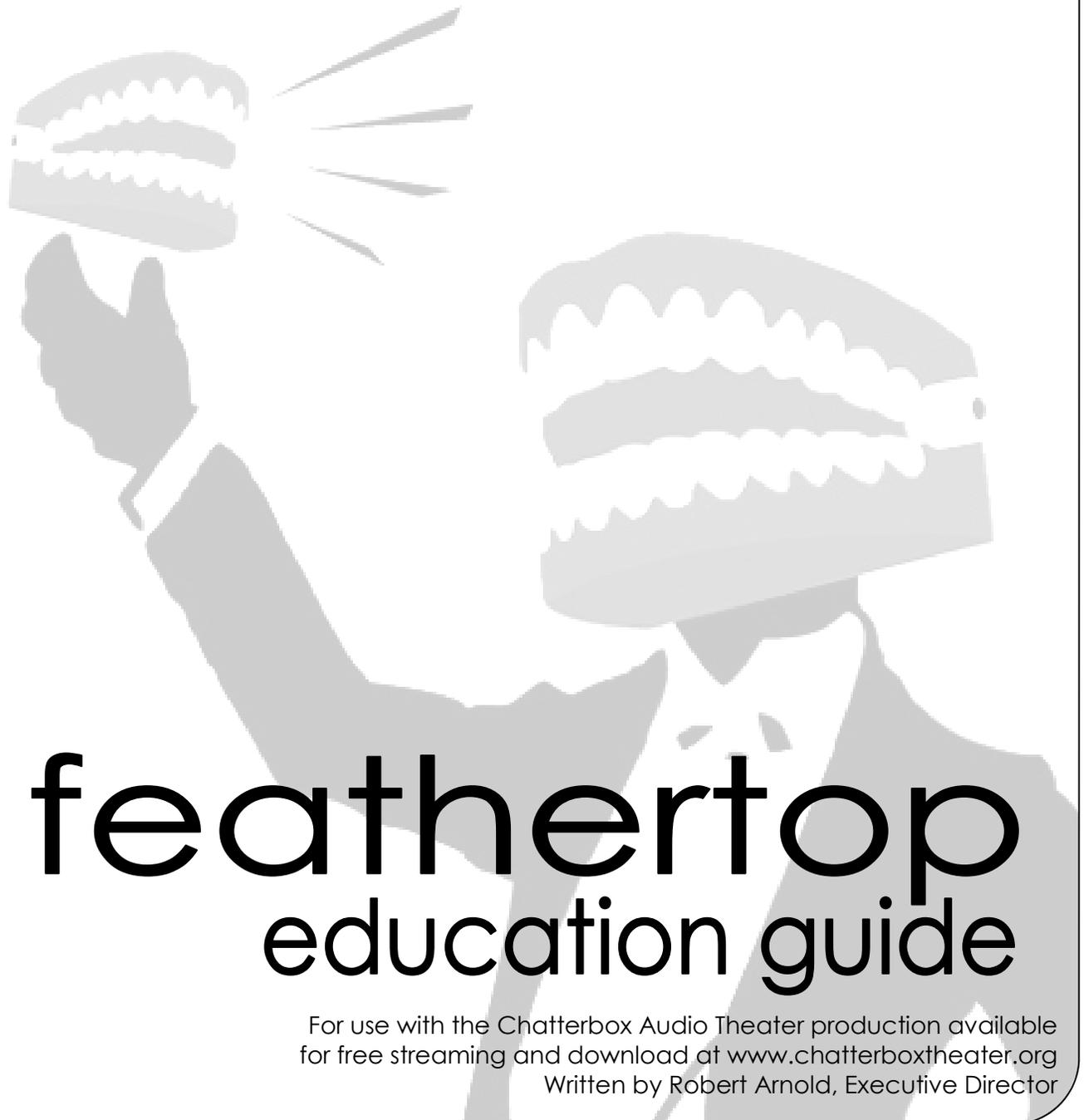


# CHATTERBOX AUDIO THEATER

[www.chatterboxtheater.org](http://www.chatterboxtheater.org)



## feathertop education guide

For use with the Chatterbox Audio Theater production available  
for free streaming and download at [www.chatterboxtheater.org](http://www.chatterboxtheater.org)

Written by Robert Arnold, Executive Director



## about chatterbox

Chatterbox Audio Theater was created in 2007 by four friends with a lot of creativity and ambition but very little money. Based in Memphis, TN, Chatterbox creates fully soundscaped audio works for free streaming or download. With rare exceptions, Chatterbox shows are recorded live, with manual sound effects and as little post-production editing as possible.

