

The novel originated in the early 18th century after the Italian word «novella,» which was used for stories in the medieval period. Its identity has evolved, and it is now considered to mean a work of prose fiction over 50,000 words. Novels focus on character development more than plot. In any genre, it is the study of the human psyche.

Chapter 1: The Prison-Door

**This first chapter
contains little in the
way of action,
instead setting the**

scene and introducing the first of many symbols that will come to dominate the story. A crowd of somber, dreary-looking people has gathered outside the door of a prison in seventeenth-century Boston. The building's heavy oak door is studded with iron spikes, and the prison appears to have been constructed to hold dangerous criminals. No matter how optimistic the founders of new colonies may be, the narrator tells us, they invariably provide for a prison and a cemetery almost immediately. This is true of the citizens of Boston, who built their prison some twenty years earlier.

The one incongruity in the otherwise drab scene is the rosebush that grows next to the prison door. The narrator suggests that it offers a reminder of Nature's kindness to the condemned; for his tale, he says, it will provide either a "sweet moral blossom" or else some relief in the face of unrelenting sorrow and gloom.

Chapter 2: The Market-Place

As the crowd watches, [Hester Prynne](#), a young woman holding an infant, emerges from the prison door and makes her way to a scaffold (a raised platform), where she is

to be publicly
condemned. The
women in the crowd
make disparaging
comments about
Hester; they
particularly criticize
her for the ornateness
of the embroidered
badge on her chest—a
letter “A” stitched in
gold and scarlet. From
the women’s
conversation and
Hester’s reminiscences
as she walks through
the crowd, we can
deduce that she has
committed adultery
and has borne an
illegitimate child, and
that the “A” on her
dress stands for
“Adulterer.”

The beadle calls Hester
forth. Children taunt
her and adults stare.
Scenes from Hester’s
earlier life flash
through her mind: she
sees her parents
standing before their
home in rural England,

then she sees a “misshapen” scholar, much older than herself, whom she married and followed to continental Europe. But now the present floods in upon her, and she inadvertently squeezes the infant in her arms, causing it to cry out. She regards her current fate with disbelief.

Chapters 1–2

These chapters introduce the reader to Hester Prynne and begin to explore the theme of sin, along with its connection to knowledge and social order. The chapters’ use of symbols, as well as their depiction of the political reality of Hester Prynne’s world, testify to the contradictions inherent in Puritan society. This

is a world that has already “fallen,” that already knows sin: the colonists are quick to establish a prison and a cemetery in their “Utopia,” for they know that misbehavior, evil, and death are unavoidable. This belief fits into the larger Puritan doctrine, which puts heavy emphasis on the idea of original sin—the notion that all people are born sinners because of the initial transgressions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Chapter 3: The Recognition

In the crowd that surrounds the scaffold, Hester suddenly spots her husband, who sent her to

America but never fulfilled his promise to follow her. Though he is dressed in a strange combination of traditional European clothing and Native American dress, she is struck by his wise countenance and recognizes his slightly deformed shoulders.

Hester's husband (whom we will learn, in the next chapters, is now calling himself [Roger Chillingworth](#)) gestures to Hester that she should not reveal his identity. He then turns to a stranger in the crowd and asks about Hester's crime and punishment, explaining that he has been held captive by Native Americans and has just arrived in Boston. The stranger tells him that Hester is the wife of a learned Englishman and had been living

with him in Amsterdam when he decided to emigrate to America. The learned man sent Hester to America first and remained behind to settle his affairs, but he never joined Hester in Boston. Chillingworth remarks that Hester's husband must have been foolish to think he could keep a young wife happy, and he asks the stranger about the identity of the baby's father.

The stranger tells him that Hester refuses to reveal her fellow sinner. As punishment, she has been sentenced to three hours on the scaffold and a lifetime of wearing the scarlet letter on her chest. The narrator then introduces us to the town fathers who sit in judgment of Hester: [Governor](#)

Bellingham, Reverend Wilson, and Reverend Dimmesdale.

Dimmesdale, a young minister who is renowned for his eloquence, religious fervor, and theological expertise, is delegated to demand that Hester reveal the name of her child's father. He tells her that she should not protect the man's identity out of pity or tenderness, but when she staunchly refuses he does not press her further.

Hester says that her child will seek a heavenly father and will never know an earthly one. Reverend Wilson then steps in and delivers a condemnatory sermon on sin, frequently referring to Hester's scarlet letter, which seems to the crowd to glow and burn. Hester bears the sermon

patiently,
hushing [Pearl](#) when she
begins to scream. At
the conclusion of the
sermon, Hester is led
back into the prison.

Chapter 4: The Interview

[Hester](#) and her
husband come face to
face for the first time
when he is called to her
prison cell to provide
medical
assistance. [Chillingworth](#)
[h](#) has promised the
jailer that he can make
Hester more “amenable
to just authority,” and
he now offers her a cup
of medicine. Hester
knows his true
identity—his gaze
makes her shudder—
and she initially refuses
to drink his potion. She
thinks that
Chillingworth might be
poisoning her, but he

assures her that he wants her to live so that he can have his revenge. In the candid conversation that follows, he chastises himself for thinking that he, a misshapen bookworm, could keep a beautiful wife like Hester happy.

