

# *The Scarlet Letter*

## Study Questions

### **Chapter 1, The Prison Door**

1. Describe the physical appearance of the prison door.
2. For what two purposes did the founders of a new colony set aside land?
3. What one thing in the setting of the prison door has been kept alive in history?
4. What does the author present to the reader in Chapter 1? Why?

### **Chapter 2: The Market-Place**

1. Why is Hester Prynne being punished?
2. How do the five women feel about the punishment the magistrates have set for Hester Prynne?
3. What is Hester wearing on the breast of her gown?
4. How do the women feel about Hester's dress?
5. Where was Hester born?
6. Who did she marry?

### **Chapter 3: "Recognition"**

1. What physical characteristic enables Hester to identify the stranger standing beside the Indian in the crowd?
2. What does the stranger mean when he says: "But he shall be known!--he shall be known!--he shall be known!"?
3. What was Hester's reaction upon spotting the stranger?
4. Who is the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale?

### **Chapter 4: "The Interview"**

1. Who is Roger Chillingworth?
2. What does Chillingworth want Hester to tell him?
3. What does Hester mean when she says, "I felt no love, nor feigned any?"

4. What promise does Chillingworth ask Hester to make?
5. What promise does Chillingworth make to Hester?

### **Chapter 5: "Hester at her Needle"**

1. Describe the place where Hester and Pearl live.
2. How does Hester earn money to support herself and Pearl?
3. Hester's work is in great demand among the fashionable town for every occasion - except one. What is the one exception?
4. How does Hester react to the vicious abuse of the "respectable" women and thoughtless children of the community?

### **Chapter 6: "Pearl"**

1. Why did Hester name her daughter Pearl?
2. What does Pearl do when the other children in the community gather around her?
3. Describe how Pearl plays at home.
4. As a baby, what was the very first thing that Pearl noticed?
5. Hester is tormented by a question that Pearl asks her. What is the question?

### **Chapter 7: The Governor's Hall**

1. Why does Hester want to talk with Governor Bellingham?
2. What does the servant think the scarlet letter means?
3. How does the polished breastplate of the suit of armor affect the image of the scarlet letter?
4. What effect does this reflecting surface have upon the appearance of Pearl's impish smile?

### **Chapter 8: The Elf-Child and the Minister**

1. This chapter has three female and four male characters. Who are they?
2. Of whom does Pearl remind the governor?
3. Why does Governor Bellingham want to take Pearl from Hester?

4. How does Reverend Wilson “test” whether Hester has been a good mother? How does the “test” turn out?
5. Who convinces the Governor that Pearl should remain with her mother, Hester?
6. To whom does Pearl give an affectionate caress? How does he/she respond?
7. What invitation does Mistress Hibbins make to Hester?

### **Chapter 9: The Leech**

1. For what two reasons are the townspeople happy to have Chillingworth, the leech, in their community?
2. Describe how the relationship between Chillingworth and Reverend Dimmesdale develops.
3. What change has come over Chillingworth since he has come to live in Boston?

### **Chapter 10: The Leech and His Patient**

1. What are the reasons Dimmesdale gives for some men keeping their sins hidden from the world?
2. Why is Chillingworth interested in the Reverend Dimmesdale?
3. How does Pearl describe the relationship of Chillingworth and Dimmesdale?
4. At the end of the chapter, what discovery does Chillingworth make that brings him ecstasy?

### **Chapter 11: The Interior of a Heart**

1. What is Chillingworth doing to Dimmesdale?
2. As Dimmesdale's suffering becomes more painful and his health deteriorates, what happens with his popularity among the people of his church?
3. Why do you think Dimmesdale beats himself with a whip?

### **Chapter 12: The Minister's Vigil**

1. How many years have passed since Hester stood on the scaffold?
2. Why does Dimmesdale stand on the scaffold?
3. While Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold, four people pass by. (not together) Who are they? From where have they come?

