

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

SHORT ANSWER STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS - *The Scarlet Letter*

Chapters 1-4

1. Identify Hester Prynne, Pearl, Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth.
2. What emblem did Hester have to wear? Why was she sentenced to wear it?
3. What information did Hester refuse to tell the officials and Mr. Dimmesdale?
4. What was the relationship between Hester and Roger Chillingworth?
5. What did Hester promise to Roger Chillingworth?

Chapters 5-7

1. Hester is released from prison. Why doesn't she run away to a different settlement?
2. How did Hester support herself and Pearl?
3. Describe Pearl.
4. Describe Hester's feelings towards Pearl.
5. Why did Hester go to see Governor Bellingham?
6. What did Hester and Pearl see in the breastplate of the armor? What is the significance of the exaggeration?

Chapters 8-10

1. Mr. Wilson asks Pearl, "Canst thou tell me, my child, who made thee?" What is Pearl's answer? Why did she say that?
2. What convinced the Governor to let Hester keep Pearl?
3. How did Roger Chillingworth become Dimmesdale's medical advisor?
4. Who is the leech? Why is he called that in the title of the chapter?
5. Why did Mr. Dimmesdale rush from the room to end the conversation he had with Roger Chillingworth?

Chapters 11-13

1. What does Rev. Dimmesdale's congregation think of him? Why is that ironic?
2. Where did Mr. Dimmesdale go at midnight? Why?
3. What did Pearl ask Mr. Dimmesdale?
4. What "sign" did the meteor make in the sky?
5. Where had Mr. Wilson, Hester, Pearl and Roger Chillingworth been that night, that they would all be walking by the scaffolding at midnight?
6. What was the other view of Hester?

Chapters 14-17

1. What did Hester tell Roger Chillingworth when they met on the peninsula?
2. Why do Hester and Pearl go to the forest?
3. When Mr. Dimmesdale finds out that Roger Chillingworth is out for revenge, he knows his religious career in Boston will be at an end and his life will be miserable. What does Hester suggest?

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Chapters 18-21

1. What did Hester have to do by the brook before Pearl would come across?
2. Mr. Dimmesdale kissed Pearl. What did she do in response?
3. How did Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale's attitude change after he decided to leave Boston with Hester?

Chapters 22-24

1. What shocking news did the commander of the Bristol ship bring Hester?
2. What did Mr. Dimmesdale tell the people of New England before he died?
3. What did the people see when Mr. Dimmesdale took off his ministerial band?
4. What happens to Hester, Pearl and Roger Chillingworth?

ANSWER KEY: STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS - *The Scarlet Letter*

Chapters 1-4

1. Identify Hester Prynne, Pearl, Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth.

Hester Prynne is the main character of the novel. She is the one who has sinned and must wear a letter "A." The Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale talks to Hester on the scaffolding, asking her to reveal the name of the man who sinned with her. In this first section, he appears overly earnest in his questioning of Hester. We later find out that he is, in fact, the other sinner. Roger Chillingworth is Hester's former husband. He remains in Boston under this assumed name and practices medicine. Pearl is Hester's daughter, a result of her affair with Dimmesdale.

2. What emblem did Hester have to wear? Why was she sentenced to wear it?

Hester had to wear the letter "A" to show that she is guilty of adultery.

3. What information did Hester refuse to tell the officials and Mr. Dimmesdale?

Hester refused to name the man who sinned with her.

4. What was the relationship between Hester and Roger Chillingworth?

Hester had married Roger Prynne prior to coming to America. He loved her, but she didn't love him. It was a marriage they both hoped would work out, but she was never satisfied with the relationship. They were separated on the way to the colony, and when he didn't show up for a year, she assumed he was dead. He appeared in Boston on the day of her public punishment and assumed the name Chillingworth.

5. What did Hester promise to Roger Chillingworth?

Hester promised not to reveal Roger's true identity.

Chapters 5-7

1. Hester is released from prison. Why doesn't she run away to a different settlement?

"Here . . . had been the scene of her guilt, and here should be the scene of her earthly punishment; and so, perchance, the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul."

2. How did Hester support herself and Pearl?

Hester did needlework.

3. Describe Pearl.

Pearl was a physically beautiful child. Hester could "recognize her wild, desperate, defiant mood, the flightiness of her temper, and even some of the . . . gloom and despondency that brooded in her heart."

