

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

The Scarlet Letter

Chapter 2

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.
- Written from LumLysia's study edition of the book — not scraped summaries.

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The quiz

The Scarlet Letter — Chapter 2. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. Where is Hester Prynne taken after leaving the prison, and for how long is she ordered to be displayed?

- A. To the platform of the pillory in the market-place until an hour past meridian
- B. To the town whipping-post near Prison Lane until the setting of the sun
- C. To the gallows beside the meeting-house until high noon
- D. To the balcony of the council chamber until late afternoon

PLOT & EVENT

2. At the conclusion of the chapter, what physical actions does Hester take to ground herself back in her harsh reality?

- A. She clutches her infant until it cries and touches the embroidered letter with her finger
- B. She looks toward Master Dimmesdale on the meeting-house balcony and bows her head
- C. She attempts to descend the wooden steps but is halted by the town-beadle's staff
- D. She draws a dark cloak over her shoulders to conceal the gold-threaded emblem

CHARACTER

3. How does the youngest woman in the crowd differ in perspective from the older matrons observing Hester?

- A. She perceives that Hester will endure internal anguish regardless of any outer covering
- B. She believes Hester deserves execution according to biblical and statutory law
- C. She demands that Hester's forehead be branded with a hot iron instead of wearing a badge
- D. She insists that Hester's fine gown be torn off and replaced with coarse rheumatic flannel

CHARACTER

4. What causes Hester to reconsider her first instinct of holding her baby tightly against her chest upon leaving the prison?

- A. She recognizes that using the infant to hide the embroidered letter would only substitute one sign of shame for another
- B. She is commanded by the beadle to reveal the letter fully to the spectators in the lane
- C. She fears the bright summer sunlight will permanently damage the child's sensitive eyes
- D. She wishes to boldly display her luxurious needlework to humiliate the watching magistrates

MICRO-DETAIL

5. According to Hester's recollections while on the scaffold, what distinctive physical feature belonged to the elderly scholar from her past?

- A. His left shoulder was slightly higher than his right
- B. His right eye was clouded and completely blind
- C. He walked with a heavy limp due to a shortened leg
- D. He possessed a deeply scarred forehead and brow

MICRO-DETAIL

6. What two symbols of legal authority does the town-beadle carry as he escorts Hester from the jail?

- A. A sword by his side and an official staff in his hand
- B. A heavy iron key ring and an open Bible
- C. A leather whip and a written court decree
- D. A set of iron manacles and a wooden baton

MICRO-DETAIL

7. In Hester's memories of her English childhood, how is her paternal home depicted?

- A. As a decaying gray stone house bearing a half-obliterated coat of arms
- B. As a prosperous brick estate situated near the bustling cathedral square
- C. As a humble thatched cottage nestled in a remote rural woodland
- D. As a well-kept timber manor marked by newly painted heraldic crests

ANALYTICAL

8. Why does Hester find the crowd's heavy, solemn silence more difficult to endure than active mockery or laughter?

- A. Solemn judgment isolates her completely and pushes her toward madness, whereas mockery would allow her to respond with defiant scorn
- B. The crowd's quiet demeanor indicates that they secretly pity her, which insults her pride far more than outright hatred
- C. The grim stillness prevents her from discerning which townsfolk are genuinely pious and which are hypocrites
- D. The solemnity makes her fear that the magistrates plan to alter her sentence into an immediate execution

ANALYTICAL

9. For what purpose does the narrator invoke the image of the 'Divine Maternity' when describing Hester and her infant on the scaffold?

- A. To emphasize through stark contrast how the sacred bond of motherhood has been clouded by sin in this fallen scene
- B. To foreshadow that the child will eventually grow up to reform and redeem the Puritan settlement
- C. To illustrate that the Puritan community secretly views Hester as a holy and elevated figure
- D. To criticize Catholic iconography as inferior to the austere reality of New England justice

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

Morally, as well as materially, there was a coarser fibre in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding, than in their fair descendants, separated from them by a series of six or seven generations; for, throughout that chain of ancestry, every successive mother has transmitted to her child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slighter physical frame, if not a character of less force and solidity, than her own.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

10. What claim does the author make regarding the physical and moral development of English women across successive generations in the colony?

- A.** Subsequent generations have steadily declined in physical robustness and moral solidity compared to their Elizabethan forebears
- B.** The harsh wilderness has hardened subsequent generations into even coarser and more pitiless figures than their ancestors
- C.** Generational refinement has replaced physical strength with superior intellectual and spiritual fortitude
- D.** The transition to the New World caused women to discard traditional English modesty in favor of frontier independence

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold-thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

11. What does the ornate craftsmanship of the scarlet letter reveal about Hester's psychological response to her sentence?

- A.** Her luxuriant and artistic embellishment displays a defiant, reckless spirit that resists simple humiliation
- B.** Her meticulous embroidery represents a desperate attempt to placate the magistrates through fine domestic industry
- C.** Her careful decoration shows that she is trying to conform precisely to the sumptuary laws of the colony
- D.** Her elaborate gold flourishes demonstrate that she fails to comprehend the gravity of her public punishment

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. To the platform of the pillory in the market-place until an hour past meridian

The town-beadle proclaims that Hester will be exhibited on the platform in the market-place from that time 'till an hour past meridian' so that all onlookers may view her.

2. A. She clutches her infant until it cries and touches the embroidered letter with her finger

To break from the vivid memories of her past and confirm her present situation, Hester clutches her baby tightly enough to elicit a cry and touches the scarlet letter on her chest.

3. A. She perceives that Hester will endure internal anguish regardless of any outer covering

While the older matrons call for harsher physical punishments or ridicule Hester's fancy needlework, the young wife softly remarks that the true pain remains inside Hester's heart.

4. A. She recognizes that using the infant to hide the embroidered letter would only substitute one sign of shame for another

Hester initially moves to hide the embroidered letter with her child, but she quickly realizes that the baby itself is a token of her shame and cannot conceal the other.

5. A. His left shoulder was slightly higher than his right

In Hester's memory of the pale, scholarly man who pored over ponderous books, she distinctly recalls that his left shoulder was slightly higher than his right.

6. A. A sword by his side and an official staff in his hand

The text explicitly notes that the beadle appears with 'a sword by his side, and his staff of office in his hand' to represent the Puritan legal code.

7. A. As a decaying gray stone house bearing a half-obliterated coat of arms

Hester remembers her family home as a decayed house of gray stone with a poverty-stricken appearance, yet retaining an antique shield of arms over the door.

8. A. Solemn judgment isolates her completely and pushes her toward madness, whereas mockery would allow her to respond with defiant scorn

Hawthorne explains that Hester was prepared to return bitter, disdainful smiles to open mockery, but the unrelenting, leaden solemnity of the Puritan crowd nearly drove her mad with agony.

9. A. To emphasize through stark contrast how the sacred bond of motherhood has been clouded by sin in this fallen scene

The narrator notes that a Papist might be reminded of the Virgin and Child, 'but only by contrast,' emphasizing how deeply sin has tainted what should be the most sacred aspect of human existence.

10. A. Subsequent generations have steadily declined in physical robustness and moral solidity compared to their Elizabethan forebears

The passage states that each successive mother transmitted to her daughter a 'fainter bloom' and a 'slighter physical frame, if not a character of less force and solidity,' showing a loss of original vigor.

11. A. Her luxuriant and artistic embellishment displays a defiant, reckless spirit that resists simple humiliation

The narrator explains that the letter's fertility of fancy and gorgeous luxuriance went far beyond sumptuary regulations, expressing 'the desperate recklessness of her mood' and converting a badge of shame into a bold personal statement.

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