

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Identify the sin of Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth, and trace the consequences of that sin on the person's life and character.
2. It is hard to believe today that a community would treat one of its members the way in which Hester was treated. What features of the Boston society in 1642, however, make the actions of the Puritans quite understandable?
3. Despite the difference in clothing and customs, how do the psychological and moral aspects of this story make it very relevant for today's readers?
4. Identify and explain at least three ways in which Hawthorne is part of the Romantic tradition and at least two ways in which he repudiates that tradition.
5. For what reasons would Hawthorne call his story a romance rather than a novel?
6. Name three characteristics of Hawthorne's style and cite examples of each.
7. Identify and explain the symbolism for each of the following items:
 - light and shadow
 - the scaffold
 - the rosebush and the weeds
 - the letter "A"
 - colors
 - the forest
 - the town
8. Explain Hawthorne's view on human nature regarding passion.
9. According to Hawthorne, what are the moral consequences of sin and how does one become redeemed? Cite incidents from the story.
10. Show that Hester is one of literature's first feminists using examples from the text.
11. Explain how the second scene on the scaffold serves as the novel's climax.
12. Consider the characters Pearl, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth. How are their names symbolic?
13. Hawthorne uses historical characters—Governor Bellingham, John Wilson, and Mistress Hibbins—and true depictions of Puritan society and beliefs to add authenticity to his work. Explain the effects that these elements make.

14. Compare Hester's scarlet letter to Dimmesdale's letter.
15. Describe Hawthorne's use of dramatic irony, and cite examples for support.
16. How does Hester's attitude change from when she emerges from jail to the last scene of the novel? What major events assist in her transformation?