

FREE PRINTABLE QUIZ

The Scarlet Letter

Chapter 4

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 4. Answers begin on the answer key page.

PLOT & EVENT

1. Why is Roger Chillingworth being held in the prison when he is introduced to Hester's cell?

- A. He is awaiting the conclusion of ransom negotiations between the magistrates and Native American leaders.
- B. He has been arrested on suspicion of practicing unlawful alchemy and witchcraft in the colony.
- C. He is voluntarily residing in the jailhouse while serving as the official town physician.
- D. He was detained after entering Boston without the proper civil credentials and travel permits.

PLOT & EVENT

2. What formal pledge does Chillingworth compel Hester to make before he leaves her prison room?

- A. An oath never to reveal to anyone that he is her husband
- B. A promise to name her lover to the magistrates within a fortnight
- C. A vow to depart the Massachusetts colony on the next departing vessel
- D. An agreement to surrender custody of Pearl into his medical care

CHARACTER

3. How does Chillingworth assess his own culpability regarding his failed marriage to Hester?

- A. He acknowledges that his own foolishness trapped her youth into an unnatural union with his physical and age-related decay.
- B. He asserts that he was completely blameless because he provided Hester with wealth and scholarly prestige.
- C. He blames the Puritan authorities for failing to provide proper spiritual guidance to his young wife during his absence.
- D. He claims that Hester deliberately deceived him from the beginning by feigning deep romantic affection.

CHARACTER

4. Why does Chillingworth choose to give Hester medicine to preserve her life rather than seeking her immediate death?

- A.** He wants her to remain alive so that she must continually suffer the public humiliation of the scarlet letter.
- B.** He hopes to win back her affection over time through acts of medical benevolence.
- C.** He fears that her death would bring unwanted scrutiny from the magistrates onto his alchemical background.
- D.** He believes that her execution by the state would be a more suitable punishment than secret poisoning.

MICRO-DETAIL

5. According to Chillingworth, from what two sources did he acquire his medical proficiency?

- A.** Past studies in alchemy and knowledge of herbal remedies learned during captivity among Native Americans
- B.** Formal medical training at Oxford University and clinical apprenticeships in London hospitals
- C.** Classical Latin medical treatises and divine revelations received during prayer in the wilderness
- D.** Traditional European folk healing and surgical manuals obtained from the ship's crew

MICRO-DETAIL

6. How does the text describe the infant Pearl's physical condition at the beginning of the interview?

- A.** She is writhing in painful convulsions after absorbing her mother's anguish through her breast milk.
- B.** She is in a deep, peaceful slumber entirely unaffected by the chaos surrounding her mother.
- C.** She is suffering from an intense fever contracted from the unwholesome atmosphere of the prison.
- D.** She is crying incessantly because she is terrified by the harsh rebukes of Master Brackett.

MICRO-DETAIL

7. What physical sensation does Hester experience when Chillingworth touches the scarlet letter on her bosom?

- A. It feels as though the fabric is scorching into her flesh like red-hot metal.
- B. It suddenly turns cold and causes her heart to stop beating for a moment.
- C. It feels strangely weightless, momentarily relieving her of her emotional burden.
- D. It tightens painfully against her chest, restricting her ability to breathe.

ANALYTICAL

8. When Chillingworth describes his heart as a 'habitation large enough for many guests, but lonely and chill,' what does the architectural metaphor convey?

- A. His profound intellectual loneliness and misguided yearning for domestic warmth despite his solitary nature
- B. His grand political ambitions to build a prominent household in the New England colony
- C. His cold belief that marriage is merely a formal legal framework rather than an emotional union
- D. His resentment of society for excluding him from scholarly institutions in Europe

ANALYTICAL

9. How does Chillingworth characterize the method he will use to discover the identity of Hester's lover?

- A. As an intuitive, obsessive intellectual investigation driven by a hidden psychological sympathy
- B. As a formal legal prosecution reliant on public interrogations and magistrate decrees
- C. As an aggressive physical search through the personal belongings of the town leaders
- D. As an appeal to supernatural spirits to reveal the paramour's name in visions

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

"I know not Lethe nor Nepenthe," remarked he; "but I have learned many new secrets in the wilderness, and here is one of them,—a recipe that an Indian taught me, in requital of some lessons of my own, that were as old as Paracelsus. Drink it! It may be less soothing than a sinless conscience. That I cannot give thee. But it will calm the swell and heaving of thy passion, like oil thrown on the waves of a tempestuous sea."

