

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Pd. \_\_\_\_

**The Scarlet Letter**  
**Reading Response Questions**  
**Chapters 1-4**

1. What is the setting of the story?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What legend accounts for the existence of the rose bush by the prison door?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is the mood of the crowd, and why is their attention focused on the door?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What reasons are given as to why Hester Prynne was not executed for her crime? What would the Puritan women have done to her if given the power?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What are Hester's specific actions as she walks from the prison to the scaffold?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What memories does Hester review during her three-hour ordeal?

**Chapter 5: “Hester at Her Needle”** – After reading this chapter, answer the following questions without using the novel.

1. What “general symbol” has Hester become?
2. Give at least 2 reasons why Hester does not leave the colony.
3. Describe Hester’s home.
4. What talent did Hester use to support herself and Pearl?
5. What garments is Hester not allowed to sew?
6. Why type of dress did Hester wear? Pearl?
7. What does Hester do that shows she has a charitable nature?
8. How did the poor, the ladies of Boston, the clergy, and the children treat Hester?

9. What special knowledge does Hester feel the Scarlet Letter gives her?

**Chapter 6: “Pearl ”** - After reading this chapter, answer the following questions without using the novel.

1. Describe Pearl. What does she remind the author of? What does Hawthorne keep comparing her to?
2. What is the author's explanation for why she is this way?
3. How does Hester punish her daughter?
4. Why do children not like Pearl? Do they know the details of Hester?
5. How does Pearl play at home?

6. “‘Tell me, mother!’ said the child, seriously, coming up to Hester.” What are Pearl and Hester discussing at this time?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Who do the townspeople think is the father of Pearl according to the end of this chapter?

#### **Chapter 7: “The Governor’s Hall”**

1. Name 2 reasons Hester visits Governor Bellingham.
  
  
  
  
2. How are the Scarlet Letter and Pearl alike?

#### **Chapter 8: “The Elf and the Minister”**

1. Who are the other visitors at the Governor’s house?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How much time has elapsed since the opening scene?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. With what creatures of fantasy is Pearl continually compared?

4. How has Chillingworth changed since Hester last saw him?
5. Why does John Wilson question Pearl?
6. How has Rev. Dimmesdale changed since Hester's public humiliation?
7. Who pleads successfully for Hester to keep her child?
8. To which visitor does Pearl respond to lovingly?

## **Chapter 9: "The Leech"**

1. What new identity has Chillingworth assumed in Boston ? Why is he successful?
2. To whom in the colony does Chillingworth attach himself as a medical advisor?

3. Describe Dimmesdale's health. See p. 123-124.
4. What gesture has become Dimmesdale's habit?
5. Quote a sentence from this chapter that associates Chillingworth with evil.
6. What two opposing views do the townspeople hold about Roger Chillingworth?

#### **Chapter 10: "The Leech and His Patient"**

1. What "investigation" consumes Chillingworth?
2. Who is Chillingworth's main suspect and victim?
3. What is a leech? What double meaning does the word "leech" have?
4. What secret does Chillingworth believe is buried in Dimmesdale's heart?
5. Why would Dimmesdale live with guilt and not confess his sin openly?

6. What reaction does Pearl have to Chillingworth when she sees him with Rev. Dimmesdale?
7. What discovery does Chillingworth make when Dimmesdale “fell into a deep, deep slumber”?

### **Chapter 11: “The Interior of a Heart”**

1. This chapter begins by discussing the last chapter. Explain the end of the last chapter using quotes. What do YOU think Chillingworth saw? Was there something there on Dimmesdale?
2. Does Dimmesdale understand what Chillingworth's motive is?
3. At the end of the chapter, what three things do we find out Dimmesdale does? Why does he do them?
4. We learn some very interesting things about Dimmesdale in this chapter. A comparison is growing between Arthur and Hester. Compare the two characters.
5. This chapter ends with Arthur doing what?

### **Chapter 12: “The Minister’s Vigil”**

1. Where does Dimmesdale go at the beginning? Why does he go there?

2. Early on, there is reference to something on Dimmesdale's breast. What is it? (A quote would be nice.)
3. ".It is done!" muttered the minister, covering his face with his hands. "The whole town will awake, and hurry forth, and find me here!". Explain this quote, telling what is going on before "the minister" says this and how this is a significant moment in the chapter.
4. Who *does* see him? "The whole town"?
5. Why is Mr. Wilson out so late?
6. Does Dimmesdale talk to Mr. Wilson?
7. Who does Dimmesdale see next?
8. What does Pearl ask him to do?
9. Consider the entire conversation between Arthur and Pearl. What happens? Is this important?
10. "Nothing was more common, in those days, than to interpret all meteoric appearances. . ." Explain what this has to do with anything going on in the rest of this chapter.
11. What does the minister see in the sky? Looking through that paragraph, is Hawthorne clear that what Dimmesdale saw was definitely what was in the sky?