4. Who does Dimmesdale ask to join him on the scaffold?
5. What does Pearl ask the minister? How does he answer?
6. Where does Dimmesdale see an immense letter "A"?
7. The next day, what item does the sexton give Dimmesdale at church? Where did it come from?

### **Chapter 13: Another View of Hester**

1. How many years have passed since Pearl was born?
2. How has public opinion of Hester changed? Why?
3. The embroidered letter "A" is now said by many to stand for what?
4. What does Hester decide to do to help Dimmesdale?

### **Chapter 14: Hester and the Physician**

1. What changes have taken place in Chillingworth during the period of Pearl's birth?
2. What does Hester ask of Chillingworth?
3. Does Chillingworth grant Hester's request?

### **Chapter 15: Hester and Pearl**

1. Who does Hester blame for setting off the chain of events that have led to her and Dimmesdale's suffering?
2. How has Pearl kept herself occupied at the shore?
3. Does Pearl know what the letter "A" on Hester's bosom stands for?
4. To what action of Dimmesdale's does Pearl compare Hester's wearing the letter "A"?
5. What reason does Hester finally give Pearl for wearing the scarlet letter?

### **Chapter 16: A Forest Walk**

1. Why does Hester go to the forest?
2. What reason does Pearl give for the sunshine "running away" from Hester?
3. Who is the "Black Man"?

### **Chapter 17: The Pastor and his Parishioner**

1. What does Dimmesdale mean when he says, "Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret"?
2. What secret does Hester reveal to Dimmesdale?
3. What solution does Hester suggest to Dimmesdale?
4. What is Dimmesdale's "sin"?
5. According to Dimmesdale, whose sin is the greatest?

### **Chapter 18: A Flood of Sunshine**

1. Is Hester a Puritan? Was she ever a Puritan?
2. What plans do Hester and Dimmesdale make?
3. What effect does this (the plan) have on Arthur Dimmesdale?
4. What symbol does Nature give when Hester throws off the scarlet letter?
5. How does Dimmesdale expect Pearl to react?

### **Chapter 19: The Child at the Brook-side**

1. What does Dimmesdale admit to being afraid that the "world might see"?
2. What does Pearl see in the brook?
3. What causes Pearl to burst into a passionate, shrieking fit of rage?
4. What does Pearl do when Dimmesdale kisses her?

### **Chapter 20: The Minister in a Maze**

1. What change takes place in Dimmesdale?
2. What plans do Hester and Dimmesdale have?
3. Describe at least two of the strange and wicked impulses that Dimmesdale has on his way back through town.
4. What accusation does Mistress Hibbins make?
5. Explain two possible meanings of Dimmesdale's response to Chillingworth, "Yea, to another world."

### **Chapter 21: The New England Holiday**

1. What is the reason for the 'New England Holiday'?
2. In what sports are some of the men engaged?
3. What bad news does Hester learn at the marketplace celebration?

### **Chapter 22: The Procession**

1. Which magistrates are named as being featured in the procession?
2. What disappoints Hester during the procession?
3. What accusation does Mistress Hibbins make?
4. What message is Pearl asked to deliver to her mother?

### **Chapter 23: The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter**

1. What do the townspeople think about Dimmesdale's sermon?
2. What reason do they give for the "sad undertone of pathos" in the sermon?
3. Why does Pearl run to Dimmesdale?
4. Why does Dimmesdale confess his "sin"?
5. How does Chillingworth react to Dimmesdale's confession?
6. What does Pearl do after she kisses Dimmesdale?

### **Chapter 24: Conclusion**

1. What are the four theories that people have regarding the scarlet letter on Dimmesdale's chest?
2. According to Hawthorne, what is one of the morals of this story?
3. What does Hawthorne say about hatred and love?
4. What makes Pearl the "richest heiress of her day, in the New World?"
5. What happens to Hester?
6. What happens to Pearl?
7. What happens to the scarlet letter?
8. What is on the tombstone that marks the graves of Hester and Dimmesdale?