

The Scarlet Letter – Study Guide

Chapter One

1. What is the setting for this chapter?
2. How is this building described?
3. How are the men in the crowd described?
4. What grows outside this building? Why is this ironic? What might it symbolize?

Chapter Two

1. What is the setting for this chapter?
2. What important fact about the Puritans, especially in regard to punishment?
3. How are the women described in the 2nd paragraph? How do these women feel about Hester Prynne (3rd and 4th paragraphs)?
4. How is Hester Prynne different from the women in the crowd?
5. What does Hester wear? What does she carry?
6. What is the scaffold?
7. To whom is Hester Prynne compared in the paragraph that begins “Had there been a Papist...”?
8. What does Hester think about while standing on the scaffold?
9. Whom does Hester see in the crowd near the end of the chapter?

Chapter Three

1. How is the mysterious man in the crowd described? What gesture does he make to Hester Prynne? What does he reveal about his past and his subsequent arrival in Boston?
2. What do we learn about Hester’s punishment in the paragraph that begins “It behooves him well...”?
3. What do the clergymen attempt to learn from Hester?
4. How is Reverend Dimmesdale described?
5. How do Hester and her baby react to Reverend Dimmesdale’s questioning?

Chapter Four

1. How does Hester feel once she returns to the jail?
2. Who visits her in jail?
3. What is the basis for Chillingworth’s knowledge of medicine?

4. What do we learn about Hester's past relationship with Chillingworth?
5. What pact does Hester enter into with Chillingworth?

Chapter Five

1. Let's learn to more readily identify examples of **juxtaposition**. How is juxtaposition used in the 2nd sentence of Chapter 5?
2. Why is it that Hester has chosen to stay in Boston? Several reasons are given in the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs of the chapter.
3. What is a "dwelling"? Describe Hester's "dwelling."
4. What does Hester do to make money? What are some of the things she creates? For whom? What is she never allowed to create? Why?
5. Describe Hester's manner of dress.
6. How is Hester treated amongst the townspeople?

Chapter Six

1. What is the baby's name? How is she described at the opening of the chapter?
2. Why did Hester give the child her name?
3. Describe the **juxtaposition** between the child's looks and the child's behavior.
4. How are the other Puritan children described?
5. What kinds of things does Hester's child play with? What are some of her favorite childhood pastimes?
6. What is it about Hester that fascinates the child?
7. What does the child demand of her mother at the end of the chapter?

Chapter Seven

1. Where does Hester travel to at the beginning of the chapter? Why? (There are two reasons.)
2. To what is Pearl compared in the paragraph that begins "But it was a remarkable tribute"?
3. How are Hester and Pearl treated as they walk through the town? How does Pearl respond to this treatment?
4. What does Pearl observe about her mother and the letter close to the end of the chapter?
5. What does Pearl cry for at the end of the chapter?

Chapter Eight

1. Four men are present at the governor's mansion. Who are they?
2. What do we learn about the relationship between Reverend Dimmesdale and old Roger Chillingworth?
3. Why is Hester questioned by the gathering of men? What do they ask her? How does she respond?
4. How does Pearl react to Reverend Wilson's questioning?
5. Who ultimately comes to Hester's defense?
6. Close to the end of the chapter, something very curious happens between Pearl and Reverend Dimmesdale. What?
7. Who calls out to Hester as she is leaving the mansion? What does she invite Hester to do? How does Hester respond?

Chapter 9

1. (The first two paragraphs + general knowledge + dictionary / Internet) Who is "the leech"? Name two reasons that he might be called "the leech."
2. Let's review: what are the details of Chillingworth's training as a doctor?
3. So...Reverend Dimmesdale isn't feeling so well. What are some specific details of his illness?
4. How is it that Dimmesdale and Chillingworth began hanging out with each other? What do they do when they spend time together?
5. What is the living arrangement of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth?
6. What rumors are about the town concerning Dimmesdale and Chillingworth?