4. Describe Hester's feelings towards Pearl.

Hester loved Pearl very much. She was always a little worried that, being the product of a sin, the child would exhibit some odd characteristics showing her as a child of the devil.

5. Why did Hester go to see Governor Bellingham?

Hester went to see the governor because she had heard some people saying she should not have custody of Pearl. She wanted to talk to the governor to get him to let her keep the child.

6. What did Hester and Pearl see in the breastplate of the armor? What is the significance of the exaggeration?

They see an enlarged, distorted letter "A" which symbolically shows the tremendous burden of Hester's sin. When people see her, they perhaps see her as she saw herself in the armor.

Chapters 8-10

1. Mr. Wilson asks Pearl, "Canst thou tell me, my child, who made thee?" What is Pearl's answer? Why did she say that?

She replies that she was plucked from the rose bush. She knew the correct answer but felt contrary.

2. What convinced the Governor to let Hester keep Pearl?

Both Hester and Mr. Dimmesdale told the governor that Pearl was a constant reminder to Hester of her sin and that Hester was capable of being a good mother since she could pass along to Pearl the lessons she had learned since she had sinned.

3. How did Roger Chillingworth become Dimmesdale's medical advisor?

The elder ministers of Boston and the deacons of the church "dealt with him" about the sin of rejecting medical help, so he saw Roger Chillingworth.

4. Who is the leech? Why is he called that in the title of the chapter?

Roger Chillingworth is the leech. He is called that because he has latched on to Mr. Dimmesdale and is systematically not only sucking out information but also the life of Mr. Dimmesdale under the guise of being a helpful doctor.

5. Why did Mr. Dimmesdale rush from the room to end the conversation he had with Roger Chillingworth?

Chillingworth suggested that Mr. Dimmesdale's illness was not just physical but rooted in some secret Mr. Dimmesdale held in his soul. Dimmesdale, recognizing Chillingworth's accuracy, does not wish to reveal his sin to anyone. He runs out of the room to avoid being trapped into a confession.

Chapters 11-13

1. What does Rev. Dimmesdale's congregation think of him? Why is that ironic?
The congregation thinks Dimmesdale is practically a saint. The worse he feels about his sin and the harder he tries to confess and bring it into the open, the more saintly he becomes in the eyes of the people.
2. Where did Mr. Dimmesdale go at midnight? Why?
He went to the public scaffolding where Hester had stood because he had some peculiar idea that standing there through the nights would in some way help him with his penance.
3. What did Pearl ask Mr. Dimmesdale?
Pearl asked Dimmesdale if he would stand on the scaffolding, hand in hand, with Hester and her at noontime the next day.
4. What "sign" did the meteor make in the sky?
It made a large letter A which glowed red.
5. Where had Mr. Wilson, Hester, Pearl and Roger Chillingworth been that night, that they would all be walking by the scaffolding at midnight?
They had all been at the deathbed of Governor Winthrop.
6. What was the other view of Hester?
Hester had taken to doing good works, living a simple, pure life. The people of Boston were beginning to recognize her as a person instead of just a sinner. Some even were beginning to say the "A" was for "Able."

Chapters 14-17

1. What did Hester tell Roger Chillingworth when they met on the peninsula?
She told him that she would break her promise and identify him as her former husband.
2. Why do Hester and Pearl go to the forest?
They go to the forest to intercept Dimmesdale on his journey home to Boston, to tell him that Chillingworth was really Hester's husband who was seeking revenge.
3. When Mr. Dimmesdale finds out that Roger Chillingworth is out for revenge, he knows his religious career in Boston will be at an end and his life will be miserable. What does Hester suggest?
She suggests that Dimmesdale could move and leave his troubles behind. She also volunteers to go with him.

Chapters 18-21

1. What did Hester have to do by the brook before Pearl would come across?
She had to put her letter A back on and pin her hair back up.

2. Mr. Dimmesdale kissed Pearl. What did she do in response?
She ran to the brook and washed it off.
3. How did Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale's attitude change after he decided to leave Boston with Hester?
He felt better and had more energy. He also has a real temptation to do some very bad things like "uttering certain blasphemous suggestions . . . regarding the communion supper" or teaching some wicked words to Puritan children.

