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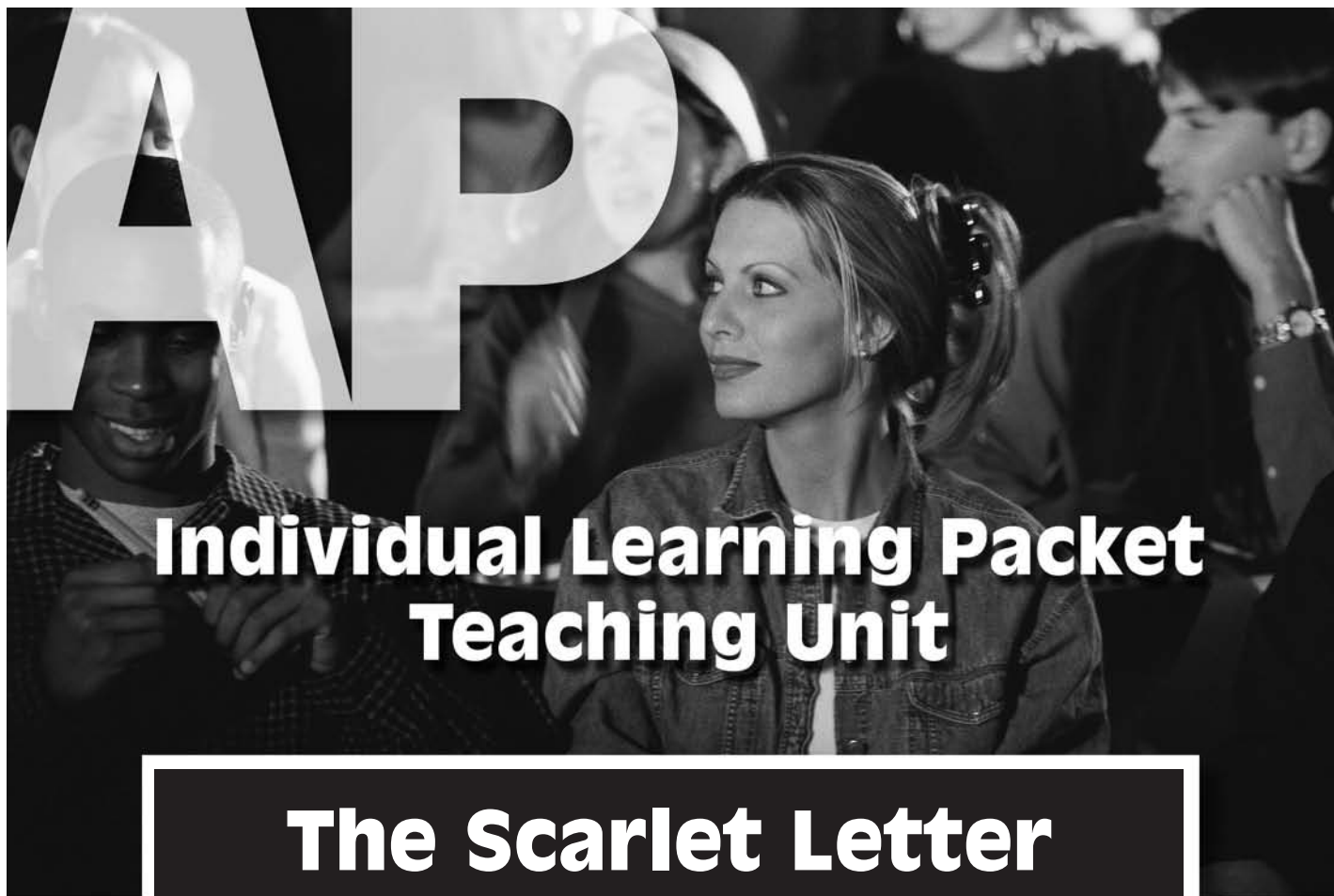
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Individual Learning Packet Teaching Unit

The Scarlet Letter

Nathaniel Hawthorne

P R E S T W I C K H O U S E , I N C .



Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Teaching Unit:
Individual Learning Packet

The Scarlet Letter

by: Nathaniel Hawthorne

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OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the characters of Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, Pearl, and their relationships to one another;
2. trace the development of Hester's, Chillingworth's, and Dimmesdale's characters from their first mention in the novel until their last, noting how and why they change;
3. examine characters and character relationships from a variety of literary positions;
4. investigate the various notions of sin;
5. identify the major elements of Romantic and Gothic literature;
6. discuss the structural development of the novel in terms of exposition, conflict, climax, resolution.
7. discuss Hawthorne's use of humor, pathos, and occasionally bathos;
8. analyze the importance of literary elements like dramatic irony and foreshadowing on the development of the plot;
9. discuss the frequent references to light and darkness and to plant life as symbols and elements of a metaphor.
10. analyze how Hawthorne creates suspense;
11. explain and identify examples of where the Transcendentalists and Anti-Transcendentalists parted company;
12. debate the rightness or wrongness of the three main characters, considering the multiple concepts of right and wrong as presented in the novel;
13. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam;
14. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam;
15. offer a close reading of *The Scarlet Letter* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

BACKGROUND LECTURE

Nathaniel Hawthorne 1804-1864

- Born in Salem, Massachusetts
- His ancestors were wealthy, influential people. One, William Hathorne, became a judge who persecuted Quakers; another, John Hathorne, sentenced many Salem women to death for witchcraft. Hawthorne was obsessed with the sins of these ancestors who reflected the religious intolerance of the Puritan society.
- The death of Hawthorne's father when Nathaniel was four resulted in a series of unfortunate circumstances that created a lonely childhood for the boy.
- Hawthorne graduated from Bowden College, Maine, and spent the next twelve years in seclusion as he struggled to become a writer.
- In 1837 he published *Twice Told Tales* and earned great national fame. His stories won the admiration of Edgar Allan Poe, who considered Hawthorne a genius.
- Another contemporary of Hawthorne, Herman Melville, who wrote *Moby Dick*, became Hawthorne's close friend. They both reacted to the Transcendental philosophers of the nineteenth century. Many critics refer to this reaction as "Anti-Transcendentalism."
- During his life, Hawthorne was friendly with Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau; however, Hawthorne struggled with what he considered the overly optimistic ideas of the Transcendentalists. Evidence of this struggle between a belief in the perfectability of humanity by following one's individual conscience and the essentially evil nature of humankind is seen in the ambiguity of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Notes on Hawthorne's Style, Setting, and Themes

1. In spite of Hawthorne's opposition to Transcendentalism, he is typical of the nineteenth century romantics. Like them, his stories
 - a. deal with the strange and the mysterious.
 - b. involve symbolic imagination.
 - c. turn to the past for subject matter.
2. Hawthorne focuses his attention on the problem of evil and the nature of sin. He is not a moralist, but like a psychologist, he analyzes the inner world of the human mind and heart; Hawthorne's stories begin with a simple idea, like guilt. This idea is developed by complex personal relationships between the characters and by symbolism. This symbolic story eventually leads to a probing of the mysteries within the human mind. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne analyzes the effect of one sin on the four main characters who are closely intertwined because of that sin (Hester, Pearl, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth).
3. Hawthorne also examines the question, "What is sin?" Notice how Hawthorne is careful to portray Dimmesdale and Hester's sin as a crime against civil law but not necessarily against natural law. Beginning with the wild rosebush growing beside the prison door, Hawthorne suggests that Nature might actually sympathize with those whom society has condemned.
4. *The Scarlet Letter* has unity of place. All action occurs in the center of Boston and the outskirts of this village. There are three scaffold scenes: one in the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end. In each of these scenes, the four main characters are present, and the changes in each are shown.
5. Hawthorne displays a use of formal language with a precise word choice; although the sentences are long and complex, they are logical and clear.
6. Hawthorne uses images frequently to create the mood and emphasize his ideas. Notice especially the use of plant life to differentiate between those with whom Nature sympathizes and those with whom she does not. Also, notice the use of darkness and shadows, light, the play of sunlight in the forest, etc.
7. The narrator tells most of the story in the form of a summary. Between the passages of explanation by the narrator are poignant, dramatic scenes. At times, Hawthorne interrupts the narration to provide necessary exposition. On other occasions, speaking directly to the reader, Hawthorne offers a choice of interpretations. The reader can decide what is literally true and what is a device to create a supernatural or symbolic effect. This ambiguity is one factor that makes the book so rich to read and discuss, but it also presents problems to readers who feel they need to understand definitively.

Setting of *The Scarlet Letter*: Puritanism in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1642

1. Accurate historical references are made to the actual governors, ministers, and practices of the Massachusetts Bay Colony of 1642-1650. Hawthorne selected specific details only to develop the mood and the ideas. Students should be reminded that Hawthorne did not live during that time and was not a Puritan. Hawthorne wants the reader to react to these attitudes.
2. Puritan ideas that are alluded to in the novel are as follows:
 - a. Puritanism emerged as a powerful religious and political force in sixteenth-century England. Following Martin Luther's posting of his ninety-five theses on the door to the church in Wittenberg, the Protestant Reformation spread quickly through Europe. In England, there were Protestants who felt that Henry VIII's break with Rome over his divorce from Katherine of Aragon did not result in sufficient reform of church doctrine and religious practices in general. These "Puritans," as they came to be called wanted to return the Church to its "pure" state as the earliest Christians had established it in the first century C.E. The New England Puritans were a radical group who felt that even the English Puritan reforms did not cut deep enough. These were the "pilgrims" who first went to the Netherlands and later sailed to the New World to establish a colony where they could worship as they chose. They did not seek religious freedom as they still persecuted and banished individuals whose beliefs and practices were different from their own.
 - b. The role of both the ministers and the magistrates was to enforce the laws of God. The church and state cooperated in serving God. In fact, the people of the Massachusetts Bay Colony felt they had a covenant with God to establish a community, a "New Jerusalem," under His laws.
 - c. As a result, all members of this community of God were judges of the faith and works of every other member. They insisted on a lifestyle of self-discipline, which zealously avoided the temptations of the devil and followed the will of God, as expressed in the Ten Commandments and the Bible. The people were completely intolerant of sin. Puritans believed that any sin committed in the community would cause God's wrath to be visited on them. An illness or misfortune would show God's disapproval. Puritans looked for sins that had been committed so that the sin could be brought out in the open and the members of the community could express their scorn for that sin. Hawthorne's scaffold scenes show this public condemnation of sin. These solemn people lived simple lives, dressed in brown, gray, or black, and avoided worldly pleasures. Hawthorne's descriptions of Puritans are true to this concept; Pearl is the exception. Some historians explain that the cults of witchcraft in this area were a rebellion against this obsession with sin and rigid lifestyle. One practice used to secure the proper discipline of children was to "put out" or transfer children from one family to another. That way, a child could not be spoiled by natural parents. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the main character, Hester, fears her child will be taken from her.

- d. Puritan theology valued hard work. Idleness was an invitation to sin (“Idle hands are the devil’s playthings”). In Elizabethan England (established early in *The Scarlet Letter* as not too far in the past at the opening of the book) the Puritans were responsible for several closings of the theaters, basing their objections on the notion that the performance of plays in the afternoon attracted people away from doing their work. Puritan societies had very few holidays for this same reason. Even Christmas Day had been outlawed in England and the New England Colonies because it encouraged idleness, encouraged licentious behavior, and was—they believed—a remnant of the Catholicism they hoped to abolish.
3. The Puritans felt, however, that humans were too sinful to earn salvation by performing good works or avoiding sin. People could go to Heaven only if they received God’s grace in the process of conversion. During conversion, saving grace enters people’s hearts, and they are released from sin. Some critics feel this happens to one of Hawthorne’s characters at the end of the story.

On the other hand, many Puritans—including the New England Puritans—accepted the Calvinist doctrine of predetermination. This meant that the “saved” (those destined to spend eternity in Heaven) had already been determined. One knew whether one was a member of “God’s elect” by being able to avoid sin. Thus, Dimmesdale and Hester are concerned that they may be damned—not because of their sin *per se*, but because the fact that they sinned indicated that they’d *already been* damned.

Again, the uncertainty as to whether Dimmesdale and Hester are damned or can be redeemed is the source of much of the book’s rich ambiguity.

Themes of *The Scarlet Letter*: Transcendentalism, Anti-Transcendentalism, Romanticism, Gothicism

1. Civil law versus Natural law. Marriage is a civil institution governed by the state. Theoretically, it is the solemnized commitment between two people who love one another. Hester, however, claims that even at the time of their marriage she did not love Chillingworth, and Chillingworth admits he violated a law of Nature by marrying a young and beautiful woman who could not love him. Hester and Dimmesdale's adultery, therefore—if motivated by true love, as the reader is led to believe—is a violation of civil law only. Hester's marriage, protected by this civil law, is a violation of natural law.
2. The novel explores the nature of sin and the effects of sin on the individual. Sin results in the physical deterioration of the sinner. Acts become sinful not only because they violate others, but also because they violate the individual's inner laws. Hester feels her unacceptability to others as a result of her sin; she deliberately becomes less beautiful. However, she also develops an inner strength and acceptance of who she is and what she has done. Her strength and usefulness to the community become legendary so that eventually the fact and nature of her sin almost seem to be forgotten by the townspeople.

