***The Scarlet Letter***

***by Nathaniel Hawthorne***





**Student Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Advanced Placement Language and Composition**

**Mrs. Garcia**

Create a binder in which to keep all of the following exercises. All exercises[[1]](#endnote-1) in this packet are intended for you to master your own interpretation by the time we complete the novel. Do not write responses in this packet. It must be well organized with categories listed (Prereading, What Does a Symbol Mean, Symbols Chart, etc.) All student work should be completed thoughtfully, thoroughly, independently, and ethically. At the end of the unit, students will turn in all completed work and will be graded on sophistication of thought (high level of analysis and justification with textual evidence), ethics (all work is original), organization (responses are correctly labeled and neat), and timely completion (all parts are accounted for and stamped).

**Prereading**

Respond thoughtfully to the following questions.

1. Have you ever heard someone talk about being branded with a scarlet letter or heard

someone called a scarlet woman? What might this mean?

2. Write about a time when you felt left out, shunned, cast aside, or in some other way

alienated. How did you handle it? How did you overcome it? What lasting effects

did it have on you? Explain.

3. “The truth will out,” is a belief espoused by many. Do you believe the truth eventually

comes to light?

4. What would be your response if you found out that your partner had committed

adultery? Would you want to seek revenge? Would you?

5. Many people are denied jobs, homes, even opportunities for friendship, because they

have been found guilty of a betrayal. How long should a person be punished for a

mistake?

6. How does today’s society respond to guilt, sin, adultery? You might draw on

television shows (such as reality TV); governmental and religious arenas; or

interviews with fellow students, ministers, adults, etc. in order to formulate a

response.

7. Respond to the following quote by Socrates: “The unexamined life is not worth

living.”

8. Respond to the following quote by Anne Frank: “Laziness may appear attractive, but

work gives satisfaction.”

9. Respond to the following quote by Thomas Szasz: “Punishment is now

unfashionable…because it creates moral distinctions among men, which, to the

democratic mind, are odious. We prefer a meaningless collective guilt to a

meaningful individual responsibility.”

10. Respond to the following quote by Margaret of Navarre: “Man is wise…when he

recognizes no greater enemy than himself.”

11. Respond to the following quote by Henrik Ibsen: “The strongest man in the world is

he who stands most alone.”

12. (Instead of the above OR as Extra Credit) As a social experiment, cut out the letter P (for “plagiarism”) from a piece of red paper or felt and embellish it and wear it on your chest around school for a week. Take note of how other people react. Log your feelings about the way you are looked at, talked about, treated. You need a picture of yourself and a journal entry for five days.

**Vocabulary**

*The Scarlet Letter* is full of rich, complex vocabulary that you may not be particularly familiar with. Hawthorne’s command of language and descriptive word choice makes *The Scarlet Letter* a classic American novel. Please copy the following words and their definitions into your binder.

**Chapters 1-3**

1. beadle (n.): a minor church official who ushers or helps preserve order during

services

2. contumely (n.): insulting display of contempt in word or action; a humiliating insult

3. ignominy (n.): total loss of dignity; disgrace; shame

4. inauspicious (adj.): unfavorable; boding ill

5. mien (n.): a person’s general appearance or carriage; often indicates a person’s mood

or state of mind

6. physiognomies (n.): faces; the outward appearance of things

7. pillory (n.): a wooden framework with holes for securing the head and hands,

designed to expose a criminal to public ridicule or abuse

8. remonstrance (n.): an argument in protest of; complaint; objection

9. sagacity (n.): wisdom, profound knowledge and insight to the world

10. vie (v.): to compete; to struggle for dominance or control

**Chapters 4-6**

1. anathemas (n.): curses; denunciations; bad wishes

2. draught (n.): a drink; a dose; that which is taken in by drinking or inhaling

3. efficacy (n.): effectiveness; capacity for producing effects

4. expostulation (n.): complaint; earnest protest

5. gesticulation (n.): an animated or exercised gesture; gestures made in an excited

manner especially with or instead of speech

6. paramour (n.): illicit lover; a beloved person

7. phantasmagoric (adj.): displaying an optical illusion; imagining changing scenes

8. quaff (v.): to drink heartily

9. sable (adj. or n.): dark and somber; mourning garments

10. uncongenial (adj.): disagreeable; not compatible; not pleasing; not well-suited