Chatterbox is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. Every Chatterbox production is available for free streaming and download from iTunes or from the group's website, [www.chatterboxtheater.org](http://www.chatterboxtheater.org).

## mission

Chatterbox Audio Theater is a non-profit web-based community theater that advances the exchange of ideas by channeling creativity and artistic collaboration into recorded audio works that enlighten, entertain, and inspire.

## contact

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Education Guide designed with help from Heather Klein, [www.heatherkleindesign.com](http://www.heatherkleindesign.com)

## about audio theater



Robert Arnold

Once known as **radio drama**, audio theater is the production of dramatic performances written and performed specifically for audiences to hear. It had its greatest popularity on radio, before television was introduced, during the period known as the “Golden Age of Radio.”

The development of audio theater began as early as the 1880s, when theatrical performances could be listened to over the telephone! In the next ten years, phonograph recordings were all the rage, and music and comedy acts—like those of the vaudeville stage—were recorded and sold all over the country.

Eventually, the comical “sight gags” that were a part of the hilarious appeal of live vaudeville performances had to be adapted into “sound gags,” and “sound effects” for audiences at home listening to their radios or record players. By the 1920s, these techniques were improved upon—and the art form of audio theater was born.

As “radio drama,” it became the most popular form of mass entertainment from the 1920s through the 1940s, now referred to as the “Golden Age of Radio.” Classic shows such as *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, *The Shadow*, and *The Lone Ranger* kept people of all ages glued to their radios. Some of these shows ran for several decades.



Robert Arnold

## about audio theater (continued)

Television sets began to pop up in American homes in the late 1930s and early 1940s. After WWII, the television started to replace the radio in most American homes as the main source of news and entertainment. By the 1960s, with a few special exceptions, radio networks began shutting down their radio drama productions altogether to make way for television shows, and instead focused on delivering news and popular music.

Since the days that television replaced the radio, audio theater has survived through the efforts of many individual theater groups like Chatterbox. Thanks to technological innovations such as computer software and the internet, audio theater is being resurrected online, and is proving a rapidly growing art form and source of entertainment.

Audio theater also is growing in another way as well. This sensory art form is gaining recognition in educational institutions around the world as an effective teaching method. Audio theater has been employed to teach subjects such as literature, theatre, and technology, but also unexpected fields such as history, social science, and ethics.

## about feathertop

“Feathertop” is a short story by American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. It is one of Hawthorne’s more whimsical tales, far lighter in tone than his well-known story “Young Goodman Brown” or novel *The Scarlet Letter*. It was first published in *The International Magazine* in February and March 1852. In 1854, it was collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. “Feathertop” is set in Colonial America, sometime in the 17th century. Chatterbox’s adaptation takes a few liberties with the story, such as eliminating the narrator and adding the character of Sarah, the Gookins’ household servant.

## summary

Mother Rigby, a powerful but good-natured witch, busily assembles a scarecrow for her garden. After tying together sticks and a bag of straw and topping them with a pumpkin, she steps back to admire her handiwork. Puffing thoughtfully on her pipe (which is kept alight by an invisible demon named Dickon), Mother Rigby decides that she will bring the scarecrow to life.