Yet Nature does not seem to condemn Hester for her “sin” as much as it condemns her self-condemnation. Compare the scene in the forest in which the shafts of sunlight fall on Pearl but seem to avoid Hester (Chapter XVI) with the later scene (Chapter XVIII) in which she takes off her scarlet letter, lets her hair down, and admits that her and Dimmesdale's relationship was indeed “consecrated”. Immediately upon her doing so, the sun breaks out from behind a cloud and shines upon both her and Dimmesdale.

Dimmesdale's sense of guilt and self-defeat lead to physical illness and death. While Hester seems almost to transcend her sin, Dimmesdale succumbs to it. His strongest moment is the third scaffold scene when he is able to admit his sin publicly and foils Chillingworth's attempt to destroy him.

Chillingworth's inability to “forgive and forget” and his obsession with revenge result in his warped ugliness. When the subject of his obsession and the target of his vengeance dies, he has no reason to live and dies as well. Further, he dies frustrated, having failed to destroy his target.

3. Another thematic aspect of *The Scarlet Letter* is Hawthorne's reaction to several Romantic ideas. Hawthorne explores the individual's relationship to society. Humans, need to feel a connection to others. Pearl, the child of nature who knows no rules, is isolated from society. To become a part of human society, however, she must share in the sorrow of other humans. Only after joining humanity, is Pearl able to cry.

People are not self-reliant. They have a sense of others, which creates their self-image and need for approval. Dimmesdale's torment comes from his inability to discern a sin against nature from a sin against civil law and his resultant misrepresentation of himself to others. Although Hawthorne has the reader sympathize with Hester, the individual who rebels against society, she lives a solitary life on the edge of a forest. He points out the loneliness and shame that are associated with breaking a law.

The Scarlet Letter

QUESTIONS FOR ESSAY AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. Identify the sin of Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth, and trace the consequences of that sin on the person's life and character.
2. It is hard to believe today that a community would treat one of its members the way in which Hester was treated. What features of the Boston society in 1642, however, make the actions of the Puritans quite understandable?
3. Despite the difference in clothing and customs, how do the psychological and moral aspects of this story make it very relevant for today's readers?
4. Identify and explain at least three ways in which Hawthorne is part of the Romantic tradition and at least two ways in which he repudiates that tradition.
5. For what reasons would Hawthorne call his story a romance rather than a novel?
6. Name three characteristics of Hawthorne's style and cite examples of each.
7. Identify and explain the symbolism for each of the following items:
 - a. light and shadow
 - b. the scaffold
 - c. the rosebush and the weeds
 - d. the letter "A"
 - e. colors
 - f. the forest
 - g. the town
8. Explain Hawthorne's view on human nature regarding passion.
9. According to Hawthorne, what are the moral consequences of sin and how does one become redeemed? Cite incidents from the story.
10. Show that Hester is one of literature's first feminists using examples from the text.
11. Explain how the second scene on the scaffold serves as the novel's climax.

12. Consider the characters Pearl, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth. How are their names symbolic?
13. Hawthorne uses historical characters—Governor Bellingham, John Wilson, and Mistress Hibbins—and true depictions of Puritan society and beliefs to add authenticity to his work. Explain the effects that these elements make.
14. Compare Hester's scarlet letter to Dimmesdale's letter.
15. Describe Hawthorne's use of dramatic irony, and cite examples for support.
16. How does Hester's attitude change from when she emerges from jail to the last scene of the novel? What major events assist in her transformation?

The Scarlet Letter

Multiple Choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 1 – 10:

- The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison. In accordance with this
- 5 rule it may safely be assumed that the forefathers of Boston had built the first prison-house somewhere in the Vicinity of Cornhill, almost as seasonably as they marked out the first burial-ground, on Isaac Johnson's lot, and round about his grave, which subsequently became the nucleus of all the congregated sepulchres in the old churchyard of King's Chapel. Certain it is
- 10 that, some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age, which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front. The rust on the ponderous iron-work of its oaken door looked more antique than anything else in the New World. Like all that pertains to crime, it
- 15 seemed never to have known a youthful era. Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass-plot, much overgrown with burdock, pig-weed, apple-pern, and such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilised society, a prison. But on one side of
- 20 the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him.
- 25 This rose-bush, by a strange chance, has been kept alive in history; but whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness, so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally overshadowed it, or whether, as there is fair authority for believing, it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson as she entered the prison-door, we
- 30 shall not take upon us to determine. Finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that inauspicious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers, and present it to the reader. It may serve, let us hope, to symbolise some sweet moral blossom that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of
- 35 human frailty and sorrow.

1. The passage suggests that the two inescapable elements of human existence are
 - A. sin and death.
 - B. crime and punishment.
 - C. frailty and sorrow.
 - D. death and redemption.
 - E. cemetery and prison.
2. The author provides specific place names (Vicinity of Cornhill, Isaac Johnson's lot) in order to give the passage a sense of
 - A. immediacy.
 - B. timelessness.
 - C. irony.
 - D. verisimilitude.
 - E. personification.
3. The author's reference to the "deep heart of nature" (line 23-24) is evidence that the passage is
 - A. comedic.
 - B. tragic.
 - C. Romantic.
 - D. Gothic.
 - E. symbolic.
4. The "sweet moral blossom" (line 33) refers to the
 - A. wild rose.
 - B. emerging prisoner.
 - C. end of the novel.
 - D. penalty for crime.
 - E. footsteps of Saint Ann.
5. What is achieved by the author's closing the passage with a reference to "human frailty and sorrow"?
 - A. The author creates suspense by foreshadowing the next chapter.
 - B. The passage closes on a reiteration of where it began.
 - C. The idea of death is emphasized.
 - D. The conflict of the story is introduced.
 - E. The plot of the story is set in motion.

6. The reference to Ann Hutchinson is an example of
 - A. biblical allusion.
 - B. historical allusion.
 - C. literary allusion.
 - D. extended metaphor.
 - E. pathetic fallacy.

7. The juxtaposition of the rose bush and the prison door is an example of
 - A. symbolic logic.
 - B. allegorical archetype.
 - C. visual irony.
 - D. thematic juxtaposition.
 - E. Freudian transference.

8. All of the following predict the nature of the story to come EXCEPT
 - A. the rosebush growing beside the prison door.
 - B. the personification of nature.
 - C. the mention of the cemetery and the prison.
 - D. the reference to Boston.
 - E. the allusion to Ann Hutchinson.

9. The overall impression created by this passage can best be described as
 - A. optimistic.
 - B. pessimistic.
 - C. ambiguous.
 - D. gloomy.
 - E. humorous.

10. All of the following describe a possible purpose of the passage EXCEPT
 - A. it introduces the tone of the novel.
 - B. it suggests the main conflict.
 - C. it introduces the central image of the story.
 - D. it suggests a potential theme to be developed.
 - E. it establishes the time and place of the novel.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 11 – 15:

- The grass-plot before the jail, in Prison Lane, on a certain summer morning, not less than two centuries ago, was occupied by a pretty large number of the inhabitants of Boston, all with their eyes intently fastened on the iron clamped oaken door. Amongst any other population, or at a later period in the history of New England,
- 5 the grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies of these good people would have augured some awful business in hand. It could have betokened nothing short of the anticipated execution of some noted culprit, on whom the sentence of a legal tribunal had but confirmed the verdict of public sentiment. But, in that early severity of the Puritan character, an inference of this kind could not so indubitably
- 10 be drawn. It might be that a sluggish bond-servant, or an undutiful child, whom his parents had given over to the civil authority, was to be corrected at the whipping-post. It might be that an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist, was to be scourged out of the town, or an idle or vagrant Indian, whom the white man's firewater had made riotous about the streets, was to be driven with stripes into the
- 15 shadow of the forest. It might be, too, that a witch, like old Mistress Hibbins, the bitter-tempered widow of the magistrate, was to die upon the gallows. In either case, there was very much the same solemnity of demeanour on the part of the spectators, as befitted a people among whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and severest
- 20 acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful. Meagre, indeed, and cold, was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for, from such bystanders, at the scaffold. On the other hand, a penalty which, in our days, would infer a degree of mocking infamy and ridicule, might then be invested with almost as stern a dignity as the punishment of death itself.
- 25 It was a circumstance to be noted on the summer morning when our story begins its course, that the women, of whom there were several in the crowd, appeared to take a peculiar interest in whatever penal infliction might be expected to ensue. The age had not so much refinement, that any sense of impropriety restrained the wearers of petticoat and farthingale from stepping forth into the public ways, and wedging
- 30 their not unsubstantial persons, if occasion were, into the throng nearest to the scaffold at an execution. Morally, as well as materially, there was a coarser fibre in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding than in their fair descendants, separated from them by a series of six or seven generations; for, throughout that chain of ancestry, every successive mother had transmitted to her
- 35 child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slighter physical frame, if not character of less force and solidity than her own. The women who were now standing about the prison-door stood within less than half a century of the period when the man like Elizabeth had been the not altogether unsuitable representative of the sex. They were her countrywomen: and the beef and ale of their
- 40 native land, with a moral diet not a whit more refined, entered largely into their composition. The bright morning sun, therefore, shone on broad shoulders and well-developed busts, and on round and ruddy cheeks, that had ripened in the far-off island, and had hardly yet grown paler or thinner in the atmosphere of New England. There was, moreover, a boldness and rotundity of speech among these matrons, as
- 45 most of them seemed to be, that would startle us at the present day, whether in respect to its purport or its volume of tone.

11. Which of the following is NOT a possible reason the townspeople have gathered?
- A. To see a religious heretic banished.
 - B. To see a witch hanged.
 - C. To see a drunken Indian whipped.
 - D. To see a disobedient child punished.
 - E. To see a queen imprisoned.
12. Based on its use in the passage, the word FARTHINGALE (line 29) most likely means
- A. a woman's garment.
 - B. a remnant of fabric.
 - C. an outmoded dance step.
 - D. a jeweled comb.
 - E. a slang term for woman.
13. The final sentence of the first paragraph can best be paraphrased as
- A. Punishments like the death penalty were especially serious in that time.
 - B. The shame of public humiliation was as severe a punishment as a sentence of death could be.
 - C. The stern dignitaries of the village mocked their infamous criminals.
 - D. The death penalty was ridiculed as too stern a punishment.
 - E. Only crimes of the most infamous degree should be punished by death.
14. The phrase "not unsubstantial" (line 30) is an example of a(n)
- A. anachronism.
 - B. mondegreen.
 - C. malapropism.
 - D. zeugma.
 - E. litote.
15. What is the central contrast developed in the second paragraph?
- A. men and women
 - B. Medieval and Renaissance women
 - C. Puritan and nineteenth-century women
 - D. British and American women
 - E. Royalty and commoners

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 16 – 25:

X. THE LEECH AND HIS PATIENT

Old Roger Chillingworth, throughout life, had been calm in temperament, kindly, though not of warm affections, but ever, and in all his relations with the world, a pure and upright man. He had begun an investigation, as he imagined, with the severe and equal integrity of a judge, desirous only of truth, even as if the question involved no more than the air-drawn lines and figures of a geometrical problem, instead of human passions, and wrongs inflicted on himself. But, as he proceeded, a terrible fascination, a kind of fierce, though still calm, necessity, seized the old man within its gripe, and never set him free again until he had done all its bidding. He now dug into the poor clergyman's heart, like a miner searching for gold; or, rather, like a sexton delving into a grave, possibly in quest of a jewel that had been buried on the dead man's bosom, but likely to find nothing save mortality and corruption. Alas, for his own soul, if these were what he sought!

Sometimes a light glimmered out of the physician's eyes, burning blue and ominous, like the reflection of a furnace, or, let us say, like one of those gleams of ghastly fire that darted from Bunyan's awful doorway in the hillside, and quivered on the pilgrim's face. The soil where this dark miner was working had perchance shown indications that encouraged him.

"This man," said he, at one such moment, to himself, "pure as they deem him—all spiritual as he seems- hath inherited a strong animal nature from his father or his mother. Let us dig a little further in the direction of this vein!"

