



May Day Flowers

The Maypole of Merry Mount

Grades 4-5

Objective

Students will listen to a story written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, to gain a better understanding of May Day celebrations in the United States.

Preparation

Print on copy paper, 2 copies, one for you to read to the class, and one to cut up into paragraphs for student use.

Background Information, Nathaniel Hawthorne

Nathaniel Hawthorne, a famous American writer, was born in Salem, Massachusetts on July 4, 1804. One of his ancestors, John Hathorne, was a judge in the Salem witch trials of the 1600s. He is the only judge who never repented of his actions during the trial. Nathaniel was so ashamed of his relation to this man, that when he became an adult he added a w to his name to hide his ancestry!

Hawthorne published his first book in 1828, entitled Fanshawe. He published several short stories in magazines which he later published in a book called Twice Told Tales. That is where the story, “*The Maypole of Merry Mount*”, can be found. Hawthorne’s stories center around Puritan life of New England, focusing on humanity’s evils and sins. His works are considered to be part of the Dark Romantic Movement, of which The Scarlet Letter is one of his most famous works. Hawthorne lived in a transcendentalist community before he married Sophia Peabody. They had three children. He also served in Europe for several years in a political appointment. He died on May 19, 1864. [Nathaniel Hawthorne. Wikipedia, Web: April 11, 2013.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathaniel_Hawthorne)

Uses

- Read aloud to the class to help students understand how the Puritans viewed May Day celebrations.
- Record onto a disk and put at your listening center.
- Have students act out the story.
- Cut out the paragraphs and have the students illustrate the story to make a book for your classroom library.
- Allow students to make an audio recording of the story with sound effects.
- Turn the story into a play.
- Do some research on Nathaniel Hawthorne.
- Learn more about the Salem witch trials.



The Maypole of Merry Mount

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

This short story first appeared in Twice Told Tales in 1837. This abridged and simplified version was edited by Sandie Flynn in order to make it more comprehensible to elementary aged students (grades 4-6 as a read aloud). The abusive behavior of the Puritans toward the citizens of Ma-re-mount as described in the original story has been omitted from this version as the purpose is to highlight the use of the Maypole in America. The original text for this adaptation came from WikiSource ([http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The Maypole of Merry Mount](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Maypole_of_Merry_Mount)), and is used under the [Creative Commons Attribution/Share Alike License](#).

The days at Merry Mount were very bright back when the Maypole was the banner of that happy colony! As long as it proudly stood, it poured sunshine over New England's rugged hills, and scattered flower seeds throughout the soil. Joy and gloom were fighting for the hearts of the people in those days. May Day had come, bringing new life to the forest and roses in her lap, with a brighter color than the tender buds of Spring. But May, or her joyful spirit, lived all the year round at Merry Mount, playing with the summer months, rejoicing with autumn, and basking in the glow of winter's fireside. Through a world of hardship and care, May flew with a dreamlike smile, and came here to find a home among the light hearts of Merry Mount.

Never had the Maypole been so joyfully dressed as at sunrise on May Day. This respected and beloved symbol was a pine tree, slim and graceful but as tall as the oldest trees in the woods. From its top streamed out a silken flag, colored like the rainbow. Down nearly to the ground the pole was dressed with the liveliest green boughs, silver leaves, garden flowers, and blossoms from the wilderness, fastened to the pole with ribbons that fluttered in fantastic knots of twenty different colors, none of them sad ones. On the lowest branch hung an enormous wreath of roses that had been gathered in the sunniest spots of the forest.

But what was that wild throng that stood hand in hand around the Maypole? On the shoulders of one handsome youth grew the head and branching antlers of a stag; another had the grim face of a wolf, a third, still, had the beard and horns of an old he goat. There was a bear standing upright, with pink silk stockings on his hind legs! There was a real bear, too, standing paw in hand with two humans, all of them ready to dance. Other faces resembled people, but with huge red noses hanging down before their mouths which seemed to stretch from ear to ear in a never ending laugh. There was an Indian hunter with a feathery crest and wampum belt, a hairy baboon covered with leaves, and many of those in this strange company had little bells tied to their clothing, tinkling with a silvery sound, jingling to the music of their happy hearts. These were the colonists of Merry Mount as they stood in the broad smile of sunset around their beloved Maypole.