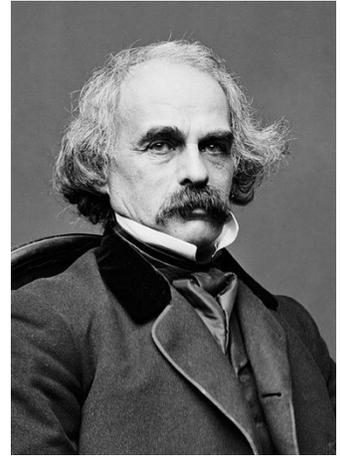
She places her enchanted pipe in the scarecrow’s mouth, and it begins to puff. Slowly, through Mother’s Rigby’s magic, the scarecrow transforms into a handsome young man. Mother Rigby names him “Feathertop,” explaining: “you have a feather in your hat, and I have thrust a handful of feathers into the hollow of your head, and your wig, too, is of the fashion they call Feathertop.” She endows Feathertop with the wealth and appearance of a gentleman—but warns him that he must continue puffing the pipe in order to sustain her magic. Beaming like a proud parent, Mother Rigby sends Feathertop to town to antagonize Justice Gookin, with whom she has an unspecified feud.

Feathertop’s dashing figure creates a stir as he strolls into town. He greatly impresses Justice Gookin’s flighty daughter Polly, with whom Feathertop quickly falls in love. The Justice is suspicious of Feathertop, and he and his servant Sarah watch through the key-hole as Feathertop romances Polly with empty but persuasive words. However, upon gazing into a mirror, Polly sees through the enchantment, and is horrified at Feathertop’s actual appearance. She screams, and an enraged Justice Gookin chases Feathertop from his home.

Feathertop returns to Mother Rigby’s in shame, vowing to “exist no longer.” He smashes the magic pipe, causing him to collapse into a pile of sticks and straw. A sorrowful Mother Rigby decides to place him in the garden after all, lamenting that Feathertop was no less “empty” than most people of the town—and yet is the only one to see himself for what he is.

## about the author

### **Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)**



Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts on July 4, 1804. His ancestors included Judge John Hathorne, who took part in the infamous Salem Witch Trials. Hawthorne may have added the “w” to his last name to distance himself from this aspect of his past.

Hawthorne began writing at an early age. As a teenager, he composed several issues of a homemade newspaper, and after college he worked as a magazine editor. By his mid-30s, however, he had settled into a more prosaic line of work, and had married and started a family. Still, he kept up his writing, producing now-famous short stories such as “Young Goodman Brown” and “The Minister’s Black Veil.”

Success as an author eluded him, however, until the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850. It was one of the first mass-produced books in America, and it became an immediate success, selling 2,500 copies within 10 days. This turn of events enabled Hawthorne to devote himself to writing full time.

Throughout his life, Hawthorne was friends with many early American luminaries, such as president Franklin Pierce (whom he met in college), Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Herman Melville, who dedicated his masterpiece *Moby-Dick* to Hawthorne.

Hawthorne's later writings included the novels *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The Marble Faun*, along with a host of short stories. After serving a four-year appointment as the U.S. Consul in Liverpool, England, and witnessing the start of the Civil War in 1862, Hawthorne fell into poor health. He died in 1864 during a tour of New Hampshire's White Mountains. He is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts.

## cast & crew

<b>Role</b>	<b>Performer</b>
Mother Rigby .....	Matty O'Shea
Feathertop .....	Odell Atkinson
Polly .....	Karen Strachan
Justice Gookin .....	Barclay Roberts
Sarah .....	Jane Harris
Musician .....	Jeanne Simmons
Producer .....	John Hiltonsmith
Assistant Director .....	Karen Strachan
Adaptation .....	Robert Arnold
Director .....	Robert Arnold
Announcer .....	Tom Badgett
Artist .....	Amy Hutcheson

# characters

## **Mother Rigby**

An old and powerful witch in Colonial New England. Though Mother Rigby's magic comes from a dark place, she is not an evil character, but is good-humored, kind to her "family" (including Feathertop and Dickon), and intent on entertaining herself. She becomes a mother figure after creating Feathertop, whom she considers the best "witch's puppet" she has ever created.

## **Feathertop**

A scarecrow brought to life by Mother Rigby's magic. Feathertop has a pumpkin for a head, a bag of straw for a body, and sticks for his arms and legs. Upon smoking Mother Rigby's magical pipe, however, he takes on the appearance of a man, specifically a nobleman. Feathertop is innocent and eager, two traits that immediately put him at a disadvantage in the world.

