

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

The Scarlet Letter

Chapter 18

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 18. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. What physical action does Hester perform immediately after unfastening and throwing aside the scarlet letter?

- A. She washes her face and hands in the running forest brook.
- B. She takes off the formal cap that confines her dark hair.
- C. She kneels on the fallen leaves and embraces Arthur Dimmesdale.
- D. She calls Pearl to cross the stream and meet Dimmesdale.

PLOT & EVENT

2. Where does the scarlet letter land when Hester flings it away from her bosom?

- A. It floats down the current of the forest stream.
- B. It alights on the near bank just short of the water.
- C. It catches on the low boughs of an overarching tree.
- D. It falls directly into the deepest part of the brook.

CHARACTER

3. According to the narrator, what internal rationale leads Arthur Dimmesdale to finally agree to flee with Hester?

- A. He believes he can establish a purer congregation in a distant land.
- B. He feels irrevocably doomed and resolves to seize solace before the end.
- C. He wants to publicly expose Roger Chillingworth's vindictive nature.
- D. He is convinced that Pearl requires a recognized father in society.

CHARACTER

4. Why does Dimmesdale express anxiety and hesitation when Hester offers to introduce him to Pearl?

- A. He is concerned Pearl will look so much like him that others will notice.
- B. He has long shrunk from children because they tend to distrust him.
- C. He believes Pearl has been corrupted by the witchcraft of the forest.
- D. He fears Pearl will refuse to leave Boston and ruin their escape plan.

MICRO-DETAIL

5. According to the narrator, which three forces served as Hester Prynne's 'stern and wild' teachers during her seven years of ostracism?

- A. Passion, Defiance, and Guilt
- B. Shame, Despair, and Solitude
- C. Nature, Intellect, and Sorrow
- D. Penance, Secrecy, and Grief

MICRO-DETAIL

6. How does the squirrel in the forest interact with Pearl while she wanders alone?

- A. It accepts partridge-berries directly from her outstretched hand.
- B. It chatters at her and drops a gnawed nut down upon her head.
- C. It flees in terror to the highest branches of a domestic tree.
- D. It leads her playfully toward the flowers near the stream.

MICRO-DETAIL

7. How does the narrator contrast the nature of Dimmesdale's transgression with Hester's state of mind?

- A. Dimmesdale's was a sin of passion within accepted laws, unlike Hester's moral speculation.
- B. Dimmesdale sinned out of deliberate intellectual rebellion against the church's doctrines.
- C. Dimmesdale calculated his actions, while Hester was completely overwhelmed by instinct.
- D. Dimmesdale retained total innocence, whereas Hester actively sought out heretical ideas.

ANALYTICAL

8. In the passage comparing the human soul to a walled citadel, what does the 'ruined wall' symbolize regarding guilt?

- A. The complete collapse of a person's religious belief after a single crime
- B. The permanent vulnerability and unhealable breach left in the soul by sin
- C. The societal punishment imposed on criminals by church authorities
- D. The physical deterioration of the body caused by intense penance

ANALYTICAL

9. What does the sudden 'flood of sunshine' into the gloomy forest signify in the context of the chapter?

- A. Nature's active moral approval and sanctification of Puritan law
- B. An outward projection and sympathetic reflection of their restored joy
- C. A divine warning that their secret transgression is now exposed to light
- D. The clearing of the wilderness to make way for civilized society

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

The stigma gone, Hester heaved a long, deep sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. O exquisite relief! She had not known the weight, until she felt the freedom! By another impulse, she took off the formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich, with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

10. In this excerpt, what does the transformation of Hester's physical appearance primarily convey?

- A. Her vanity and desire to conform to secular standards of beauty
- B. The immediate revival of her long-suppressed femininity, youth, and vitality
- C. Her complete spiritual corruption and abandonment of maternal duty
- D. Her attempt to disguise herself so that townspeople will not recognize her

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

A wolf, it is said,—but here the tale has surely lapsed into the improbable,—came up, and smelt of Pearl's robe, and offered his savage head to be patted by her hand. The truth seems to be, however, that the mother-forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

11. What does the narrator's reflection on the wild animals approaching Pearl emphasize about her character?

- A. Her dangerous lack of self-preservation in the wilderness
- B. An innate, elemental affinity between her nature and the untamed forest
- C. Her supernatural ability to magically domesticate predatory beasts
- D. Her learned hunting skills developed while living on the outskirts of town

Answer key

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

1. B	2. B	3. B	4. B	5. B
6. B	7. A	8. B	9. B	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 takes off the formal cap that confines her dark hair.

After casting off the scarlet letter, Hester removes the formal cap that had confined her hair, allowing it to fall freely upon her shoulders.

2. B. It alights on the near bank just short of the water.

The text states that the discarded letter landed on the hither verge of the stream, missing the water by only a hand's breadth.

3. B. He feels irrevocably doomed and resolves to seize solace before the end.

Dimmesdale reasons that since he is already irrevocably doomed, he might as well take the solace allowed to a condemned culprit and seek life with Hester.

4. B. He has long shrunk from children because they tend to distrust him.

Dimmesdale confesses that he has long shrunk from children because they often exhibit distrust and backwardness around him, making him afraid of Pearl.

5. B. Shame, Despair, and Solitude

The narrator explicitly identifies Shame, Despair, and Solitude as the teachers that strengthened Hester while teaching her much amiss.

6. B. It chatters at her and drops a gnawed nut down upon her head.

The text notes that the squirrel chattered in anger or merriment and dropped a last year's gnawed nut onto Pearl's head.

7. A. Dimmesdale's was a sin of passion within accepted laws, unlike Hester's moral speculation.

The narrator explains that Dimmesdale had never wandered beyond received laws except in a single sin of passion, whereas Hester had habituated herself to wide moral speculation.

8. B. The permanent vulnerability and unhealable breach left in the soul by sin

The ruined wall represents the sad truth that once guilt breaches the human soul, the damage is never truly repaired in mortal life, leaving an enduring vulnerability.

9. B. An outward projection and sympathetic reflection of their restored joy

The sunshine mirrors and responds to the radiance awakening within Hester and Dimmesdale, demonstrating Nature's wild sympathy with their relief.

10. B. The immediate revival of her long-suppressed femininity, youth, and vitality

Removing the cap and letter allows Hester's hidden beauty, youth, and warmth to rush back, demonstrating how suppression had stifled her true self.

11. B. An innate, elemental affinity between her nature and the untamed forest

The narrator explains that the forest creatures recognize a 'kindred wildness' in Pearl, emphasizing her natural alignment with the untamed wilderness rather than Puritan society.

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