**Chapters 7-9**

1. cabalistic (adj.): mystic; occult

2. chirurgical (adj.): surgical

3. contagion (n.): the ready transmission or spread, as of an attitude, idea or emotion

from person to person; harmful or undesirable contact or influence

4. deportment (n.): demeanor; conduct; behavior

5. despondent (adj.): dispirited; feeling or showing profound hopelessness;

discouraged

6. emaciated (adj.): gradually wasted away; abnormally thin, marked by lack of

nutrition or disease

7. erudition (n.): knowledge acquired by study or research; learning; scholarship

8. imperious (adj.): dictatorial; urgent; commanding

9. leech (n.): a person who clings to another for personal gain; parasite; also a name for

a doctor in the 1600s; (v.): to cling and to feed upon so as to drain

10. pestilence (n.): a deadly epidemic disease; something harmful or evil

**Chapters 10-12**

1. demerits (n.): punishments for wrongdoing

2. ethereal (adj.): light or airy; tenuous; extremely delicate or refined

3. expiation (n.): the means by which atonement or reparation is made

4. inextricable (adj.): incapable of being disentangled, undone, loosed, or solved;

hopelessly intricate, involved, or perplexing

5. inimical (adj.): harmful; hostile; unfriendly

6. ominous (adj.): foreboding; threatening; portending to evil or harm

7. portent (n.): ominous significance; an indication or omen of something momentous

about to happen

8. scurrilous (adj.): insulting; offensive; vulgar; grossly or obscenely abusive

9. somnambulism (n.): sleepwalking; performing acts while asleep

10. zenith (n.): the highest point or state; culmination; the point in the sky directly

above the observer

**Chapters 13-15**

1. asperity (n.): harshness; severity in tone; roughness

2. austerity (n.): stern coldness in appearance and manner; without excess or

ornamentation

3. despotic (adj.): holding absolute power; autocratic; tyrannical

4. effluence (n.): something that flows out; emanation; outward expression

5. enigma (n.): a person of contradicting or puzzling character; riddle; problem

6. gibe (n.): mocking words; taunts

7. innate (adj.): existing in one from birth; inborn; native; originating in something;

not learned

8. petulant (adj.): showing sudden impatience or irritation

9. proffered (v.): offered or proposed for one’s acceptance or rejection

10. requital (n.): a return or reward for service; kindness

**Chapters 16-18**

1. colloquy (n.): a dialogue; conversational exchange; conference

2. consecration (n.): the act of giving sacramental character; dedication to the service

and worship of God; sacredness

3. denizen (n.): an inhabitant; resident

4. dryad (n.): a deity or nymph of the woods

5. harrowed (v.): disturbed keenly or painfully; distressed the mind

6. hillock (n.): a little hill

7. loquacity (n.): talkativeness; chattiness; state of talking freely

8. meditative (adj.): contemplative; deeply thoughtful

9. transmuting (v.): transforming; changing from one form to another

10. vestige (n.): a mark, trace or visible evidence of something that is no longer present

or in existence

**Chapters 19-21**

1. depredation (n.): the act of preying upon or plundering; robbery; ravage

2. disquietude (n.): uneasiness; the state of disturbance

3. jocularity (n.): state or quality of being facetious or joking; a funny remark

4. languor (n.): physical weakness or faintness; lack of energy; lack of spirit;

sluggishness

5. obeisance (n.): a bow or curtsey; a movement of the body expressing deep respect

6. potentate (n.): one who possesses power or dominion; monarch; ruler

7. prattle (v.): to utter by chattering or babbling; to talk in a simple-minded or foolish

way

8. preternatural (adj.): out of the natural or ordinary course of nature; abnormal;

exceptional

9. uncouth (adj.): unmannerly; awkward; clumsy; of ungraceful appearance

10. vicissitude (n.): a change or variation in the course of something

**Chapters 22-24**

1. apotheosize (v.): to glorify or exalt someone or something; deify

2. audacity (n.): boldness or daring without regard for personal safety

3. contiguous (adj.): touching; in close proximity with; close by

4. erratic (adj.): eccentric; deviating from the proper or usual course in conduct or

opinion

5. gait (n.): a manner of walking, stepping, or running

6. indefatigable (adj.): incapable of being tired out; not tiring

7. morion (n.): helmet worn by common soldiers in the 16th and 17th centuries

8. necromancy (n.): the art of divination through communication with the dead;

witchcraft

9. pathos (n.): pity or compassion

10. repugnance (n.): strong distaste or aversion; objection; antipathy

**Hawthorne’s Words of Wisdom**

We will devise a class list of Hawthorne’s “words of wisdom.” As you read, select and mark passages that you would like to contribute to our class list. You should come up with a list of ten in total. Make sure to put the list in your binder. Examples include:

* “To the untrue man, the whole universe is false” (142).
* “No man for any considerable period can wear one face to himself and another to

the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true”

(203).

