

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

The Scarlet Letter

Chapter 17

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 17. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. What critical secret does Hester Prynne disclose to Arthur Dimmesdale during their conversation in the forest?

- A. She reveals that Pearl knows Arthur Dimmesdale is her father.
- B. She reveals that Roger Chillingworth is actually her lawful husband.
- C. She reveals that the magistrates intend to seize Pearl from her care.
- D. She reveals that Chillingworth plans to poison the town's water supply.

PLOT & EVENT

2. When Dimmesdale despairs that he lacks the courage to flee alone, how does Hester resolve their dilemma at the end of the chapter?

- A. She promises him that he will not have to go alone.
- B. She gives him Pearl's hand and urges him to confess on the scaffold.
- C. She decides to stay behind to confront Chillingworth by herself.
- D. She advises him to seek formal guidance from the senior magistrates.

CHARACTER

3. Why does Arthur Dimmesdale find the reverence of his congregation to be a source of deep agony rather than comfort?

- A. He feels that his parishioners demand more intellectual sermons than he can provide.
- B. He perceives a stark, torturous contrast between his outward holiness and his inward corruption.
- C. He suspects that the congregation is secretly aware of his hidden sin and is mocking him.
- D. He worries that his flock relies too heavily on him instead of cultivating personal faith.

CHARACTER

4. What realization ultimately motivates Hester to break her vow and inform Dimmesdale of Chillingworth's true identity?

- A. She sees that Chillingworth's constant presence is systematically poisoning and corrupting Dimmesdale's spirit.
- B. She wants to incite Dimmesdale to take physical vengeance against the vengeful physician.
- C. She fears that Chillingworth will publicly expose her own hidden role in the deception.
- D. She believes that exposing Chillingworth will compel the magistrates to pardon her.

MICRO-DETAIL

5. How does the text describe the effect of the initial physical contact between Hester and Dimmesdale when their hands meet?

- A. It sparks an immediate feeling of youthful joy that banishes all memory of grief.
- B. It causes both to recoil in mutual terror and distrust of one another.
- C. It removes the dreariest aspect of their meeting, uniting them in the same sphere.
- D. It leaves Dimmesdale feeling physically warmer and instantly restores his strength.

MICRO-DETAIL

6. What distinction does Dimmesdale make between 'penance' and 'penitence' when Hester suggests his good works bring peace?

- A. He asserts that he has endured abundant penance, but has achieved no genuine penitence.
- B. He claims that penitence is easily achieved, whereas penance requires severe bodily suffering.
- C. He argues that penance is granted by the church, but penitence must come from the state.
- D. He believes penitence has cleansed his soul, while penance remains an unfulfilled obligation.

MICRO-DETAIL

7. According to Dimmesdale, why is Roger Chillingworth's sin far blacker than his and Hester's?

- A. Chillingworth committed murder under the pretense of offering medical treatment.
- B. Chillingworth openly renounced God and embraced witchcraft in the forest.
- C. Chillingworth violated the sacred sanctity of a human heart in cold blood.
- D. Chillingworth refused to forgive Hester despite her public punishment on the scaffold.

ANALYTICAL

8. How does the author use the forest setting in this chapter to contrast with the Puritan settlement?

- A. The forest represents untamed savagery that threatens to destroy their remaining moral decency.
- B. The forest provides a space of truth and freedom where the social pretenses of the settlement fall away.
- C. The forest symbolizes inescapable damnation where neither character can find comfort or forgiveness.
- D. The forest acts as an illusion that temporarily blinds them to the real legal power of the magistrates.

ANALYTICAL

9. When Dimmesdale refers to himself as an 'unfaithful sentinel,' what does the metaphor convey about his moral dilemma?

- A. He feels compelled to maintain his assigned spiritual post despite knowing he has compromised his honor.
- B. He sees himself as a literal soldier defending the physical boundaries of the Puritan settlement.
- C. He believes that abandoning his ministry will trigger an armed uprising among the townspeople.
- D. He considers his duty to the church far less significant than his personal desire for safety.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

So strangely did they meet, in the dim wood, that it was like the first encounter, in the world beyond the grave, of two spirits who had been intimately connected in their former life, but now stood coldly shuddering, in mutual dread; as not yet familiar with their state, nor wonted to the companionship of disembodied beings. Each a ghost, and awe-stricken at the other ghost!

