



Discussion Questions: ***The Scarlet Letter*** by Nathaniel Hawthorne

1. How does Hawthorne's wonderful use of adjectives "paint pictures" for the reader?
Examples:
 - a. sad-colored garments (of the Puritans)
 - b. grizzled locks of hair (on the clergy from Boston)
 - c. wildflower prettiness of a peasant baby (Pearl)
2. Do readers appreciate reading the "Old English" usage of words in today's world of writing? Examples:
 - a. thitherward (towards)
 - b. nigher (nearer)
 - c. in good sooth (the truth)
3. In Chapter IV, Hester meets the "physician" Chillingworth after what today would be called a suicide watch. How much credence can be put on the infant's upset being the result of Hester's turmoil? Is a child effected by a mother's emotional well-being? Internally? Externally? Socially?
4. As the readers see Hester separated from the town and shunned by the simply-clad Puritan community, is there a touch of irony in the fact that she can supply their demands by working beautiful, bright-colored embroidery? A touch of irony that their fanciful ceremonial garments were artistically stitched by Hester's "sinful" hands?
5. Is it human nature to remain where and with the familiar, one's comfort zone, even though we may be shamed or shunned. Is Hester's decision to stay and not flee an example of this?
6. Think about Hester becoming a self-appointed Sister of Mercy and despite her badge of shame, her tireless efforts to help others. Discuss the differences between those hearts who accepted her and those who rebuffed her. Is it human nature for people to love more readily than hate as Hawthorne asserts?
7. In Chapter XXIII, readers are presented with another view of Hester. How does Hester view or question womens' place in society? Was this a vein of thought throughout the ages and not a modern thought? Does society continue to look unfavorably toward this type of sinner?

8. Hester shows strength. Dimmesdale shows weakness. Is Hawthorne suggesting it is easier to live openly admitting your sin? Or hiding it?

9. In Chapter XX, the reader can see the change in Reverend Dimmesdale after resolving his future with Hester and Pearl. After seven years of close-lipped denial, his attitude is much more clear. Hawthorne says that "no man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true." Discuss how this circumstance holds true for all.

10. First, the scaffold platform appears for Hester's punishment, then Dimmesdale's fit of anguish, and then Dimmesdale's death. Can readers confer on the symbolism of the scaffold?

11. Hawthorne's use of dark places such as the night, the forest, and the prison are symbolic when they are used as the background for the characters in their revealing confrontations. Can the reader assume this is a habit for all? Do we choose to tell our secrets in the dark?

12. Was Dimmesdale's self-inflicted wound proof of his years of suffering? Is there hypocrisy in the minister's stirring Election day sermon with the people adoring him, then his revealing of his sin?