

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

The Scarlet Letter

Chapter 21

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 21. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. What causes the exhibition of buckler and broadsword on the pillory platform to be stopped?

- A. The town beadle steps in to prevent the misuse of a consecrated place of punishment.
- B. The newly elected Governor arrives early, causing the crowd to clear the square.
- C. A violent storm forces the spectators to seek shelter in the meeting-house.
- D. The mariners from the Bristol ship instigate a brawl with the two combatants.

PLOT & EVENT

2. What unexpected news does the commander of the Bristol ship communicate to Hester in the market-place?

- A. The magistrates have ordered the ship to remain anchored until after the procession.
- B. Arthur Dimmesdale has declined passage aboard the vessel due to failing health.
- C. Roger Chillingworth has engaged a berth and plans to join their voyage as part of their party.
- D. The vessel has run out of medical supplies and cannot depart on schedule.

CHARACTER

3. Why does Pearl express irritation when Master Brackett nods and smiles at her in the crowd?

- A. She resents his grim demeanor and asserts he should only acknowledge her mother who wears the scarlet letter.
- B. She mistakes him for the mysterious physician and fears he intends to poison her mother.
- C. She believes he wants to imprison her for dancing playfully in the public market-place.
- D. She wants only the colonial magistrates and the minister to acknowledge her in public.

CHARACTER

4. Why does Hester instruct Pearl not to greet the minister when the procession passes by?

- A. The magistrates have issued a decree forbidding children from approaching any clergy during the holiday.
- B. The minister will not publicly acknowledge their bond in the daylight before the townspeople.
- C. She worries that interacting with the minister will alert Roger Chillingworth to their escape plans.
- D. She believes Pearl's outspoken nature might tempt Dimmesdale to confess his sin prematurely.

MICRO-DETAIL

5. How did the visiting mariners behave in the market-place compared to the standard Puritan citizenry?

- A. They maintained a solemn silence out of reverence for the newly elected magistrates.
- B. They refused to interact with any colonists wearing garments of gray or brown wool.
- C. They strictly adhered to colonial statutes to avoid corporal punishment in the pillory.
- D. They openly flouted local regulations by smoking tobacco and drinking spirits in public.

MICRO-DETAIL

6. What distinguishing physical feature did the commander of the Bristol ship actively display rather than conceal?

- A. A prominent sword-cut across his forehead that he styled his hair to display.
- B. A branded mark upon his cheek received during his time in a Spanish prison.
- C. An empty eye socket concealed beneath the wide brim of his palm-leaf hat.
- D. A jagged burn along his jaw sustained during an engagement on the high seas.

MICRO-DETAIL

7. According to the narrator, why were traditional English sports like wrestling and quarterstaff allowed in the colony?

- A. They were required by colonial magistrates to assess the physical strength of the militia.
- B. They were staged specifically to entertain the visiting crew of the Bristol vessel.
- C. They were valued for preserving the courage and manliness associated with traditional English sports.
- D. They served as a distracting spectacle while the town leaders prepared the formal procession.

ANALYTICAL

8. How does the narrator's description of the 'magic circle' surrounding Hester in the throng function symbolically?

- A. It demonstrates her mystical power to intimidate the crowd and keep them at a distance.
- B. It emphasizes the profound moral isolation that permanently separates her from the community.
- C. It marks a formal perimeter established by the constables for public safety during the festival.
- D. It symbolizes her complete emotional liberation from the judgments of the Puritan settlement.

ANALYTICAL

9. What is the thematic significance of contrasting Hester's drab gray attire with Pearl's bright, energetic appearance?

- A. Pearl's bright garb externalizes the suppressed passion and vitality concealed beneath Hester's marble exterior.
- B. Pearl's ornate costume indicates her defiance against her mother's insistence on severe Puritan humility.
- C. Pearl's dress aligns her with the authority of the magistrates rather than the sorrow of her mother.
- D. Pearl's colorful clothes serve exclusively to attract the attention of the mariners in the market-place.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

"What a strange, sad man is he!" said the child, as if speaking partly to herself. "In the dark night-time he calls us to him, and holds thy hand and mine, as when we stood with him on the scaffold yonder. And in the deep forest, where only the old trees can hear, and the strip of sky see it, he talks with thee, sitting on a heap of moss! And he kisses my forehead, too, so that the little brook would hardly wash it off! But here, in the sunny day, and among all the people, he knows us not; nor must we know him! A strange, sad man is he, with his hand always over his heart!"