Be prepared to discuss these quotations in class.

**What Does a Symbol Mean?**

Read the following excerpt about symbols, and answer the questions. Be prepared for class discussion.

**Identifying Symbols**

Learning to recognize symbols is largely a matter of using our intuition and our background in literature. We should remember first of all that anything may be a symbol, that a symbol is any sign that has acquired extra meaning. It may be an object, a gesture, an incident, a person, a plot, a color, a sound, a pattern or sequence of action—anything that reminds us of something else that in turn seems applicable to the text before us. The word *may* is crucial. Although we must develop a sensitivity to the possibility that anything unusual *may* be symbolic, we must refrain from concluding that everything unusual *is* symbolic. A balance between sensitivity to the possibility of symbols and a commonsense approach to the basic meaning of the text is the best guide.[[2]](#endnote-2)

1. What do you already know about symbols in general?

2. How does Roland Bartel’s explanation add to that understanding?

3. What should you do in order to determine whether or not some thing, some person,

some action, etc., might be symbolically used in a work of fiction?

4. Explain what Bartel means by saying: “The word *may* is crucial. Although we must

develop a sensitivity to the possibility that anything unusual *may* be symbolic, we

must refrain from concluding that everything unusual *is* symbolic.” How can this

best be done?

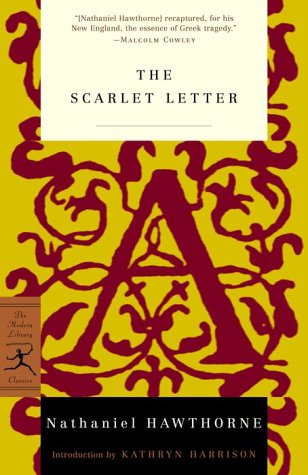
5. Based on this reading, draw up a list of criteria that you will use as a guide to

determine what the symbols are in *The Scarlet Letter.*

**Symbols Chart**

As you read *The Scarlet Letter*, complete the following log based on the symbols assigned to you. Please record three annotations for each symbol listed below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol: Darkness/Light** | | | |
| **Chapter** | **Page** | **Description** | **Significance** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Symbol: The letter “A”** | | | |
| **Chapter** | **Page** | **Description** | **Significance** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Symbol: Roses/Rosebush** | | | |
| **Chapter** | **Page** | **Description** | **Significance** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Symbol: Clothing** | | | |
| **Chapter** | **Page** | **Description** | **Significance** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Symbol: Characters’ Names (Hester, Pearl, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth)** | | | |
| **Chapter** | **Page** | **Description** | **Significance** |
|  |  |  |  |

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**Character Study**

As you read *The Scarlet Letter*, complete the following log based on the characters. Please record three annotations for each character listed.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character: Hester Prynne** | | | |
| **Chapter / Page** | **Significant Action / Significant Statement** | **Insight into Character Provided by Action and Statement** | **Personal Reaction to Character** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Character: Pearl** | | | |
| **Chapter / Page** | **Significant Action / Significant Statement** | **Insight into Character Provided by Action and Statement** | **Personal Reaction to Character** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Character: Roger Chillingworth** | | | |
| **Chapter / Page** | **Significant Action / Significant Statement** | **Insight into Character Provided by Action and Statement** | **Personal Reaction to Character** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Character: Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale** | | | |
| **Chapter / Page** | **Significant Action / Significant Statement** | **Insight into Character Provided by Action and Statement** | **Personal Reaction to Character** |
|  |  |  |  |

**Then and Now**

Review chapters 1-6 of *The Scarlet Letter.* Examine how Hester is punished for her crime of adultery, how she is judged by the people in the crowd as she stands with Pearl on the scaffold, and how she judges herself. Think about instances in today’s society in which someone is revealed to have committed adultery. Write a well-though-out essay comparing Hester’s punishment and treatment in her Puritanical society with how an individual would be treated and punished in today’s society. Consider how these similarities and differences impact the life of the adulterer (and in the case of Hester, impact the life of the adulterer’s child). Also, consider how the differences and similarities reflect society, both then and now.

