“Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment” worksheet

1. What is the tone of "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment"? Is Hawthorne's story scary or amusing? Have them select at least one brief passage from the text to explain your answer.

2. Who is the narrator?

3. What does the narrator mean when he says he "must be content to bear the stigma of a fiction monger"? Is the narrator distancing himself from the disreputable characters? Why or Why not?

4. Why does Dr. Heidegger invite his friends to his chamber?

5. What warning does the doctor give his guests?

6. The narrator is deliberately unclear about whether the guests are actually restored to youth. What do you think? Support your answer.
7. What do you think would have happened if the water had not spilled?

8. What do the four guests resolve to do at the end of the story?

9. The story could be read as an allegory, a story in which people, objects and events represent abstract qualities. The four guests in "Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment" are not realistic, fully developed characters. Instead, they seem more like representations of ideas. Allegories are written not only to entertain but also to teach lessons or moral principles. Identify an abstract quality or idea that each of the four guests in the story might represent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>What he/she loses or wastes</th>
<th>What happens when he/she is given a second youth</th>
<th>What he/she might represent (symbolize)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Medbourne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colonel Killigrew</td>
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<td>Mr. Gascoigne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Widow Wycherly</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
10. The following are objects in Dr. Heidegger’s study. What do these objects represent?

   1. The Picture of his Love –

   2. The Skeleton in the Closet –

   3. The Mirror –

   4. The Youth Water –

   5. The Rose –

11. Based on these objects, what assumptions can be made about Dr. Heidegger. (Is he a wise man or is he foolish and crazy.) Why?

12. What do you think was the reason for the experiment and what were his findings?

13. Why is this piece “dark”? What is it about the “evil” side of human nature that Hawthorne is exploring?

14. What does this say about people in general? (Thematic Statement)
If all stories were true, Dr. Heidegger’s study must have been a very curious place. It was a dim, old-fashioned chamber, festooned with cobwebs, and besprinkled with antique dust. Around the walls stood several oaken bookcases, the lower shelves of which were filled with rows of gigantic folios and black-letter quartos, and the upper with little parchment-covered duodecimos. Over the central bookcase was a bronze bust of Hippocrates, with which, according to some authorities, Dr. Heidegger was accustomed to hold consultations in all difficult cases of his practice. In the obscurest corner of the room stood a tall and narrow oaken closet, with its door ajar, within which doubtfully appeared a skeleton. Between two of the bookcases hung a looking-glass, presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. Among many wonderful stories related of this mirror, it was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor’s deceased patients dwelt within its verge, and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward. The opposite side of the chamber was ornamented with the full-length portrait of a young lady, arrayed in the faded magnificence of silk, satin, and brocade, and with a visage as faded as her dress. Above half a century ago, Dr. Heidegger had been on the point of marriage with this young lady; but, being affected with some slight disorder, she had swallowed one of her lover’s prescriptions, and died on the bridal evening.

The greatest curiosity of the study remains to be mentioned; it was a ponderous folio volume, bound in black leather, with massive silver clasps. There were no letters on the back, and nobody could tell the title of the book. But it was well known to be a book of magic; and once, when a chambermaid had lifted it, merely to brush away the dust, the skeleton had rattled in its closet, the picture of the young lady had stepped one foot upon the floor, and several ghastly faces had peeped forth from the mirror; while the brazen head of Hippocrates frowned, and said, -- ``Forbear!''

``You shall judge for yourself, my dear colonel,'' replied Dr. Heidegger; ``and all of you, my respected friends, are welcome to so much of this admirable fluid as may restore to you the bloom of youth. For my own part, having had much trouble in growing old, I am in no hurry to grow young again. With your permission, therefore, I will merely watch the progress of the experiment.''

``Before you drink, my respectable old friends,'' said he, ``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, in passing a second time through the perils of youth. Think what a sin and shame it would be, if, with your peculiar advantages, you should not become patterns of virtue and wisdom to all the young people of the age!''

The doctor’s four venerable friends made him no answer, except by a feeble and tremulous laugh; so very ridiculous was the idea that, knowing how closely repentance treads behind the steps of error, they should ever go astray again.

