

Applied Practice
in

The Scarlet Letter
Essential Skills Version

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RESOURCE GUIDE

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Printed in the United States of America.

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Practice 1

Read the following passage from Chapter 2 of *The Scarlet Letter*, "The Market-Place," and choose the best answer to each question.

1 The grass-plot before the jail, in Prison Lane, on a certain summer morning, not less than two centuries ago, was occupied by a pretty large number of the inhabitants of Boston, all with their eyes intently fastened on the iron-clamped oaken door. Amongst any other population, or at a later period in the history of New England, the grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies of these good people would have augured some awful business in hand. It could have betokened nothing short of the anticipated execution of some noted culprit, on whom the sentence of a legal tribunal had but confirmed the verdict of public sentiment. But, in that early severity of the Puritan character, an inference of this kind could not so indubitably be drawn. It might be that a sluggish bond-servant, or an undutiful child, whom his parents had given over to the civil authority, was to be corrected at the whipping-post. It might be, that an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist was to be scourged out of the town, or an idle and vagrant Indian, whom the white man's fire-water had made riotous about the streets, was to be driven with stripes into the shadow of the forest. It might be, too, that a witch, like old Mistress Hibbins, the bitter-tempered widow of the magistrate, was to die upon the gallows. In either case, there was very much the same solemnity of demeanor on the part of the spectators; as befitted a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and the severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful. Meagre, indeed, and cold was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for from such by-standers, at the scaffold. On the other hand, a penalty, which, in our days, would infer a degree of mocking infamy and ridicule, might then be invested with almost as stern a dignity as the punishment of death itself.

2 It was a circumstance to be noted, on the summer morning when our story begins its course, that the women, of whom there were several in the crowd, appeared to take a particular interest in whatever penal infliction might be expected to ensue. The age had not so much refinement, that any sense of impropriety restrained the wearers of petticoats and farthingale from stepping forth into the public ways, and wedging their not unsubstantial persons, if occasion were, into the throng nearest to the scaffold at an execution. Morally, as well as materially, there was a coarser fibre in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding, than in their fair descendants, separated from them by a series of six or seven generations; for, throughout that chain of ancestry, every successive mother has transmitted to her child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slighter physical frame, if not a character of less force and solidity, than her own. The women who were now standing about the prison-door stood within less than half a century of the period when the man-like Elizabeth had been the not altogether unsuitable representative of the sex. They were her country-women; and the beef and ale of their native land, with a moral diet not a whit more refined, entered largely into their composition. The bright morning sun, therefore, shone on broad shoulders and well-developed busts, and on round and ruddy cheeks, that had ripened in the far-off island, and had hardly yet grown paler or thinner in the atmosphere of New England. There was, moreover, a boldness and rotundity of speech among these matrons, as

most of them seemed to be, that would startle us at the present day, whether in respect to its purport or its volume of tone.

- 3 "Goodwives," said a hard-featured dame of fifty, "I'll tell ye a piece of my mind. It would be greatly for the public behoof, if we women, being of mature age and church-members in good repute, should have the handling of such malefactresses as this Hester Prynne. What think ye, gossips? If the hussy stood up for judgment before us five, that are now here in a knot together, would she come off with such a sentence as the worshipful magistrates have awarded? Marry, I trow not!"
- 4 "People say," said another, "that the Reverend Master Dimmesdale, her godly pastor, takes it very grievously to heart that such a scandal should have come upon his congregation."
- 5 "The magistrates are God-fearing gentlemen, but merciful overmuch—that is a truth," added a third autumnal matron. "At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead. Madam Hester would have winced at that, I warrant me. But she—the naughty baggage—little will she care what they put upon the bodice of her gown! Why, look you, she may cover it with a brooch, or such like heathenish adornment, and so walk the streets as brave as ever!"
- 6 "Ah, but," interposed, more softly, a young wife, holding a child by the hand, "let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart."
- 7 "What do we talk of marks and brands, whether on the bodice of her gown, or the flesh of her forehead?" cried another female, the ugliest as well as the most pitiless of these self-constituted judges. "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly, there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates, who have made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray!"
- 8 "Mercy on us, goodwife," exclaimed a man in the crowd, "is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows? That is the hardest word yet! Hush, now, gossips! for the lock is turning in the prison-door, and here comes Mistress Prynne herself."