12. Who else is with Dimmesdale?

13. Why doesn't Dimmesdale recognize him? What is *your* explanation and what is Hawthorne's?

14. This chapter ends in the next day. What happens at the end of this chapter? Why do you think Dimmesdale says, "I had not heard of it"?

### **Chapter 13: "Another View of Hester"**

1. How old is Pearl in this chapter?

2. How has the townspeople's view changed toward Hester?

3. How has Hester's appearance changed?

4. What does Hester resolve to do?

### **Chapter 14: "Hester and the Physician"**

1. How has Roger Chillingworth changed in the past 7 years?

2. Quote at least one line that directly associates Chillingworth with the devil. Cite the page number.
3. What does Hester want Chillingworth to do?
4. What revelation is she going to make to Reverend Dimmesdale.
5. What effect has Chillingworth had on Dimmesdale? Quote a line to support your answer.

### **Chapter 15: “Hester and Pearl ”**

1. Read Hester’s description of Chillingworth carefully. How does she feel about him?
2. What questions does Pearl ask her mother? Why does this trouble Hester?

### **Chapter 16: “A Forest Walk”**

1. Where does Hester plan to meet Dimmesdale? Why?
2. Describe the scene with Hester and Pearl in the sunlight. What symbolic meaning could the sunlight have? Why does sunlight shine on Pearl and not on Hester?

3. What story has Pearl heard about the “black man”?
4. What does Hester mean when she says, “Once in my life, I met the Black Man. This scarlet letter is his mark.”
5. Why does Pearl think the minister holds his hand over his heart? How is there symbolic truth in what she says?

### **Chapter 17: “The Pastor and His Parishioner”**

1. How has Dimmesdale’s secret sin affected his life? Use a quote to support your answers and cite the page number.
2. What is Dimmesdale’s “secret poison his malignity, infecting all air about him?”
3. From what does Hester hope to save Dimmesdale by telling him the truth about Chillingworth?
4. Does Hester still love Dimmesdale? Use a quote to support your answer. Cite a page number.
5. What is Dimmesdale’s reaction to the truth?
6. What future plans does Hester suggest to Dimmesdale as a way to escape Chillingworth?

## **Chapter 18: “A Flood of Sunshine”**

1. What is Dimmesdale’s decision in response to Hester’s plea that they leave the colony? Cite a quote and page number to support your answer.
2. Why is the chapter called, “A Flood of Sunshine”?
3. What does Hester do that symbolizes putting the past behind them?
4. What is the sunshine a symbol of?
5. When Hester throws down her scarlet letter, the transfiguration foreshadowed Chapter 13 occurs, and Hester’s beauty returns. What is the “magic touch” that effects the transformation?
6. Near the end of this chapter, the forest creatures are naturally drawn to Pearl and recognize her as “a kindred wildness.” How do you account for this wildness in Pearl?

### **Chapter 19: “The Child at the Brookside”**

1. What does Dimmesdale mean when he says, “Oh, Hester, what a thought is that, and how terrible to dread it! That my own features were part repeated in her face, and so strikingly that the world might see them!”
2. Why is Pearl upset when her mother calls her?
3. What is Pearl ’s reaction to Dimmesdale? How is Pearl a symbol for Hester and Dimmesdale?

### **Chapter 20: “The Minister in a Maze”**

1. Where have Hester and Dimmesdale decided to go when they leave Boston? Why do they choose to go to Europe rather than remain in the New World?
2. How does it happen that Hester is acquainted with the captain of the ship now in the harbor?
3. Why does Dimmesdale consider it fortunate that the ship is not to sail for 4 days?

4. When Mistress Hibbens offers to introduce Dimmesdale to “yonder potentate you wot of,” to whom is she referring?

### **Chapters 21 “The New England Holiday,” and Chapter 22 “The Procession”**

1. What have the crowds of people gathered in the market-place to witness?
2. Of what ceremony in England was the Election Day pageantry a pale imitation?
3. What piece of unwelcome news does the master of the ship on which, she, Pearl , and Dimmesdale are to sail have for Hester?
4. What is particularly noticeable about Dimmesdale’s manner as he walks in the procession?
5. Where does Hester stand during the procession and during Dimmesdale’s sermon in the church?

### **Chapter 23 “The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter” and Chapter 24 “Conclusion”**

1. How does Dimmesdale appear as he leaves the church after his triumphant sermon?
2. How does Pearl react when Dimmesdale calls Hester and herself to mount the scaffold with him?

3. Where, according to Chillingworth, is the one place where Dimmesdale could have successfully escaped him?
4. What were some of the conjectures made by parishioners as to the origin of the minister's scarlet letter?
5. What explanation for the events of Election Day is made by the minister's friends to make him seem blameless?
6. Dimmesdale enters the church energetically and upright to give his sermon; he leaves it stooped and tottering. How would you account for each of these quite different ways he carried himself? What might we assume has happened to him during the course of the sermon?
7. Explain why Chillingworth desperately tries to stop Dimmesdale from confessing his sins on the scaffold?
8. What do you think Dimmesdale means when he describes his and Hester's sin as violating "our reverence for each other's soul"?