## **Justice Gookin**

A judge in Colonial New England, Justice Gookin has had some unspecified run-in with Mother Rigby, and she now regards him as an enemy. Though he exhibits loving and protective feelings toward Polly, Justice Gookin is portrayed as one of the many empty-headed, vain people who make up the town.

## **Polly Gookin**

Justice Gookin's daughter. Polly is sweet but shallow, and is so excited about the prospect of falling in love that she cannot see through Feathertop's empty talk. Upon catching a glimpse of his true appearance, Polly immediately turns on Feathertop, suggesting that her feelings for him never ran very deep.

## **Sarah**

In Chatterbox's adaptation, Sarah is the Gookins' servant. She is fond of Polly and chides Justice Gookin for spying on her. Initially excited by the thought of Polly marrying a nobleman, she turns quickly against Feathertop once Justice Gookin expresses his suspicions.

## **Townpeople**

The people of the unnamed New England village are portrayed as gossipy, shallow, and unthinking. They cannot see through Mother Rigby's magic (which, after all, is only surface deep), and engage in absurdly comical speculation as to Feathertop's origins. As Mother Rigby later laments, these characters have even less substance than Feathertop, a creature made only of sticks and straw.

# themes, motifs, and symbols

Literary works often use **themes** (unifying or dominant ideas), **motifs** (recurring subjects, ideas, or other patterns), and **symbols** (an object or image used to represent a larger idea). Below are just a few examples and suggestions of these literary devices to explore in your classroom discussions.

## **THEME: Emptiness vs. substance**

“Feathertop” can be considered a satire for the view it takes of humanity. In Hawthorne’s eyes, the world is full of “empty” people: people who have no emotional or intellectual substance. These people are so oblivious that Feathertop, a *truly* empty person (made only of “sticks and straw”), not only passes for one of them, but is immediately admired. Feathertop’s gentlemanly act is just that—an act. His “pretty way of speaking” is meaningless, since, being new to the world, he has little to say. However, upon being cast out of the Gookins’ residence, Feathertop undergoes a painful process of self-awareness. Ironically, this gives him *more* substance than the people of the town, who “never see themselves for what they are.”

## **THEME: Creation**

In bringing Feathertop to life, “Mother” Rigby represents two different types of creators: a parent and an artist. After bringing Feathertop to life, Mother Rigby quickly begins expressing maternal feelings toward him. She dotes on him, calling him pet names and giving him gifts. And, like any mother, she eventually sends her “son” out into the world to seek his fortune. The process of creation also ties Mother Rigby to the figure of the artist, who attempts to bring her work to life using a kind of inexplicable “magic”: inspiration and talent. Like Mother Rigby, the artist cannot control how people respond to her creation once it is released into the world.

## **MOTIF: Magic and witchcraft**

The subtitle of Hawthorne’s original story is “A Moralized Fable.” As with most fables, “Feathertop” has elements of the fantastic, including the presence of magic and witchcraft. Throughout the story, the use of imaginary spells and enchantments allow Hawthorne to create a fanciful “what if” scenario. Magic

## themes, motifs, and symbols (continued)

enables Mother Rigby to create Feathertop, and it enables Feathertop to venture out into the world undetected. As with many stories of fantasy, Hawthorne uses these imaginative conceits to make a point about the real world. Ultimately, the magic in the story is simply a literary tool that allows Hawthorne to explore the true nature of the characters.

### **SYMBOL: The mirror**

The mirror that ultimately exposes Feathertop symbolizes clarity and self-awareness. For the first time, Feathertop is able to see himself as he appears “when stripped of all witchcraft.” Prior to this moment, Feathertop does not know what he really looks like, and does not feel any shame in his appearance. It is not until he visits the town—and enjoys a taste of high society—that he develops expectations of how people “should” look and act. Upon seeing his own reflection, however, he comes to the painful realization that he himself does not fit into this mold, and he understands that the townspeople’s acceptance of him is based on a façade.