1 The harsh attitude of the women toward Hester Prynne most likely reflects —

- A some grudge they have against Hester
- B the time period in which the events are set**
- C their sympathy for the Reverend Master Dimmesdale
- D the fact that her offense was worse than any they had ever encountered

- 2 Paragraph 2 is mostly about —**
- A the fact that England had recently been ruled by a woman
 - B the women’s lack of compassion for criminals
 - C how the women of the age differed from their descendents
 - D the idea that women are always harsher in their judgments than men are
- 3 In paragraph 8, the man refers to the woman’s words at the end of Paragraph 7 as “the harshest word yet” because she is implying that —**
- A the magistrates do not love their own wives and daughters
 - B the magistrates do not follow the law as they should
 - C women will only remain virtuous if they fear punishment
 - D women in the town are likely to envy Hester Prynne’s position
- 4 Based on what the narrator says about the Puritans in paragraph 1, the reader can conclude that the harsh penalties suggested by the women for Hester Prynne —**
- A reveal nothing about the seriousness of Hester’s offense
 - B prove that Hester’s offense must have been extremely outrageous
 - C show that the women must have a personal grudge against Hester
 - D are out of character for women of this era to suggest
- 5 In paragraph 5, which word helps the reader understand the word brooch?**
- A “cover”
 - B “heathenish”
 - C “adornment”
 - D “brave”

- 6 The effect of placing paragraph 7 immediately after paragraph 6 is to emphasize that —**
- A the Puritan women did not respect young mothers
 - B no one heard what the young wife said
 - C the crowd held many differing opinions
 - D the young wife's opinion was not given much consideration
- 7 The reader can infer that the narrator's society differs from Puritan society in all of the following ways EXCEPT that in the narrator's society —**
- A a greater distinction is made between minor and major crimes
 - B wrongdoers are not subjected to humiliating punishments
 - C women in general are more refined
 - D civil law is less closely tied to religious law
- 8 Which of the following is an opinion of the speaker in paragraph 7?**
- A Bringing shame on the whole community merits a sentence of death.
 - B There is a law in the Scripture to support Hester's death.
 - C There is a law in the statute books to support Hester's death.
 - D The magistrates have given Hester a lighter sentence than death.
- 9 Which line in the passage best foreshadows the treatment that Hester will receive from the townspeople?**
- A ". . . the grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies of these good people would have augured some awful business in hand."
 - B "Meagre, indeed, and cold was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for from such by-standers, at the scaffold."
 - C "'If the hussy stood up for judgment before us five, . . . would she come off with such a sentence as the worshipful magistrates have awarded?'"
 - D "' . . . let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart.'"

10 The point-of-view of *The Scarlet Letter*, as represented by this selection, is —

- A first-person, Hester Prynne
- B first-person, Reverend Dimmesdale
- C third-person, limited
- D third-person, omniscient

11 What hints does the narrator give that might explain the different opinion expressed in paragraph 6? Support your answer with evidence from the text. (extended response)

12 What is the narrator's own attitude toward the Puritans, and specifically toward the assembled crowd, and which of the narrator's word choices help reveal this attitude? Support your answer with evidence from the text. (short answer)

Use the visual representation on the following page to answer questions 13 and 14.

FRUSTRATED with your weight-loss efforts?
DON'T BE!!

TRY E-Z Slim



Wasting time and energy at the gym!



Worrying about calories and nutrition!

Chew just one of our *DELICIOUS* chocolate-flavored
E-Z Slim tablets each day, and **LOSE** up to **20 LBS.**
in just **ONE** week!!!!!!!

