**The Scarlet Letter**

**Introduction-Chapter 1**

Introduction: The first forty-four pages written by the author tell about his life working at the Custom House in Salem Massachusetts. During his time of employment there, he discovers some records in the attic and begins to piece together the story of Hester Prynne, an adulterous man in Puritan Salem. The Scarlet Letter is his account of the story with as many facts as he, the author, was able to gather from the documents he found. Chapter 1: Hawthorn’s first chapter is short, detailing the set up of colonial Salem. He talks of the town and how essential prisons and cemeteries are in the organization. Next to the steps of the Salem prison is a rosebush that has survived centuries and Hawthorn says this bush gives comfort with it’s beauty to the people who enter and leave the establishment.

Chapter 2: A town meeting is taking place and the people of the town, mainly the women, are gathered for the release of the adulteress, Hester Prynne. She steps out of the prison with the town beadle leading her with his hand on her shoulder. Hawthorn describes her as beautiful with a very proud stature that does not cower to the crowd of disdain that surrounds her. On her chest she bears the scarlet letter ‘A’ that is surrounded by shining gold thread upon a gown that scandalizes the women of the town.

Clutched close to her breast is the child that was produced by her adultery and the apparent reason she was not more harshly punished for her crime. She stood there under public scrutiny, not with a look of shame but almost bewilderment that her life had panned out as it had.

Chapter 3: Mistress Prynne is placed upon the pillory for three hours so all can see her shame. As she is standing there with her babe, she notices a new man in town along with an Indian. From the moment she sees him, she cannot take her eyes from him. An angry look quickly flashes across the man’s face at the sight of her and he inquires to the town person next to him why the woman is made to stand upon the pillory. Both the man and the readers are informed that Mistress Prynne was married to a man who has not yet returned from the Netherlands where they sailed from to New England.

 Because she was so long away from her husband, it is obvious that he was not the father of her child. The man asked of her sentence, and of the man who did father the child and the town’s person told him that the father is not known. The Governor of the town who is standing on a higher platform then appeals to the Reverend Dimmesdale to extract the name of father from Mistress Prynne. After an emotional plea to Mistress Prynne, she still refuses to state the name of the father of her child, and states that her child has only a heavenly father.

Chapter 4: When Mistress Prynne was returned to the prison, she was in such mental disarray that the jailer, Master Brackett, decided to call in the physician. Roger Chillingworth, Hester’s real husband, introduces himself as the physician for Mistress Prynne and as soon as he enters the room, she goes perfectly still. Mr. Chillingsworth was the same man who she saw when she was on the pillory. He began to examine the baby and Hester expresses her concern that he will hurt the child as revenge on her.

 They talk about their failed marriage, and how there was never love between them, and Roger tells her not to reveal to anyone who he really was. After giving her a draught to calm her, he asks her who the father of the child was. Again, as she did when asked by the Reverend, she refuses to give the name of the father. At her refusal, he tells her that he will find out who the man is and that she not breathe a word of his identity to anyone.

Chapter 5: Hester was released from prison and free to go wherever she wished. Instead of fleeing the town she moved to a little cottage outside of it, and supported herself with her needlework. She sewed for many different people of the town but kept herself in plain clothing, save the letter upon her bosom. She took all of the passion of her life and used it to ply her needle. Much of her work she donated to the poor as penance for her guilt. Although they all coveted her services, she was still an outcast looked upon with malice and her sin burned deep in her soul.