He urges her to reveal the identity of her lover, telling her that he will surely detect signs of sympathy that will lead him to the guilty party. When she refuses to tell her secret, he makes her promise that she will not reveal to anyone his own identity either. His demoniacal grin and obvious delight at her current tribulations lead Hester to burst out the speculation that he may be the “Black Man”—the Devil in disguise—come to lure her into a pact and damn her soul.

Chillingworth replies that it is not the well-being of her soul that his presence jeopardizes, implying that he plans to seek out her unknown lover. He clearly has revenge on his mind.

Chapters 3–4

The town has made [Hester](#) into a “living sermon,” as [Chillingworth](#) puts it, because she is stripped of her humanity and made to serve the needs of the community. Her punishment is expressed in violent terms. Reverend Wilson relates an argument he had with Dimmesdale about whether to force Hester to confess in public. Dimmesdale spoke of such an action in terms of a rape, arguing that “it were wronging the very nature of woman

to force her to lay open her heart's secrets in such broad daylight, and in presence of so great a multitude."

The men who sit in judgment of Hester are not only hypocritical but also ignorant.

Bellingham, surrounded by the trappings of his office, and Wilson, who looks like "the darkly engraved portraits which we see prefixed to old volumes of sermons," both occupy positions where power is dependent upon self-portrayal and symbols. They know little of human nature and judge using overarching precepts rather than the specifics of an individual situation as their guides. The narrator tells us that these ignorant men "had no right" to "meddle with a

question of human guilt, passion and anguish.” Dimmesdale, on the other hand, seems to know something of the human heart. He is compassionate toward Hester and is able to convince Bellingham and Wilson to spare her any harsher punishment.

As part of its meditation on the concept of evil, the text begins to elucidate Dimmesdale’s character for the reader. The emerging portrait is not altogether positive. Although Dimmesdale displays compassion and a sense of justice, he also seems spineless and somewhat sinister. His efforts to get Hester to reveal her lover’s identity involve a set of confusing instructions about following her

conscience and exposing her lover in order to save his soul. The reader does not know why Dimmesdale declines to speak straightforwardly, but Hester does. When it is later revealed that Dimmesdale is the lover she seeks to protect, his speech becomes retrospectively ironic and terribly cruel.

In this way, *The Scarlet Letter* comes to resemble a detective story: things have meaning only in the context of later information. The larger implication of such a structure is that lives have meaning only as a whole, and that an individual event (Hester's adultery, for example) must be examined in a framework larger than that allowed by the categorical rules of

religion. This notion returns the reader to the book's general theme of whether it is ethically right to judge others.

Chillingworth, too, begins to come into focus in these pages. The novel sets up a formal parallel between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth before the story makes clear the logical connection between the two characters. In contrast to Wilson's dehumanizing condemnations and to Dimmesdale's mysterious circuitousness, Chillingworth's willingness to take some of the blame for Hester's "fall" seems almost noble. He admits that he was not the right husband for Hester and that he was remiss in not joining up

with her sooner (even though he seems to have been held captive). Yet, he ultimately chooses to use his knowledge for vengeance. While he is less hypocritical than the Puritan fathers, who claim to want only the salvation of their followers, Chillingworth, as the name he takes suggests, is devoid of human warmth.

His marriage to Hester—his one attempt at human contact—has led to disaster, and any compassion he may once have felt has now faded. Bellingham, Wilson, and the rest of the Puritan leadership come across as bumbling, ignorant, and silly in their pageantry and ritual when compared with the intentionally

malevolent
Chillingworth, who
seeks revenge,
destruction, and sin.
Perhaps most
cunningly, he forces
Hester to become the
keeper of everyone's
secrets, thus stripping
her of any chance she
may have had at
redemption or a happy
life.

Q1: What are the types of the
novel?

Q2: What are the elements of the
novel ?

Q3: Compare between Drama and
Novel .

Q4. What Does the Scarlet Letter
A symbolize ?

Q5: Talk about Nathaniel
Hawthorne as the novelist of the
Scarlet Letter .

Q6: Talk about Hester Prynne as the protagonist of the Scarlet Letter .

Q7: Hypocrisy is one of the major themes in the Scarlet Letter , Discuss .

Q8: Explain the prison door importance .

Q9: Show the significance of the rose bush near the prison door ?

Q10: Dimmesdale , is a sinner minister and religious man , Discuss .

Q11: Pearl is a bless and curse at the same time , Discuss .

Q12: Explain Hester and her Needle .

Q13: Why Hester committed the sin of Adultery ?

Q 14: Why Hester didn't confess her the identity of her lover ?

Q15: Love and Sacrifice are two of the main themes in the Scarlet Letter, Discuss .

Q16: Explain the (Interview)
between Hester and her husband

.

Q17: In the crowd
that surrounds the
scaffold, Hester
suddenly spots her
husband, Discuss
the Recognition