Chapter 10

1. Let's answer this question again: Who is THE LEECH? And who is THE PATIENT?
2. Chillingworth finds some black weeds. What's up with that?
3. What gesture does Dimmesdale make repeatedly? (I'm not sure if you have noticed, but he has been making this gesture throughout the novel.)
4. What has Pearl affixed to Hester's letter while the two are visiting the burial ground? What does she fling at Reverend Dimmesdale? What does she say about Chillingworth?
5. What do Dimmesdale and Chillingworth discuss after they see Hester and Pearl? (Look at the passage that starts with "There goes a woman..." and ends with "With a frantic gesture he rushed out of the room.")
6. So...Chillingworth walks in and finds Dimmesdale sleeping. What happens next? (What do you think he sees?)

Chapter Eleven

1. The first paragraph of the chapter says that old Roger Chillingworth was filled with "malice, hitherto latent, but active now." What does this mean?
2. The third paragraph of the chapter mentions that Dimmesdale began to find Chillingworth's appearance "odious." What does that mean?
3. Despite his failing health, Reverend Dimmesdale has "achieved a brilliant popularity in his sacred office." Review the 2nd half of the long paragraph that begins with "Not improbably . . ." and comment on how the churchgoers feel about their minister.
4. In the paragraph that begins with "It is inconceivable...", we learn that Reverend Dimmesdale longs to "speak out, from his own pulpit, at the full height of his voice." What does he want to say?

5. Towards the end of this chapter, we learn that Reverend Dimmesdale is apparently punishing himself. He punishes himself in two ways – one physical and one mental. What does he often think of in these moments of self-torture?

Chapter Twelve

1. In the opening paragraph of the chapter, the narrator states that Dimmesdale is “under the influence of a species of somnambulism.” What the heck is “somnambulism”?
2. In the 2nd paragraph of the chapter, Hawthorne uses the word “catarrh.” I want you to look it up and find out what it means because I think it’s a cool word to know. Enjoy.
3. Look at the paragraph that starts with “And thus, ...” Carefully study the first sentence. Interpret.
4. So...Dimmesdale is on the scaffold and he screams out. What does he scream? Who apparently hears him?
5. As Dimmesdale is standing on the scaffold, several people walk by. Who? Why?
6. What has happened near the bottom that inspires the narrator to say “The three formed an electric chain”?
7. What does Pearl ask Dimmesdale? How does he respond? How does Pearl respond to his response?
8. Look at the paragraph that begins with “But before Mr. Dimmesdale had done speaking...” The last seven or so lines that end that paragraph (“And there stood the minister...”) are pretty awesome, yes?
9. What happens in the night sky? How is this interpreted by the townspeople? (You won’t find out this part of the answer until the end of the chapter.)

10. Pearl makes Dimmesdale feel bad toward the end of the chapter. What does she say to him?
11. What is revealed about Dimmesdale's sermon on the next day?
12. What does the sexton bring to the minister? Where was it found? What is a "sexton"?

Chapter 13

1. How old is Pearl now?
2. How has the public's attitude toward Hester changed?
3. What does the letter "A" now mean?
4. How does Hester react when encountering others in the street?
5. What does a townspeople say about Hester (it is in the paragraph that begins "The rulers...")?
6. In that same paragraph are two myths or rumors about the letter. What are they?
7. Did you notice the juxtaposition concerning Hester's hair in the paragraph that begins "The effect of the symbol"? Comment on it.
8. There is even more juxtaposition dealing with Hester and Chillingworth near the end of the chapter. Comment on it as well.

Chapter 14

1. What is the setting for Chapter 14?
2. Whom does Hester meet at the beginning of the chapter?
3. What does Hester say about her wearing of the scarlet letter?

4. What do Hester and Chillingworth discuss?

Chapter 15

1. What's up with Chillingworth and sunlight and shadow at the beginning of the chapter?
2. What does Hester declare about Chillingworth?
3. What has Pearl been doing while her mother was talking to old Roger Chillingworth? (You could list as many as 8 things.)
4. Hester and Pearl have an interesting conversation beginning with "My little Pearl...". Discuss it.
5. What does the narrator tell us about Pearl's emerging personality in the paragraph that begins "She took her mother's hand..."
6. Pearl seems to revert to her younger years near the end of the chapter and she and Hester have a curious question and answer session. What does Pearl ask? How does Hester respond?