Chapter 6: Hester named her child Pearl because she was her treasure in life. Pearl was beautiful and intelligent, and had an air of a nymph about her. Even as a baby, the child was fascinated by the scarlet letter Hester wore upon her breast. This was a constant reminder for Hester of her sin. Pearl was a happy laughing child who had a fiery passion and temper that made Hester and others wonder if she was a demon with her black eyes. Everywhere Hester went Pearl went also. They had only each other. Hester attempted to raise her daughter with Puritan values but could not discipline her and Pearl held the strings on whether or not she did what she was told. Chapter 7: Hester and Pearl went to the Governor Bellingham’s house to deliver a pair of gloves she had embroidered for him. More than the delivery, Hester was there to plead to be able to keep Pearl. The people of the town thought that because of her sin, Hester was unfit to raise her child. When she arrived to the house, the governor was with other gentleman in the garden and they waited for a chance to speak with him. As they were waiting, Pearl was examining a shining suit of armor and saw Hester in it. She was delighted by the sight, and Hester’s image was lost behind the large shiny red letter that was magnified by the polished armor.

Chapter 8: The Governor, the pastor John Wilson, Reverend Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth exited the garden to find their path blocked by the nymph Pearl. Struck by the beauty of the scarlet clad child they ask her to whom she belongs. She answers that she is Pearl, and her mother’s child. As they enter the hall, they see Mistress Prynne and are happy that she has come so they can discuss what to do with Pearl. Testing to see whether the child has been properly instructed so far, the dotting John Winston asks young Pearl who made her. Pearl, though she knew the correct answer was the Heavenly Father answered that she had been plucked by her mother from the rose bush by the prison door.

The gentlemen were appalled by the child’s answer and decided that Hester should not raise her further. Hester was angry with this and pleaded Reverend Dimmesdale who knew she was capable of guiding the child spiritually to let her keep Pearl. She argued that God gave her Pearl, and that they could not take away the only joy that God gave her. After discussing it further among themselves, with the Reverend giving an impassioned plea for Hester, they decided to let her keep Pearl. Hester was thankful, and she and Pearl left for home. Mr. Chillingworth offered to figure out the identity of the father of the child, but his offer was refused. As she leaves, Hester realizes that she would have sold her soul to the devil if it meant she could keep her child.

Chapter 9: Since his first appearance in town, the people looked on Roger Chillingworth as a blessing. They were thankful that such a learned physician was given to them. As time went on, Mr. Chillingworth and the Reverend Dimmesdale became very close. Though he was young, the Reverend was growing sicker and sicker by the day and the people of the town implored him to let the physician examine him. He refused but continued to become closer and closer to the old man. After a while they even began living together in the home of a respected matron of the town. As time passed, the people began to look at Mr. Chillingworth differently however. Instead of seeing a man sent from God to help them, they saw in his old disfigured form, a servant of Satan that was sent to haunt the Reverend.

Chapter 10: Mr. Chillingworth watched the Reverend searching him for the secret sin of his soul. Searching for Hester’s lover became the secret purpose of his life and it clouded his head and heart. Slowly he was trying to get the Reverend to confess to the deed, and one afternoon began a discussion with him about unconfessed sin and how it eats away at the soul. While they are talking, they see Hester and Pearl in the cemetery. They look up at the men in the window and they wonder if the mischevious nymph like, Pearl, is true evil. After the woman and the child leave the cemetery, the men continue with their conversation.

 Mr. Chillingworth accuses the Reverend that he cannot cure him until he knows the pain upon his soul because that sin is part of his bodily ailment. In a moment of passion, the Reverend blows up at him telling him that he will reveal nothing to the earthly man and leaves the room. This display of passion makes Mr. Chillingworth exceptionally pleased because it brings him closer to finding out that his suspicions of Hester and the Reverend are true.

Chapter 11: As the days went by the Reverend Dimmesdale continued to be haunted more and more by the sin upon his soul. He would look upon his companion the physician with disgust and feel as if the black part of his heart was spilling over into the rest of his life. The people of the town began to worship him more, saying he was a wonderful and saintly young preacher. As they looked up to him with greater fervor, he began to hate himself more. Many a time he stood on his pulpit aching to tell them of his sin, release it from his heart. However, all he could manage to say was that he was a terrible sinner, which only inspired his congregation more because they saw him as virtually flawless. He fasted, prayed, and kept vigils in order to purge himself, but the sin upon his soul haunted him without end.