Then after long search into the minister's dim interior, and turning over many precious materials, in the shape of high aspirations for the welfare of his race, warm love of souls, pure sentiments, natural piety, strengthened by thought and study, and illuminated by revelation—all of which invaluable gold was perhaps no better than rubbish to the seeker—he would turn back, discouraged, and begin his quest towards another point. He groped along as stealthily, with as cautious a tread, and as wary an outlook, as a thief entering a chamber where a man lies only half asleep—or, it may be, broad awake—with purpose to steal the very treasure which this man guards as the apple of his eye. In spite of his premeditated carefulness, the floor would now and then creak; his garments would rustle; the shadow of his presence, in a forbidden proximity, would be thrown across his victim. In other words, Mr. Dimmesdale, whose sensibility of nerve often produced the effect of spiritual intuition, would become vaguely aware that something inimical to his peace had thrust itself into relation with him. But Old Roger Chillingworth, too, had perceptions that were almost intuitive; and when the minister threw his startled eyes towards him, there the physician sat; his kind, watchful, sympathizing, but never intrusive friend.

16. The opening of the passage describes Roger Chillingworth's
- A. scientific and deductive processes.
 - B. devolution from impartial scientist to obsessed avenger.
 - C. transformation from kind husband to angry cuckold.
 - D. descent into temptation and sin.
 - E. acquisition of knowledge.
17. The author's refinement of the simile at the end of the first paragraph emphasizes
- A. the morbidity of Chillingworth's probing.
 - B. the depth of Chillingworth's knowledge.
 - C. the mystery surrounding Chillingworth's skill.
 - D. the seriousness of Dimmesdale's illness.
 - E. the depth of the love shared by the two friends.
18. The "dark miner" in line 17 refers to
- A. Dimmesdale.
 - B. Chillingworth.
 - C. Bunyan.
 - D. Dimmesdale's subconscious.
 - E. the Village's "black man."
19. The image of the "ghastly fire" (line 16) is an allusion to
- A. Chillingworth's scientific apparatus.
 - B. Hell.
 - C. an iron-worker's oven.
 - D. Chillingworth's jealousy.
 - E. Boston.
20. The final line of the third paragraph further emphasizes the
- A. sensory imagery.
 - B. contrast between the two men.
 - C. men's deep friendship.
 - D. doctor's concern.
 - E. mining metaphor.

21. What does the passage suggest is happening to Dimmesdale while Chillingworth probes his psyche?
- A. He is growing weaker.
 - B. He is beginning to trust Chillingworth more.
 - C. He is aware of being the subject of a probe.
 - D. He is growing more grateful to his friend.
 - E. He is feeling purged of his sin.
22. The sentence that begins on line 31, "In spite of his premeditated carefulness..." and ends on line 33, "... thrown across his victim," is a(n)
- A. oxymoron contrasting Chillingworth's care with Dimmesdale's suspicion.
 - B. metaphor comparing Chillingworth's probing with a physical intruder.
 - C. allegory explaining Chillingworth's method of inquiry.
 - D. mondegreen confusing the words "creak" and "creek."
 - E. affective fallacy explaining a non-human act in human terms.
23. The passage suggests that inwardly Dimmesdale is
- A. a truly good man.
 - B. an unrepentant sinner.
 - C. fearful of Chillingworth.
 - D. devoid of human sympathy.
 - E. a man with many dark secrets.
24. The title of this chapter is ambiguous because
- A. Dimmesdale is not Chillingworth's paying patient.
 - B. Dimmesdale is not Chillingworth's only patient.
 - C. Chillingworth must be patient to discover Dimmesdale's secret.
 - D. the word "leech" can mean both a doctor and a parasite.
 - E. leeches were often used to cure people of diseases.
25. Dimmesdale's natural sensitivity makes him
- A. see his own warm love of souls.
 - B. watch Chillingworth carefully.
 - C. susceptible to Chillingworth's plan.
 - D. half-realize that Chillingworth is not his true friend.
 - E. grateful for Chillingworth's care.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 1:

Read the following passage and write a well-organized essay in which you explain the dramatic irony and how it builds suspense and foreshadows the future development of character developments and plot.

Such was the young clergyman's condition, and so imminent the prospect that his dawning light would be extinguished, all untimely, when Roger Chillingworth made his advent to the town. His first entry on the scene, few people could tell whence, dropping down as it were out of the sky or starting from the nether earth, had an aspect of mystery, which was easily heightened to the miraculous. He was now known to be a man of skill; it was observed that he gathered herbs and the blossoms of wild-flowers, and dug up roots and plucked off twigs from the forest-trees like one acquainted with hidden virtues in what was valueless to common eyes. He was heard to speak of Sir Kenelm Digby and other famous men—whose scientific attainments were esteemed hardly less than supernatural—as having been his correspondents or associates. Why, with such rank in the learned world, had he come hither? What, could he, whose sphere was in great cities, be seeking in the wilderness? In answer to this query, a rumour gained ground—and however absurd, was entertained by some very sensible people that Heaven had wrought an absolute miracle, by transporting an eminent Doctor of Physic from a German university bodily through the air and setting him down at the door of Mr. Dimmesdale's study! Individuals of wiser faith, indeed, who knew that Heaven promotes its purposes without aiming at the stage-effect of what is called miraculous interposition, were inclined to see a providential hand in Roger Chillingworth's so opportune arrival.

This idea was countenanced by the strong interest which the physician ever manifested in the young clergyman; he attached himself to him as a parishioner, and sought to win a friendly regard and confidence from his naturally reserved sensibility. He expressed great alarm at his pastor's state of health, but was anxious to attempt the cure, and, if early undertaken, seemed not despondent of a favourable result. The elders, the deacons, the motherly dames, and the young and fair maidens of Mr. Dimmesdale's flock, were alike importunate that he should make trial of the physician's frankly offered skill. Mr. Dimmesdale gently repelled their entreaties.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 2:

Read the following passage and write a well-organized essay in which you explain how this episode can serve as a climax or turning point of the story. Do not merely summarize the passage or offer a definition of climax.

It came to pass, not long after the scene above recorded, that the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, noon-day, and entirely unawares, fell into a deep, deep slumber, sitting in his chair, with a large black-letter volume open before him on the table. It must have been a work of vast ability in the somniferous school of literature. The profound depth of the minister's repose was the more remarkable, inasmuch as he was one of those persons whose sleep ordinarily is as light as fitful, and as easily scared away, as a small bird hopping on a twig. To such an unwonted remoteness, however, had his spirit now withdrawn into itself that he stirred not in his chair when old Roger Chillingworth, without any extraordinary precaution, came into the room. The physician advanced directly in front of his patient, laid his hand upon his bosom, and thrust aside the vestment, that hitherto had always covered it even from the professional eye.

Then, indeed, Mr. Dimmesdale shuddered, and slightly stirred.

After a brief pause, the physician turned away. But with what a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror! With what a ghastly rapture, as it were, too mighty to be expressed only by the eye and features, and therefore bursting forth through the whole ugliness of his figure, and making itself even riotously manifest by the extravagant gestures with which he threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot upon the floor! Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at that moment of his ecstasy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won into his kingdom.

But what distinguished the physician's ecstasy from Satan's was the trait of wonder in it!

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 3:

In many novels and plays, there is a scene of revelation or realization, on which hinges much of the plot's outcome and which usually occurs too late to benefit the recipient. Read the passage below from Chapter ___ of *The Scarlet Letter*, and write a well-organized essay in which you demonstrate how this revelation affects the outcome of the novel.

Do not merely summarize the plot.

“Oh, Arthur!” cried [Hester], “forgive me! In all things else, I have striven to be true! Truth was the one virtue which I might have held fast, and did hold fast, through all extremity; save when thy good—thy life—thy fame—were put in question! Then I consented to a deception. But a lie is never good, even though death threaten on the other side! Dost thou not see what I would say? That old man!—the physician!—he whom they call Roger Chillingworth!—he was my husband!”

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 4:

The following passage from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* shows the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale in a state of moral confusion following an encounter with Hester Prynne in the forest. Read the passage carefully and then write a well-organized essay in which you explain the significance of the incidents narrated here in terms of both Arthur Dimmesdale's character development and the progress and structure of the plot. Avoid mere plot summary.

Before Mr. Dimmesdale reached home, his inner man gave him other evidences of a revolution in the sphere of thought and feeling. In truth, nothing short of a total change of dynasty and moral code, in that interior kingdom, was adequate to account for the impulses now communicated to the unfortunate and startled minister. At every step he was incited to do some strange, wild, wicked thing or other, with a sense that it would be at once involuntary and intentional, in spite of himself, yet growing out of a profounder self than that which opposed the impulse. For instance, he met one of his own deacons. ...Now, during a conversation of some two or three moments between the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale and this excellent and hoary-bearded deacon, it was only by the most careful self-control that the former could refrain from uttering certain blasphemous suggestions that rose into his mind, respecting the communion supper.

...

...Hurrying along the street, the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale encountered the eldest female member of his church, a most pious and exemplary old dame, poor, widowed, lonely, and with a heart as full of reminiscences about her dead husband and children, and her dead friends of long ago, as a burial-ground is full of storied gravestones. Yet all this, which would else have been such heavy sorrow, was made almost a solemn joy to her devout old soul, by religious consolations and the truths of Scripture, wherewith she had fed herself continually for more than thirty years. ...But, on this occasion, up to the moment of putting his lips to the old woman's ear, Mr. Dimmesdale, as the great enemy of souls would have it, could recall no text of Scripture, nor aught else, except a brief, pithy, and, as it then appeared to him, unanswerable argument against the immortality of the human soul.

...

...a third instance...he met the youngest sister of them all...newly-won—and won by the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale's own sermon. ... The minister knew well that he was himself enshrined within the stainless sanctity of her heart, which hung its snowy curtains about his image, imparting to religion the warmth of love, and to love a religious purity. ...As she drew nigh, the arch fiend whispered him to condense into small compass, and drop into her tender bosom a germ of evil that would be sure to blossom darkly soon, and bear black fruit betimes. ...So—with a mightier struggle than he had yet sustained—he held his Geneva cloak before his face, and hurried onward, making no sign of recognition, and leaving the young sister to digest his rudeness as she might. She ransacked her conscience—which was full of harmless little matters, like her pocket or her work-bag—and took herself to task, poor thing! for a thousand imaginary faults, and went about her household duties with swollen eyelids the next morning.

...

Before the minister had time to celebrate his victory over this last temptation, he was conscious of another impulse, more ludicrous, and almost as horrible...to stop...and teach some very wicked words to a knot of little Puritan children who were playing there, and had but just begun to talk.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 5:

The passage below is the end of *The Scarlet Letter*. Read it carefully, and then write a well-organized essay in which you define Hawthorne's attitude toward his characters and the Puritan society of seventeenth-century Massachusetts and analyze the techniques Hawthorne uses to convey this attitude to his reader. Do not merely summarize the plot.

And Hester Prynne had returned, and taken up her long-forsaken shame! But where was little Pearl? If still alive she must now have been in the flush and bloom of early womanhood. None knew—nor ever learned with the fullness of perfect certainty—whether the elf-child had gone thus untimely to a maiden grave; or whether her wild, rich nature had been softened and subdued and made capable of a woman's gentle happiness. But through the remainder of Hester's life there were indications that the recluse of the scarlet letter was the object of love and interest with some inhabitant of another land. Letters came, with armorial seals upon them, though of bearings unknown to English heraldry. In the cottage there were articles of comfort and luxury such as Hester never cared to use, but which only wealth could have purchased and affection have imagined for her. There were trifles too, little ornaments, beautiful tokens of a continual remembrance, that must have been wrought by delicate fingers at the impulse of a fond heart. And once Hester was seen embroidering a baby-garment with such a lavish richness of golden fancy as would have raised a public tumult had any infant thus appareled, been shown to our sober-hued community.

In fine, the gossips of that day believed— and Mr. Surveyor Pue, who made investigations a century later, believed—and one of his recent successors in office, moreover, faithfully believes—that Pearl was not only alive, but married, and happy, and mindful of her mother; and that she would most joyfully have entertained that sad and lonely mother at her fireside.

But there was a more real life for Hester Prynne, here, in New England, than in that unknown region where Pearl had found a home. Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence. She had returned, therefore, and resumed—of her own free will, for not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed it—resumed the symbol of which we have related so dark a tale. Never afterwards did it quit her bosom. But, in the lapse of the toilsome, thoughtful, and self-devoted years that made up Hester's life, the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too. And, as Hester Prynne had no selfish ends, nor lived in any measure for her own profit and enjoyment, people brought all their sorrows and perplexities, and besought her counsel, as one who had herself gone through a mighty trouble.

Women, more especially—in the continually recurring trials of wounded, wasted, wronged, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion—or with the dreary burden of a heart unyielded, because unvalued and unsought came to Hester's cottage, demanding why they were so wretched, and what the remedy! Hester comforted and counselled them, as best she might. She assured them, too, of her firm belief that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness. Earlier in life, Hester had vainly imagined that she herself might be the destined prophetess, but had long since recognized the impossibility that any mission of divine and mysterious truth should be confided to a woman stained with sin, bowed down with shame, or even burdened with a life long sorrow. The angel and apostle of the coming revelation must be a woman, indeed, but lofty, pure, and beautiful, and wise; moreover, not through dusky grief, but the ethereal medium of joy; and showing how sacred love should make us happy, by the truest test of a life successful to such an end.