### **SYMBOL: The pipe**

Mother Rigby’s enchanted pipe becomes a symbol of Feathertop’s very existence. Like Feathertop, it is kept alive by a fiery magic. (Feathertop himself glows with an inner light that the Townspeople mistake for a decorative star on his coat.) Upon losing his will to live, Feathertop smashes the pipe, breaking the spell and collapsing into a pile of inanimate materials. Mother Rigby muses that she could always bring him back to life and try again, but that his delicate temperament is better suited to a life of scaring crows. Thus decided, Mother Rigby reclaims the magical pipe for herself.

## entry points for teachers

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne
2. Colonial New England
3. Witchcraft / The Salem Witch Trials
4. Appearance vs. reality
5. Character creation and description
6. Short story format
7. Audio theater
8. Narrative theater
9. Music in a story
10. Sound effects in a story

# curriculum connections

## **English/Language Arts**

1. Literary forms—fiction
2. Satire / Parody
3. Rhythmic nature of language found in the play
4. Recurring themes
5. Observation
6. Compare and contrast
7. Cause and effect
8. Outcomes, conclusions
9. Figurative Language
10. Make predictions about stories
11. Draw, dictate, or write stories that include settings, characters, problem/solution situations, a series of events, and a sense of sequence
12. Participate in group discussions
13. Express personal opinions about the play/story
14. After reading or hearing the play/story, identify the main idea, describe main characters, re-enact or map major plot elements, draw conclusions, and make inferences
15. Dramatize or re-enact story events
16. Describe the plot, characters, and setting in the play
17. Explain a speaker's message and purpose
18. Speak to express an opinion, persuade, or entertain

## **Social Studies**

1. Show how societies develop expectations for appearance and behavior
2. Show how social perceptions affect thoughts and behavior of individuals
3. Show how social customs are similar and different
4. Explain and respect the diversity of people and their experiences

## **Science**

1. Report on the technical process of recording and reproducing sound
2. Examine the psychological connection between experience and behavior

## shorter activities

1. Write short, original narratives that include characters, settings, and a sequence of events.
2. Write about a real-life experience in which you defied or failed to meet other people's expectations.
3. Discuss and/or write an alternative ending to the story.
4. Compare/contrast "Feathertop" with other works by Hawthorne.
5. Write about or discuss relationships between music, story, and literature.
6. Adapt a familiar story into play form.

## longer activities

1. The students will write letters about the play to specific people, depending on the content of your class. Students may write letters to the characters within the stories discussing their choices and motivation, and/or making predictions about what may occur to them in the future. Students may write letters to the actors, discussing choices the actor made in bringing his/her character to life, or techniques used within the play. Other students will also write a letter to a newspaper as a play critic, describing the play he/she heard, the production elements (sound effects, voices, music, etc.) and what he/she thought was effective (or ineffective).

2. The students will write reactions to specific questions and/or prompts relating to the story. Some examples are: (a) Compare and contrast the relationship between Mother Rigby and Feathertop to that of Dr. Frankenstein and his Creature, or perhaps that of Geppetto and Pinocchio. What statements, if any, do you think the authors are meaning to convey by these relationships? (b) Upon his first appearance in public, many of the townsfolk make immediate judgments or speculations about Feathertop. In a few sentences, and in your own words, explain what this says about the townspeople, and about society as a whole. (c) In your own words, explain the significance of the mirror as a turning point in "Feathertop," both literally and symbolically.

3. The students will write original short stories based upon the themes of social perceptions, expectations, and alienation.

4. The students will listen to samples of sound effects used in the audio theater piece. They will discuss the role of sound in audio theater, and in theater in general. Students will speculate on what objects or devices were used to create sound effects in the audio theater piece, and will create their own sound effects using everyday objects.

