)</p>	 <p>I can do it!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use your inner resources. Reduce your anxiety by reminding yourself of your progress, the resources you have available, and your goals.</li> </ul>