Chapter 16

1. What is the setting for Chapter 16?
2. There is more juxtaposition here with sunlight and shadow and Hester and Pearl. What's going on?
3. What kind of story does Pearl want to hear? What does Pearl tell her mother about Mistress Hibbins?
4. What comparison is drawn between little Pearl and the babbling brook?
5. Who arrives near the end of the chapter? What does Pearl immediately notice about him?

Chapter 17

1. The chapter is titled “The Pastor and the Parishioner.” What is a “parishioner” and who is the “parishioner” in this chapter?
2. Select three words from the 4th paragraph of the chapter (“Gathering himself...”) that help to establish a mysterious tone.
3. Read carefully the big paragraph that starts with “It was no wonder...”. How does the narrator describe the reunion between Hester and Dimmesdale? What physical contact do they make at the end of the paragraph?
4. Hester and Dimmesdale discuss finding “peace”? Have the characters “found peace”? Be specific.
5. Dimmesdale discusses his work as a minister. What does he say about his ability to do his job?
6. In the paragraph that begins with “No, Hester, no!”, Dimmesdale discusses public sin and secret sin. What does he say?
7. What does Hester finally confess to Dimmesdale in the paragraph that begins with “O Arthur”?
8. How does Dimmesdale respond to Hester’s confession?

9. Hester and Dimmesdale begin making plans for a future together. Name two suggestions that Hester makes to Dimmesdale.

10. How does Dimmesdale respond to Hester's suggestions?

Chapter 18

1. In the second paragraph, the narrator tells us about Hester's past. In the third, the narrator speaks of Dimmesdale's status. What do we learn about each?

2. What does Dimmesdale finally agree to?

3. Oh, my! Hester starts taking things off. What does she remove? Describe the transformation that occurs.

4. The scene shifts to little Pearl playing with the animals. Which animals does she play with? Then, Pearl decorates herself again. What does she use?

Chapter 19

1. Which parent does Pearl most resemble?

2. Explain the paragraph that begins with "It was with a feeling..." all about Pearl's existence.

3. Why does Dimmesdale fear officially meeting Pearl?

4. What's up with that brook?

5. Why doesn't Pearl return immediately to her mother? What is her reaction to the scene before her? How does Hester respond? Finally, what does Pearl ultimately do?
6. Describe the interaction between Pearl and Dimmesdale at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 20

1. The second paragraph of this chapter explains Hester's and Dimmesdale's plans for leaving town. What are they?
2. Why don't Hester and Dimmesdale leave town immediately?
3. How does Dimmesdale feel as he makes his way back into town? What does he imagine doing?
4. Describe the three encounters with his parishioners that Dimmesdale experiences on his walk home. (This section is weird, am I right?)
5. What does Dimmesdale imagine teaching to the Puritan children?
6. Describe the encounter that Dimmesdale has with Mistress Hibbins.
7. Describe the encounter between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth that occurs at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 21

1. What is the “New England Holiday”?
2. Describe the juxtaposition between the way in which Hester is dressed and the way in which Pearl is dressed during the celebrations.
3. How does Pearl characterize Dimmesdale in the paragraph that begins “What a strange...”?
4. Who all is part of “the picture of human life in the market-place” on the holiday?
5. What does the ship’s captain reveal to Hester at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 22

1. What is a procession?
2. What is revealed about Dimmesdale’s appearance in the paragraph that begins “It was the observation of those...”?
3. What does Mistress Hibbins say to Hester in the market-place?
4. How is Dimmesdale’s voice described in the paragraph that begins “This vocal organ was in itself...”?
5. What has Pearl been up to in the market-place during Dimmesdale’s sermon?
6. What is the nature of the conversation between Pearl and the sailor?

Chapter 23

1. How is Dimmesdale's sermon described?
2. How is Dimmesdale's appearance described?
3. What does Dimmesdale request of Hester and Pearl? How does this request seem to transform little Pearl?
4. Describe the encounter between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth.
5. Carefully summarize the events of the last three pages of the chapter.

Chapter 24

1. Did Dimmesdale have his own scarlet letter? Suggest four different theories.
2. What happens to Chillingworth following Dimmesdale's death?
3. What do we learn of Pearl's future?
4. What do we learn of Hester's future?
5. Describe the burial arrangements of Dimmesdale and Hester. Your description should include the distance between them as well as what is on the tombstone.