FOLLOW THE 4 SIMPLE E-Z SLIM STEPS:

1. Chew one delicious E-Z Slim tablet



2. Eat as MUCH as you want of WHATEVER you want!!!!



3. Sit back and PUT YOUR FEET UP!!!!!!!!



4. Have the body you've always DREAMED of!!!!

THE COST? ONLY \$19.95 FOR A THIRTY-DAY SUPPLY.
YOU COULD LOSE 80 POUNDS FOR UNDER \$20.00!!!!!!!
OVER 3 MILLION SOLD! ORDER NOW!!!!

13 The creators of the ad are primarily targeting those people who —

- A are dedicated exercisers
- B plan to enter a beauty pageant
- C want quick and easy solutions
- D are very careful about their health

14 The statement that three million E-Z Slim units have been sold so far is intended to persuade the viewer that —

- A the product must be effective to be in such high demand
- B he or she is not alone in having a weight problem
- C supplies of E-Z Slim may soon run out
- D E-Z Slim is the top selling weight loss product

(Thematic connection to *The Scarlet Letter*—gullibility; the willingness of people to believe anything if it aligns with what they wish to be true.)

READING PRACTICES ANSWER KEY
[Common Core State Standards in brackets]

Practice 1

1. B the time period in which the events are set [RL 1]
2. C how the women of the age differed from their descendents [RL 2]
3. C women will only remain virtuous if they fear punishment [RL 1]
4. A reveal nothing about the seriousness of Hester's offense [RL 1]
5. C "adornment" [L 4a]
6. D the young wife's opinion was not given much consideration [RL 5]
7. B wrongdoers are not subjected to humiliating punishments [RL 1]
8. A Bringing shame on the whole community merits a sentence of death. [RL 6]
9. B "Meagre, indeed, and cold was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for from such by-standers, at the scaffold." [RL 2]
10. D third-person, omniscient [RL 6]
11. Answers will vary. A good answer will point out that the narrator uses sympathetic terms to describe the speaker and her words ("softly," "young wife," "holding a child by the hand"). Unlike the other women who are harsh in their judgments and described as "hard featured," this woman is in a position in life (young motherhood) characterized by tender feelings, and her soft manner of speaking probably corresponds to her softer feelings toward Hester and her predicament. [RL 4]
12. Answers will vary. A good answer will point to specific words that show the narrator to be less than sympathetic to Puritan attitudes and to the assembled crowd described. Examples of such words are "grim rigidity," "petrified," "severity of the Puritan character," "cold was the sympathy," "not unsubstantial persons," "hard-featured dame," "the ugliest as well as the most pitiless," "these self-constituted judges." [RI 6]
13. C want quick and easy solutions [RI 7]
14. A the product must be effective to be in such high demand [RI 7]

Practice 2

1. C self-conscious [RL 3]
2. C The stranger's laying his fingers on his lips [RL 2]
3. B sinister [L 5a]
4. A Honorable [L 4a]
5. C seek to discover the father's identity [RL 1]
6. D respectful [RL 4]
7. B For several reasons, Hester is given a relatively light sentence. [RL 2]
8. A Effortless [L 5b]
9. D allusion [L 5a]
10. C A Year in the Life of the New England Colonists interactive Web site [W 8]
11. Answers will vary. A good answer will note that Hester clearly recognizes the stranger and that the recognition causes her to "convulsively" squeeze her infant. The stranger's inordinate interest in the identity of the baby's father hints that he might be Hester's husband. Another hint is his "bitter smile" at the beginning of paragraph 9, indicating that it was he who was unwise enough to send his wife ahead of him to the colonies. The stranger's long captivity coincides with the absence of Hester's husband. [RL 2]

MULTIPLE-CHOICE ANSWER EXPLANATIONS
READING PRACTICE 1

1. (B) the time period in which the events are set. In the first paragraph, the narrator establishes the fact that wrongdoers during Puritan times faced severe penalties, even if their offenses were relatively minor. The women are a striking example of this harshness. There is no hint that they have a grudge against Hester in particular. The Reverend Mister Dimmesdale is mentioned only in passing. While they say that Hester deserves a severe punishment, there is nothing to indicate that her offense was the worst they had ever encountered.