Chapter 12: It was midnight and Reverend Dimmesdale was so tortured by his sin that he took himself out and stood upon the scaffold that Hester had stood. He planned to stay there all night suffering from his own shame. At one point he cried out hoping in his mind to wake the whole town so they could see him standing there, so his sin could finally be revealed and his mind eased. However, no one in the town was awakened by his cry. At one point from his perch, he saw the Pastor John Winston walking towards him, but the man was wrapped up tightly in his cloak and did not notice the Reverend on the scaffold.

His mind wandered to what he would look like in the morning when his body was frozen with cold, and at the image of himself in his mind, he laughed. His laugh was returned by a sprightly laugh in the darkness that was none other than Pearl’s. He cried out to her in the night, and to Hester. They appeared having been out measuring a robe for a man who had died that evening. At the Reverend’s request, they came to stand upon the scaffold with him and they joined hands in their sin. Pearl asked the Reverend repeatedly if he would come stand with them on the scaffold the next day at noon, but the Dimmesdale refused. Out of the darkness, Mr. Chillingworth appeared, and the Reverend spoke his fear and hatred of the man. He asked who he really was, and because of her oath, Hester kept her silence. Pearl whispered gibberish to him in revenge for him not standing with them the next day on the scaffold. The Reverend looked up into the sky and saw a meteor trail that looked like a large red ‘A’ leering at him. Mr. Chillingworth told him to come home and he left the scaffold with the evilly happy physician.

Chapter 13: Seven years had passed since little Pearl’s birth. The letter on Hester’s chest to the village people had become a symbol of her good deeds. It set her apart from the general population, but many looked on her as a sister of charity. When someone was in need she was always the one by his or her side. Many people in town said the A stood for able. She had changed. She was an empty form, void of the passion and love that people were able to see in her before.

 Her luxurious hair was always hidden from the sight of the people. After the minister’s vigil, Hester found a new cause for sacrifice, a new purpose. She decided to talk to the old physician, her former husband, and try to save his victim from further mental torture. After making her decision, she came upon him as he was walking the peninsula.

Chapter 14: Hester instructed Pearl to go run and play and she went to a pool and saw herself there. Hester accosted Mr. Chillingworth and he began telling her of all the good things the people in the town had said about her. The leaders in the town at the last council meeting had even thought about admitting Hester to take the letter off her bosom. Hester told him that if the Lord meant her to take it off her chest that it would have fallen off long ago. While they began talking, Hester took a good look at him. In the past seven years he had aged well, but there was a strikingly different look about him. He wore a guarded look of an eager angry man who was out for revenge.

 They began talking about the minister and Mr. Chillingworth reveals that had it not been for his care, the minister would have died long ago. Hester asks if he has not had enough revenge since he was able to torture the minister every day by burying into his heart. He answers no, that it will never be enough. Hester tells him that she plans on revealing his secret to the minister and he tells her that neither of them are sinful and evil, they just must lead the lives that they were given because of her sin. They say farewell, and Hester leaves him to gathering herbs.

Chapter 15: Hester watches him for a while from a distance disgusted at the evil she sees in him. She turns to find little Pearl who was playing with all the different things in nature. When Pearl goes back to her mother, Hester sees that the child has made a letter A out of seaweed and placed it on her chest. Hester asks the child if she knows what the letter her mother wears means. Pearl answers that it is the same reason the minister keeps his hand over his chest.

That is all she knows however, and she asks earnestly why she wears the scarlet letter, and why the minister places his hand over his heart. Ever since she was little, Pearl had a certain fascination with the letter that tortured her mother even more. Hester decided it was better to not unburden her sin upon her child and told her daughter that it meant nothing. After that day however, Pearl would ask her mother two or three times a day what the scarlet letter meant.