**Rembrandt the Painter**

The following definitions are taken from www.artlex.com. Notice how each of these elements are used in the paintings.

a. *Nuance*: a subtle difference, distinction or variation; a subtle quality. Or a sensibility

to, awareness of, or ability to express delicate gradations of a meaning (as of an

attitude or expression) or of a form (as of its values, textures, or shades, tints, or

tones of color, etc.)

b. *Chiaroscuro:* the term refers to the fine art painting modeling effect of using a

strong contrast between light and dark to give the illusion of depth or three-

dimensionality.

c. *Hue*: The name of any color as found in its pure state in the spectrum or rainbow, or

that aspect of any color.

d. *Tint:* A soft and light color—one to which white has been added. For example, white

added to green makes a lighter green tint.

e. *Contrast:* A large difference between two things; for example, light and shadow.

This term refers to a way of juxtaposing elements of art to stress the differences

between them.

f. *Value:* refers to the luminance or luminosity—the lightness or darkness of a color.

g. *Shading:* showing change from light to dark or dark to light in a picture by

darkening areas that would be shadowed and leaving other areas light. Blending of

one value into another is sometimes called feathering. Shading is often used to

produce illusions of dimension and depth.

As you study some of Rembrandt’s paintings, consider the following questions about technique and effect.

1. How does Rembrandt use lighting to draw your attention to various people or objects

in the painting?

2. How does he use darkness to accentuate other aspects of the painting?

3. What is the overall impression you get about the tonal quality of the painting from

the colors and light and dark mixtures of the painting?

4. Does the light come from a source within or outside of the painting? How does this

affect your perception of the painting?

**Hawthorne the Painter**

After completing the study of Rembrandt’s paintings, read the passage below from *The Scarlet Letter* and answer the questions that follow.

**from Chapter 16**

The road, after the two wayfarers had crossed from the peninsula to the mainland, was no other than a footpath. It straggled onward into the mystery of the primeval forest. This hemmed it in so narrowly, and stood so black and dense on either side, and disclosed such imperfect glimpses of the sky above, that, to Hester’s mind, it imaged not amiss the moral wilderness in which she had so long been wandering. The day was chill and sombre. Overhead was a gray expanse of cloud, slightly stirred, however, by a breeze; so that a gleam of flickering sunshine might now and then be seen at its solitary play along the path. This flitting cheerfulness was always at the further extremity of some long vista through the forest. The sportive sunlight—feebly sportive, at best, in the predominant pensiveness of the day and scene—withdrew itself as they came nigh, and left the spots where it had danced the drearier, because they had hoped to find them bright.

1. What words or phrases suggest the tonal qualities you found in the Rembrandt

paintings?

2. What words or phrases correspond with the art terms above?

3. How does Hawthorne paint this scene using words instead of paint?

4. How do the questions used for the Rembrandt paintings help you to visualize this

scene?

5. What feeling does Hawthorne evoke in you as you read this scene? How does he

accomplish this?

6. How does he use contrast of light and dark in this scene? How is this similar to

Rembrandt’s use of light and dark?

**The Painting of a Soul**

Read the following descriptions of Roger Chillingworth. As you read these passages from chapter 10, think of the work you did with the Rembrandt painting and the scene from the novel. Apply some of the same techniques in analyzing Chillingworth’s character.

**Passage 1**

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 door-way in the hill-side and quivered on the pilgrim’s face. The soil where this dark miner was working had perchance shown indications that encouraged him.

**Passage 2**

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 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.

**Passage 3**

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.

Obviously, the way a writer describes a person is different from the way he or she would describe a scene. In both cases, the author’s “brush strokes of color” are words. Answer the following questions about the passages above.

1. How is Hawthorne’s description of Chillingworth similar to his description in the

scene from chapter 16 referenced above?

2. What contrasts, either direct or indirect, does Hawthorne use in his description of

Chillingworth in these passages?

3. What is the overall tone of these descriptions?

4. What insight into Chillingworth’s character do the contrasts and tone of the

descriptions provide?

**Viewing the Painting**

Viewing a painting is a visual experience. In a sense, reading literature is also a visual experience since you must use your eyes. The significant difference between a painting and a novel is that the painter uses paints to represent a scene and a novelist uses words. The reader must supply the visual aspect of the novel by means of imagination. Symbolism and characterization are “brush strokes” of a novelist’s palette. Consider these points as you answer the following questions.

1. How has Hawthorne used words and symbols to create a picture?

2. What do the descriptions both of the scene from chapter 16 (see above) and of Roger

Chillingworth (see above) tell you about Hawthorne as a “painter” of verbal pictures?

3. How are Rembrandt and Hawthorne similar in their use of color, light and dark, and

contrast?