Chapters 22-24

1. What shocking news did the commander of the Bristol ship bring Hester?
She learned that Chillingworth had also booked passage on the ship.
2. What did Mr. Dimmesdale tell the people of New England before he died?
He confessed that he was the one who had sinned with Hester, that Pearl was his child.
3. What did the people see when Mr. Dimmesdale took off his ministerial band?
Some say they saw a scarlet letter.
4. What happens to Hester, Pearl and Roger Chillingworth?
Chillingworth died within a year, leaving his property to Pearl, who we are led to believe married and lived on that property in England. Hester vanished with Pearl, but later she supposedly returned to Boston to finish her penance sentence there. She supposedly died there years later and was buried, we assume next to Dimmesdale.

PREREADING VOCABULARY WORKSHEETS

VOCABULARY - *The Scarlet Letter*

Chapters 1-4

Part I: Using Prior Knowledge and Contextual Clues

Below are the sentences in which the vocabulary words appear in the text. Read the sentence. Use any clues you can find in the sentence combined with your prior knowledge, and write what you think the underlined words mean in the space provided.

1. The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery. . . .
2. Finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that inauspicious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers, and present it to the reader.
3. . . . that the mildest and the severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful.
4. The age had not so much refinement, that any sense of impropriety restrained the wearers of petticoat and farthingale from stepping forth into the public ways. . . .
5. Those who had before known her, . . . were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped.
6. Although, by a seemingly careless arrangement of his heterogeneous garb, he had endeavored to conceal or abate the peculiarity. . . .
7. It irks me, nevertheless, that the partner of her iniquity should not, at least, stand on the scaffold by her side.
8. . . . with the scarlet token of infamy on her breast . . .

Vocabulary Worksheet *Scarlet Letter* Chapters 1-4 Continued

Part II: Determining the Meaning -- Match the vocabulary words to their dictionary definitions.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| ___ 1. demeanor | A. lessen; reduce in amount or degree |
| ___ 2. venerable | B. unfortunate; ill-omened |
| ___ 3. ignominy | C. manner; way in which a person conducts himself |
| ___ 4. inauspicious | D. evil fame or reputation |
| ___ 5. impropriety | E. worthy of reverence or respect |
| ___ 6. abate | F. something improper, incorrect; not appropriate |
| ___ 7. irks | G. dishonor; infamy; disgraceful conduct |
| ___ 8. infamy | H. annoys |

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 5-7

Part I: Using Prior Knowledge and Contextual Clues

Below are the sentences in which the vocabulary words appear in the text. Read the sentence. Use any clues you can find in the sentence combined with your prior knowledge, and write what you think the underlined words mean in the space provided.

1. But there is a fatality, a feeling so irresistible and inevitable that it has the force of doom,
2. It was as if a new birth . . . had converted the forest-land, still so uncongenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer, into Hester Prynne's wild and dreary, but life-long home.
3. She bore on her breast . . . a specimen of her delicate and imaginative skill, of which the dames of a court might gladly have availed themselves, to add the richer and more spiritual adornment of human ingenuity to their fabrics of silk and gold.
4. . . . even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, and often expressed, that she was banished
5. . . . it seared Hester's bosom so deeply, that perhaps there was more truth in the rumor than our modern incredulity may be inclined to admit.
6. We have as yet hardly spoken of the infant; that little creature, whose innocent life had sprung, by the inscrutable decree of Providence, a lovely and immortal flower, out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion.
7. Pearl's aspect was imbued with a spell of infinite variety; in this one child there were many children
8. It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits
9. Another and far more important reason than the delivery of a pair of embroidered gloves impelled Hester, at this time, to seek an interview with a personage of so much power

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 5-7 Continued

Part II: Determining the Meaning -- Match the vocabulary words to their dictionary definitions.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| ___ 9. uncongenial | A. saturated; permeated |
| ___ 10. inevitable | B. disbelief |
| ___ 11. ingenuity | C. not possible to explain |
| ___ 12. implied | D. not suitable; not agreeable |
| ___ 13. incredulity | E. not able to be understood; mysterious |
| ___ 14. inscrutable | F. unavoidable |
| ___ 15. imbued | G. compelled; urged to action by moral pressure |
| ___ 16. inexplicable | H. to express indirectly; hint; suggest |
| ___ 17. impelled | I. inventive skill or imagination; cleverness |

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 8-10

Part I: Using Prior Knowledge and Contextual Clues

Below are the sentences in which the vocabulary words appear in the text. Read the sentence. Use any clues you can find in the sentence combined with your prior knowledge, and write what you think the underlined words mean in the space provided.

