

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

The Scarlet Letter

Chapter 13

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 13. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. What specific incident prompts Hester to resolve to intervene in Mr. Dimmesdale's situation?

- A. Her observation of his ruined moral force and near-lunacy during their encounter on the scaffold at night
- B. A formal request sent to her cottage by the town magistrates seeking her nursing care for the minister
- C. A private warning delivered by Pearl that Roger Chillingworth intended to poison the clergyman
- D. An unexpected letter from Dimmesdale begging her to release him from his clerical duties

PLOT & EVENT

2. Where and under what circumstances does Hester find Roger Chillingworth at the end of the chapter?

- A. In a secluded part of the peninsula, where he is gathering medicinal roots and herbs with a basket and staff
- B. Inside the town meeting-house, where he is publicly conferring with the magistrates about Dimmesdale
- C. At the doorway of her seaside cottage, where he has come uninvited to demand custody of Pearl
- D. Near the town scaffold, where he is searching for evidence discarded during the midnight vigil

CHARACTER

3. Why does Hester believe she owes an inescapable duty to aid Arthur Dimmesdale, despite her complete isolation from the community?

- A. She recognizes that their shared transgression forms an unbreakable bond of mutual obligation
- B. She hopes to regain her lost social status by securing the clergyman's public endorsement
- C. She feels bound by the traditional marital vows she took before leaving England
- D. She fears that Dimmesdale's death would leave Pearl without any legal guardian

CHARACTER

4. Why does Hester now feel capable of confronting Roger Chillingworth, in contrast to their earlier meeting in the prison?

- A. Her endurance through years of penance has elevated her moral strength, while Chillingworth has degraded himself through revenge
- B. She has amassed financial independence through her needlework and can afford legal protection
- C. The magistrates have formally absolved her of her original sentence, granting her equal authority
- D. Chillingworth's physical illness has left him completely bedridden and defenseless

MICRO-DETAIL

5. Because of Hester's tireless devotion to the sick and afflicted, what alternate meaning do many townspeople assign to the scarlet 'A'?

- A. Able
- B. Angel
- C. Admirable
- D. Atoning

MICRO-DETAIL

6. What supernatural legend did townspeople begin to circulate regarding the protective qualities of Hester's scarlet badge?

- A. That an Indian's arrow struck the badge and fell harmlessly to the ground
- B. That the letter glowed with visible flame to guide lost travelers in the dark
- C. That touching the embroidery could instantly cure victims of the pestilence
- D. That sea storms parted whenever Hester walked along the shore wearing it

MICRO-DETAIL

7. According to the narrator, what historical figure might Hester have resembled had Pearl not arrived to anchor her intellectual energies?

- A. Ann Hutchinson
- B. Mary Dyer
- C. Queen Elizabeth
- D. Joan of Arc

ANALYTICAL

8. How does the narrator characterize the transformation of Hester's physical appearance and internal disposition during her years of isolation?

- A.** Her life shifted from passion and feeling to cold, speculative thought, resulting in the suppression of her feminine warmth and beauty
- B.** Her physical beauty was enhanced by ascetic religious practices, making her appear saintly and unearthly to all onlookers
- C.** Her intellect steadily deteriorated under community scorn, leaving only an instinctive maternal protective reflex
- D.** Her outward demeanor became increasingly aggressive and defiant, directly reflecting her revolutionary ideas

ANALYTICAL

9. What does the narrator mean by the assertion that 'The scarlet letter had not done its office'?

- A.** Rather than producing orthodox Puritan repentance and submission, the badge spurred Hester into radical, independent intellectual speculation
- B.** The badge failed to protect Hester from physical violence when walking through dangerous outskirts of the settlement
- C.** The magistrates failed to enforce the legal requirement that Hester wear the embroidery in public settings
- D.** The townspeople completely forgot Hester's original offense and removed the badge from her attire

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

It is to the credit of human nature, that, except where its selfishness is brought into play, it loves more readily than it hates. Hatred, by a gradual and quiet process, will even be transformed to love, unless the change be impeded by a continually new irritation of the original feeling of hostility. In this matter of Hester Prynne, there was neither irritation nor irksomeness. She never battled with the public, but submitted, uncomplainingly, to its worst usage; she made no claim upon it, in requital for what she suffered; she did not weigh upon its sympathies.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

10. According to this passage, what primary behavior from Hester allowed the community's hostility to gradually evolve into regard?

- A.** Her uncomplaining submission to ill-treatment and refusal to demand sympathy or rights from the public
- B.** Her persistent appeals to the town council demanding pardon for her past offenses
- C.** Her public declarations of guilt delivered weekly on the church steps
- D.** Her active defiance against community standards that forced the rulers to respect her

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change; in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life, will be found to have evaporated.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

11. In this excerpt, what conclusion does Hester reach concerning the prospect of reforming society to improve the condition of women?

- A.** It is a virtually impossible undertaking requiring a total dismantling of society, a change in male nature, and a fundamental internal transformation in women
- B.** It can be achieved quickly if women unite to establish their own independent religious congregations
- C.** It is an inevitable historical outcome that will naturally occur without any internal modification of woman's character
- D.** It depends entirely upon educating male rulers in the principles of European intellectual philosophy

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. Her observation of his ruined moral force and near-lunacy during their encounter on the scaffold at night

Hester is moved to act after witnessing Dimmesdale's shattered state during his late-night vigil, realizing that Chillingworth has been actively tormenting him.

2. A. In a secluded part of the peninsula, where he is gathering medicinal roots and herbs with a basket and staff

At the close of Chapter 13, Hester encounters Chillingworth while walking with Pearl in a retired area of the peninsula, observing him stooping for herbs.

3. A. She recognizes that their shared transgression forms an unbreakable bond of mutual obligation

The text explains that while all ordinary social ties were broken, the 'iron link of mutual crime' remained, imposing a unique obligation upon her toward Dimmesdale.

4. A. Her endurance through years of penance has elevated her moral strength, while Chillingworth has degraded himself through revenge

Hester feels strengthened by years of solemn trial and elevated above her former abasement, whereas Chillingworth has lowered himself by stooping to revenge.

5. A. Able

The narrative notes that because of her great helpfulness and strength to sympathize, many interpreted the letter 'A' as meaning 'Able.'

6. A. That an Indian's arrow struck the badge and fell harmlessly to the ground

The text mentions a popular belief that the badge acted like a sacred talisman, including a rumor that an arrow shot at it dropped harmlessly.

7. A. Ann Hutchinson

The narrator states that without Pearl to raise, Hester might have become a religious foundress and prophetess alongside Ann Hutchinson.

8. A. Her life shifted from passion and feeling to cold, speculative thought, resulting in the suppression of her feminine warmth and beauty

Hawthorne describes Hester's transformation as a transition from feeling to intellectual speculation, which withered her graceful foliage and crushed her tenderness deep within.

9. A. Rather than producing orthodox Puritan repentance and submission, the badge spurred Hester into radical, independent intellectual speculation

The letter was designed by Puritan society to enforce humility and conformity to dogma; instead, it liberated Hester's mind from societal law and led her to question the foundation of social institutions.

10. A. Her uncomplaining submission to ill-treatment and refusal to demand sympathy or rights from the public

The excerpt explains that hostility turns to love when there is no new friction; Hester never fought the public, accepted its harshness without complaint, and asked for nothing in return.

11. A. It is a virtually impossible undertaking requiring a total dismantling of society, a change in male nature, and a fundamental internal transformation in women

Hester identifies three massive hurdles: tearing down and rebuilding society, modifying male hereditary habit, and an even mightier internal transformation of woman herself.

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