2. (C) how the women of the age differed from their descendents. The focus in the paragraph is on how these Puritan women were coarser and more outspoken than women of the narrator's time. Lack of compassion for criminals is not mentioned. Choice A is merely a small detail mentioned in the paragraph. Choice D is an absolute that is not stated in the paragraph.

3. (C) women will only remain virtuous if they fear punishment. The rhetorical question immediately preceding the man's statement makes it clear that he is shocked by the woman's implication that only fear of the gallows keeps the magistrates' "wives and daughters" (representing women in general) virtuous.

4. (A) reveal nothing about the seriousness of Hester's offense. In the first paragraph, the narrator states that, while the crowd looks as if they are expecting some notorious, heinous criminal to emerge, they might simply be awaiting the punishment of a disobedient child, a person with heterodox views, or an Indian who had been "drunk and disorderly." Thus, the reader can draw no reliable conclusion about the seriousness of Hester's offense from the behavior of the crowd.

5. (C) "adornment". It is clear that the word "brooch" must refer to something a woman could place on the bodice of a gown. The word "adornment" gives a clear clue that a brooch is likely some kind of decorative jewelry. The word "heathenish" gives no clue as to what a brooch actually is, especially since the Puritans would apply that word to many different things.

6. (D) the young wife's opinion was not given much consideration. There is no suggestion that the young woman's words were not heard, but the way the next speaker simply picks up the conversation as if the young woman had not spoken shows that her compassionate attitude toward Hester is not given much consideration by the crowd of generally pitiless women.

7. (B) wrongdoers are not subjected to humiliating punishments.

The last sentence of the first paragraph says that in the narrator's society ("in our days"), wrongdoers are indeed subjected to "mocking infamy and ridicule." He makes clear that it is the "early severity of the Puritan character" which caused the Puritans to make no distinctions between minor and major crimes. In the second paragraph, he specifically says that the Puritan women were coarser and less refined than women of the narrator's time. Referring to the Puritans as "a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical" indicates that this would not be an accurate characterization of the narrator's contemporaries.

8. (A) Bringing shame on the whole community merits a sentence of death. The speaker in paragraph 7 gives three reasons Hester should die and complains of the magistrates' leniency. Her first reason is an opinion. The next two reasons cite the laws under which the community chooses to live. The other fact is that the magistrates set aside the death penalty prescribed in these laws.

9. (B) "Meagre, indeed, and cold was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for from such by-standers, at the scaffold."

Even without knowing what follows this passage, the reader learns in paragraph 1 the practice of townspeople standing by the scaffold, coldly looking on any person receiving public discipline. Choice A comments on what readers might infer about the crime from the faces of the bystanders. The comment of the older woman is wishful thinking about Hester's sentence, and the younger woman's inference prepares us for Hester's less public suffering.

10. (D) third-person, omniscient. The narrator is omniscient; he analyzes the characters and tells the story in a way that shows that he knows more about the characters than they know about themselves.

11. See answer key for explanation.

12. See answer key for explanation.

13. (C) want quick and easy solutions. Promising weight loss through chewing a chocolate flavored tablet and then eating whatever one wants and remaining sedentary is an appeal to those who want a quick, easy fix. Dedicated exercisers and those careful about their "health" (not just their appearance) would not be tempted by such a "program."

14. (A) the product must be effective to be in such high demand.

Using the "bandwagon" appeal, the ad's creators try to persuade their audience that three million people could not be wrong. These numbers do not imply a shortage or that the product is the top seller. Choice B would indicate that the ad is intended to console the viewer rather than persuade the viewer to buy the product.