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

10. In the context of the passage, what distinction does Chillingworth emphasize regarding the potion he offers Hester?

- A.** While it can soothe physical and emotional agitation, it cannot bestow moral peace or clear her guilty conscience.
- B.** Although it contains European alchemy, it relies entirely on Native American remedies to be effective.
- C.** While it will grant her immediate physical strength, it will eventually induce fatal nightmares.
- D.** Although it tastes bitter and unpleasant, it is the only medicine capable of preventing madness.

READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER

“Why dost thou smile so at me?” inquired Hester, troubled at the expression of his eyes. “Art thou like the Black Man that haunts the forest round about us? Hast thou enticed me into a bond that will prove the ruin of my soul?” “Not thy soul,” he answered, with another smile. “No, not thine!”

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

11. In the concluding exchange of the chapter, Chillingworth’s response ('Not thy soul... No, not thine!') primarily functions to:

- A.** Foreshadow that his destructive pursuit of vengeance will target the soul of Hester's secret lover.
- B.** Assure Hester that he forgives her and wishes to protect her eternal salvation.
- C.** Demonstrate that he views Pearl as the true source of demonic corruption in the prison.
- D.** Confirm that he has made a formal pact with the devil to sacrifice his own life.

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. He is awaiting the conclusion of ransom negotiations between the magistrates and Native American leaders.

The text explains that Chillingworth was lodged in the prison not for any crime, but as a convenient place to keep him until magistrates finished negotiating his ransom with the Indian sagamores.

2. A. An oath never to reveal to anyone that he is her husband

Chillingworth explicitly commands Hester, 'Breathe not, to any human soul, that thou didst ever call me husband!' and requires her to swear an oath to maintain his anonymity.

3. A. He acknowledges that his own foolishness trapped her youth into an unnatural union with his physical and age-related decay.

Chillingworth admits that 'Mine was the first wrong' when he, an aging and misshapen scholar, persuaded a vibrant young woman into a marriage devoid of mutual passion.

4. A. He wants her to remain alive so that she must continually suffer the public humiliation of the scarlet letter.

Chillingworth explains that the greatest vengeance is to keep her alive so that 'this burning shame may still blaze upon thy bosom' before the world and her child.

5. A. Past studies in alchemy and knowledge of herbal remedies learned during captivity among Native Americans

Chillingworth notes that his expertise stems from his 'old studies in alchemy' and his year-long stay among Native Americans who were skilled in the properties of medicinal plants ('simples').

6. A. She is writhing in painful convulsions after absorbing her mother's anguish through her breast milk.

The child is described as writhing in convulsions of pain, having drawn in the turmoil, anguish, and despair pervading Hester's system while nursing.

7. A. It feels as though the fabric is scorching into her flesh like red-hot metal.

When Chillingworth places his long forefinger on the embroidered letter, it 'forthwith seemed to scorch into Hester's breast, as if it had been red-hot.'

8. A. His profound intellectual loneliness and misguided yearning for domestic warmth despite his solitary nature

The metaphor illustrates that although his scholarly mind had capacity for emotion, his life was chill and solitary until he foolishly attempted to kindle warmth by marrying Hester.

9. A. As an intuitive, obsessive intellectual investigation driven by a hidden psychological sympathy

Chillingworth states he will seek the man as he sought truth in books and gold in alchemy, relying on an inward 'sympathy' that will cause him to shudder and perceive the guilt hidden in the man's heart.

10. A. While it can soothe physical and emotional agitation, it cannot bestow moral peace or clear her guilty conscience.

Chillingworth explicitly points out that while the draught can calm the tempestuous swell of her passions, it cannot give her what a 'sinless conscience' would provide.

11. A. Foreshadow that his destructive pursuit of vengeance will target the soul of Hester's secret lover.

By stating 'Not thy soul... No, not thine!', Chillingworth ominously indicates that his sinister, soul-destroying vengeance is reserved specifically for the unidentified father of Hester's child.

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