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

10. What does the ghostly imagery in this passage primarily convey about Hester and Dimmesdale's initial interaction?

- A.** It illustrates that both characters have lost their memory of each other over the seven years.
- B.** It emphasizes how prolonged suffering and isolation have alienated them from ordinary human existence.
- C.** It suggests that both characters believe they are encountering actual supernatural apparitions.
- D.** It demonstrates that their mutual affection has withered into cold resentment and hatred.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

Exchange this false life of thine for a true one. Be, if thy spirit summon thee to such a mission, the teacher and apostle of the red men. Or,—as is more thy nature,—be a scholar and a sage among the wisest and the most renowned of the cultivated world. Preach! Write! Act! Do anything, save to lie down and die!

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

11. In this excerpt, what is the primary rhetorical objective of Hester's impassioned exhortations to Dimmesdale?

- A.** To shame Dimmesdale for his lack of masculine courage and past spiritual weakness.
- B.** To rouse Dimmesdale from his passive despair by presenting meaningful paths toward renewal.
- C.** To convince Dimmesdale that he must completely abandon all scholarly and ministerial ambitions.
- D.** To demonstrate that she alone possesses the intellectual capacity to lead the community.

Answer key

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

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

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Answers explained

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

1. B. She reveals that Roger Chillingworth is actually her lawful husband.

Hester finally confesses the truth she had long concealed: that the physician Roger Chillingworth is her husband, whom she had sworn not to reveal.

2. A. She promises him that he will not have to go alone.

When Dimmesdale despondently repeats that he cannot venture into the wide world alone, Hester reassures him in a whisper that he will not go alone.

3. B. He perceives a stark, torturous contrast between his outward holiness and his inward corruption.

Dimmesdale views the adoration of his flock as a delusion that deepens his misery because it forces him to confront the vast divide between what he appears to be and his actual sinful state.

4. A. She sees that Chillingworth's constant presence is systematically poisoning and corrupting Dimmesdale's spirit.

Hester realizes that Chillingworth's malicious interference under the guise of medical care is driving Dimmesdale toward madness and spiritual ruin, making her concealment of the truth a terrible wrong.

5. C. It removes the dreariest aspect of their meeting, uniting them in the same sphere.

Though their hands are cold as death, touching one another dispels the spectral isolation of their encounter and brings them back into shared reality.

6. A. He asserts that he has endured abundant penance, but has achieved no genuine penitence.

Dimmesdale explains that while he has punished himself severely through outward acts of penance, he lacks the genuine spiritual renewal of penitence, which would require open honesty.

7. C. Chillingworth violated the sacred sanctity of a human heart in cold blood.

Dimmesdale identifies Chillingworth's calculated, cold-blooded psychological violation of another human heart as far more evil than the passion-driven sin he and Hester shared.

8. B. The forest provides a space of truth and freedom where the social pretenses of the settlement fall away.

In the gloom of the forest, away from the watchful eyes of the settlement, Hester's letter loses its burning ignominy, and Dimmesdale can abandon his false public persona to be authentic.

9. A. He feels compelled to maintain his assigned spiritual post despite knowing he has compromised his honor.

Dimmesdale compares himself to a watchman placed by Providence who has failed his duty, yet feels he cannot abandon his post even though his failure ensures dishonor and death.

10. B. It emphasizes how prolonged suffering and isolation have alienated them from ordinary human existence.

The depiction of the pair as disembodied spirits meeting beyond the grave highlights the profound psychological alienation and trauma that have cut them off from ordinary earthly life.

11. B. To rouse Dimmesdale from his passive despair by presenting meaningful paths toward renewal.

Hester offers a series of dynamic alternatives (apostle, scholar, author) using vigorous imperative verbs to inspire Dimmesdale to reject his self-destructive resignation and embrace life.

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