So said Hester Prynne, and glanced her sad eyes downward at the scarlet letter. And, after many, many years, a new grave was delved, near an old and sunken one, in that burial-ground beside which King's Chapel has since been built. It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tomb-stone served for both. All around, there were monuments carved with armorial bearings; and on this simple slab of slate—as the curious investigator may still discern, and perplex himself with the purport—there appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon. It bore a device, a herald's wording of which may serve for a motto and brief description of our now concluded legend; so sombre is it, and relieved only by one ever-glowing point of light gloomier than the shadow:—

“ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES”

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 6:

In many novels and plays, the setting consists essentially of two locations set in binary opposition to one other. Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the way the setting of *The Scarlet Letter* affects the character development of Hester and Dimmesdale and helps identify the novel as a Romance. Do not merely summarize the plot or describe the setting.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 7:

The structure of many novels and plays is shaped by the recurrence of certain key events. Write a well-organized essay in which you describe the major similarities and differences in a sequence of recurring events in *The Scarlet Letter*, and analyze how this recurrence determines the structure of the story. Do not merely summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 8:

While modern writers seem to favor the well-rounded, fully developed character, earlier authors successfully utilized the character type to achieve their purposes. Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze Hawthorne's use of character type or stereotype to establish his theme. Do not merely summarize the plot or offer character descriptions.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 9:

The themes of many novels depend upon a single image, metaphor, or symbol whose meaning and significance evolve as the story progresses. In a well-written essay, trace the evolution of Hester Prynne's scarlet letter as it is viewed throughout the book by Hester, the villagers, Pearl, and by the author himself.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 10:

Rather than establish a single, definitive theme, many authors end their novels on a note of ambiguity, inviting readers to examine the various sides of a complex issue. Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the ambiguous ending of *The Scarlet Letter* and explain the possible reasons for Hawthorne's ending the book in this way. Do not merely show that the ending is ambiguous or assert a theme for the book.

Multiple Choice Answers and Explanations

1. The passage begins by explaining that the two necessities of every new colony are a prison, indicating sin, and a cemetery, indicating death. Hence, A is the best answer. B deals only with the sin aspect, while C merely repeats a phrase from later in the passage. D accounts for the cemetery, but a Puritan prison can hardly be considered institution for redemption. E is merely a literal repetition of the passage.
2. The fact that the story clearly takes place in the 1600's makes A impossible. B, also, is nearly the opposite of the effect Hawthorne is trying to create. There is nothing ironic (C) about the place names used, nor do the names illustrate personification (E). Therefore, D is the only possible answer. Hawthorne is naming specific and real places to make the story seem real to his reader.
3. A personification of Nature, especially as a sympathetic being with compassion for humankind is a Romantic (C) notion.
4. The wild rose (A) suggests the possibility of the "sweet moral lesson" so it cannot be the lesson's object. Likewise, the rose may give comfort to the emerging prisoner (B), but this is not the subject of the lesson. The contrast of the beauty of the rose with the ugliness of the prison door, however, suggest that the theme established at the end of the book, the "sweet moral lesson" will have something to do with beauty and pain or beauty and ugliness.
5. The final reference to "human frailty and sorrow" does not suggest action still to come, thus eliminating (A). Nor does the reader receive any hints regarding the specific conflict (C) or sequence of actions (E). Death (C) is too specific a reading of the general phrase, "frailty and sorrow," but, as the passage begins with the prison and cemetery and ends considering frailty and sorrow (B) is the best choice.
6. As Ann Hutchinson is a figure from early United States history (as is apparent by her having been imprisoned in the same prison described in this passage), B is the only possible choice.
7. A (symbolic logic) and E (Freudian transference) are not literary terms. While B (allegorical archetype) is a literary term, there is nothing archetypal about the rosebush. D (allegorical archetype) is a mere repetition of the question. Thus, C (visual irony) is the correct answer.
8. A (the rosebush growing beside the prison door) suggests the contrast between the ugliness of sin and the beauty of nature; B (the personification of nature) suggests the romantic nature of the story to come. C (the mention of the cemetery and the prison) continues the same contrast as A. E (the allusion to Ann Hutchinson) suggests the idea of nature's compassion for the sinner/criminal. Therefore, only D (the reference to Boston) does not offer any suggestion about the nature of the story to come.

9. The emphasis on death and punishment of crime render A (optimistic) and E (humorous) impossible, while the references to the rosebush eliminate B (pessimistic) and D (gloomy). The contrast of the ugliness of the prison with the beauty of the rosebush, the punishment for crime and the possibility of compassion for the criminal make the passage ambiguous (C).
10. Given the passage's ambiguity, A (it introduces the tone of the novel) is certainly a possibility. The established contrast between punishment and compassion validates B (it suggests the main conflict) and D (it suggests a potential theme to be developed). The passage clearly establishes that the story takes place "some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement" of Boston (E). Therefore, only C (it introduces the central image of the story) is an appropriate choice as the central image (the scarlet letter) has not yet been introduced.
11. A. To see a religious heretic banished ("It might be that an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist, was to be scourged out of the town.")
 B. To see a witch hanged. ("It might be, too, that a witch, like old Mistress Hibbins, the bitter-tempered widow of the magistrate, was to die upon the gallows.")
 C. To see a drunken Indian whipped ("or an idle or vagrant Indian, whom the white man's firewater had made riotous about the streets, was to be driven with stripes into the shadow of the forest")
 D. To see a disobedient child punished ("It might be that ... an undutiful child, whom his parents had given over to the civil authority, was to be corrected at the whipping-post")
 E. (To see a queen imprisoned) is the correct choice.
12. The passage describes the women of the village as "the wearers of petticoat and farthingale." E and C are thereby eliminated. D might be tempting, but the pairing of farthingale with petticoat suggests it is more a garment than an accessory. The additional fact that we are dealing with a plain-dressing Puritan society also helps eliminate D. E is improbable, thus leaving A as the best choice.
13. Each of the choices is essentially silly except for B (The shame of public humiliation was as severe a punishment as a sentence of death could be).
14. Anachronism (A) is the placement of something out of its appropriate time period. Mondegreen (B) is the mishearing or misinterpretation of phrase or expression. Similarly, a malapropism (C) is the incorrect or inappropriate use of a word or phrase. Zeugma (D) is a compact expression in which a single word governs two or more succeeding phrasing, often with divergent meanings. Thus E, litote, the use of a negative to establish the positive, is the correct choice.

15. The comparison is clearly between women of two generations (“...there was a coarser fibre in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding than in their fair descendants”), thus eliminating A, and E. D might be tempting, but the separation between the two groups of women is “series of six or seven generations”, not a separation of distance. The generations, however, begins at this seventeenth-century scene and runs to the nineteenth century (C), thus eliminating B.
16. If we examine the most necessary elements of the sentence, “Old Roger Chillingworth ... had been calm ... kindly ... a pure and upright man... But, as he proceeded, a terrible fascination, a kind of fierce ... necessity, seized the old man within its gripe, and never set him free again until he had done all its bidding,” we see that B (devolution from impartial scientist to obsessed avenger) is the best choice.
17. The simile first compares Chillingworth’s probing to a miner, but then says it is more like a sexton digging a grave. It further emphasizes that the sought-after jewel is buried at the heart of a dead man. Thus, Hawthorne is emphasizing the morbidity of Chillingworth’s search (A).
18. Because of the simile above, the only possible identity of the mine could be B, Chillingworth.
19. The “ghastly fire” gleams from a doorway in the hill, an obvious allusion to Hell (B).
20. This should be a giveaway. The idea of digging along a vein is clearly a reference to mining (E).
21. “Mr. Dimmesdale ... would become vaguely aware that something inimical to his peace had thrust itself into relation with him.” Thus C (He is aware of being the subject of a probe) is the best choice.
22. A does not offer a correct definition of oxymoron. An allegory (C) would take much more than one sentence to establish. A mondegreen (D) relies on the confusion of more than a single word. E, likewise offers an incorrect definition of affective fallacy. Thus B is the correct answer.
23. The passage states that, in his probe, Chillingworth finds, “many precious materials, in the shape of high aspirations for the welfare of his race, warm love of souls, pure sentiments, natural piety, strengthened by thought and study, and illuminated by revelation,” thus validating A as the correct answer.
24. As a straight vocabulary question, this should be fairly easy. D (the word “leech” can mean both a doctor and a parasite) is the correct answer.
25. This question is similar to number 21, the issue of Dimmesdale’s suspicion that something is not quite right. Hence, D (half-realize that Chillingworth is not his true friend) is the best choice.

The Scarlet Letter

ADVANCED PLACEMENT TEACHING UNIT

Study Guide Teacher's Copy

The Custom-House

1. What is the primary purpose for the Custom House introduction?

The Custom House establishes a sense of verisimilitude to the story. By claiming to have found the actual letter and the diary, the author can assert that the main gist of the story is true.

2. What significant change does Hawthorne admit to making in telling the story contained in the diary?

Hawthorne has changed the narrative point of view from the first person of the diaries to third person omniscient.

3. What potential impact will this change have on the story?

If Hawthorne maintained the first person of the diary, he would be limited to Hester's actions, reactions, thoughts, etc. He would not be able to narrate any of the conversations between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, etc. By adopting a third-person-omniscient narrator, Hawthorne can open up the story and examine the hearts and minds of all of the characters. He can also pause in the narrative from time to time to comment on plot or character developments.

Chapter 1

1. What is the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*?

The novel is set in Boston and the surrounding area (Salem, Massachusetts) in the early to mid seventeenth century.

2. Why does Hawthorne begin the story with a reflection about the need for a cemetery and a prison?

Hawthorne begins the story with an acknowledgement of the inevitability of sin and death.

3. What is the significance of the wild rosebush that grows beside the prison door?

The rosebush, being wild, was “planted” by nature and not by humans. This one bit of beauty juxtaposed with the ugliness of the prison door represents the Romantic notion of a Nature that is sympathetic to human frailty and imperfection.

4. Who was Ann Hutchinson?

Ann Hutchinson was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1638 for conducting religious meetings in her home at which “erroneous opinions” were taught. While the New England Puritans held that only the Bible was the source of God’s truth, and that only ordained clergy had the ability to interpret scripture for the people, Hutchinson and her followers believed that each person could communicate directly with God. She was also charged with stepping “beyond the bounds” of what was allowed for women.

5. What does Hawthorne achieve by his reference to “the sainted Ann Hutchinson?”

From the very start of the story, Hawthorne establishes his sympathies with the victims of the early Puritans’ cruel self-righteousness.

Chapter 2

1. On what note does this chapter begin?

The chapter begins amid speculations about the nature of the criminal about to pass through the prison door. The reader is led to believe the criminal could be guilty of any of a number of crimes from extremely heinous to offenses a modern reader would consider quite mild.

2. What is Hawthorne saying about the Puritan women of the New World?

The women in this novel are large and strong (“man like”). They have not yet developed the frailties that have been bred into them in the generations between the time of the story and Hawthorne’s own time.

3. For what sin is Hester Prynne condemned?

Hester Prynne is guilty of adultery.

4. What is the Old Testament punishment for adultery?

Both the man and the woman caught in adultery were to be put to death.

5. What is the public view of Hester’s sin as expressed by the women outside the prison? What do their comments suggest about this society?

Generally, the women feel that Hester’s punishment is too lenient. Some desire death while others assert that Hester should at least be branded with a hot iron. The women’s comments suggest that the society is much more deeply concerned with punishment than with compassion and forgiveness.

6. What is Hester’s punishment?

Hester is to stand on the scaffold as a “spectacle of guilt and shame” for three hours and to wear a scarlet “A” for the rest of her life.

7. What is surprising about the “A” Hester has sewn for herself? What might this indicate?

One would expect a badge like Hester’s “A” would be as small as legally allowed and very plain—certainly nothing the wearer would want to call attention to. On the contrary, Hester has made her “A” large and beautiful, almost gaudy. This might indicate either that Hester does not consider her “sin” to be really wrong, or that she is fiercely independent and strong in the face of her wrongdoing.

8. What is accomplished by Hawthorne’s allusion to the Madonna and Child?

Hawthorne creates an ironic comparison between the Adulteress and her Child and the Virgin and Hers.

9. Considering the common use of physiognomy in pre-twentieth-century literature, what might Hawthorne be suggesting by portraying Hester as extremely beautiful?

Hawthorne is probably suggesting that Hester is a good person.

10. What does the flashback reveal about Hester’s past?

In England, Hester’s childhood was happy but poverty-stricken, and her parents were loving and refined. She married an aged scholar, traveled some in Europe and then came to the New World.

Chapter 3

1. What purpose does the conversation between the townsman and the stranger at the beginning of this chapter serve?

Hawthorne uses the conversation to provide needed exposition about Hester, her missing husband, and the circumstances of her adultery.

