“The Devil and Tom Walker” by Washington Irving

**Reading Strategy: Evaluate Social Influences of the Historical Period**

The characters in “The Devil and Tom Walker” are American colonists living in New England in the late 1720s and early 1730s. The dialogue, the narrator’s comments about the characters, and the events that the characters experience help the reader to recognize and evaluate the social influences of the period. Of course, some of these influences and attitudes are often exaggerated in Irving’s satirical story. Nevertheless, readers do get a picture of colonial life in the New England of Tom Walker’s day.

**DIRECTIONS:** On the basis of each passage that follows, evaluate the social influences of New Englanders, or American colonists in general, in the 1720s and 1730s. Write your evaluation on the lines provided.

1. Tom Walker . . . had a wife as miserly as himself: they were so miserly that they even conspired to cheat each other . . . many and fierce were the conflicts that took place about what ought to have been common property.

2. “I [the Devil] amuse myself by presiding at the persecutions of Quakers and Anabaptists; I am the great patron and prompter of slave dealers, and the grandmaster of the Salem witches.”

3. About the year 1727, just at the time that earthquakes were prevalent in New England, and shook many tall sinners down upon their knees. . . .

4. Such was the end of Tom Walker and his ill-gotten wealth. Let all griping money brokers lay this story to heart.