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

10. In the excerpt, what key contradiction about the minister's behavior does Pearl astutely identify?

- A.** She suspects he is afflicted by a physical ailment that prevents him from walking in the sunlight.
- B.** She believes he is possessed by an evil spirit that forces him to avoid holy gatherings.
- C.** She perceives the contradiction between his private intimacy in secret and his refusal to acknowledge them in public.
- D.** She laments that he has forgotten the affectionate promises he made beside the forest brook.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

It may not be too much to affirm, on the whole, (the people being then in the first stages of joyless deportment, and the offspring of sires who had known how to be merry, in their day,) that they would compare favorably, in point of holiday keeping, with their descendants, even at so long an interval as ourselves. Their immediate posterity, the generation next to the early emigrants, wore the blackest shade of Puritanism, and so darkened the national visage with it, that all the subsequent years have not sufficed to clear it up. We have yet to learn again the forgotten art of gayety.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

11. Based on this passage, what historical perspective does the narrator offer regarding the evolution of Puritan society?

- A.** The original settlers were entirely devoid of mirth, but subsequent generations revived English festivities.
- B.** The first settlers retained faint memories of Elizabethan joy, while later generations deepened the culture of gloom.
- C.** The immediate descendants of the founders eliminated all social boundaries separating holy days from workdays.
- D.** The arrival of seafaring mariners permanently eroded the solemn religious discipline of the Puritan commonwealth.

Answer key

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

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

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Answers explained

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

1. A. The town beadle steps in to prevent the misuse of a consecrated place of punishment.

The text explains that the sword exhibition on the pillory was stopped by the town beadle, who objected to the violation and abuse of one of the law's consecrated places.

2. C. Roger Chillingworth has engaged a berth and plans to join their voyage as part of their party.

The shipmaster tells Hester that he must prepare another berth because Roger Chillingworth has secured passage, claiming to be part of Hester's party and a close friend of the gentleman traveling with her.

3. A. She resents his grim demeanor and asserts he should only acknowledge her mother who wears the scarlet letter.

Pearl rebukes the old jailer as a 'black, grim, ugly-eyed old man' and tells Hester that he may nod at Hester because of her gray clothes and letter, but should not smile at Pearl.

4. B. The minister will not publicly acknowledge their bond in the daylight before the townspeople.

Hester tells Pearl that Dimmesdale will be in the procession but will not greet her today, acknowledging the strict separation between his private relations with them and his public identity in the community.

5. D. They openly flouted local regulations by smoking tobacco and drinking spirits in public.

The narrator notes that the mariners transgressed behavioral rules without fear, smoking tobacco right in front of the beadle and drinking wine or aqua-vitae freely from flasks.

6. A. A prominent sword-cut across his forehead that he styled his hair to display.

The text describes the captain as having a sword-cut on his forehead, which he arranged his hair to display rather than hide.

7. C. They were valued for preserving the courage and manliness associated with traditional English sports.

The passage states that sports from English country fairs and village greens were kept alive on colonial soil for the sake of the essential courage and manliness they fostered.

8. B. It emphasizes the profound moral isolation that permanently separates her from the community.

The vacant area or 'magic circle' that naturally forms around Hester illustrates the moral solitude imposed on her by the scarlet letter and the instinctive withdrawal of her fellow townspeople.

9. A. Pearl's bright garb externalizes the suppressed passion and vitality concealed beneath Hester's marble exterior.

The narrator explains that Pearl acts as a diamond or gem reflecting Hester's unquiet bosom, expressing through her vibrant attire and spirited dance the intense inner turbulence Hester conceals behind a calm, marble facade.

10. C. She perceives the contradiction between his private intimacy in secret and his refusal to acknowledge them in public.

Pearl highlights that while Dimmesdale is willing to hold hands on the scaffold in the dark and speak intimately in the deep forest, he refuses to acknowledge or recognize them in the bright daylight before the community.

11. B. The first settlers retained faint memories of Elizabethan joy, while later generations deepened the culture of gloom.

The narrator explains that the early settlers were offspring of Elizabethans who still knew how to celebrate, whereas their immediate descendants adopted the darkest shade of Puritanism, leaving a lasting legacy of solemnity.

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