2. Why wasn't Hester sentenced to death for her adultery?

The magistrates considered Hester's youth and beauty, plus the fact that her husband might have perished in a shipwreck (thus making her a widow), and passed this more lenient sentence on her.

3. Where has the stranger been? What motion does he make to Hester?

Chillingworth has been a captive among the Indians in the wild. He motions for her not to show any recognition of him by placing his finger against his lips.

4. Who is Dimmesdale? What appeal does he use to convince Hester to reveal the baby's father?

Dimmesdale is the village's young minister. Dimmesdale argues that Hester would be doing the baby's father a kindness by revealing him, for then he would no longer live with hypocrisy and sin.

5. What is Hawthorne foreshadowing with the stranger's prediction that the name of the father will eventually be disclosed?

Hawthorne is foreshadowing that (1) the search for the identity of the father will be a main focus of this book, and (2) this stranger will play a key role in this search.

6. What is ironic about Dimmesdale's reaction to Hester's refusal to name the father of her child?

Rather than pressing her to name the father, he is impressed with what he calls her "wondrous strength and generosity."

7. Explain the allusion in the townsman's telling Chillingworth, "that matter remaineth a riddle; and the Daniel who shall expound it is yet a-wanting."

Daniel was an Old Testament prophet in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. He had the ability to interpret dreams and other cryptic communications from God.

Chapter 4

1. Who does the stranger Hester recognized in the crowd that afternoon turn out to be?

The stranger, the physician, called Roger Chillingworth, turns out to be Hester's missing husband.

2. Why does Hester fear Chillingworth?

Hester fears that Chillingworth may try to poison her baby as revenge for her sin against him.

3. Again, given the use of physiognomy in literature, what is Hawthorne suggesting by Chillingworth's aged, deformed appearance?

Hawthorne is suggesting that Chillingworth is evil.

4. Explain Chillingworth's attitude toward Hester.

Chillingworth takes partial blame for her situation and realizes that he should not have married a young woman and expected her to be faithful.

5. What does Chillingworth intend to do and why?

Chillingworth is intent on knowing the baby's father because he wants to take his revenge on the man who has violated his marriage.

6. What does Chillingworth ask Hester to promise? Why does she agree?

Chillingworth wants Hester to conceal his identity. Hester agrees because he promises not to kill the baby's father or reveal the name to anyone.

7. What is foreshadowed by Chillingworth and Hester's exchange at the end of the chapter?

Chillingworth says he will neither kill nor reveal the father. He further specifies that the promise Hester has made will not harm her soul. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that Chillingworth intends to torment the soul of Hester's lover.

Chapter 5

1. How is Hester's emergence from the prison at the end of her confinement different from her emergence on the day she stood in public humiliation?

The day of the public humiliation, she was supported by her defiance and her desire to turn the humiliation into a triumph. On her second emergence, this resolve is spent, and she is simply aware of her shame.

2. What traditional dichotomy does Hawthorne begin to establish with the location of Hester's cottage?

Hawthorne establishes the town, the forest, and the in-between region occupied by Hester. The town represents civil law and morals. The forest is the realm of Natural Law, and Hester and Pearl exist somewhere in between.

3. Give two reasons why Hester decides to remain instead of moving to a less-restrictive colony.

Hester wishes to remain close to her secret lover. She also feels that remaining in Boston will help purge her soul of the sin.

4. How do the townspeople treat Hester, and how does she react?

Hester is an object of scorn and ridicule: clergymen admonish her, townspeople stare at her, and children mock her. While she feels the pain of insult, Hester never responds or acknowledges the insults.

5. How does Hester's character evolve?

Hester becomes more serious and humble, and spends her free time doing charitable work. She begins to realize that no one is infallible, and she develops "a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts."

6. Describe the difference between Hester's clothing and her child's.

Hester's garments are plain and coarse, but her daughter's clothes are ornate.

7. What point is Hawthorne making about an individual's ability to separate oneself from one's wrongdoings?

A sin, once committed, can never be undone.

8. Where do Hawthorne's sympathies lie? How do you know?

Hawthorne's sympathies lie clearly with Hester. She is clearly emerging as the main character of the story. Hawthorne emphasizes the ambiguity of Hester's "sin" of love with the father of her child and the "sin" of a loveless marriage to Chillingworth, so that the reader has to be slow to condemn her. Hawthorne allows Hester to prosper in her adversity.

Chapter 6

1. What, according to the narrator, is ironic about Pearl's existence?

It is ironic that something so lovely could result from the ugliness of the sin.

2. What is the significance of Pearl's name?

The Gospel of Matthew (chapter 13 verses 45-46) tells the parable of a wealthy merchant who found a "pearl of great price" hidden in a field. He sold everything he owned and bought the field so that he could possess the pearl. Pearl is Hester's "pearl of great price" in that Hester has sacrificed everything for her.

3. What is significant about Pearl's temperament?

Pearl is energetic and willful, and apparently devoid of all human compassion. This could be interpreted to indicate that she is evil, or it could simply emphasize the Romantic notion that she has been born outside of the realm of human law, in the realm of natural law.

4. Explain the ambiguity concerning Pearl's background.

Townspeople believe that Pearl is the incarnation of a demon from hell, but Hester thinks that she is the physical embodiment of her sin.

5. Hester believes that, while society punishes her for sinning, God has a different reaction. How does Hester explain Pearl's existence?

Hester believes that Pearl is both a punishment—the physical incarnation of the scarlet letter—and a gift from God. Hester's sin has cut her off from all human society, and it is only through Pearl that she maintains any contact with her fellow humans.

Chapter 7

1. How sincerely concerned are the townspeople of Salem for the souls of Hester and Pearl?

Clearly the good people of Salem Village simply want to take Pearl away from her mother, as they have determined justification for doing so whether the child is a Demon-child or not.

2. Compare the Governor's garden with gardens in Old England. What is significant about the difference?

Gardens in Old England were orderly and ornamental. The Governor's is mostly a vegetable—or kitchen—garden. Beside a few roses and apple trees, the most ornamental plants are pumpkins. Hawthorne suggests that living conditions were easier in Old England for plant life as for human life and the New World is a harsh environment for both plants and people.

3. How is Pearl dressed, and what is her dress compared to?

Pearl is dressed in a scarlet dress with elaborate gold embroidery. She is described as “the scarlet letter endowed with life.”

4. Where else have we seen a rose bush in this novel?

In the first chapter, the reader is shown a rose bush that grows beside the prison door and allegedly sprang from the footsteps of Ann Hutchinson.

5. What was its significance then?

- *If something of beauty could spring up from the footsteps of a “criminal/sinner,” perhaps her “sin” wasn’t necessarily “wrong.”*
- *Nature (the rosebush) is sympathetic to those who are true to their own consciences (Ann Hutchinson and her “heretical” teachings).*
- *Human law, represented by the prison door, and Natural law, represented by the rosebush, often contradict each other.*

6. Does it maintain the same significance here?

It could, except now the wrongdoer is Hester, not Ann Hutchinson.

Chapter 8

1. Explain the Puritan attitude toward luxury and how Governor Bellingham and the Reverend John Wilson responded to it.

The New England Puritans eschewed luxuries as frivolous and distractions from the essential spiritual aspects of life. There was something righteous to be gained by not being too comfortable. Wearing fashionable clothing, jewelry, cosmetics were all evidence of vanity, the emphasis on the physical rather than the spiritual.

Governor Bellingham and Reverend Wilson, however, had strong roots in the Church of England, which allowed its members to enjoy comfortable lives. Therefore the Governor's mansion is a house of relative luxury, and the Reverend Wilson is noted as a frequent visitor.

2. How do the magistrates react to Pearl and why?

The magistrates are shocked because Hester seems to be raising Pearl in defiance of proper behavior.

3. How does Hester behave towards the magistrates and why?

Hester is determined to keep Pearl, and passionately claims that she will keep her child or die. Pearl is her only link to love and humanity.

4. Why does Hester feel that Arthur Dimmesdale should speak on her behalf?

Expressly the reason is that Dimmesdale is Hester's pastor and knows her and her fitness as a mother better than anyone. However, many readers will begin to suspect that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father, and he owes it to Hester to help her keep the child as she has never disclosed his identity.

5. Why would Hawthorne have Pearl perform such an uncharacteristically tender action?

This is another clue that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father. She is expressing an "instinctive" or "natural" bond that exists between her and the minister. Similarly, Pearl will several times in the book be friendly toward Dimmesdale when he is close to revealing his identity as Hester's lover, and cold toward him when he hides the truth.

6. What does Chillingworth note about Dimmesdale's defense of Hester?

He notes that Dimmesdale speaks with an uncommon passion.

7. Describe how Dimmesdale has changed since Hester's public punishment.

Dimmesdale's health appears to be failing because he seems weak and overly thin. His face also wears a pained and haunted expression.

8. Describe how Chillingworth has changed over the last few years.

Chillingworth's complexion is darker and more ugly.

9. What would physiognomy suggest about Dimmesdale and Chillingworth?

Dimmesdale is troubled in his soul and Chillingworth has grown more evil.

10. Why would Hawthorne want to include Mistress Hibbins as a minor character in this book?

Using Anne Hibbins as a character helps support the historical "truth" of the novel. As Hibbins was the governor's sister and hanged as a witch, her presence in the book indicates that no family is exempt from sin. Historically, Ann Hibbins was more likely insane than evil, so Hawthorne could be pointing out the tragic ridiculousness of some of the Puritans' superstitious severity.

Chapter 9

1. Why doesn't Chillingworth assert his rights as Hester's husband?

He does not want to share the shame and ignominy of a man married to an adulteress.

2. A difference of opinion arises over the cause of Dimmesdale's failing health. Compare the townspeople's opinion to Dimmesdale's.

The townspeople feel that Dimmesdale is too earnest and good; his study, vigils, and fasting have weakened him. They believe that his death would indicate that the world is not worthy of him. Dimmesdale, however, feels that his death would be proof of his unworthiness to serve God on earth.

3. Why does Dimmesdale reject Chillingworth's offer of help? What finally persuades him to accept the offer?

Dimmesdale believes that, if it is God's will for him to die, he is willing to die. He accepts the help because the elder ministers and deacons feel that God sent Chillingworth to save him.

4. Explain the ambiguity of the chapter's title, "The Leech."

At this time, doctors were called leeches because they used leeches to suck blood from the patient and rid the body of toxins. Chillingworth has become a parasite; he will feed on Dimmesdale's emotional suffering.

5. The passage sets up an interesting contrast between two types of men. What is this contrast, and how is it likely to shape the future of the novel?

Chillingworth is a man of science. Dimmesdale is a man of faith. Chillingworth is ostensibly trying to discern and cure Dimmesdale's ailment while Dimmesdale is all too willing to succumb. As a man of science, nothing is beyond Chillingworth's scope of observation and questioning. Dimmesdale has been trained not to question but merely to accept.

6. Describe Chillingworth's method for treating illness.

Chillingworth acts more like a confessor or psychologist than a medical doctor in that he does not look for a physical reason for Dimmesdale's decline as much as he begins to probe the young minister's mind, heart, and soul in an apparent attempt to ferret out a moral or psychological cause.

7. Describe the relationship between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth.

An intellectual intimacy develops between the men as they spend a great deal of time discussing ideas. As Chillingworth probes Dimmesdale's heart, Dimmesdale is intellectually drawn to Chillingworth's liberal views.

8. Some people in the community feel that God has sent Chillingworth to heal their minister, but other people have a different view. Explain the second view about Chillingworth.

When Chillingworth first comes to the settlement, his expression is "calm, meditative, [and] scholar-like." In time, his appearance becomes more ugly and evil looking. People begin to feel that Chillingworth is an agent of Satan sent to test the minister.

9. How do the people explain "the gloom and terror in the depths of the poor minister's eyes"?

The people believe that Chillingworth is the devil's agent, sent to enter Dimmesdale's soul through close friendship. Dimmesdale is experiencing great agony as he struggles against the devil, and the people are not overly confident of the minister's victory.

10. What is suggested by the names Chillingworth and Dimmesdale?

"Chillingworth" suggests coldness – cold heart, calculating, manipulative, and the kind of chill one gets up one's spine in the presence of a "creepy" person. Dimmesdale suggests lack of wit or ability to recognize the truth of the situation.

Chapter 10

1. What is suspicious about Dimmesdale's position in his debate with Chillingworth about sin?

Dimmesdale passionately defends sinners who do not confess their sins, which would be the exact opposite of the stand a minister should defend..

2. How do the black flowers initiate a discussion on hidden sins?

Chillingworth claims that the black flowers grew out of the heart of a man who had died with a hidden sin.

3. How does Dimmesdale's rationale for not confessing a hidden sin support the doctrine of salvation by works rather than salvation by faith?

Dimmesdale points out that some people, in order to do God's work, hide their sin. If people knew of the sin, they would not let the sinner perform good works. Thus, if a sinner cannot be saved by his faith (lack of sin), then it is only his works that can save him.

