

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

The Scarlet Letter

Chapter 23

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 23. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. What does Arthur Dimmesdale do immediately after ripping away the ministerial band from his breast before the crowd?

- A. He falls to his knees in prayer alongside the magistrates.
- B. He collapses directly onto the platform of the scaffold.
- C. He flees through the market-place toward the nearby forest.
- D. He turns to denounce Roger Chillingworth to Governor Bellingham.

PLOT & EVENT

2. How does Pearl respond on the scaffold when Dimmesdale asks if she will now bestow the kiss she withheld in the forest?

- A. She recoils in fear and buries her face in Hester's garments.
- B. She wipes her cheek in the nearby brook water before approaching.
- C. She kisses his lips and weeps tears that fall upon his cheek.
- D. She points accusingly at the scarlet letter upon Hester's gown.

CHARACTER

3. Why does Roger Chillingworth attempt to physically hold back and dissuade Dimmesdale from ascending the scaffold?

- A. He fears the Puritan magistrates will execute Dimmesdale for heresy.
- B. He recognizes that public confession is the only place where Dimmesdale can escape his power.
- C. He hopes to confess his own identity as Hester's husband before Dimmesdale speaks.
- D. He wants to preserve Dimmesdale's health so they can depart together on the Bristol ship.

CHARACTER

4. In his final dialogue with Hester, how does Dimmesdale interpret his bodily agony and Chillingworth's relentless torment?

- A. As arbitrary misfortunes imposed by an unfeeling universe.
- B. As signs that God has utterly rejected his plea for salvation.
- C. As expressions of divine mercy designed to keep him from eternal ruin.
- D. As proof that his earthly romance with Hester was blessed by nature.

MICRO-DETAIL

5. According to the description of the Election Sermon, how did Dimmesdale's message contrast with the prophecies of the ancient Jewish seers?

- A. He warned of physical destruction rather than spiritual corruption.
- B. He predicted a glorious destiny for his people rather than denouncing doom.
- C. He focused on individual salvation instead of communal governance.
- D. He rejected Old Testament covenant theology in favor of pure mysticism.

MICRO-DETAIL

6. Who is the first individual to step forward from the procession and offer physical assistance to the visibly enfeebled minister?

- A. Governor Bellingham
- B. The venerable John Wilson
- C. Roger Chillingworth
- D. Mistress Hibbins

MICRO-DETAIL

7. How does Hester initially approach the minister after he stretches out his arms and calls her toward the scaffold?

- A. She rushes forward eagerly with an exclamation of joyful release.
- B. She draws near slowly, impelled as if by fate and against her strongest will.
- C. She stands motionless and refuses to move until Bellingham orders her forward.
- D. She turns her back to shield Pearl from the scrutiny of the magistrates.

ANALYTICAL

8. How does Hawthorne structurally use the scaffold scene in Chapter 23 to resolve the central conflict of the novel?

- A. It exposes the hypocrisy of the magistrates by triggering a violent public revolt.
- B. It reunites the nuclear family on the exact site of original ostracism to achieve spiritual truth.
- C. It dismantles the Puritan theocracy by proving the minister's absolute innocence.
- D. It allows Hester and Dimmesdale to fulfill their plan of escaping together across the Atlantic.

ANALYTICAL

9. What does Roger Chillingworth's 'blank, dull countenance' signify after Dimmesdale collapses on the scaffold?

- A. His physical exhaustion from attempting to revive the dying clergyman.
- B. The complete collapse of his life's purpose once his victim escapes his revenge.
- C. His feigned indifference in order to conceal his true identity from the crowd.
- D. A sudden awakening of genuine Christian forgiveness toward the minister.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

Now, at the death-hour, he stands up before you! He bids you look again at Hester's scarlet letter! He tells you, that, with all its mysterious horror, it is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast, and that even this, his own red stigma, is no more than the type of what has seared his inmost heart! Stand any here that question God's judgment on a sinner? Behold! Behold a dreadful witness of it!

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

10. In this passage, what hierarchy of significance does Dimmesdale establish between Hester's scarlet letter and his own condition?

- A. Hester's letter is a holy relic, while his own stigma represents complete spiritual damnation.
- B. Hester's letter is an unfair civic punishment, whereas his physical mark is entirely imaginary.
- C. Hester's letter is merely an external shadow compared to the physical and spiritual brand searing his own heart.
- D. Hester's letter proves her greater guilt, while his hidden mark reflects his superior endurance.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

11. According to this passage, what transformative effect does the shared grief on the scaffold have upon Pearl?

- A.** It drives her into permanent seclusion away from the harsh Puritan society.
- B.** It softens her wild, otherworldly nature and binds her sympathies to ordinary human life.
- C.** It burdens her with lifelong vengeance against the community that condemned her parents.
- D.** It forces her to assume her mother's role as a perpetual messenger of anguish.

Answer key

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

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

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Answers explained

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

1. B. He collapses directly onto the platform of the scaffold.

After exposing what is upon his breast to the horrified assembly, Dimmesdale's remaining physical energy gives out and he sinks down onto the scaffold, where Hester supports him.

2. C. She kisses his lips and weeps tears that fall upon his cheek.

Pearl willingly kisses Dimmesdale on the lips, breaking the wild spell that surrounded her and weeping tears of human grief over her dying father.

3. B. He recognizes that public confession is the only place where Dimmesdale can escape his power.

Chillingworth realizes that the scaffold of confession is the one sanctuary where his vindictive psychological torment loses all control over the minister.

4. C. As expressions of divine mercy designed to keep him from eternal ruin.

Dimmesdale views his burning agony, Chillingworth's harassment, and his dying public exposure as instruments of God's mercy without which his soul would have been lost forever.

5. B. He predicted a glorious destiny for his people rather than denouncing doom.

The text states that whereas ancient Jewish prophets denounced judgments and ruin upon their country, Dimmesdale foretold a high and glorious destiny for the newly planted New England community.

6. B. The venerable John Wilson

The venerable John Wilson is the first clerical brother who steps forward hastily to offer his arm, though Dimmesdale tremulously but decidedly repels his support.

7. B. She draws near slowly, impelled as if by fate and against her strongest will.

While Pearl flies directly to Dimmesdale, Hester approaches slowly and reluctantly, feeling driven by inevitable fate against her own inner resistance.

8. B. It reunites the nuclear family on the exact site of original ostracism to achieve spiritual truth.

The novel's three scaffold scenes mark its narrative arc; this final scene brings Hester, Pearl, and Dimmesdale together on the platform where Hester stood seven years earlier, resolving Dimmesdale's concealment through public confession.

9. B. The complete collapse of his life's purpose once his victim escapes his revenge.

Chillingworth's dull, drained expression reflects the spiritual void left when Dimmesdale's confession strips him of his vengeance, leaving his parasitic existence without aim or vitality.

10. C. Hester's letter is merely an external shadow compared to the physical and spiritual brand searing his own heart.

Dimmesdale tells the crowd that Hester's visible scarlet letter is merely a shadow of the physical stigma on his chest, which in turn is only an outward symbol of the anguish searing his inmost soul.

11. B. It softens her wild, otherworldly nature and binds her sympathies to ordinary human life.

The passage explains that Pearl's tears and grief break the isolating spell around her, developing her emotional sympathies so she can grow up to experience common human joy and sorrow as a woman in the world.

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