But a band of Puritans, who hated the May festivities, watched the joyful scene, hidden in the dark forest. They thought the dancers looked like devils with ruined souls, full of horrid superstitions.

In the middle of the monsters were two of the loveliest creatures that had ever walked on earth. One was a young man in glistening clothing with a rainbow scarf fluttering across his chest. He held a golden staff in his right hand, and in his left hand he held the slender fingers of a fair maiden, dressed as wonderfully as he. They had bright roses in their dark and glossy curls, and roses were scattered around their feet. Near to them stood an English priest, dressed in his church clothes, yet decked with flowers, wearing prayer beads made from a forest vine. He seemed to be the wildest monster there!

"Dancers of the Maypole," cried the flower-bedecked priest, "Merrily, all day long the woods have echoed with your laughter. But this will be your merriest hour, my hearts! Look, here stand the Lord and Lady of the May,

whom I, the high priest of Merry Mount, will join in holy matrimony. Up with you, you Morris dancers, green men and gleeful maidens, bears and wolves. Come now, with the old joy of Merry England, and the wilder glee of this fresh forest, and dance, to show the young couple what life is made of and how happily they shall go through it. All ye that love the Maypole, lend your voices to the wedding song of the Lord and Lady of the May!"

In Merry Mount, tricks, jokes, and fantasy ruled every day, but this was none of those because the Lord and Lady of the May were truly getting married there that day. The enormous wreath of roses would be thrown over their heads when they became husband and wife.

"Start the ceremony, reverend Sir," they all cried, "and never did the woods ring to such a merry sound as we of the Maypole shall send up!"

Immediately, from out of a nearby thicket, a flute, cither, and viol began to play a song with such a merry sound that the flowers on the Maypole began to quiver. But the May Lord, looking into his lady's eyes, was shocked to see a look of sadness there. "Edith, sweet lady of the May," Edgar whispered reproachfully, "is that wreath of roses going to hang above our graves? Why do you look so sad?"

"That is exactly what I was thinking of! How did that thought come into your mind, too?" said Edith, in a still lower tone than he, for it was high treason to be sad at Merry Mount. "I am afraid that all this is a dream, and our joy is unreal and that we are not really the Lord and Lady of the May. Where did this thought come from?"

Just then, as if they had been released from a spell, down came a little shower of withering rose leaves from the Maypole. Alas for the young couple! No sooner had their hearts glowed with real love than they were aware of something vague, unsure, and dreary in their futures. But the priest married them while the forest shadows mingled gloomily with the gleeful dancers.

Huddled in those dark forest shadows was the party of grim Puritans, those who loved to work day and night, punishing lazy ones, or paying for the heads of wolves. Woe to their child who dreamed of dancing! At one nod from the selectman, the light hearted youngster landed in the stocks; or if he danced, it was around the whipping pole, not the Maypole! As the last light of day faded from the joyful Maypole of Merry Mount, those black shadows rushed forward from the forest in human shape. Standing in the middle of the merry wedding party stood the leader of the angry Puritans, John Endicott himself! "Stand off, priest of Baal!" said he, with a grim frown. "I know thee, Blackstone! Thou canst follow even one rule of your corrupt church. As for this flower-bedecked abomination, the alter of thy worship—", and with his keen sword Endicott assaulted the beloved Maypole. It could not resist his arm. It groaned with a dismal sound. It showered leaves and rosebuds upon its followers, and finally, with all its green boughs and ribbons and flowers, down fell the banner staff of Merry Mount. As it sank, tradition says, the evening sky grew darker and woods threw forth a more somber shadow.

"There," cried Endicott, looking triumphantly on his work, "there lies the only Maypole in New England! I think that by its fall we have destroyed light and idle merry makers amongst us and our posterity. Amen!" saith John Endicott.

"Amen!" echoed his followers.

But the dancers of the Maypole gave one groan for their fallen hero, each of them strangely expressing their sorrow and dismay.

And that day, as the moral gloom of the Puritans overpowered the joy of the Maypole of Merry Mount, even so the village of Merry Mount became desolate in the midst of the sad, dark, and shadowed forest. They returned to it no more; instead they went on their merry way, supporting each other along the difficult path which it was their lot to tread, and never wasted one regretful thought on what was left of the village of Merry Mount.