

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

The Scarlet Letter

Chapter 20

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 20. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. How does Hester Prynne arrange passage for Dimmesdale, Pearl, and herself to leave New England?

- A. She secures berths on a vessel bound for Bristol through her acquaintance with the captain and crew as a Sister of Charity.
- B. She uses funds sent secretly from her family in England to purchase passage from a visiting merchant trader.
- C. She negotiates with Mistress Hibbins to secure space on a privateer anchored beyond the harbor.
- D. She convinces Roger Chillingworth to sponsor their voyage under the pretext of seeking specialized medical care abroad.

PLOT & EVENT

2. What does Dimmesdale do with the unfinished Election Sermon manuscript upon returning to his study and speaking with Chillingworth?

- A. He throws the existing pages into the fire and impulsively writes an entirely new sermon throughout the night.
- B. He hides the draft inside his Hebrew Bible to keep Chillingworth from inspecting his theological arguments.
- C. He carefully revises the original text to include subtle condemnations of his own secret hypocrisy.
- D. He dictates the remainder of the sermon to a servant because his hands tremble too violently to write.

CHARACTER

3. Why does Reverend Dimmesdale consider it fortunate that the ship will not depart until the fourth day?

- A. It enables him to preach the prestigious Election Sermon and conclude his public ministry honorably.
- B. It provides him enough time to publicly confess his hidden guilt to the magistrates before leaving.
- C. It gives Hester sufficient opportunity to pack their belongings and purchase supplies for the Atlantic crossing.
- D. It ensures that Chillingworth will be away on medical business when the ship sets sail.

CHARACTER

4. How does Dimmesdale respond when Roger Chillingworth offers remedies to strengthen him for the upcoming Election discourse?

- A.** He declines the medicine, asserting that his journey into the wilderness and fresh air have already restored him.
- B.** He accepts the tinctures with feigned gratitude to prevent Chillingworth from suspecting his planned escape.
- C.** He directly denounces Chillingworth as an enemy and forbids him from ever entering his study again.
- D.** He asks the physician to prepare a restorative draught for Hester Prynne and Pearl instead.

MICRO-DETAIL

5. When Dimmesdale encounters the eldest female member of his congregation in the street, what blasphemous thought tempts him?

- A.** To whisper an unanswerable argument against the immortality of the human soul into her ear.
- B.** To mock her prolonged grief over her dead family by telling her that prayer is futile.
- C.** To confess his adultery openly and shatter her reverent faith in his personal sanctity.
- D.** To declare that the holy scriptures she read for thirty years were fabricated fables.

MICRO-DETAIL

6. How does Dimmesdale avoid yielding to evil impulses when he encounters the young, innocent maiden who recently joined the church?

- A.** He covers his face with his Geneva cloak and hurries past her without any gesture of recognition.
- B.** He turns down a side street and hides in the shadow of a house until she passes.
- C.** He silently recites Latin verses while fixing his gaze strictly on the ground.
- D.** He gives her a severe theological admonition to make her turn away from him.

MICRO-DETAIL

7. According to the narrator, what primarily prevents Dimmesdale from stopping to exchange oaths and crude jokes with the drunken sailor?

- A. His innate good taste and deeply ingrained habit of clerical decorum.
- B. His fear of being spotted and reprimanded by the town magistrates.
- C. A sudden return of authentic spiritual humility and religious devotion.
- D. His eagerness to return to his study before Chillingworth arrived.

ANALYTICAL

8. The narrator states, 'No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.' In context, this observation functions to:

- A. Diagnose the profound psychological fracture and self-delusion caused by Dimmesdale's prolonged hypocrisy.
- B. Critique the rigid expectations of the Puritan community for forcing ministers to appear sinless.
- C. Highlight Chillingworth's tragic transformation from an honest scholar into a vengeful fiend.
- D. Illustrate Hester's inability to perceive how thoroughly Dimmesdale has changed during their separation.

ANALYTICAL

9. During his return from the forest, the familiar streets, buildings, and inhabitants appear profoundly strange to Dimmesdale. How does the narrator explain this sensory experience?