Chapter 16: : Hester learned that the Minister had gone into the woods to visit a friend who lived among the Indians. She learned when he was expected to return, and when the day came, she and Pearl went into the forest so she could catch him on his return and speak with him in private. As they enter the forest, Pearl says that she can stand in the sunlight, but the sunlight runs away from Hester. In response, Hester reaches out to touch the stream of light that flocks around the little elf-child, and it vanishes when her hand comes near. Pearl then asks her mother for a story about the black man who inhabits the forest, which she over heard a woman the previous evening talking about. Pearl said that people went into the forest and signed the Black man’s book with their blood and that she heard the scarlet letter was the black man’s mark on her mother. They traveled into the deep into the forest and stopped next to a little brook that Pearl began playing around. After a while, they saw the Reverend Dimmesdale come walking slowly down the path, and Hester tells Pearl to run and play.

Chapter 17: Hester calls out to the Minister and he instantly straightens up and looks towards her. He finds out it is she and they inquire on how their lives have been in the last seven years. They sit down together on a log, and ask each other if they have found peace. The minister expresses his sadness and how he feels like a hypocrite teaching others to be holy, when he himself has a terrible hidden sin. Hester tries to help him by talking with him and caring for him. He thanks her for her friendship. She then tells him of Roger Chillingsworth, how he is her husband, and out for revenge. Dimmesdale is horrified but knew that something was wrong with Roger Chillingworth. Hester could not take the frown that descended upon his face, and asked him if he forgave her. He has, and she asks if he remembers what they had. She hints that they once had a great passion and affection for each other. Hester talks of them leaving together. Arthur says he has not the strength to travel that far, but with Hester helping him, they thought they could do it.

Chapter 18: Together they decide to leave the New World together and not torture themselves further with their sin so that only God will judge them. To them, they are damned already. Hester unhooks her scarlet letter and tosses it by the bubbling brook. They make plans together and say that they will leave for England on the ship that is in the harbor. Talking of their love and their plans, they call back Pearl, for once happy and with lifted spirits. Pearl is off in the forest playing and interacting with the animals. When they call her back, Pearl comes slowly when she sees them sitting together.

 Chapter 19: They sat there looking at Pearl as she approached. She had adorned herself with wild flowers and looked like a fairy child. They rejoiced in their child as she came towards him, and Arthur was exceptionally afraid and anxious for the interview. Pearl stopped at the brook and stared at them. The child pointed at her mother with a frown. Hester called out to her harshly to come and Pearl began screaming and throwing a tantrum. Hester realized that the child was upset that her scarlet letter was not affixed to her mother’s breast. She walked over to where it lay on the ground and showed it to the child. She pinned it back into place, and Pearl was pacified and happy again. They approached the minister and the three of them held hands, and they tried to explain to her that they were all going to be a happy family. The minister kissed Pearl’s forehead and she ran quickly to the brook to try to wash it away.

Chapter 20: Arthur Dimmesdale walked home happily. For the first time in seven years, there was a bounce in his step and a light in his hurting heart. On his way, he saw some of his parishioners and he had thoughts of corruption on his mind. He thought about the reaction he would get if he whispered corrupting things in their ears. There are three different people he runs into in which he feels this. He resists the temptation to do this, and wonders why he is having these thoughts. He wonders if he signed the black man’s book in the forest with his blood. He runs into a woman known as the town witch, and she tells him the next time he wants to go into the forest she would go with him. When he arrives home, Mr. Chillingworth comes into his room, and the Reverend refuses to take anymore of his medicine. He sits at his desk and reworks the sermon he had planned for the following celebration.

Chapter 21: A public holiday because of the election was planned and everyone from that and the neighboring towns attended in their best clothing. Hester and little Pearl attended but stayed slightly apart from the crowd. Though everyone was packed close to see the parade, there was an empty circle around Hester because of her scarlet letter. She had gone previously to make plans with the captain of the ship that they were going to take to England, and she saw the captain of that vessel talking to Roger Chillingworth. The captain then came over to her and informed her that the physician would be attending the voyage with them. She looked towards him, and he smiled at her evilly.