1. . . . this badge hath taught me . . . lessons whereof my child may be the wiser and better, albeit they can profit nothing to myself.
2. The elders, the deacons, the motherly dames, and the young and fair maidens, of Mr. Dimmesdale's flock, were alike importunate that he should make trial of the physician's frankly offered skill. Mr. Dimmesdale gently repelled their entreaties.
3. Roger Chillingworth possessed all, or most, of the attributes above enumerated.
4. . . . it truly seemed that this sagacious, experienced, benevolent old physician . . . was the very man of all mankind to be constantly within reach of his voice.
5. He groped along as stealthily, with as cautious a tread, and as wary an outlook, as a thief entering a chamber where a man lies only half asleep
6. . . . Mr. Dimmesdale . . . would become vaguely aware that something inimical to his peace had thrust itself into relation with him.
7. Why should not the guilty ones sooner avail themselves of this unutterable solace?

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 8-10 Continued

Part II: Determining the Meaning -- Match the vocabulary words to their dictionary definitions.

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| __ 18. albeit | A. wise |
| __ 19. importunate | B. not conducive; harmful; adverse |
| __ 20. entreaties | C. stubbornly persistent in a request or demand |
| __ 21. enumerated | D. although |
| __ 22. sagacious | E. make use of; benefit |
| __ 23. wary | F. pleas; petitions; requests |
| __ 24. inimical | G. listed |
| __ 25. avail | H. cautious |

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 11-13

Part I: Using Prior Knowledge and Contextual Clues

Below are the sentences in which the vocabulary words appear in the text. Read the sentence. Use any clues you can find in the sentence combined with your prior knowledge, and write what you think the underlined words mean in the space provided.

1. There were men, too, of a sturdier texture of mind than his, and endowed with a far greater share of shrewd, hard, iron, or granite understanding, which . . . constitutes a highly respectable, efficacious, and unamiable variety of the clerical species.
2. Had he told his hearers that he was altogether vile, a viler companion of the vilest, the worst of sinners, an abomination, a thing of unimaginable iniquity . . .
3. An unvaried pall of cloud muffled the whole expanse of sky from zenith to horizon.
4. We impute it, therefore, solely to the disease in his own eye and heart
5. His moral force was abased into more than childish weakness.
6. . . . society was inclined to show its former victim a more benign countenance than she cared to be favored with, or, perchance, than she deserved.
7. Thus, Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb, wandered without a clew in the dark labyrinth of mind: now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now starting back from a deep chasm.
8. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 11-13 Continued

Part II: Determining the Meaning -- Match the vocabulary words to their dictionary definitions.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| __ 26. unamiable | A. lowered in rank; humbled; humiliated |
| __ 27. iniquity | B. covering that darkens or obscures |
| __ 28. pall | C. not good natured; not agreeable |
| __ 29. impute | D. anticipated and disposed of effectively |
| __ 30. abased | E. sin; wickedness |
| __ 31. benign | F. to attribute |
| __ 32. insurmountable | G. of a kind disposition; gentle or mild |
| __ 33. obviated | H. not capable of being climbed or overcome |

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 14-17

Part I: Using Prior Knowledge and Contextual Clues

Below are the sentences in which the vocabulary words appear in the text. Read the sentence. Use any clues you can find in the sentence combined with your prior knowledge, and write what you think the underlined words mean in the space provided.

1. Yea, indeed!--he did not err!--there was a fiend at his elbow!
2. The unfortunate physician . . . lifted his hands with a look of horror, as if he had beheld some frightful shape, which he could not recognize, usurping the place of his own image in a glass.
3. . . . I shall stoop to implore thy mercy.
4. At first, as already told, she had flirted fancifully with her own image in a pool of water, beckoning the phantom forth, and . . . seeking a passage for herself into its sphere of impalpable earth and unattainable sky.
5. "And what reason is that?" asked Hester, half smiling at the absurd incongruity of the child's observation
6. She possessed affections, too, though hitherto acrid and disagreeable, as are the richest flavors of unripe fruit.
7. Here they sat down on a luxuriant heap of moss, which, at some epoch of the preceding century, had been a gigantic pine

