Dr. Heidegger's Experiment
Who was Nathaniel Hawthorne?

- Born in Salem, Massachusetts
- 1804-1864
- Famous for writing *Twice Told Tales* and *The Scarlet Letter*.
- Writing centers around New England
- Many of his works are moral allegories with a Puritan inspiration
Who was Nathaniel Hawthorne?

- He became a judge in the Massachusetts Bay colony and was responsible for some of the harsh sentencing that took place during the Salem Witch Trials.

Statue of Hawthorne in Salem, Massachusetts.
“Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment”
by Nathaniel Hawthorne

- A short story about a scientist who claims to have water from the Fountain of Youth.
- Published in Twice-Told Tales in 1837.
- The plot is didactic (intended to teach).
  – allegory: a story in which a moral principle is presented.
“Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

• Discuss question: If one could be young again, would the wisdom of old age motivate him to correct the waywardness of his youth?

• Do you agree or disagree?
  – Dr. Heidegger would probably not do his experiment again.
  – It is almost impossible to break bad habits after a certain age.
  – A man of fairly good character, if given a second chance at youth, would be more likely than Dr. Heidegger’s friends to learn from their past mistakes.
“Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

- Who is the central character?
  Dr. Heidegger is the character controlling the action and it is his conclusions that Hawthorne wants the reader to notice.

- What is the doctor’s advice to his companions before they drink the liquid?
  (p. 179) “. . . it would be well that, with the experience of a lifetime to direct you, you should draw up a few general rules for your guidance . . .”
“Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

• How do the characters change physically?
• Do their non-physical characteristics change after the experiment? How do they act?
• After the experiment how does each character respond?
• What best describes the conflict in his story?
  – man vs. man; man vs. power greater than self; man vs. himself
“Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

• How is the conflict resolved?
  The Water of Youth is lost. The four characters learn nothing; however, Dr. Heidegger is content with this knowledge.

• Who learns the lesson and what is it?
  Dr. Heidegger learns the futility of going back to his youth to remedy past mistakes.
“Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

• What are some symbols in the story and what do they symbolize?
  • rose
  • book
  • mirror
  • small round table
  • vase with water
  • butterfly