**The Artist’s Point of View**

Study a visual work of art carefully, and answer the following questions.

1. Where is the artist standing relative to the subject of the painting?

2. What does this position tell about what is important in the painting? What is

important to the artist?

3. What does the artist want you to think about the subject? How do you know?

4. What details does the artist seem to emphasize in this picture?

5. What insight do these details give you into the mind of the artist?

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**Point of View—Literature**

Look carefully at the following chart[[3]](#endnote-3) to understand what each point of view means.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Outside Narrators** | | **Inside Narrators** | |
| **Privileged** | **Effaced** | **Dramatized** | **Restricted** |
| **Identity in Story** | Not a character | Not a character | A character | Not a character |
| **Voice** | Third-person pronouns (he, she, they, etc.) occasionally use first-person pronouns | Third-person pronouns | First-person pronouns (I, my, mine, etc.) | Third-person pronouns |
| **Access to Characters’ Consciousness** | Unlimited access to consciousnesses of all the characters | No access: does not enter consciousness of characters; reveals their thoughts and feelings through dialogue and action | Access to consciousness of one character--himself | Access to consciousness of one character or to consciousness of a “community” of characters through whose perceptions he conveys in the story |
| **Presence** | Calls attention to himself as narrator through:  1. descriptions conveyed in his own voice and reflecting his position outside the events of the story;  2. narrative analysis of interpretation of character, incident, and setting;  3. adoption of perspectives different from his own when he reveals the thoughts of certain characters at close range | Conveys almost no sense of his presence, since he generally gives no long description or narrative analysis and does not adopt different perspectives | Dominates story; relates his own experience or, as witness, someone else’s | Speaks in his own voice but submerges his vision into the character(s) whose perspective(s) serves as narrative focus |
| **Reliability** | Generally reliable because he frequently stands close to the implied author | Reliable in that he is “neutral” | Frequently unreliable because his self-knowledge and knowledge of others is imperfect | Ranges from reliable to unreliable depending on the character(s) whose consciousness(es) he reveals and on the presence or absence of “clues” affirming or negating implicit attitudes and values |

Read the following excerpt and answer the questions that follow. Refer to the chart above as you read.

**The Function of Point of View**

The fiction writer’s chief structural resource is *point of view*—at its most fundamental level, the physical vantage point occupied by the narrator in a story or novel and the device by which the writer establishes the “authority” for his fiction. For the writer, point of view is the basic means of ordering and unifying his material. Once he has decided upon the position and, further, upon the disposition of his narrator (choices that are often partly unconscious), all other ingredients of the work must relate to his decision. For the reader, point of view, by affecting the shape of the story, determines how the story material reaches him and how he perceives the fictional events.

The narrator of a story stands in one of two basic relationships to the events of the story: *outside* or *inside* the action. The task of the critical reader is to ascertain the effects of each narrative perspective and disposition. In addition, he must concern himself with the matter of “open” and “closed” consciousnesses and their relation to point of view. An *open consciousness* is a character whose inner thoughts are revealed to the reader. Frequently, the author depicts setting or action through the perceptions of such a character. A *closed consciousness* is a character whose inner thoughts are hidden—making the reader view him through such externals as physical action, dialogue, the reaction of others, and personal appearance. Ultimately, the reader must see how point of view . . . serves as *a mode of thematic definition* (as a way of conveying meaning) as well as *a mode of dramatic definition* (as a determiner of structure).[[4]](#endnote-4)

1. How important is point of view to your understanding of any story? Explain.

2. What is the difference between an artist’s use of point of view and a writer’s use of

point of view?

3. What is meant by “thematic definition”? How do you think point of view helps to

discover a theme or themes of a story?

4. What is meant by “dramatic definition”? How might point of view help you discover

the structure of a story?

**Examining Point of View**

From the chosen point of view, we learn what the author is thinking about a character, a scene, or an action in the story. Reread chapter 13 of *The Scarlet Letter* carefully and answer the following questions.

1. What is the point of view of this novel thus far? (Choose the appropriate one from

the point of view chart above.)

2. How do you know this? Support your answer with direct proof from the novel.

3. In real life, we often interpret actions, events, and people based on our own point of

view. We make judgments and decisions based on our experience as individuals.

Recount here one important event from your own life.

4. Reread your accounting. How did you present it? How would your best friend

recount that event? What is the difference?

5. Write a description of a water fountain.

6. Now, write a description of a water fountain from the point of view of a four-year-old

child.

