“Young Goodman Brown” by Nathaniel Hawthorne
Group Discussion Questions

Directions: You will first discuss and answer the questions for whichever group you are in. Be thoroughly prepared to present your answer to the class. After you finish, start looking over and thinking about the other questions. Later, we will discuss all questions as a class, and you will complete this worksheet at that time.

GROUP A
According to the introduction, Goodman Brown witnesses “an evil ceremony that implicates his wife, Faith, in sin [and] he returns from the journey with blackness in his soul” (36). Do you agree? Does he already have “blackness in his soul” before he leaves? At what point does he become bitter? Why? Is he at all to blame for this?

GROUP B
Why is Goodman Brown so surprised by the people he sees in the forest? What kinds of people are they? Why is Goodman Brown surprised when he sees this particular mix of people? How does he view them at the end of the story (after the dream)? How does that affect his entire life from then on?

GROUP C
Goodman Brown begins “doubting whether there really was a heaven above him” (41). Why? What events cause him to begin to doubt?
GROUP D
After Goodman Brown sees Faith in the forest, he says, “There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given” (41). What does he mean? Why does he say this?

GROUP E
Find words and phrases from the story that give it a dream-like or surreal feeling. List them along with page references.

GROUP F
Why does Goodman Brown see himself as “the chief horror of the scene” (42)? In what way(s) is he implicated in sin? Does he have any right to be so embittered at the end of the story when he himself participates in the evils that occur in the forest?
GROUP G
A “dark figure” (43) says, “Ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream. Now are ye undeceived. Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness” (44). What does he mean? Does Goodman Brown believe (or come to believe) that virtue is just a dream and that evil is happiness? Does the author?

GROUP H
The narrator asks, “Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting?” (44) What do you think? Why? What part of the story is a dream and what part is real?

GROUP I
How and why does his experience in the forest change Goodman Brown? Does it have a lasting impact on him? In what way is his life different afterwards? Why?
GROUP J
Literary critic Leo B. Levy argues that “the truth conveyed in the dream—that faith may betray us—is also a truth of waking experience.” What does he mean? In the story, it is the dream (or is it a reality?) that makes Goodman Brown lose faith. Would he have lost faith anyway? Why/why not?

GROUP K
According to literary critic Leo B. Levy, “there is a .. dreadful irony in the manner in which Faith greets Brown on his return to the village, as if she had not been present in the forest and had played no part in the terrible events that take place there. She is as she was at the beginning—except that it is impossible for Brown to see her as she was. The meaning of the story arises from this discrepancy.” What does he mean? What is the meaning of the story? How does Faith’s treatment of Goodman Brown help you to understand the story’s meaning?