1. What is the narrator's job at the Custom-House?
   The narrator is the Surveyor at the Custom-House, or the chief administrative officer.

2. What is a Custom-House?
   A custom-house is where taxes are paid on imports into a country. Custom-houses were located at ports where ships entered the country.

3. How does the narrator describe the city of Salem, Massachusetts?
   Salem is no longer the “bustling wharf” that it was 50 years ago. The wooden warehouses are “decayed,” the streets are overgrown with grass, and commercial ships only stop occasionally. Since few ships come through the port, the Custom-House is a quiet place with little activity.

   The narrator acknowledges that although Salem is a rather drab place with a design as irregular as a “disarranged checkerboard,” he retains affection for the city as his “native place.”

4. What does the narrator think of his workplace and his fellow workers?
   The narrator initially regards his co-workers as incompetent and corrupt public servants, many of whom owe their jobs to family or political connections. The men in his department are mostly aged and sickly, and some only leave their beds to report for work a few months a year. Those who do show up go through the motions of inspecting vessels, but spend much of their time sleeping or repeating old stories to each other. In spite of their lack of motivation, the narrator confesses that he eventually developed a paternal affection for them.

5. According to the narrator, how would his Puritan ancestors view his choice of writing as a career?
   The narrator says that his Puritan ancestors would regard him as a disgraceful failure and his career choice (“a writer of story books”) as a “degenerate” and worthless profession.

6. Who is the Inspector, and what is the narrator’s opinion of him?
   The Inspector is the 80-year-old patriarch of the Custom-House. His father (a Revolutionary colonel) created the permanent position of Inspector for him. Although he is aged, he has a sunny disposition and laughs frequently. The narrator regards him disdainfully as someone with a secure job, regular income, and “no power of thought, no depth of feeling.” He sarcastically describes the Inspector’s absence of intellect and spirituality as animal-like, except for his ability to relate detailed descriptions of all the meals he has ever eaten.

7. Who is General Miller, and what is the narrator’s opinion of him?
   General Miller is a 70-year-old retiree who once had a distinguished military career and is now serving as the Custom-House Collector. He is infirm, needing the aid of a servant to ascend the Custom-House steps, and he spends his time sitting peacefully by the fireplace. The narrator regards the General as a “noble and heroic” relic of the past, whom he admires for his integrity and inner strength.

8. Describe what the narrator finds in the unoccupied second floor of the Custom-House.
   The narrator discovers a package of documents wrapped in parchment and tied together with a faded piece of embroidered gold and scarlet cloth in the shape of a capital “A.” The documents belonged to Jonathan Pue, the custom-house surveyor a hundred years earlier, who documented the story of Hester Prynne that took place at the end of the 1600's.

   The narrator uses the documents as the basis for the novel in the subsequent pages. After he loses his politically appointed job at the custom-house, he admits that he used his imagination to fill out the details of Pue’s manuscript and transform it into the novel *The Scarlet Letter*.

9. Why did the narrator lose his job at the Custom-House?
   After three years as Surveyor, the narrator was terminated when General Zachary Taylor (a Whig) was elected president.