With palsied hands, they raised the glasses to their lips. The liquor, if it really possessed such virtues as Dr. Heidegger imputed to it, could not have been bestowed on four human beings who needed it more woefully. They looked as if they had never known what youth or pleasure was, but had been the offspring of Nature’s dotage, and always the gray, decrepit, sapless, miserable creatures, who now sat stooping round the doctor’s table, without life enough in their souls or bodies to be animated even by the prospect of growing young again. They drank off the water, and replaced their glasses on the table.
Highlight, in three different colors, the characterization for the three male guests.

Meanwhile, the three gentlemen behaved in such a manner as proved that the water of the Fountain of Youth possessed some intoxicating qualities; unless, indeed, their exhilaration of spirits were merely a lightsome dizziness caused by the sudden removal of the weight of years. Mr. Gascoigne's mind seemed to run on political topics, but whether relating to the past, present, or future, could not easily be determined, since the same ideas and phrases have been in vogue these fifty years. Now he rattled forth full-throated sentences about patriotism, national glory, and the people's right; now he muttered some perilous stuff or other, in a sly and doubtful whisper, so cautiously that even his own conscience could scarcely catch the secret; and now, again, he spoke in measured accents, and a deeply deferential tone, as if a royal ear were listening to his well-turned periods. Colonel Killigrew all this time had been trolling forth a jolly bottle song, and ringing his glass in symphony with the chorus, while his eyes wandered toward the buxom figure of the Widow Wycherly. On the other side of the table, Mr. Medbourne was involved in a calculation of dollars and cents, with which was strangely intermingled a project for supplying the East Indies with ice, by harnessing a team of whales to the polar icebergs.

Highlight the characterization for Widow Wycherly.

As for the Widow Wycherly, she stood before the mirror curtsying and simpering to her own image, and greeting it as the friend whom she loved better than all the world beside. She thrust her face close to the glass, to see whether some long-remembered wrinkle or crow's foot had indeed vanished. She examined whether the snow had so entirely melted from her hair that the venerable cap could be safely thrown aside. At last, turning briskly away, she came with a sort of dancing step to the table.

Highlight the characterization of the youthful guests.

Youth, like the extremity of age, had effaced the strongly-marked characteristics of middle life, and mutually assimilated them all. They were a group of merry youngsters, almost maddened with the exuberant frolicsome of their years. The most singular effect of their gayety was an impulse to mock the infirmity and decrepitude of which they had so lately been the victims. They laughed loudly at their old-fashioned attire, the wide-skirted coats and flapped waistcoats of the young men, and the ancient cap and gown of the blooming girl. One limped across the floor like a gouty grandfather; one set a pair of spectacles astride of his nose, and pretended to pore over the black-letter pages of the book of magic; a third seated himself in an arm-chair, and strove to imitate the venerable dignity of Dr. Heidegger. Then all shouted mirthfully, and leaped about the room. The Widow Wycherly -- if so fresh a damsel could be called a widow--tripled up to the doctor's chair, with a mischievous merriment in her rosy face.

Highlight the diction that helps to identify the tone of the passage.

They all gathered round her. One caught both her hands in his passionate grasp another threw his arm about her waist -- the third buried his hand among the glossy curls that clustered beneath the widow's cap. Blushing, panting, struggling, chiding, laughing, her warm breath fanning each of their faces by turns, she strove to disengage herself, yet still remained in their triple embrace. Never was there a livelier picture of youthful rival ship, with bewitching beauty for the prize. Yet, by a strange deception, owing to the duskiness of the chamber, and the antique dresses which they still wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of the three old, gray, withered grandsires, ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shriveled grandam.

But they were young: their burning passions proved them so. Inflamed to madness by the coquetry of the girl-widow, who neither granted nor quite withheld her favors, the three rivals began to interchange threatening glances. Still keeping hold of the fair prize, they grappled fiercely at one another's throats. As they struggled to and fro, the table was over-turned, and the vase dashed into a thousand fragments.