- A. Dimmesdale's sudden internal moral upheaval has transformed his subjective perception of unchanged external reality.
- B. Mistress Hibbins has cast a deceptive psychological spell over the town to disorient the minister.
- C. Physical exhaustion, fasting, and fever have caused Dimmesdale to suffer waking hallucinations.
- D. The townspeople intuitively sense his corruption and project an atmosphere of estrangement toward him.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

Now, during a conversation of some two or three moments between the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale and this excellent and hoary-bearded deacon, it was only by the most careful self-control that the former could refrain from uttering certain blasphemous suggestions that rose into his mind, respecting the communion supper. He absolutely trembled and turned pale as ashes, lest his tongue should wag itself, in utterance of these horrible matters, and plead his own consent for so doing, without his having fairly given it.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

10. In this passage, how is Dimmesdale's internal conflict during his encounter with the deacon characterized?

- A.** As a frightening, semi-involuntary surge of impiety that threatens to overcome his conscious restraint.
- B.** As a premeditated desire to publicly challenge the orthodox theology of the Puritan church.
- C.** As a temporary cognitive confusion resulting from extreme physical fatigue and illness.
- D.** As a deliberate effort to test the deacon's patience and capacity for Christian charity.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

The physician knew then, that, in the minister's regard, he was no longer a trusted friend, but his bitterest enemy. So much being known, it would appear natural that a part of it should be expressed. It is singular, however, how long a time often passes before words embody things; and with what security two persons, who choose to avoid a certain subject, may approach its very verge, and retire without disturbing it.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

11. In this passage, what underlying dynamic defines the interaction between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth?

- A.** A covert mutual understanding where both men recognize their enmity while preserving an outward veil of polite formality.
- B.** A genuine reconciliation sparked by Dimmesdale's renewed physical vigor and sincere spiritual gratitude.
- C.** A heated confrontation prevented solely because Dimmesdale lacks the physical stamina to accuse Chillingworth directly.
- D.** A complete failure of communication in which Dimmesdale remains unaware that Chillingworth suspects his forest interview.

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. She secures berths on a vessel bound for Bristol through her acquaintance with the captain and crew as a Sister of Charity.

The text explains that Hester's charitable work had made her acquainted with the captain and crew of a questionable vessel from the Spanish Main that would sail for Bristol, allowing her to secure their passage secretly.

2. A. He throws the existing pages into the fire and impulsively writes an entirely new sermon throughout the night.

After Roger Chillingworth leaves, Dimmesdale flings the already written draft of the Election Sermon into the fireplace and spends the entire night passionately composing a new one.

3. A. It enables him to preach the prestigious Election Sermon and conclude his public ministry honorably.

Dimmesdale feels relieved because the departure date falls after the Election Sermon, allowing him to fulfill this pivotal clerical duty and terminate his career with an untarnished public reputation.

4. A. He declines the medicine, asserting that his journey into the wilderness and fresh air have already restored him.

Dimmesdale rejects Chillingworth's medical treatments, stating that the forest air and his journey have revitalized him and that he no longer requires any drugs.

5. A. To whisper an unanswerable argument against the immortality of the human soul into her ear.

Instead of offering scripture to comfort the pious old widow, Dimmesdale is seized by an urge to whisper a potent, destructive argument denying the immortality of the soul.

6. A. He covers his face with his Geneva cloak and hurries past her without any gesture of recognition.

To prevent himself from corrupting the young girl's purity with a wicked glance or word, Dimmesdale holds his Geneva cloak before his face and rushes past her without acknowledging her.

7. A. His innate good taste and deeply ingrained habit of clerical decorum.

The text explicitly states that it was not moral principle, but rather Dimmesdale's natural good taste and habitual clerical decorum, that restrained him during his encounter with the sailor.

8. A. Diagnose the profound psychological fracture and self-delusion caused by Dimmesdale's prolonged hypocrisy.

This aphorism diagnoses Dimmesdale's moral and psychological state: maintaining an outward appearance of holiness while harboring hidden sin has eroded his character and clouded his self-awareness.

9. A. Dimmesdale's sudden internal moral upheaval has transformed his subjective perception of unchanged external reality.

The narrator clarifies that the external scene did not alter at all; rather, the radical shift in Dimmesdale's moral consciousness and will made familiar surroundings feel completely transformed.

10. A. As a frightening, semi-involuntary surge of impiety that threatens to overcome his conscious restraint.

The passage emphasizes that the blasphemous thoughts arose unbidden and terrified Dimmesdale, who had to exert intense self-control so that his tongue would not utter them against his will.

11. A. A covert mutual understanding where both men recognize their enmity while preserving an outward veil of polite formality.

The passage describes how both men are acutely aware of their true adversarial relationship, yet they operate under an unspoken social agreement to approach the edge of the truth without stating it aloud.

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