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The Scarlet Letter
BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE


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All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Press edition of *The Scarlet Letter*, published 2005.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters I – IV**Characterization and Inference**

Objectives: Understanding character motivation
Drawing inferences

Activity

Chillingworth appears on the day of Hester's ignominy. After his initial shock, he makes a series of decisions about Hester.

Use the attached chart to list the rest of his decisions, decide his probable reasons, and indicate what textual information supports your conclusions about his reasons.

Assume the role of Hester's husband and write a letter to your closest friend, John, in England. The letter should explain your decisions. You may write in Hawthorne's style or not. That choice is up to you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters V – VIII

Style

Objectives: Understanding ambiguity
Recognizing aspects of a writer's style

Activity

Hawthorne's writing style incorporates the use of ambiguity; throughout the novel the narrator offers more than one possible explanation for events. He points out philosophical ideas and illustrates his opinion with bits of history, digressions, and incisive comments. Because of the depiction of complex human thought and behavior, readers must personally consider and choose the explanations that may or may not be appropriate. A lack of definite, right-or-wrong answers mirrors the natural complexity of human thought and interaction.

The narrator indicates what the reader may gain by reading the novel:

But, on one side of 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.

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 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 human frailty and sorrow.

The explanations for the existence of the rose-bush are:

- Nature is sympathetic and offers beauty and kindness even to criminals.
- It is a surviving part of the “stern old wilderness.”
- It sprang from the footsteps of Ann Hutchinson.

The rose symbolizes two possibilities for the reader:

- A legitimate but rare element of morality.
- A beautiful relief from the tale's “human frailty and sorrow.”

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters IX – XVI**Symbolism and Themes**

Objectives: Inferring the thematic significance of a symbol
Understanding symbolism

Activity

In these chapters, Hawthorne transforms the symbolism of the letter A.

Complete the **Symbolism of the Scarlet Letter chart**. For each quotation you find, discuss the ideas relevant to the symbol. Write the ideas beneath the quotation.

At the bottom of the chart, write a sentence that states the thematic idea that is suggested to you by Hawthorne's transformation of the A. One has been completed for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters XIII – XVI

Characterization

Objectivea: Comparing and contrasting characters
Understanding thematic ideas

Activity

At the start of the novel, Hester and Chillingworth appear to contrast with each other; Hester is young and beautiful, while Chillingworth is aged and ugly. In Chapter IV, Hester reveals her guilt by admitting to Chillingworth, “I have greatly wronged thee.” Rather than allowing Hester the sole blame, Chillingworth replies, “Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay.” By Chapter XV, Hester hates Chillingworth; she decides that Chillingworth’s betrayal is far more damaging than her own: “Yes, I hate him!...He has done me worse wrong than I did him!” The narrator justifies Hester’s feelings:

But Hester ought long ago to have done with this injustice. What did it betoken? Had seven long years, under the torture of the scarlet letter, inflicted so much of misery, and wrought out no repentance?

The emotions of that brief space, while she stood gazing after the crooked figure of old Roger Chillingworth, threw a dark light on Hester’s state of mind, revealing much that she might not otherwise have acknowledged to herself.

Chillingworth admits to Hester, “A mortal man, with once a human heart, has become a fiend for his especial torment!” The narrator follows:

The unfortunate physician, while uttering these words, lifted his hands with a look of horror, as if he had beheld some frightful shape, which he could not recognise, usurping the place of his own image in a glass. It was one of those moments—which sometimes occur only at the interval of years—when a man’s moral aspect is faithfully revealed to his mind’s eye. Not improbably, he had never before viewed himself as he did now.

Complete the **Comparison of Hester and Chillingworth Chart** that follows. For each point, look for similarities and differences. Support the information in each square with details from the text.

At the bottom of the chart, write a statement of what the analysis of these two characters and their characteristics tells you about the human heart.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters XVII – XX**Imagery**

Objectives: Visualizing imagery
Understanding how imagery can be used to create a mood in a literary text

Activity

Hawthorne includes paragraph after paragraph describing the forest, in which he contrasts the gloom and the rays of light. Until Chapter XVIII, Hester is unable to be in the light, but after Dimmesdale agrees to flee with her, Hawthorne describes a flood of sunshine that surrounds her.

Reread the descriptions of the forest and select the paragraph that appeals to you the most.

Illustrate the scene that you select.

Attach a page to your illustration that includes an explanation of the details of the scene. Also include any thematic ideas that the scene suggests to you.