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 14-17 Continued

Part II: Determining the Meaning

Match the vocabulary words to their dictionary definitions. If there are words for which you cannot figure out the definition by contextual clues and by process of elimination, look them up in a dictionary.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| ___ 34. err | A. to entreat; plead; beg |
| ___ 35. usurping | B. harsh; caustic; bitter |
| ___ 36. implore | C. milestone; particular point in time |
| ___ 37. impalpable | D. make a mistake |
| ___ 38. incongruity | E. not matching |
| ___ 39. acrid | F. taking over |
| ___ 40. epoch | G. not able to be touched |

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 18-21

Part I: Using Prior Knowledge and Contextual Clues

Below are the sentences in which the vocabulary words appear in the text. Read the sentence. Use any clues you can find in the sentence combined with your prior knowledge, and write what you think the underlined words mean.

1. "Hasten, Pearl; or I shall be angry with thee!" cried Hester Prynne, who, however inured to such behavior on the elf-child's part at other seasons, was naturally anxious for a more seemly deportment now.
2. But Pearl, not a whit startled at her mother's threats any more than mollified by her entreaties, now suddenly burst into a fit of passion
3. . . . the intervening space of a single day had operated on his consciousness like the lapse of years.
4. . . . my good word will go far towards gaining any strange gentleman a fair reception from yonder potentate you wot of!
5. I thank you, and can but requite your good deeds with my prayers.
6. Might there not be an irresistible desire to quaff a last, long, breathless draught of the cup of wormwood and aloes
7. It might be, on this one day, that there was an expression unseen before, nor, indeed, vivid enough to be detected now; unless some preternaturally gifted observer should have first read the heart, and have afterwards sought a corresponding development in the countenance and mien

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 18-21 Continued

Part II: Determining the Meaning

Match the vocabulary words to their dictionary definitions. If there are words for which you cannot figure out the definition by contextual clues and by process of elimination, look them up in a dictionary.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| ___ 41. inured | A. repay |
| ___ 42. intervening | B. calmed; pacified |
| ___ 43. mollified | C. to have become used to something undesirable |
| ___ 44. potentate | D. one's bearing or manner; appearance |
| ___ 45. requite | E. to drink heartily |
| ___ 46. quaff | F. coming between so as to hinder or modify |
| ___ 47. mien | G. monarch; one who holds power or position over others |

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 22-24

Part I: Using Prior Knowledge and Contextual Clues

Below are the sentences in which the vocabulary words appear in the text. Read the sentence. Use any clues you can find in the sentence combined with your prior knowledge, and write what you think the underlined words mean in the space provided.

1. It is not for me to talk lightly of a learned and pious minister of the World, like the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale!
2. There was a sense within her . . . that her whole orb of life, both before and after, was connected with this spot, as with the one point that gave it unity.
3. Hester's strong, calm, steadfastly enduring spirit almost sank, at last, on beholding this dark and grim countenance of an inevitable doom, which . . . showed itself, with an unrelenting smile, right in the midst of their path.
4. These . . . now thronged about Hester Prynne with rude and boorish intrusiveness.
5. . . . through the whole discourse, there had been a certain deep, sad undertone of pathos, which could not be interpreted otherwise than as the natural regret of one soon to pass away.
6. How feeble and pale he looked, amid all his triumph!
7. And now, almost imperceptible as were the latter steps of his progress, he had come opposite the well-remembered and weather-darkened scaffold
8. Surely, surely, we have ransomed one another, with all this woe!

Vocabulary - *The Scarlet Letter* Chapters 22-24 Continued

Part II: Determining the Meaning -- Match the vocabulary words to their dictionary definitions.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| __ 48. pious | A. not capable of being discerned by the senses or mind |
| __ 49. orb | B. deep sorrow; grief; misfortune |
| __ 50. unrelenting | C. devout; religious |
| __ 51. intrusiveness | D. surrounded by; in the middle of |
| __ 52. pathos | E. a compass of endeavor, influence or activity; sphere |
| __ 53. amid | F. coming in rudely or inappropriately; enter uninvited |
| __ 54. imperceptible | G. not diminishing in speed, intensity or effort |
| __ 55. woe | H. a quality in something that arouses feelings of pity, sorrow, or sympathy |