7. What choices did you have to make in describing the water fountain as a four-year-

old child would view it?

**Hawthorne and Hester**

Readers of fiction are always looking through someone else’s eyes. We call this person the narrator. The narrator makes judgments about the characters and actions. The story is filtered through the narrator’s eyes, and readers make judgments about characters based on what the narrator tells them.

1. Where do you see the narrator standing in relationship to Hester in chapter 13?

2. How does the narrator feel about Hester?

3. What specific words or phrases indicate this?

4. Look carefully at the following passages from chapter 13. Explain how they help to

substantiate the narrator’s attitudes and judgments about Hester.

a. The links that united her to the rest of human kind—links of flowers, or silk, or gold, or whatever the material—had all been broken.

b. It was perceived, too, that while Hester never put forward even the humblest title to share in the world’s privileges,--farther than to breathe the common air, and earn daily bread for little Pearl and herself by the faithful labor of her hands,--she was quick to acknowledge her sisterhood with the race of man, whenever benefits were to be conferred.

c. She was self-ordained a Sister of Mercy; or, we may rather say, the world’s heavy hand had so ordained her, when neither the world nor she looked forward to this result. The letter was the symbol of her calling. Such helpfulness was found in her,--so much power to do, and power to sympathize,--that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength.

d. She who has once been woman, and ceased to be so, might at any moment become a woman again, if there were only the magic touch to effect the transfiguration.

e. Much of the marble coldness of Hester’s impression was to be attributed to the circumstance that her life had turned, in a great measure, from passion and feeling, to thought.

f. Thus, Hester Prynne . . . wandered without a clew in the dark labyrinth of the mind; now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now . . . ghastly scenery all around her, and a home and comfort nowhere.

5. In what ways is the presentation of Hester in chapters 13-15 different from that of

previous chapters?

**Setting—Reflection of the Soul**

Read the following commentary about setting, and answer the questions that follow.

**The Importance of Setting**

*Setting* is the representation in fiction of the place and time that constitute the environment of the action. Incorporating the tangible and spiritual aspects of physical locations and historical eras, setting includes the depiction of objects and institutions peculiar to certain places and periods. . . .

Closely related to characterization, setting enhances the credibility of the characters by providing a visible context for them. It can also influence, sometimes even control, their lives. As with character and plot, the establishment of setting calls for selectivity by the writer. Often, what he chooses *not* to describe is particularly significant, and frequently what *is* included alerts us to what is missing. . . .

As the writer may depict a rich variety of characters, so he may set his story in any time or any place—actual or imaginary. He may invent a place and time, creating fanciful landscapes sustained only by his imagination and putting the action backward into a remote era or forward into a visionary future. . . .

By setting his story in a “real” location or in one resembling an actual place, the writer releases a host of associations in the reader. . . .

By establishing a “real” setting, the writer can manipulate the reader’s knowledge in still another way: he can choose to confirm preconceptions about a particular place or to reverse those expectations. . . .

Like every other aspect of fiction, setting is affected by point of view. In stories told by an effaced narrator, description of setting is customarily objective and brief, with the narrator providing only those details necessary to convey a minimal sense of place. In contrast, there is often copious description in stories related by a privileged narrator, who is at liberty to depict setting either through his own perceptions or through those of his characters. . . .

Setting is related to mood as well as to point of view. *Mood* refers to the atmosphere that surrounds and helps to define the world in which the characters move. Thus mood involves the feeling that emanates from certain locales or accrues from particular actions. Although intangible, mood can be an unshakeable quality that affects our responses to a story, as in real life we are affected by the atmosphere of certain places.[[5]](#endnote-5)

1. Using your own words, describe the importance of setting.

2. How are character and setting related? Why is this important?

3. How are point of view and setting related? Why is this important?

4. Describe a real life place from your experience. Convey the mood of the place

through your descriptions.

**The Hawthorne Trees**

Reread chapters 16-19 carefully. Pay particular attention to the descriptions of the forest in each chapter. Describe the mood that each chapter presents through its description of the forest.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Chapter** | **Overall Description of Forest** | **Particular Description of Some Part of the Forest** | **Overall Mood Evoked in the Chapter** |
| 16 |  |  |  |
| 17 |  |  |  |
| 18 |  |  |  |
| 19 |  |  |  |

Answer the following questions.

1. What overall impression do you get about the forest based on your charting?

2. What differences do you see in the descriptions through the different chapters?

3. What impressions about nature does Hawthorne present with his descriptions of the

forest in these chapters?

