***The Scarlet Letter* Study Questions**

**Chapter 1 – The Prison Door**

1. What is the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*?

2. Why does Hawthorne begin the story with a reflection about the need for a cemetery and a prison?

3. What is the significance of the wild rosebush that grows beside the prison door?

4. Who was Ann Hutchinson?

5. What does Hawthorne achieve by his reference to “the sainted Ann Hutchinson?”

**Chapter 2 – The Market Place**

1. On what note does this chapter begin? In other words, what is the mood?

2. What is Hawthorne saying about the Puritan women of the New World?

3. For what sin is Hester Payne condemned?

4. What is the Old Testament punishment for adultery?

5. What is the public view of Hester’s sin as expressed by the women outside the prison? What do their comments suggest about this society?

6. What is Hester’s punishment?

7. What is surprising about the “A” Hester has sewn for herself? What might this indicate?

8. What is accomplished by Hawthorne’s allusion to the Madonna and Child?

9. Considering the common use of physiognomy in pre-twentieth-century literature, what might Hawthorne be suggesting by portraying Hester as extremely beautiful?

10. What does the Flashback reveal about Hester’s past?

**Chapter 3**

1. What purpose does the conversation between the townsman and the stranger at the beginning of this chapter serve?

2. Why wasn’t Hester sentenced to death for her adultery?

3. Where has the stranger been? What motion does he make to Hester?

4. Who is Dimmsdale? What appeal does he use to convince Hester to reveal the baby’s father?

5. What is Hawthorne foreshadowing with the stranger’s prediction that the name of the father will eventually be disclosed?

6. What is ironic about Dimmesdale’s reaction to Hester’s refusal to name the father of her child?

7. Explain the allusion in the townsman’s telling Chillingworth, “that matter remaineth a riddle; and the Daniel who shall expound it is yet a-wanting.”

**From the mini- series:**

**Parts 1 and 2**

1. Who visits Hester in jail? What is his occupation? His relationship to Hester?
2. What do you learn about the marriage between Hester and Roger Chillingsworth?
3. Who does Chillingsworth want to punish? Why?
4. What does Roger make Hester promise? Why?
5. What is Hester’s baby’s name? Why is it an appropriate name?
6. Where does Hester want to live? Why?
7. Why is Hester concerned about Perl and her relationship to others?
8. What is the “6th Sense” the letter has given Hester? Because of this new insight, what is Hester’s internal conflict?
9. What are the two possibilities, according to Puritans, that would explain where Pearl “came from”?
10. What does the church want to do with Pearl?
11. What happens at the Governor’s house?
12. Who speaks up in Hester’s defense?
13. What does Mistress Hibbins tell Hester? What does Hester say?
14. How does the community regard their minister, Rev. Dimmesdale?
15. What does the doctor think is causing Dimmesdale’s poor health?
16. Where does Chillingworth stay?
17. What is the doctor trying to find out about the minister?
18. Why doesn’t the minister want to reveal his sin?
19. Who suffers the grater pain, Hester or the father of Pearl?
20. What does Chillingworth say must happen before there can be a physical cure?
21. What would Dimmesdale like to tell his church members?
22. Where does the minister go at night?
23. Who finds him on the scaffold? What does Pearl tell him?
24. What do they see in the sky?
25. Who discovers them in the village square?

**Part 3**

1. What service does Hester offer the community?
2. How do the people treat her now?
3. What does Hester discuss with Chillingworth?
4. What changes has the doctor undergone?
5. What does Hester tell Chillingworth to do?
6. How well does Hester explain the meaning of the Scarlet Letter to Pearl?
7. What does Hester want to tell Rev. Dimmesdale?
8. What do Hester and Dimmesdale discuss?
9. Why is the minister upset with Hester?
10. Why is the doctor’s sin worse than theirs?
11. What does Hester advise the minister to do? Why won’t he do it?
12. What does Hester offer to do in order to help the minister?
13. What does Hester do with the scarlet letter?
14. How does Pearl react to her mother?
15. What chance do Hester and the minister have with starting a new life?
16. What seems to be the main obstacle to their happiness?

**Chapter 22- The Procession**

1. What is Hawthorne’s point about the governors’ ability to govern? Does he seem to find fault with them? Why or why not?
2. What is the source of Dimmsdale’s apparent new strength? (infer)
3. What might be implied by the fact that Dimmesdale does not acknowledge Hester or Pearl as he passes by?
4. What does Pearl want from Dimmsdale?
5. Explain the remarks, “The sainted minister in the church! The woman of the scarlet letter in the market-place!”
6. What is Mistress Hibbins saying about the people of Boston?

**Chapter 23**

1. Many critics believe the novel is structures around the three scaffold scenes: the ones in chapters 2 and 12 and this one. Explain how each fits the typical plot scheme of conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion.
2. Why does Dimmsdale stand “on the very proudest eminence of superiority” before the crowd?
3. What does Chillingworth mean when he says, “There was no one place…where thou couldst have escaped me—save on this very scaffold!”
4. In what way is Dimmsadale’s sin worse than Hester’s? Of Hester, Chillingworth, and Dimmsdale, whose sin is the worst? Why?
5. List, in order, the events that happen starting with Dimmesdale stopping in front of the scaffold.

**Chapter 24**

1. What theories are given about the scarlet letter imprinted in the minister’s flesh?
2. Why does Hawthorne leave the origin of Dimmsdale’s mark ambiguous?
3. What happens to Chillingworth? What does he give Pearl?
4. What becomes of Pearl?
5. Why do you suppose Hester returns to Boston? What is her new role in Boston when she returns?
6. Why would Hawthorne allow the story to end with Hester and Dimmesdale being remembered so ignominiously?
7. What is unique about the way Hester is buried?