## vocabulary

**Aspect.** In this instance, facial expression or countenance. *"I never saw such dignity of aspect. He has the old Norman blood in his veins, I warrant him."* (15:47)

**Charlatan.** A person who claims to have more knowledge or skill than he or she possesses; a quack. *"There are thousands upon thousands of coxcombs and charlatans in the world, made up of just such a jumble of worn-out, forgotten, and good-for-nothing trash as he was!"* (29:54)

**Circumlocutions.** Rambling, meandering talk. *"But alas! I see now that you are too wise to be deceived to such circumlocutions."* (24:56)

**Coxcomb.** A conceited, foolish, or pretentious person. *"There are thousands upon thousands of coxcombs and charlatans in the world, made up of just such a jumble of worn-out, forgotten, and good-for-nothing trash as he was!"* (29:54)

**Cur.** A mongrel dog, especially a worthless or unfriendly one. *"Hush now, you cur! Hush! Is that any way to behave toward... such a gentleman?"* (17:23)

**El Dorado.** A legendary treasure city of South America, sought by the early Spanish explorers. *"You shall own a gold mine in El Dorado..."* (10:18)

**Equipage.** A collection of articles for personal ornament or use. *"If he have arrived overland from the south, pray where are his attendants and equipage?"* (15:33)

**Fain.** Gladly; willingly. *"I would fain speak, but... being without wits... what shall I say?"* (08:37)

**Farthing.** A former bronze coin of Great Britain, equal to one-fourth of a British penny; withdrawn in 1961. *"Now, that you might not lack ready money, here is a farthing, which is all the coin I have about me."* (10:35)

**Flail.** an instrument for threshing grain, consisting of a staff or handle to one end of which is attached a freely swinging stick or bar. *"This old broken flail will make a fine arm."* (01:35)

## vocabulary (continued)

**Gait.** A manner of walking, stepping, or running. *“That gait, now! A vulgar spectator might deem it stiff...”* (16:13)

**Gild.** To give a bright, pleasing aspect to; to adorn. *“Since arriving here I have wondered how I might gild my request—with what finery I might adorn it to hide the sincere wish it represents.”* (24:47)

**Gill.** A pot for holding liquids. As a unit of measurement, a gill is officially 1/4 of a pint. *“The powwow parted with them for a gill of strong waters during one of our dances in the forest.”* (03:45)

**Gouty.** Puffy or swollen, as if from gout, a disease characterized by painful inflammation of the joints. *“Gouty as the old fellow is, he’ll run your errands for you, when once you have given him that word in his ear!”* (11:31)

**Hie.** To hasten; speed; go in haste. *“Good my Master, hie you away from that keyhole!”* (20:29)

**Marvel.** Something that causes wonder, admiration, or astonishment. *“Yes, my puppet, you shall be a marvel.”* (01:17)

**Might and main.** Great physical strength, power, or force. *“Come, another good stout whiff, and let it be with might and main.”* (07:01)

**Native.** Here, crude, unrefined, or without manners. *“No, there is nothing left rude or native in him! Why, he is no less than a work of art!”* (21:52)

**Old Nick.** The devil; Satan. *“You know, there are those who would swear this coat belongs to Old Nick’s wardrobe...”* (03:18)

**Pith.** The important or essential part; essence; core; heart. *“He impresses me as an unreality—as having hardly pith enough to cast a shadow upon the floor.”* (22:17)

**Promenade.** A stroll or walk, especially in a public place, for pleasure or display. *“If you do not think me too forward, may I—may I request that you promenade the room with me?”* (25:43)

## vocabulary (continued)

**Shirk.** To evade (work, duty, responsibility, etc.). *"A witch I am, and a witch I'm likely to be, and there's no use trying to shirk it."* (06:20)

**Simulacrum.** An unreal or superficial likeness or semblance. *"He appears thus when stripped of all witchcraft! No more than a wretched simulacrum of a man!"* (27:29)

**Troth.** Faithfulness, fidelity, or loyalty. *"And now, darling, I have taken so many pains with you, and you are so beautiful, that, by my troth, I love you better than any witch's puppet in the world!"* (09:23)

**Trow.** To believe, think, or suppose. *"Talk? Why, you shall babble like a mill-stream! You've brains enough for that, I trow!"* (09:00)

**Unimpeachable.** Unquestionable as to honesty or truth. *"I confess it, Sarah. As of yet his manner has been wholly unimpeachable."* (21:59)

Definitions from [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com).