**Among the Trees**

Note the characters’ actions and feelings when they are in the forest.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Chapter** | **Overall Description of the Forest** | **Particular Action of a Character in Forest** | **Feeling of Character in Forest** |
| 16 |  |  |  |
| 17 |  |  |  |
| 18 |  |  |  |
| 19 |  |  |  |

Answer the following questions.

1. What did you notice about the character’s actions and feelings while in the forest?

2. What changes take place in the character’s feelings? in personality?

3. How are these changes related to or reflected in the description of the forest?

4. What does Hawthorne wish you to know about the character by his presentation in

the forest scenes? How do you know this?

5. How has Hawthorne linked the forest scenes with his characters?

6. How has Hawthorne manipulated your reactions to his characters by placing them in

the forest?

7. What are some associations you have with the forest?

8. Of what might Hawthorne’s forest by symbolic?

9. In one sentence, describe a possible theme of the novel that was generated from your

study of the forest.

**Un-Mazing Grace**

Reread chapter 20 carefully in order to complete the following chart. Find specific words or phrases that fit the categories listed.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Peace** | **Terror/Dismay** |
| Natural Setting |  |  |
| Other Setting Details |  |  |
| Sense Imagery |  |  |
| Feelings |  |  |
| Social Setting |  |  |

Answer the following questions.

1. What are the strongest image words used to create a sense of peace?

2. What are the strongest image words used to create a sense of dismay or terror?

3. What conclusions can you draw from these contrasting images?

4. What insight into Arthur Dimmesdale do you have at this point?

5. In what ways do the contrasting images seem to indicate that Dimmesdale has had a

great burden lifted from his soul?

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**Setting the Stage**

Reread chapters 21 and 22 carefully. Imagine that these chapters are two scenes from a movie. Try to visualize what is going on and what the settings and characters look like. Find words or phrases in these chapters to use in completing the chart.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Physical Description** | **Clothing Description** | **Sense Imagery** | **Feelings** |
| Hester |  |  |  |  |
| Pearl |  |  |  |  |
| Dimmesdale |  |  |  |  |
| Chillingworth |  |  |  |  |
| Other Characters |  |  |  |  |

Answer the following questions.

1. Based on the physical descriptions of the characters, what does Hawthorne want you

to think about them?

2. Which characters are sympathetically presented? Which are not? Why is this so?

3. How do the clothing descriptions add to an understanding of the characters and their

roles?

4. How does the sense imagery set a tone?

5. What role do the feelings of the characters play in setting a tone?

6. In the opening chapters of the novel, there was a gathering of people, as there is in

these two chapters. What is different about the two gatherings?

7. What is different about the characters now as compared with the opening chapters?

8. What has caused this difference?

9. For what do you think Hawthorne is setting the stage? How do you know?

**The Forest and the Marketplace**

Reread the first three chapters and chapters 21 and 22. You will notice that the marketplace is the central setting in these chapters. However, the forest also plays an important role in chapters 21 and 22, so the two settings are merged. Complete the following chart, and answer the questions.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **The Marketplace Chapters 1-3** | **The Marketplace Chapters 21-22** |
| People Present in Marketplace |  |  |
| Reasons for Being There |  |  |
| Attitudes of Those Present |  |  |
| Major Sense Imagery Used in Description of Market |  |  |

1. What major differences do you see in the two descriptions of the marketplace?

2. Why have these changes taken place?

3. How are the townspeople different?

4. While the forest is not physically present in the second presentation of the

marketplace, it is spiritually present. The four major characters—Hester, Pearl,

Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth—have all been in the forest at one time or another

for various reasons. How has this changed them?

a. Hester

b. Pearl

c. Dimmesdale

d. Chillingworth

5. What other character present in the marketplace is associated with the forest? Why

is the character in the marketplace?

6. What is the spiritual power of the forest?

7. How has the forest affected the second presentation of the marketplace in chapters 21

and 22 and thus affected all those present?

**Climb Every Scaffold**

Read the following commentary carefully, and answer the questions that follow.

***The Scarlet Letter***

[The novel] is built around the scaffold. At the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the story the scaffold is the dominating point. Just as it literally rises above the market-place, so does it structurally rise out of the novel’s plan and attribute pattern to it. In chapter 2, after the very short first chapter, Hester is taken up on the scaffold. In chapter 12, the middle chapter (when we omit the concluding chapter), Dimmesdale mounts the scaffold. In chapter 23, the last (omitting the conclusion), Dimmesdale takes Hester and Pearl up there with him. These three incidents are, in every sense, the high points of the novel. The middle chapter, number 12, tends to divide the story into two parts (or three parts, counting this middle chapter). This division is logical when we realize that up to chapter 12, neither the reader nor Chillingworth is certain that Dimmesdale is the father of little Pearl; after chapter 12, there can be no doubt.[[6]](#endnote-6)

1. Based on the commentary, what is the importance of the scaffold in the

novel?