4. What metaphors does Hawthorne establish for Chillingworth's probe? How do they further define Chillingworth's character?

First Hawthorne compares Chillingworth's probe to a miner's digging for precious metal, and then he refines it to a sexton digging a grave. Both emphasize the digging into deep, hidden materials. The mine metaphor suggests that there is something specific that Chillingworth is looking for. The sexton metaphor emphasizes the morbidity of the search and the depravity of Chillingworth's character.

5. What does Chillingworth mean when he mutters, "A strange sympathy betwixt soul and body! Were it only for the art's sake, I must search this matter to the bottom!"?

Chillingworth suspects that Dimmesdale's illness is not physical but spiritual. The problem intrigues him, and despite his ulterior motive, is worth investigating.

6. What does Chillingworth do while Dimmesdale sleeps, and what does his action symbolize? Describe Chillingworth's reaction and what his response reveals about his character.

Chillingworth looks under Dimmesdale's vestment that keeps Dimmesdale's chest hidden. Symbolically, he looks into Dimmesdale's heart, and sees Dimmesdale's sin, which is not specifically revealed. Chillingworth's reaction is of demonic ecstasy. By this intrusion into Dimmesdale's heart, against Dimmesdale's will, Chillingworth has given himself over to evil. That he takes pleasure from knowing of another's sin makes him more sinful.

7. What do you suppose is the specific secret that Chillingworth discovers?

It is fairly clear that somehow Chillingworth has discovered that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father.

Chapter 11

1. Explain the statement, “He [Chillingworth] became, thenceforth, not a spectator only, but a chief actor, in the poor minister’s interior world.”

Chillingworth is aware of Dimmesdale’s inner world—his sins and thoughts. Chillingworth uses his knowledge to make remarks that arouse pain, guilt, and fear within Dimmesdale. In short, rather than merely probing Dimmesdale, he now becomes Dimmesdale’s tormentor.

2. What is ironic about Dimmesdale’s incredible success as a minister?

Hawthorne makes it clear that it is Dimmesdale’s own sin that makes him compassionate to human frailty. His sermons are so powerful because they speak from a heart that is itself full of guilt and pain.

3. Why are Dimmesdale’s public assertions of guilt ironic?

The more sinful Dimmesdale claims to be, the more holy he appears. As he tries to convince others of his sinfulness, they are convinced only of his Godliness. He is aware of the effect he is having, which makes him feel like a hypocrite.

4. Explain the ways that Dimmesdale tortures himself.

Dimmesdale beats himself with a bloody scourge, fasts until he is weak, and keeps vigils at night in which he imagines ghostly horrors. His mental focus is on his sinfulness, but he does not confess his sin.

5. Comparing Dimmesdale’s current struggle with his sin with Hawthorne’s earlier treatment of Hester and her sin, what is Hawthorne suggesting about the effects of sin?

Hidden sin torments and destroys both physically and emotionally. Confessed or disclosed sin can actually make the sinner stronger.

6. What is ironic about Hawthorne’s portrayal of the Puritan society, in terms of this developing theme?

By their treatment of known/confessed sinners (Hester), it is clear that they do not encourage admission of guilt. As sin is a part of the human condition, one can only assume that each of the Puritans is guilty, yet unable to express (and therefore overcome) that guilt.

Chapter 12

1. How is the episode of Dimmesdale's midnight vigil on the scaffold structurally significant?

The scaffold is a fairly obvious symbol of the public acknowledgement of sin. This is the second of three scaffold scenes, the first being Hester's humiliation in Chapter 2. A third scaffold scene in Chapter 23 will bring the Hester-Dimmesdale-Chillingworth triangle to a close.

2. What is the significance of Pearl's challenge to Dimmesdale?

Certainly Pearl has no firsthand memory of the time she and her mother mounted the scaffold and faced public humiliation for the same sin of which Dimmesdale is guilty, but she identifies for Dimmesdale the crux of his problem: he must publicly acknowledge his sin just as Hester did. He must stand on the scaffold with his lover and child in the daylight before crowds of people.

3. Considering the role of Nature in Anti-Transcendental literature, what is the significance of the meteor event?

The Transcendentalists saw Nature as sympathetic to the human condition (the rosebush beside the prison door). The Anti-Transcendentalists were more ambivalent. On the one hand, there is the rosebush beside the prison door. On the other hand, there is Pearl, unfettered by human values and rules, who is a constant reminder to Hester of her sin and guilt. The "A" formed by the lightning is likewise ambiguous. It might be a simple acknowledgement of Dimmesdale's share of the guilt – expressed metaphysically since he will not express it literally. It could be a condemnation – if not of his sin, then of his failure to acknowledge it. It probably does not mean "angel" for the death of Governor Winthrop.

4. Although Governor Winthrop is merely mentioned in the book, why would Hawthorne choose this night as the night Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl?

Since the historical date of Winthrop's death is known, the event helps to establish the historical context of the novel. It also allows Hawthorne to suggest a second interpretation for the celestial event, and thus maintain the event's ambiguity.

5. How does Dimmesdale feel as he holds Pearl's hand and why?

He feels a rush of new life because he is doing what he believes is right.

6. Why does Pearl pull away from Dimmesdale?

Pearl pulls away because Dimmesdale refuses to take her hand there at noontide.

7. What effect does Dimmesdale's vigil have on his career?

Dimmesdale preaches his most powerful sermon and brings divine grace to many people.

Chapter 13

1. What is significant about Hester's position in the community now that years have passed?

After years of good works and humble living, Hester has begun to earn the respect—if not the affection—of many of the townspeople. They refer to her as “our Hester,” and claim that perhaps her scarlet A stands for “able.” Newcomers to the town know nothing of Hester's past or the true significance of the letter. This indicates that the stigma of confessed sin can indeed fade while the torment of hidden sin grows more severe.

2. Compare the feelings of the general public to those of the community leaders regarding Hester Prynne. Explain why the groups view her differently.

The public willingly forgives Hester and welcomes her into the community, but the leaders are much slower at forgiving her sin. Hester's seemingly humble behavior softens the hearts of her neighbors. Forgiving Hester also inflates the town's pride because the people feel benevolent from their generous acquittal. The leaders, however, are hard of heart and slow to forgive. They illustrate, for Hawthorne, the damage that can be done when a spiritual code is reduced to mere laws.

3. What social and philosophical changes is Hawthorne describing in this chapter?

By describing Hester's independence of thought and her reaction to the laws of her community and how they have treated her, Hawthorne is exploring the essential premise of Transcendentalism, the perfection of the self by a reliance on the individual conscience.

4. Explain the statement: “It is remarkable, that persons who speculate the most boldly often conform with the most perfect quietude to the external regulations of society. The thought suffices them....”

Radical thinkers have no need to reveal their thoughts through actions, and easily conform to society's regulations.

5. Compare the initial intent behind the scarlet letter to the actual effect on Hester.

The letter is meant to break Hester's spirit through shame, but, instead, she becomes more independent.

6. What does Hester resolve to do and why?

Hester is going to talk with Chillingworth in an attempt to rescue Dimmesdale from the doctor's vengeful scheme. She feels that she is responsible for Dimmesdale's near lunacy because she has withheld Chillingworth's identity from Dimmesdale.

7. What is Hawthorne's point comparing Hester's and Dimmesdale's reactions to their sin?

Hawthorne's point is that, since sin is an inescapable part of the human condition, it is better to acknowledge it and move on than suppress or repress it and become stunted.

8. What image is Hawthorne evoking with Chillingworth, old, one shoulder higher than the other, digging up roots and collecting leaves, etc. in the forest?

Chillingworth looks like the stereotypical witch.

Chapter 14

1. Notice that Chillingworth is called a “leech” in the chapters in which he interacts with Dimmesdale, but a “physician” in this interaction with Hester. Considering the definition of “leech,” what do you suppose is Hawthorne’s point in using these two designations?

Hester is beyond Chillingworth’s touch. His medical/psychological knowledge is no threat to her, so he is a physician. To Dimmesdale, however, he is the parasite, draining the minister of his emotional and spiritual life.

2. What is Hester’s response to the announcement that the Council had debated allowing her to remove her scarlet letter?

Hester responds that only Heaven can remove the scarlet letter. Once the sin has been committed, the sinner cannot be restored to an “innocent” state.

3. Look again at what you found out about the Anti-Transcendentalists. Why isn’t forgiveness an option?

Sin is an inescapable fact. Just as Hester cannot return to a time before Pearl existed, she cannot return to a sin-free state. Hester and Chillingworth’s relationship can never be restored. Therefore “forgiveness” becomes a relatively meaningless concept.

4. How is the doctrine of predestination reflected in this conversation between Hester and Chillingworth?

Chillingworth indicates that neither he nor Hester had any choice in their actions, but they are simply acting out their fates.

5. Why does Chillingworth believe he has a double reason for punishing Dimmesdale?

Chillingworth blames Dimmesdale for seducing Hester and for transforming him into a cruel person.

6. Compare Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth in terms of their responses to the initial sin.

Hester has acknowledged her sin and has gone beyond the guilt and humiliation to become a strong, independent person. Dimmesdale has become weak and ill, emotionally and psychologically paralyzed by his unconfessed guilt. He has also become susceptible to manipulation by evil men like Chillingworth. Chillingworth, relishing the role of “victim” has allowed his inability to forgive to consume him, making him an obsessed, inhuman creature.

7. What pleas of Hester’s arouse sympathy and admiration in Chillingworth?

Hester reminds Chillingworth that he should have avenged himself on her, too, and not just Dimmesdale. She also says that she will reveal his identity, and Chillingworth respects her courage. She wants him to forgive so that he can be human again.

8. What does Hester ask of Chillingworth? What is his response?

Hester wants Chillingworth to forgive them and forget his revenge. Chillingworth claims that he does not have the power; he is a victim of fate. He regrets that Hester’s good nature was wasted.

Chapter 15

1. What is Hester coming to realize is the true sin she has committed? Why would Hawthorne consider this a worse sin than her sin with Dimmesdale?

Hester's sin is actually in marrying a man she did not love. When she did this, she precluded the possibility of (legitimately) falling in love.

Hester's sin with Dimmesdale violated human law (the marriage contract) not Natural law (love). In her marriage to Chillingworth, she violated her heart and betrayed her true self.

2. What does Hester realize about her “repentance”?

Hester realizes that she does not repent of (feel remorse for) the “sin” of adultery for which she is being punished. She repents of the “sin” of having married Chillingworth in the first place.

3. Why does Hester hate Chillingworth?

Hester realizes that Chillingworth betrayed her by allowing her to marry him. Whereas she once thought her marriage was happy, she now realizes that she was a mere prisoner of convention and convenience.

4. Hester refuses to answer Pearl's question about the meaning of the “A.” Why does Hester not confide in Pearl?

The scarlet A has become a truly ambiguous symbol, and Hester herself would probably be unable to explain it. It is, on the one hand, a punishment for a sin,” yet there are times when Hester does not believe that her relationship with Dimmesdale was truly a sin. At other times, however, it burns into her breast and it is indeed a mark of shame. The townspeople forget the original meaning of the letter and even discuss allowing Hester to remove it, yet Hester refuses to remove it, saying that the stain of the sin will always remain. That Hester has violated human law is clear—and the scarlet letter—is the appointed punishment for that. It is less clear, however, whether Hester has violated natural law, and whether or not the scarlet letter is a necessary part of her redemption.

5. Why does Hawthorne portray Pearl as such a wild child?

Pearl illustrates the Romantic notion of the true child of Nature, unfettered by human rules and expectations. She is pure impulse.

6. How have Hester's conversations with Chillingworth and Pearl changed her attitude toward herself and her sin?

Hester now considers herself more a sinner than she did before – not that she is more aware of her adultery, for she now realizes that she never really considered that a sin – but that she sinned by betraying her heart and her inner self when she married Chillingworth.

Chapter 16

1. Explain the significance of the sunlight imagery.

The sunlight, in that it will shine on Pearl, but not Hester, somehow indicates Nature's disapproval of Hester. At this point it seems most likely that the sunlight "condemns" Hester for her sin, but it will become apparent in Chapter 18 that Nature condemns Hester for her failure to free herself of the Puritan moral code and fully live by the dictates of her conscience

2. When Hester determines to warn Dimmesdale about Chillingworth, why does the meeting take place in the forest?

In the town, that represents human law and morality, Dimmesdale and Hester are sinners. The forest, however, represents natural law and it is here that Hester and Dimmesdale can rightfully express their love for one another..

3. Explain the probable allusion in the line "the minister and she would need the whole wide world to breathe in."

John Milton's Paradise Lost, which tells the story of Adam and Eve's sin and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, ends with the hopeful lines, "some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon. The world was all before them, where to choose their place of rest ..." Like Adam and Eve, Hester and Dimmesdale are about to plan their leaving the relative security of their "home" to try to find their way in the "outside world."

