

*The Scarlet Letter* journal prompts

- Chapter 1: Hawthorne makes quite sure he describes the rosebush outside the prison (it's pretty heavy symbolism--hint!!). What does the rosebush symbolize and how do you know? Keep in mind its location when you're writing your journal
- Chapter 2: Hester is sentenced to wear the "A" on her bosom for the rest of her life AND to stand for three hours on the pillory, subject to the ridicule of the townspeople. Is public humiliation an appropriate punishment for Hester? Does it work? Does it work in the modern day?
- Chapter 3: Although hard-pressed by the townspeople to disclose the identity of her paramour (lover), Hester refuses to divulge his identity, even though it might lessen her punishment. Why does she make this decision?
- Chapter 4: In this chapter, Chillingworth admits he "wronged" Hester when he married her. He knew she didn't love him and he realized she was very young. Nevertheless, he vows he will have vengeance on the man who committed adultery with Hester. Why should he still feel the need for vengeance? What does this reveal about his character?
- Chapter 5: After Hester is released from prison, she takes up residence in a small cottage on the outskirts of town. To support herself, she does needlework which is of very high quality and eventually become much sought after. Everyone buys her needlework, but she is never asked to create a bridal veil. Obviously, the townspeople don't want her "jinxing" a new bride. With this in mind, consider why Hester doesn't simply leave town. She has a marketable skill; she has distanced herself from the community by living on its outskirts--why does she choose to live there?
- Chapter 6 Pearl's relationship with her mother, Hester, seems to be extremely complicated. At some times, Hester is filled with love and joy (especially when Pearl is asleep) about her child; at other times, Hester seems lost as to what to do with her child as when she groans "O Father in Heaven,--if Thou art still my Father,--what is this being which I have brought into the world!" Why is Hester unable to establish a comfortable relationship with her daughter? After all, they are both outcasts in the village.
- Chapter 7: When Hester and her daughter go to Governor Bellingham's mansion, Pearl sees her mother's reflection in the shining breastplate of a suit of armor. In this reflection, the scarlet letter Hester wears is "...represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed absolutely hidden behind it." (Symbolism again!!) Why is the "A" so large? Why does Pearl see it before her mother does? How do you think Hester reacts when she sees herself almost hidden behind the reflected "A"?
- Chapter 8: The focus of the interview with the Governor is whether or not Pearl should be taken away from Hester. Hester pleads with the authorities to leave Pearl in her keeping. They are inclined to take the child away. However, the Reverend Dimmesdale intercedes, making a persuasive argument for leaving Pearl with Hester. Why does he intervene on Hester's behalf? What would you have done

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had you been Dimmesdale? Why?

Chapter 9 This chapter details the relationship between Roger Chillingworth, Hester's husband, and Arthur Dimmesdale. In this chapter, Chillingworth becomes the "medical adviser of the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale." However, we must keep in mind the title: "The Leech." The dictionary defines "leech" as...

- leech: 1 Any of various chiefly aquatic bloodsucking or carnivorous annelid worms of the class Hirudinea, of which one species (*Hirudo medicinalis*) was formerly used by physicians to bleed patients.
2. One that preys on or clings to another; a parasite.
3. A physician. <archaic>

In what sense is Chillingworth a leech? Consider all three definitions.

Chapter 10 Dimmesdale and Chillingworth debate about a guilty person wanting to confess his sins. Dimmesdale argues that guilty people feel better when they confess their sins. Chillingworth contends that many people hide their sins. To this, Dimmesdale responds, "they shrink from displaying themselves black and filthy in the view of men; because, thenceforward, no good can be achieved by them; no evil of the past be redeemed by better service." In other words, people who have done evil will hide their misdeed(s) because they will accomplish nothing by confessing and will lose the ability to do any good in the future. Is Dimmesdale's opinion correct? Why or why not?

Chapter 11 Dimmesdale begins having visions in this chapter, brought on, perhaps, by sleepless vigils. In one of these visions he sees "...Hester with little Pearl, in her scarlet garb, and pointing her forefinger, first, at the scarlet letter on her bosom, and then at the clergyman's own breast." Interpret this vision. What might it mean? Why does Hawthorne include it in the novel?

Chapter 12 Once again Hawthorne hits us with some heavy symbolism. At the end of this chapter, we discover some townspeople have seen "...a great red letter in the sky,-- the letter A,--" This also marks the midpoint of the novel (24 chapters in all). What does Hawthorne accomplish by having this portent seen in the sky? Keep in mind it happens shortly after Dimmesdale has stood on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl (under cover of night) and Governor Bellingham has died. In short-- what does the symbol mean and how do you know?

Chapter 13 How has the townspeople's opinion of Hester changed? Has she changed or have they? JUSTIFY.

Chapter 14 Chillingworth asks Hester "And what am I now?...A fiend! Who has made me so?" Hester replies, "It was myself." What does she mean? Is it really her fault Chillingworth has become what he is? JUSTIFY.

Chapter 15 Of Chillingworth Hester says "He betrayed me." How can this be true when she's the one who had the affair?

Chapter 16 Explain/analyze the symbolism of the sunlight in this chapter.

Chapter 17 Who has sacrificed more for their "relationship": Hester or Dimmesdale? JUSTIFY.

Chapter 18 Dimmesdale says he is "irrevocably doomed." Why does he say this? Is he truly

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"doomed"?

- Chapter 19 When Pearl sees her mother without the scarlet letter, she "burst into a fit of passion, gesticulating violently, and throwing her small figure into the most extravagant contortions. She accompanied this wild outbreak with piercing shrieks, which the woods reverberated on all sides; so that, alone as she was in her childish and unreasonable wrath, it seemed as if a hidden multitude were lending her their sympathy and encouragement. Seen in the brook, once more, was the shadowy wrath of Pearl's image, crowned and girdled with flowers, but stamping its foot, wildly gesticulating, and, in the midst of all, still pointing its small forefinger at Hester's bosom!" Why does she react this way? Is it reasonable? Why/why not?
- Chapter 20 On the way home from his encounter with Hester, Dimmesdale does several things he would not normally do. Identify AT LEAST three of them and explain the impact they have on the minister.
- Chapter 21 Of Dimmesdale, Pearl observes, "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!" Her mother replies that Pearl simply doesn't understand. Is that true? Or does Pearl understand more than Hester thinks? JUSTIFY your response.
- Chapter 22 Last chance to reflect on Pearl. Mistress Hibbins tells Pearl she is the daughter of the Prince of Air. After reading most of the novel, what is your view? What/who is Pearl?
- Chapter 23 Dimmesdale gives his Election Day sermon. What is the content of the sermon and how do you explain his parishioners' reaction to the sermon?
- Chapter 24 Whose story is this? Hester's? Dimmesdale's? Pearl's? or Chillingworth's? Justify your response.