Chapter 22: The parade began and Pearl saw the minister when he reached the front. She asked if that was the same minister who kissed her in the woods, and Hester told her to not talk about it in the marketplace. Mistress Hibbins approached her and began talking to Hester about the minister. Hester denied any involvement with him, and they began watching as he preached to the people. Pearl left her mother and wandered around. The captain of the ship told Pearl to give her mother a message for him. She told him that her father was the Prince of Air. She threatened him and ran to her mother. Hester’s mind wandered and thought about how she would soon be free of he scarlet letter and the pain associated with it.

 Chapter 23: The minister ended his incredible speech and it was one of the best of his life. The people were inspired and as the parade turned therefor, everyone would exit. The minister looked exceptionally sick and called to Hester and Pearl to come to him. Roger Chillingworth ran towards and tried to get Hester back from the minister. He is dying and with his last breaths he shouts his sin to the audience around and blesses Hester and Pearl. He tells the people to take another better look at Hester and at himself so they see the truth in them. He ripped off the ministerial band from his chest, and the people stood shocked. The people are struck with awe and sympathy. The doctor came over the minister, awestruck because he will lose him and his revenge. Dimmesdale asks Pearl for a kiss and she finally places one on his lips. Hester kneels over him and asks him if they will not see each other again, and spend eternity together. The reverend tells her that their sin was too large, and that is all she should be concerned. He shouted farewell to the audience and breathed his last breath.

Chapter 24: People swore after that day that when they saw the minister rip off the band on his breast that a scarlet ‘A’ resided there. Many thought that he made the revelation in the dying hour so everyone would know that one who appeared so pure, was as much a sinner as the rest of them. Roger Chillingworth died within the year and bequeathed large amounts of property both in New England and in England to Pearl. This made Pearl the richest heiress in the New World. Soon after his death, Hester Prynne and her little Pearl disappeared. Years later Hester came back alone to live with her sin in her cottage. Pearl was thought to be happily married elsewhere and mindful of her mother. After her return, many people of the town went to Hester for advice and help when they were in need. After many years she died, and was placed next to the saintly minister. They shared a tombstone and they would be together forever.

Character Profiles

Hester Prynne: A beautiful puritan woman full of strong passions, Hester Prynne is the main character in the story. Employed as the village seamstress, she is strong and caring, helping anyone she can when he or she are in need. With a penitent heart, Hester travels through the story becoming only a shadow of her former passionate loving self. Other than the scarlet letter, she was a very moral woman whose only joy in life was her daughter Pearl. Roger Chillingsworth: The missing husband of Hester Prynne. He shows up the day that Hester is put on public display and does not show himself as her husband. A scholar and a man of medicine, his soul purpose in his life becomes revenge against the man who helped his wife sin. By the end of the story, he is shown to be an evil character.

Pearl: Looked on as the devil’s child, Pearl is the only one in the story that is purely innocent. She is passionate, intelligent, and energetic. Pearl is in touch with nature and with her mother’s feelings. Ever since she was born, Pearl had a fascination with the scarlet letter that is a constant reminder for Hester of her sin.

Arthur Dimmesdale: The minister of the town that the people adore, Arthur was the secret lover of Hester Prynne. He was a sickly man who took his sin very seriously. He spent the seven years since his indiscretion with Mistress Prynne trying to repent. He wore down his body with his penitence and his sin ate away his soul. In the end, he frees himself from his guilt by admitting to everyone his sin.

Metaphor Analysis

The Rose Bush: A rose bush that grew outside the prison was a symbol of survival, that there is life after the prison where Hester spent he beginning of the story.

 The Scarlet Letter ‘A’: The letter that Hester was forced to wear upon her bosom, the scarlet letter was not only a symbol of her adulterous sin, but of the women herself. The letter masks her beauty and passion as the story goes until it is what she is known.

The Black Man in the Woods: the peoples symbol for the devil. The woods in those times were a very scary place, and they thought that people that went into it came out evil and corrupted.