4. What positive significance does the forest begin to take on?

The woods serve as an archetype for the natural world, unencroached upon by human law and reason. It is presumably in the woods where Hester and Dimmesdale sinned, and it is in the woods where they will plan their escape from the confines of the Puritan society. It is also in the woods that Dimmesdale and Chillingworth had their long talks, in which Dimmesdale entertained philosophical and scientific concepts previously completely foreign to him.

5. What negative significance does the forest begin to assume?

Just as the forest is unencroached upon by human reason and law, so too is there no moral guidance. The woods are dark and frightening, the alleged home of the feared "black man" (a mythic combination of the Native American and the Puritan notion of Satan). Hawthorne describes Hester's frame of mind—having relied for so long on her own conscience for guidance—as a "moral wilderness."

6. In what way does Hester acknowledge her sin to Pearl?

Hester says that she met the Black Man, and the scarlet letter is his mark.

Chapter 17

1. How is Hawthorne advancing his theme of the difference between revealed and secret sin?

Hester's scarlet letter has freed her to live her life – such as it is. Dimmesdale is imprisoned by the fear of his sin's being disclosed.

2. Explain the distinction Dimmesdale makes between penance and penitence.

To Dimmesdale, penance is the act, the good work that balances out or cancels the bad work of the sin. Yet Dimmesdale does not seem to see the possibility of redemption in mere penance. Penitence is the state of being sorry for the sin. Surely Dimmesdale has experienced and expressed remorse for his sin, but he seems to see public confession as an essential part of true repentance. Many Christian denominations do teach that there can be no forgiveness for unconfessed sins, though many of these denominations disagree on to whom the sinner must confess—to a priest, to the congregation in general, to God directly. Dimmesdale seems to believe that the confession must be public in order to be valid.

3. What do we learn is the emotional connection between Hester and Dimmesdale? Why is this significant to the developing theme of the book?

Hester has to admit that she still actually loves Dimmesdale. Dimmesdale will eventually realize that even though they betrayed the human marriage laws, they never betrayed their hearts.

4. Do you believe Hester is to blame for Dimmesdale's suffering during the past seven years? Why or why not?

Answers will vary, but it is hopefully pretty clear that Hawthorne would find Dimmesdale fully responsible for his own inability to confess. If Dimmesdale were to confess, Chillingworth would have no power over him, and the nature of Chillingworth's relationship with Hester would be irrelevant.

5. What theme about the nature of sin finally begins to emerge in Hester and Dimmesdale's conversation?

Marriage is a human institution, and that is what Hester and Dimmesdale violated. They did not violate what Dimmesdale calls "the sanctity of a human heart," indicating that love transcends human attempts to legalize and moralize it. Hester agrees when she answers that their "sin" had a "consecration of its own."

6. Here is a key question for Hawthorne and the Anti-Transcendentalists: can a “polluted soul” do good for others?

One would have to conclude that Hawthorne would say that it could, as Hester has been of great service to the less unfortunate. Dimmesdale too has “enjoyed” remarkable effectiveness as a pastor.

However, a deeper question might actually be: what constitutes a “polluted soul”? Are Hester’s and Dimmesdale’s souls “polluted” because of their sin? Is (possibly) Hester’s soul redeemed because of her public acknowledgement and punishment? Is it Dimmesdale’s failure to confess that has actually “polluted” his soul?

7. Who are the heartless people with laws of iron to whom Hester refers?

The New England Puritans.

8. This chapter ends on an optimistic note. What is the source of the optimism?

Hester and Dimmesdale have been living under the enormous weight of their sin for seven years. Now that there is the possibility of escape from Salem, they may be able to put their “guilt” behind them and build new lives. Dimmesdale especially has been living under the specter of hidden sin and is now feeling the exuberance of having the sin made public.

Chapter 18

1. What contrast does the narrator point out between Hester and Dimmesdale's ability to leave town?

Hester is a free thinking social outlaw. Her suffering helps to prepare and strengthen her for a new life. Dimmesdale is constricted by his Puritan conformity; he is weakened by his desire to not sin and he is not prepared for new freedom.

2. Why does Dimmesdale decide to flee with Hester?

Dimmesdale feels that he is "irrevocably doomed" and should take "the solace allowed to the condemned culprit." He also hopes that perhaps, this is the path to a better life. Dimmesdale realizes that he can no longer live without Hester's companionship.

3. What is significant about the title of this chapter?

In Chapter 16, the sun would not shine on Hester, possibly indicating Nature's disapproval of her or her sin. In this Chapter, the sun does shine upon her and she regains her beauty when she and Dimmesdale begin to confess their love, and she takes off the scarlet letter, tossing it aside.

4. How does Hawthorne reinforce his idea that nature is sympathetic with the union of Hester and Dimmesdale?

Pearl is welcomed by the forest, which "recognized a kindred wildness in the human child." The forest creatures are friendly to Pearl, to the point of obvious exaggeration.

5. Why would children dislike Dimmesdale?

As the Romantics and Transcendentalists would both claim that children are less corrupted by human values, and therefore are closer to Natural law and truth, children would have an intuitive sense that Dimmesdale is being untrue to his nature. This would cause them to distrust, and draw away from, him.

Chapter 19

1. Beyond Hester's explanation, why won't Pearl come to Hester without the scarlet letter?

On an obvious/literal level, Pearl may simply not recognize her mother without the badge – as a child might not recognize a parent without his or her glasses. Also, Pearl is still the living reminder of Hester's sin, and Hester is not “complete” without the letter.

2. What is significant about the fact that Pearl will not bring her the scarlet letter, but makes her pick it up for herself?

The shame is not Pearl's to give, it is Hester's to acknowledge.

3. Why won't Pearl show any affection to Dimmesdale? Why does she want him to walk with them hand-in-hand in the marketplace?

She will not acknowledge him until he publicly acknowledges them. Just like asking him to stand with them on the scaffold at noon, this is an invitation for Dimmesdale to publicly acknowledge his sin and the “family” it has created.

4. This chapter begins on the same optimistic note that ends the previous chapter. On what kind of note does the chapter end? Why?

Rather gloomy – Pearl does not accept Dimmesdale's affection, and the forest is left to aloneness and darkness. This probably foreshadows an unfortunate turn of events.

Chapter 20

1. What would account for Dimmesdale's sudden change?

Coming so close to liberating himself from the burden of his own unconfessed sin begins to open up other repressed aspects of his personality.

2. In terms of Hawthorne's theme contrasting hidden sin versus revealed sin, how can you explain Dimmesdale's change in this chapter?

Concealed sin is a prison from which one can only be liberated by confession. Dimmesdale has suffered for seven years under his cloak of secrecy while Hester has grown stronger. Having decided to confess and liberate himself – from his own conscience as well as Chillingworth's torment – he is becoming a “free” man.

3. Why is the chapter called “The Minister in a Maze”?

Answers will vary, but the metaphor of Hester and Dimmesdale's situation as a “moral maze” has been brought up a few times now. There is no “right” way to go. There seems to be no way out. They can only find their way out by trial and error.

Chapter 21

1. Compare these first-generation New Englanders with their recent English ancestors and with their future New England descendents.

The English Puritans, while eschewing most festivities as frivolous, were still steeped in centuries of festivals and feast days. Also, since their English society was composed of a number of religious sects and denominations, even if they themselves did not participate in certain festivities, still they were witness to them.

This first generation of New England Puritan is more strict than their English ancestors, but not as strict and somber as their descendents were soon to become.

2. What distressing news does Hester receive from the ship captain?

Chillingworth has booked passage on the same ship with Hester and Dimmesdale.

3. In addition to providing more information, what other purpose does this chapter serve?

The chapter adds suspense to the plot, especially when the captain informs Hester that Chillingworth will be aboard ship.

Chapter 22

1. What is Hawthorne's point about the governors' ability to govern? Does he seem to find fault with them? Why or why not?

Hawthorne seems to indicate that while these men might not have been gifted leaders, they were good men, motivated by "proper" intentions. He does not seem to fault them, in fact saying that they were not "corrupt, selfish, or lazy."

2. What is the source of Dimmesdale's apparent new strength?

As in chapter 20, Dimmesdale is feeling the liberating and invigorating effect of coming out from under his sin.

3. What does Pearl want from Dimmesdale?

Pearl wants Dimmesdale to accept her publicly.

4. Explain the remarks, "The sainted minister in the church! The woman of the scarlet letter in the market-place!"

These statements portray the social contrast between two sinners of equal offense, and highlight the irony of the minister's position.

5. What is Mistress Hibbins saying about the people of Salem Village?

They are all unconfessed sinners. Sin is a universal human condition. (Remember in Chapter 1 how it is established that the first two areas located in a new colony are the places for the jail (sin) and the cemetery (death)).

6. What clues has Hawthorne offered his reader to prepare him or her for the revelation of the scarlet letter on his chest?

- Dimmesdale's action of placing his hand over his heart;
- Chillingworth's opening Dimmesdale's shirt and rejoicing at what he saw there (Chapter 10);
- the nighttime scene (Chapter 12) when Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl;
- Pearl's insistence that Dimmesdale stand with them on the scaffold at noon;
- everyone's assurance that, even if Dimmesdale did not confess his sin, it would somehow be made public.

Chapter 23

1. Many critics believe the novel is structured around the three scaffold scenes: the ones in Chapters 2 and 12, and this one. Explain how each fits into the typical plot scheme of conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion.

The first scaffold scene offers some important exposition: what is the crime and who is the criminal? It also introduces a main conflict of the book: who is the father of the baby, and will Hester ever reveal his identity?

The second scaffold scene is a climactic moment in that the reader now knows with certainty who the father is. A new conflict is now introduced: will Dimmesdale reveal his sin and end his suffering, or will the suffering (and Chillingworth's torture) continue?

This final scaffold scene is the ultimate climax of the book. The sin is revealed. Dimmesdale's suffering is over (he dies). Chillingworth's torment is over. The novel now enters the falling action and resolution.

2. Why does Dimmesdale stand "on the very proudest eminence of superiority" before the crowd?

Dimmesdale's intellect, eloquence, and pure reputation has earned him the respect of all people; they look upon him with awe.

3. What does Chillingworth mean when he says, "There was no one place...where thou couldst have escaped me—save on this very scaffold!"

Chillingworth knows that, once Dimmesdale has confessed his sin, he will no longer be susceptible to the doctor's torture.

4. In what way is Dimmesdale's sin worse than Hester's? Of Hester, Chillingworth, and Dimmesdale, whose sin is the worst? Why?

He has added hypocrisy (dishonesty) to his initial sin of adultery.

Answers will vary, but demand an explanation, not just an opinion.

Hester's may be considered the worst in that she originally entered a loveless marriage and that is what allowed all of the subsequent sins to occur. She also did not warn Dimmesdale (the man she claims to love) sooner of Chillingworth's true identity.

Dimmesdale, of course, adds years of hypocrisy to his initial sin, and contributes to Hester's punishment by making her bear it alone.

Chillingworth admits that he was wrong to marry a woman he knew did not – and could not – love him. He is also not at all concerned with "righting" a wrong, he simply wants revenge.

5. What accounts for the change in Pearl?

All along she has demanded Dimmesdale's public acknowledgement of his relationship to her and her mother. This essential injustice (that her mother was punished for a sin while Dimmesdale apparently escaped punishment), and Dimmesdale's hypocrisy – his failure to be true to himself – were what motivated her wildness and apparent lack of compassion.

Chapter 24

1. What theories are given about the scarlet letter imprinted in the minister's flesh?

The theories include that the mark is the result of Dimmesdale's self-torture; the mark is a result of Chillingworth's poisonous drugs; and that it is the effect of remorse, "gnawing from the inmost heart."

2. Why does Hawthorne leave the origin of Dimmesdale's mark ambiguous?

It is ultimately more fulfilling for the origin of the mark to be left open to interpretation. Is it a physiological phenomenon? Spiritual? Emotional? Psychological? Any combination of the above?

3. What happens to Chillingworth? What does he give Pearl?

Chillingworth quickly and inexplicably loses his vitality and dies. He leaves Pearl all of his property in England and America.

4. What becomes of Pearl?

Pearl inherits Chillingworth's fortune. Hester takes her to England. There, Pearl marries, has a child, and always remembers her mother with fine gifts.

5. Why do you suppose Hester returns to Salem? What might be Hawthorne's point about sin, repentance, and redemption?

Salem is where Dimmesdale is buried. Having Hester return could simply be an act of love. Having her resume wearing the scarlet letter again indicates that no amount of repentance and penance can ever truly eradicate the guilt of sin.

6. Why would Hawthorne allow the story to end with Hester and Dimmesdale being remembered so ignominiously?

This emphasizes the possible theme that one cannot ever truly separate oneself from one's sin. Redemption, if at all possible, is not of this world.

