The Scarlet Letter

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

Literature Guide Developed by Rosemary Stassi for Secondary Solutions®

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## Chapters 1 – 3
### Active Reading Guide

**Directions:** As you read Chapters 1-3 of *The Scarlet Letter*, examine each character’s motivation and actions, completing the chart below. For help, refer to page 25.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plot Points</th>
<th>Prynne</th>
<th>Dimmesdale</th>
<th>Chillingworth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prediction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapters 1 – 3

Comprehension Check

Directions: As you read each chapter, answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper using complete sentences.

Chapter 1
1. What does Hawthorne describe in detail in this first chapter? Write a short description of it in your own words.
2. What were the first two things the Puritans built upon arriving to the new colony? What does this reveal about the needs and views of Puritan culture?
3. What does the narrator say he hopes the rose bush will symbolize? In your own words, what can you predict about the ending of the novel based upon this statement?

Chapter 2
1. Why are all the townspeople gathered in the center of town?
2. Describe how the women in New England are different from the generations of women before them.
3. What is Hester Prynne’s relationship to Arthur Dimmesdale?
4. Describe Hester Prynne.
5. What is Hester’s crime? What does the letter A stand for?
6. Why were the women upset when they saw Hester’s embroidered letter?
7. What is the scaffold? What is it used for?
8. What is on Hester’s mind as she serves out the first part of her punishment?

Chapter 3
1. What does Hester notice immediately about the strange man being accompanied by an Indian?
2. What gesture does the stranger make to Hester when he realizes that she recognizes him?
3. What does the stranger tell one of the townspeople about himself?
4. What does the townsman tell the stranger about Hester’s crime? What do we learn about Hester’s husband?
5. Describe Reverend Dimmesdale.
6. What do the magistrates and ministers want Hester to tell them? What does she do?
7. What does Dimmesdale do and say after Hester firmly states that she will not reveal the name of her lover?
Chapters 1 – 3

Standards Focus: Allusions

An allusion is an implied or indirect reference to a person, event, or another text. Allusions are included in literature with the assumption that the reader and the author share a common knowledge, and therefore the reader will understand the reference. Most allusions in Western literature come from the Bible, mythology, or other Western literature.

Allusions conjure images of various characters or events that are linked to a specific idea and can be used to tie together a past issue with a current one. An allusion can be anything from the mention of a name to a line of a song, as an author uses the reference to make his point clearer. However, if the reader does not know the allusion to which the author is referring, the effect of the allusion is lost and the point of the reference may be missed.

Allusions are used not only in literature, but also in films, speeches, poetry, and even common, everyday dialogue. For example, maybe you know a person who is stingy and grumpy when Christmas time rolls around. You might say something to them like, “Oh, John, don’t be such a Scrooge.” Maybe you have said this before and not even realized you were giving an allusion to a character from Charles Dickens’s novel, A Christmas Carol.

Directions: Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper using complete sentences.

1. Read the list of allusions from The Scarlet Letter (pages 17-21). Have you heard of any of these allusions? Are there some references with which you are more familiar than others? Take a look specifically at the allusions found in Chapters 1-3. Choose three allusions, and then explain the reference and how it is appropriate at that point in the novel. Why do you think Hawthorne included each of these in his novel?

2. What is important about the allusion Hawthorne makes about Mistress Hibbins?

3. Have you heard any of the allusions made in or about The Scarlet Letter in any other contexts, such as in another book, speech, or part of history? Where and in what context? Make a prediction about how these allusions may affect The Scarlet Letter.

4. Name some other allusions that you have heard or read about in literature. What was their context and significance? Why was an allusion appropriate at that particular moment? If necessary, thumb through a novel or two you have already read.

5. Why are allusions sometimes more effective than simply explaining a situation more thoroughly? What are the pros and cons of using allusions?
Chapters 1 – 3
Assessment Preparation: Definitions

Directions: Complete the assignment by using a dictionary to (a.) find the vocabulary word’s part of speech, (b.) define the word, and (c.) use the word in an original sentence.

1. inauspicious
   a. part of speech: ______________________
   b. definition: __________________________
   c. sentence: __________________________

2. physiognomy
   a. part of speech: ______________________
   b. definition: __________________________
   c. sentence: __________________________

3. beadle
   a. part of speech: ______________________
   b. definition: __________________________
   c. sentence: __________________________

4. pillory
   a. part of speech: ______________________
   b. definition: __________________________
   c. sentence: __________________________

5. ignominy
   a. part of speech: ______________________
   b. definition: __________________________
6. mien
   a. part of speech: ____________________________
   b. definition: ________________________________
   c. sentence: ________________________________

7. vie
   a. part of speech: ____________________________
   b. definition: ________________________________
   c. sentence: ________________________________

8. remonstrance
   a. part of speech: ____________________________
   b. definition: ________________________________
   c. sentence: ________________________________

9. contumely
   a. part of speech: ____________________________
   b. definition: ________________________________
   c. sentence: ________________________________

10. sagacity
    a. part of speech: ____________________________
    b. definition: ________________________________
    c. sentence: ________________________________