2. Is the writer’s contention that the scaffold divides the novel into two or

three parts a valid one? Why or why not?

3. How is the scaffold described in the following chapters?

a. Chapters 1-3

b. Chapter 12

c. Chapter 23

4. What are the differences in these descriptions?

5. What is the symbolic use of the scaffold?

**In Full View**

Answer the following questions about chapter 23.

1. How does Hester respond to Dimmesdale’s asking her and Pearl to come

up onto the scaffold with him?

2. Why do you think she feels this way?

3. The following characters, rather than uniting, become more isolated.

Explain their isolation.

a. Hester

b. Pearl

c. Dimmesdale

d. Chillingworth

4. What specific evidence in the novel reveals their isolation?

a. Hester

b. Pearl

c. Dimmesdale

d. Chillingworth

5. Show how this sense of isolation is a possible theme for the novel.

**Conclusion**

Reread chapter 24 carefully before answering the following questions.

1. Some critics say that chapter 23 is the actual end of the novel. If this is so,

why do you think Hawthorne wrote chapter 24?

2. How are the following characters described in chapter 24?

a. Hester

b. Pearl

c. Dimmesdale

d. Chillingworth

3. How are these descriptions consistent with what has happened to the

characters?

4. If you were writing this novel, how would you end it? Why?

**The Symbol—A Means of Understanding**

Refer to your work on **What Does a Symbol Mean** and **Symbols Chart** in order to develop an accurate and concrete summary of your findings.

Select 1 Symbol: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What stands out in your mind about the symbol as you follow it

throughout the novel? What is the significance of the symbol in relation to

the novel?

2. How does the symbol weave itself into the texture of the novel?

3. How does the symbol help you to understand the story?

4. Is the symbol in any way connected with any of the characters in the

novel? What is the connection? How does this connection help you to

understand the character?

5. What other conclusions and observations can you make about the symbol?

6. What information and understanding of the novel can you share with the

class based on your work with the symbol?

7. What is the best method for presenting this information? Why is this the

best way?

**Character Analysis**

In your **Character Study** chart, you followed assigned characters throughout your reading. Review the charts you have kept, and then answer the following questions.

Select one character: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What are some of the character’s significant actions as we follow him or

her throughout the novel?

2. What insight do these actions provide into the personality of the

character?

3. What are some of the most significant statements made by the character?

4. How do these statements provide insight into the character?

5. How does the character interact with other characters?

6. In the final analysis, how do you feel about the character and the

character’s role in the story?

7. What information do you need to present to your classmates so that they

will understand what you have learned about this character?

8. What is the best way for you to present this information? Why?

**Theme—A Thread That Binds**

A theme of any story is a thread that runs throughout the story. In the case of a novel there may be several themes. Listed below are some of the themes that are commonly discussed in relation to *The Scarlet Letter*. Based on the knowledge you have acquired, select one theme to work with.

**Possible Themes**

a. The effects of guilt

b. The effects of sin

c. Isolation and alienation from self and society

d. Intolerance and nonforgiveness

e. Obsession for revenge

f. Suffering, punishment, and redemption

Selected Theme:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. How is this theme demonstrated by the actions of the characters? What

character best demonstrates this theme? Why?

2. How do the symbols used in the novel serve to underscore the theme?

What symbol best demonstrates this theme? Why?

3. What aspect of setting best demonstrates the theme? How? Why?

4. How does the point of view allow you to see this as a theme for the novel?

5. How does the structure of the novel, as presented in **Climb Every**

**Scaffold**, help you to understand this theme?

1. Source: The Center for Learning Curriculum Unit and Secondary Solutions Standards-Based Literature Guide [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Roland Bartel, *Metaphors and Symbols: Forays into Language* (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1983), 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Source: *The Process of Fiction: Contemporary Stories and Criticism,* 2nd ed., ed. Barbara McKenzie (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 10-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Barbara McKenzie, ed., *The Process of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 8-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Barbara McKenzie, ed., *The Process of Fiction: Contemporary Stories and Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 32-36. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Leland Schubert, *Hawthorne, the Artist: Fine-Art Devices in Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 138. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)