The Scarlet Letter

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The Custom-House

1. What is the primary purpose for the Custom House introduction?
2. What significant change does Hawthorne admit to making in telling the story contained in the diary?
3. What potential impact will this change have on the story?

Chapter 1

1. What is the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*?
2. Why does Hawthorne begin the story with a reflection about the need for a cemetery and a prison?
3. What is the significance of the wild rosebush that grows beside the prison door?
4. Who was Ann Hutchinson?
5. What does Hawthorne achieve by his reference to “the sainted Ann Hutchinson?”

Chapter 2

1. On what note does this chapter begin?
2. What is Hawthorne saying about the Puritan women of the New World?
3. For what sin is Hester Prynne condemned?
4. What is the Old Testament punishment for adultery?
5. What is the public view of Hester's sin as expressed by the women outside the prison?
What do their comments suggest about this society?
6. What is Hester's punishment?

7. What is surprising about the “A” Hester has sewn for herself? What might this indicate?
8. What is accomplished by Hawthorne’s allusion to the Madonna and Child?
9. Considering the common use of physiognomy in pre-twentieth-century literature, what might Hawthorne be suggesting by portraying Hester as extremely beautiful?
10. What does the flashback reveal about Hester’s past?

Chapter 3

1. What purpose does the conversation between the townsman and the stranger at the beginning of this chapter serve?
2. Why wasn't Hester sentenced to death for her adultery?
3. Where has the stranger been? What motion does he make to Hester?
4. Who is Dimmesdale? What appeal does he use to convince Hester to reveal the baby's father?
5. What is Hawthorne foreshadowing with the stranger's prediction that the name of the father will eventually be disclosed?
6. What is ironic about Dimmesdale's reaction to Hester's refusal to name the father of her child?
7. Explain the allusion in the townsman's telling Chillingworth, "that matter remaineth a riddle; and the Daniel who shall expound it is yet a-wanting."

Chapter 4

1. Who does the stranger Hester recognized in the crowd that afternoon turn out to be?
2. Why does Hester fear Chillingworth?
3. Again, given the use of physiognomy in literature, what is Hawthorne suggesting by Chillingworth's aged, deformed appearance?
4. Explain Chillingworth's attitude toward Hester.
5. What does Chillingworth intend to do and why?
6. What does Chillingworth ask Hester to promise? Why does she agree?
7. What is foreshadowed by Chillingworth and Hester's exchange at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 5

1. How is Hester's emergence from the prison at the end of her confinement different from her emergence on the day she stood in public humiliation?
2. What traditional dichotomy does Hawthorne begin to establish with the location of Hester's cottage?
3. Give two reasons why Hester decides to remain instead of moving to a less-restrictive colony.
4. How do the townspeople treat Hester, and how does she react?
5. How does Hester's character evolve?
6. Describe the difference between Hester's clothing and her child's.
7. What point is Hawthorne making about an individual's ability to separate oneself from one's wrongdoings?
8. Where do Hawthorne's sympathies lie? How do you know?

Chapter 6

1. What, according to the narrator, is ironic about Pearl's existence?

2. What is the significance of Pearl's name?

3. What is significant about Pearl's temperament?

4. Explain the ambiguity concerning Pearl's background.

5. Hester believes that, while society punishes her for sinning, God has a different reaction. How does Hester explain Pearl's existence?

Chapter 7

1. How sincerely concerned are the townspeople of Salem for the souls of Hester and Pearl?
2. Compare the Governor's garden with gardens in Old England. What is significant about the difference?
3. How is Pearl dressed, and what is her dress compared to?
4. Where else have we seen a rose bush in this novel?
5. What was its significance then?
6. Does it maintain the same significance here?

Chapter 8

1. Explain the Puritan attitude toward luxury and how Governor Bellingham and the Reverend John Wilson responded to it.
2. How do the magistrates react to Pearl and why?
3. How does Hester behave towards the magistrates and why?
4. Why does Hester feel that Arthur Dimmesdale should speak on her behalf?
5. Why would Hawthorne have Pearl perform such an uncharacteristically tender action?

6. What does Chillingworth note about Dimmesdale's defense of Hester?
7. Describe how Dimmesdale has changed since Hester's public punishment.
8. Describe how Chillingworth has changed over the last few years.
9. What would physiognomy suggest about Dimmesdale and Chillingworth?
10. Why would Hawthorne want to include Mistress Hibbins as a minor character in this book?

Chapter 9

1. Why doesn't Chillingworth assert his rights as Hester's husband?
2. A difference of opinion arises over the cause of Dimmesdale's failing health. Compare the townspeople's opinion to Dimmesdale's.
3. Why does Dimmesdale reject Chillingworth's offer of help? What finally persuades him to accept the offer?
4. Explain the ambiguity of the chapter's title, "The Leech."
5. The passage sets up an interesting contrast between two types of men. What is this contrast, and how is it likely to shape the future of the novel?

6. Describe Chillingworth's method for treating illness.
7. Describe the relationship between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth.
8. Some people in the community feel that God has sent Chillingworth to heal their minister, but other people have a different view. Explain the second view about Chillingworth.
9. How do the people explain "the gloom and terror in the depths of the poor minister's eyes"?
10. What is suggested by the names Chillingworth and Dimmesdale?

Chapter 10

1. What is suspicious about Dimmesdale's position in his debate with Chillingworth about sin?
2. How do the black flowers initiate a discussion on hidden sins?
3. How does Dimmesdale's rationale for not confessing a hidden sin support the doctrine of salvation by works rather than salvation by faith?
4. What metaphors does Hawthorne establish for Chillingworth's probe? How do they further define Chillingworth's character?
5. What does Chillingworth mean when he mutters, "A strange sympathy betwixt soul and body! Were it only for the art's sake, I must search this matter to the bottom!"?
6. What does Chillingworth do while Dimmesdale sleeps, and what does his action symbolize? Describe Chillingworth's reaction and what his response reveals about his character.
7. What do you suppose is the specific secret that Chillingworth discovers?

Chapter 11

1. Explain the statement, “He [Chillingworth] became, thenceforth, not a spectator only, but a chief actor, in the poor minister’s interior world.”
2. What is ironic about Dimmesdale’s incredible success as a minister?
3. Why are Dimmesdale’s public assertions of guilt ironic?
4. Explain the ways that Dimmesdale tortures himself.
5. Comparing Dimmesdale’s current struggle with his sin with Hawthorne’s earlier treatment of Hester and her sin, what is Hawthorne suggesting about the effects of sin?
6. What is ironic about Hawthorne’s portrayal of the Puritan society, in terms of this developing theme?

Chapter 12

1. How is the episode of Dimmesdale's midnight vigil on the scaffold structurally significant?
2. What is the significance of Pearl's challenge to Dimmesdale?
3. Considering the role of Nature in Anti-Transcendental literature, what is the significance of the meteor event?
4. Although Governor Winthrop is merely mentioned in the book, why would Hawthorne choose this night as the night Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl?
5. How does Dimmesdale feel as he holds Pearl's hand and why?
6. Why does Pearl pull away from Dimmesdale?
7. What effect does Dimmesdale's vigil have on his career?

Chapter 13

1. What is significant about Hester's position in the community now that years have passed?
2. Compare the feelings of the general public to those of the community leaders regarding Hester Prynne. Explain why the groups view her differently.
3. What social and philosophical changes is Hawthorne describing in this chapter?
4. Explain the statement: "It is remarkable, that persons who speculate the most boldly often conform with the most perfect quietude to the external regulations of society. The thought suffices them...."
5. Compare the initial intent behind the scarlet letter to the actual effect on Hester.

6. What does Hester resolve to do and why?

7. What is Hawthorne's point comparing Hester's and Dimmesdale's reactions to their sin?

8. What image is Hawthorne evoking with Chillingworth, old, one shoulder higher than the other, digging up roots and collecting leaves, etc. in the forest?

Chapter 14

1. Notice that Chillingworth is called a “leech” in the chapters in which he interacts with Dimmesdale, but a “physician” in this interaction with Hester. Considering the definition of “leech,” what do you suppose is Hawthorne’s point in using these two designations?
2. What is Hester’s response to the announcement that the Council had debated allowing her to remove her scarlet letter?
3. Look again at what you found out about the Anti-Transcendentalists. Why isn’t forgiveness an option?
4. How is the doctrine of predestination reflected in this conversation between Hester and Chillingworth?

5. Why does Chillingworth believe he has a double reason for punishing Dimmesdale?
6. Compare Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth in terms of their responses to the initial sin.
7. What pleas of Hester's arouse sympathy and admiration in Chillingworth?
8. What does Hester ask of Chillingworth? What is his response?

Chapter 15

1. What is Hester coming to realize is the true sin she has committed? Why would Hawthorne consider this a worse sin than her sin with Dimmesdale?
2. What does Hester realize about her “repentance”?
3. Why does Hester hate Chillingworth?
4. Hester refuses to answer Pearl’s question about the meaning of the “A.” Why does Hester not confide in Pearl?
5. Why does Hawthorne portray Pearl as such a wild child?
6. How have Hester’s conversations with Chillingworth and Pearl changed her attitude toward herself and her sin?

Chapter 16

1. Explain the significance of the sunlight imagery.
2. When Hester determines to warn Dimmesdale about Chillingworth, why does the meeting take place in the forest?
3. Explain the probable allusion in the line “the minister and she would need the whole wide world to breathe in.”
4. What positive significance does the forest begin to take on?
5. What negative significance does the forest begin to assume?
6. In what way does Hester acknowledge her sin to Pearl?

Chapter 17

1. How is Hawthorne advancing his theme of the difference between revealed and secret sin?
2. Explain the distinction Dimmesdale makes between penance and penitence.
3. What do we learn is the emotional connection between Hester and Dimmesdale? Why is this significant to the developing theme of the book?
4. Do you believe Hester is to blame for Dimmesdale's suffering during the past seven years? Why or why not?
5. What theme about the nature of sin finally begins to emerge in Hester and Dimmesdale's conversation?
6. Here is a key question for Hawthorne and the Anti-Transcendentalists: can a "polluted soul" do good for others?
7. Who are the heartless people with laws of iron to whom Hester refers?
8. This chapter ends on an optimistic note. What is the source of the optimism?

Chapter 18

1. What contrast does the narrator point out between Hester and Dimmesdale's ability to leave town?
2. Why does Dimmesdale decide to flee with Hester?
3. What is significant about the title of this chapter?
4. How does Hawthorne reinforce his idea that nature is sympathetic with the union of Hester and Dimmesdale?
5. Why would children dislike Dimmesdale?

Chapter 19

1. Beyond Hester's explanation, why won't Pearl come to Hester without the scarlet letter?
2. What is significant about the fact that Pearl will not bring her the scarlet letter, but makes her pick it up for herself?
3. Why won't Pearl show any affection to Dimmesdale? Why does she want him to walk with them hand-in-hand in the marketplace?
4. This chapter begins on the same optimistic note that ends the previous chapter. On what kind of note does the chapter end? Why?

Chapter 20

1. What would account for Dimmesdale's sudden change?
2. In terms of Hawthorne's theme contrasting hidden sin versus revealed sin, how can you explain Dimmesdale's change in this chapter?
3. Why is the chapter called "The Minister in a Maze"?

Chapter 21

1. Compare these first-generation New Englanders with their recent English ancestors and with their future New England descendents.
2. What distressing news does Hester receive from the ship captain?
3. In addition to providing more information, what other purpose does this chapter serve?

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5. What is Mistress Hibbins saying about the people of Salem Village?
6. What clues has Hawthorne offered his reader to prepare him or her for the revelation of the scarlet letter on his chest?

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6. Why would Hawthorne allow the story to end with Hester and Dimmesdale being remembered so ignominiously?

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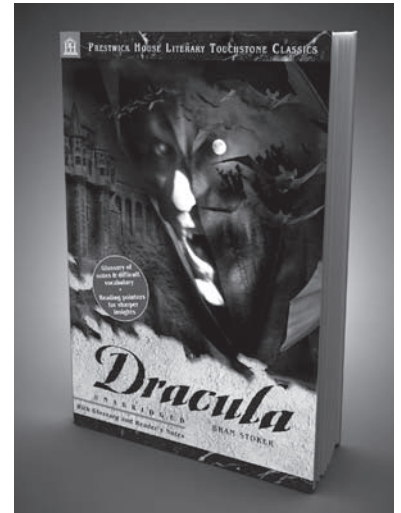
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Subtotal \$

Shipping \$
12% S&H (\$6.00 minimum)

Total \$

Shipping & Handling

For orders of \$50.00 or less, please add \$6.00 for shipping and handling charges. For orders from \$50.01 to \$799.99 add 12%. For orders of \$800.00 and more, add 10%.

Delivery Service

Most orders are shipped FedEx and you can expect delivery within 7-10 working days. Items in stock are usually shipped within one working day of receiving your order.

Expedited Delivery

for expedited delivery ask about the following options:

- Overnight Air
- 2nd day air
- 3 Day Select