**Theme Analysis**

The Scarlet Letter is a story that illustrates intricate pieces of the Puritan lifestyle. Centered first on a sin committed by Hester Prynne and her secret lover before the story ever begins, the novel details how sin affects the lives of the people involved. For Hester, the sin forces her into isolation from society and even from herself. Her qualities that Hawthorne describes at the opening of the book, i.e. her beauty, womanly qualities, and passion are, after a time, eclipsed by the ‘A’ she is forced to wear. An example of this is her hair. Long hair is something in this time period that is a symbol of a woman. At the beginning of the story, Hawthorne tells of Hester’s long flowing hair. After she wears the scarlet letter for a time, he paints a picture of her with her hair out of site under a cap, and all the wanton womanliness gone from her.

Yet, even with her true eclipsed behind the letter, of the three main characters affected, Hester has the easiest time because her sin is out in the open. More than a tale of sin, the Scarlet Letter is also an intense love story that shows itself in the forest scene between Hester and the minister Arthur Dimmesdale. With plans to run away with each, Arthur and Hester show that their love has surpassed distance and time away from each other. This love also explains why Hester would not reveal the identity of her fellow sinner when asked on the scaffolding. Roger Chillingworth is the most affected by the sin, though he was not around when the sin took place. Demented by his thoughts of revenge and hate, Hawthorne shows Mr. Chillingworth to be a devil or as a man with an evil nature. He himself commits one of the seven deadly sins with his wrath.

By the end of the tale that surpasses seven years, Hester is respected and revered by the community as a doer of good works, and the minister is worshipped for his service in the church. Only Mr. Chillingworth is looked upon badly by the townspeople although no one knows why. Through it all, Hawthorne illustrates that even sin can produce purity, and that purity came in the form of the sprightly Pearl. Though she is isolated with her mother, Pearl finds her company and joy in the nature that surrounds her. She alone knows that her mother must keep the scarlet letter on her at all times, and that to take it off is wrong.

Through the book the child is also constantly asking the minister to confess his sin to the people of the town inherently knowing that it will ease his pain. Hawthorne’s metaphor of the rose growing next to the prison is a good metaphor for Pearl’s life that began in that very place. The reader sees this connection when Pearl tells the minister that her mother plucked her from the rose bush outside of the prison. Finally, for all the characters, Hawthorne’s novel illustrates how one sin can escalate to encompass one’s self so that the true humans behind the sin are lost. This is what makes Hawthorne’s novel not only a story of love vs. hate, sin vs. purity, good vs. evil, but all of these combined to make a strikingly historical tragedy as well.

Top Ten Quotes

1) «It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow.» 2) « ‘People say,’ said another, ‘that the Reverend Master Dimmesdale, her godly pastor, takes it very grievously to his heart that such a scandal has come upon his congregation.’» 3) « ‘If thou feelest to be for thy soul’s peace, and that they earthly punishment will there by be made more effectual to salvation, I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer.’» 4) «But she named the infant ‘Pearl,’ as being of great price- purchased with all she had- her mother’s only pleasure.» 5) «After putting her fingers in her mouth, with many ungrateful refusals to answer Mr. Wilson’s question, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison door» 6) « ‘He hath done a wild thing ere now, this pious Mr. Dimmesdale, in the hot passion of his heart!’» 7) «Such helpfulness was found in her- so much power to do and power to sympathize- that many people refused to interpret the scarlet ‘A’ by it’s original signification. They said that it meant ‘Able’; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a women’s strength.» 8) «‘That old man!- the physician!- the one whom they call Roger Chillingworth!-he was my husband!’» 9) «Pacify her, if thou lovest me!» 10) « ‘Hester Prynne’ cried he, with a piercing earnestness ‘in the name of Him, so terrible and so merciful, who gives me grace, at this last moment, to do what- for my own heavy sin and miserable agony- I withheld myself from doing seven years ago, come hither now, and twine thy strength about me!»