

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

The Scarlet Letter

Chapter 1

Nathaniel Hawthorne · 11 questions with a full answer key and explanations

What's inside

- **11 multiple-choice questions**, including passage analysis with the original text printed above it — the way your English class asks it.
- **Answer key** on its own page so you can take the quiz first.
- **Explanations** for every question, so a wrong answer teaches you something.
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The quiz

The Scarlet Letter — Chapter 1. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. At the beginning of Chapter 1, where has the crowd of Puritans gathered?

- A. In front of a wooden prison with an iron-spiked oak door
- B. Around the grave of Isaac Johnson in King's Chapel churchyard
- C. Along the wheel-track of Cornhill to establish a new marketplace
- D. Beside the town scaffold to witness a public proclamation

PLOT & EVENT

2. What action does the narrator symbolically take at the conclusion of Chapter 1?

- A. Plucks a flower from the wild rose-bush to offer to the reader
- B. Unlocks the rusted iron door to reveal the interior of the jail
- C. Gathers unsightly weeds from the grass-plot outside the portal
- D. Traces the ancient footsteps of Ann Hutchinson to the threshold

CHARACTER

3. According to the narrator, what do the founders of a new colony invariably establish first, despite any utopian projections?

- A. A cemetery and a prison
- B. A church and a town hall
- C. A marketplace and a courthouse
- D. A schoolhouse and a defensive garrison

CHARACTER

4. How does the narrator describe the attire and general countenance of the assembled Puritan crowd?

- A. Bearded men in sad-colored garments and steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women in hoods or bareheaded
- B. Elegantly dressed citizens wearing ornate European lace and brightly colored cloaks
- C. Disheveled and impoverished refugees lacking adequate clothing for the June weather
- D. A heavily armored militia bearing swords and muskets to guard the settlement

MICRO-DETAIL

5. According to the text, what served as the nucleus for all subsequent graves in the old churchyard of King's Chapel?

- A. The first burial ground marked on Isaac Johnson's lot and round about his grave
- B. The overgrown grass-plot situated directly beside the town prison
- C. The original plot of virgin soil cleared near Cornhill
- D. The site where Ann Hutchinson first addressed the early colonists

MICRO-DETAIL

6. Which specific unsightly plants are described as overgrowing the grass-plot between the prison and the street?

- A. Burdock, pigweed, and apple-peru
- B. Thistle, nightshade, and hemlock
- C. Crabgrass, dandelion, and wild mustard
- D. Brambles, stinging nettle, and poison ivy

MICRO-DETAIL

7. Which physical feature of the jail is described as looking 'more antique than anything else in the New World'?

- A. The rust on the ponderous iron-work of its oaken door
- B. The weather-stains darkening its beetle-browed wooden facade
- C. The gigantic pine timbers forming the framework of the edifice
- D. The deep ruts worn into the street's wheel-track before the threshold

ANALYTICAL

8. The narrator characterizes the prison as the 'black flower of civilized society.' How does this metaphor function within the chapter?

- A. It frames human sin and punitive institutions as an inevitable, dark outgrowth of civilization
- B. It emphasizes the Puritans' ability to transform natural decay into civic order
- C. It suggests that civil law completely eradicates natural moral corruption
- D. It contrasts the darkness of the forest wilderness with the enlightened purity of town life

ANALYTICAL

9. What is the primary thematic effect of juxtaposing the grim wooden prison with the delicate wild rose-bush?

- A.** It contrasts the relentless, punitive severity of Puritan law with the enduring pity and grace of Nature
- B.** It illustrates the settlers' deliberate efforts to cultivate beauty around their penal institutions
- C.** It shows that the encroaching wilderness posed an active physical threat to colonial structures
- D.** It demonstrates that nature is completely indifferent to the suffering of condemned criminals

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

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.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

10. In this excerpt, what is the primary effect of referencing 'the sainted Ann Hutchinson'?

- A.** It links the rose-bush with historical religious dissent and moral independence against rigid authority
- B.** It establishes that the narrator intends to write a strictly factual, non-fiction historical account
- C.** It demonstrates that the Puritan authorities eventually came to revere Hutchinson's theological teachings
- D.** It proves that supernatural miracles regularly occurred at the threshold of the prison

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

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 symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

11. According to this passage, why does the narrator offer a blossom from the rose-bush to the reader at the outset?

- A.** To provide a symbol of moral sweetness and relief in a story marked by frailty and sorrow
- B.** To reassure the reader that the upcoming narrative will conclude with an unambiguous, joyful ending
- C.** To warn the reader not to extend sympathy to individuals who break established moral codes
- D.** To emphasize the physical beauty and botanical accuracy of the seventeenth-century setting

Answer key

Check your answers here, then read the explanations on the next page.

1. A	2. A	3. A	4. A	5. A
6. A	7. A	8. A	9. A	10. A
11. A				

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Answers explained

Why the right answer is right — and what the question is really testing.

1. A. In front of a wooden prison with an iron-spiked oak door

The chapter opens with a throng of men and women assembled outside a wooden edifice whose oak door is heavily timbered and studded with iron spikes.

2. A. Plucks a flower from the wild rose-bush to offer to the reader

At the close of the chapter, the narrator symbolically plucks a rose from the bush at the prison threshold to present to the reader before beginning the tale.

3. A. A cemetery and a prison

The narrator observes that regardless of utopian ideals of human virtue, colony founders always allocate land for a cemetery and a prison among their earliest practical necessities.

4. A. Bearded men in sad-colored garments and steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women in hoods or bareheaded

The opening sentence details the crowd as bearded men wearing 'sad-colored garments' and 'gray, steeple-crowned hats,' accompanied by hooded or bareheaded women.

5. A. The first burial ground marked on Isaac Johnson's lot and round about his grave

The text states that the first burial ground was marked out on Isaac Johnson's lot around his grave, which became the nucleus of the sepulchres in King's Chapel churchyard.

6. A. Burdock, pigweed, and apple-peru

The narrator lists 'burdock, pigweed, apple-peru, and such unsightly vegetation' as the plants flourishing in the soil before the prison.

7. A. The rust on the ponderous iron-work of its oaken door

The narrator highlights the heavy iron-work on the oak door, noting that its rust appeared older than anything else in the New World.

8. A. It frames human sin and punitive institutions as an inevitable, dark outgrowth of civilization

By calling the prison a 'black flower,' Hawthorne uses botanical imagery paradoxically to suggest that crime and punishment naturally and inevitably blossom wherever human civilization takes root.

9. A. It contrasts the relentless, punitive severity of Puritan law with the enduring pity and grace of Nature

The rose-bush offering fragrance and beauty at the prison door symbolizes Nature's sympathy and kindness, standing in sharp relief against the cold, unyielding judgment of the Puritan community.

10. A. It links the rose-bush with historical religious dissent and moral independence against rigid authority

Mentioning Ann Hutchinson—a real historical figure banished and imprisoned by the Puritans for her beliefs—aligns the rose-bush with individual conscience and moral resistance against dogmatic orthodoxy.

11. A. To provide a symbol of moral sweetness and relief in a story marked by frailty and sorrow

The narrator explicitly hopes the plucked flower will serve as a 'sweet moral blossom' to offer relief during a somber tale of 'human frailty and sorrow.'

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