

Applied Practice

The Scarlet Letter

Essential ELA

RESOURCE GUIDE

By Nathaniel Hawthorne

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READING PRACTICES

Practice 1

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

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

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. Read this sentence from the selection.

“But she—the naughty baggage—little will she care what they put upon the bodice of her gown!”

The tone of this sentence can best be described as

- A. flippant
- B. contemptuous
- C. unemotional
- D. threatening

12. 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)

13. 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)

Questions 8 – 12 refer to the following outline. Read the outline carefully and answer the following questions.

Camilla's Outline

- I. Early life
 - A. Born
 - 1. On July 4, 1804
 - 2. In Salem, Massachusetts
 - 3. From Puritan ancestors
 - B. Father
 - 1. Salem Custom House
 - 2. Died in 1808
 - 3. Left family in poverty
 - C. Mother
 - 1. Highly dependent on relatives for support
 - 2. Overly protective of Nathaniel
 - a. Caused him to be shy
 - b. Led him to be studious
- II. Young adulthood
 - A. Graduated from Bowdoin College
 - B. Devoted to his writing
 - 1. Wrote stories and novel Fanshawe
 - 2. Worked two local jobs
 - a. Income
 - b. Boston Custom House
 - c. Worked as a sea captain
 - C. Introduced to future wife
- III. Middle-age life
 - A. Married to Sophia Peabody
 - 1. Mother and sister ran a school.
 - 2. Sophia was a teacher.
 - 3. Sophia was an artist.
 - a. Recreated famous artwork
 - b. Illustrated Hawthorne's The Gentle Boy
 - B. Lived in Concord, Massachusetts
 - 1. Neighbors—Emerson and Thoreau
 - 2. Hawthorne—friend and skeptic
 - C. Succeeded as a writer
- IV. Later years
 - A. Married total of twenty-two years
 - B. Fathered three children
 - C. Resided in New England
 - D. Stayed four years in England
 - E. Died at fifty-nine

8. Where could the writer add information about the author’s traveling around Europe with his wife and children and about his experiences living abroad?
- A. As III.B.3. and III.B.4.
 - B. As IV.D.1. and IV.D.2.
 - C. As I.B.4. and I.B.5.
 - D. As I.A.4. and I.A.5.
9. Based on the information in the writing plan, which title would be more appropriate for subtopic I.A.?
- A. Birthplace
 - B. Place of birth
 - C. Birth
 - D. Facts of birth

10. Camilla wants to add the following details to the outline:

Attended with Longfellow Attended with later-to-be-President Pierce
--

Based on the organization of the writing plan, where would be the most appropriate place for this subtopic to be added?

- A. As III.B.3. and III.B.4.
 - B. As I.B.4. and I.B.5.
 - C. As II.A.1. and II.A.2.
 - D. As II.B.2.d. and II.B.2.e.
11. What is the most effective way for Camilla to improve the organization of her writing plan?
- A. Reverse I.B.1. and II.B.2.c.
 - B. Move III.A.2. to follow I.C.3.
 - C. Reverse II. and III.B.1.
 - D. Move III.B.2 to follow I.A.3.
12. Based on information in Camilla’s outline, which of the following organizational patterns would be most appropriate for her essay?
- A. Cause and effect
 - B. Chronological
 - C. Compare and contrast
 - D. Analysis

SELECTION 3

Questions 1 – 10 refer to the following essay written on a group project in English class. Carefully read the essay and look for any revisions that need to be made and answer the questions that follow.

Group Three: Archetypes

(1) Our group was assigned the task of finding out the meaning of the term “archetype” and then discussing any examples of archetypes we could find in *The Scarlet Letter*. (2) We were not familiar with the term, so we went to the library and also did some online research. (3) Most of our research pointed toward the twentieth-century Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung. (4) Jung believed that all people share what he called a “collective unconscious” and that there are some symbols, called “archetypes,” that are universal. (5) For example, Jung would say that all people, regardless of when or where they live, recognize darkness as a negative symbol. (6) Darkness represents danger, the unknown, or even evil. (7) As it happens, people recognize light as a symbol for safety, goodness, and wisdom.

(8) Literary archetypes are those that occur in many works of literature in many different cultures. (9) We understood the concept of archetypes more clearly when we began to think of familiar fairy tales, which are full of such symbols. (10) There is often a hero who must set out into the dark forest and fight evil before he or she obtains a prized goal. (11) Wicked witches and beautiful, kind Princesses fill the pages of fairy tales. (12) “Evil” plants, such as the thorn bushes that grow over Sleeping Beautys’ palace, present a contrast to the beautiful roses presented by princes to their beloveds.

(13) Having a basic understanding of what literary archetypes are, we set out to examine *The Scarlet Letter* to see if we could apply our knowledge to this novel. (14) The dark forest is where Mistress Hibbins and the devil conduct their meetings. (15) The clear light of day is where things are exposed for what they are. (16) We remembered that little Pearl comments that the sun does not “love” Hester because every time Hester steps into a bright patch of sunlight, a cloud passes by and covers the light. (17) The symbolic meaning is that Pearl realizes her mother has done something that is not quite right or is not correct.

(18) Hester herself seems to be a perfect example of the archetype of the Fall; just as Adam and Eve “fell” in the Garden of Eden, Hester has fallen out of grace with her Puritan community. (19) Because of this, she comes to represent another archetype: the outcast. (20) On the other hand, Hester names her daughter “Pearl,” a name associated with a precious, costly gem. (21) Beautiful jewels are another archetype, and Hester’s choice of this name for her daughter indicate that Hester has paid a great price for her and that, despite the shame involved, she considers Pearl to be a person of great worth.

(22) Among the many other examples of archetypes we found in the novel, one of the most obvious is the devil figure. (23) Of course, the devil himself is referred to in the novel. (24) Mistress Hibbins tries to entice Hester into the forest. (25) Mistress Hibbins wants Hester to meet with the devil. (26) She also wants Hester to sign his “black book.” (27) However, Roger Chillingworth is the clearest embodiment of evil in the novel. (28) Chillingworth is deformed (another archetype), and as his plan for vengeance proceeds, he becomes more and more mishapen, both physically and spiritually. (29) Chillingworth’s face begins to darken, and the townspeople begin to sense that he is in contact with the sooty regions inhabited by the devil.

(30) When we make our presentation to the class, we will display a chart showing all the archetypes we discovered in Hawthorne’s novel. (31) Being aware of archetypes has changed the way we look at modern films such as Star Wars and the way we approach classic works of literature like *The Scarlet Letter*. (32) We have concluded that Carl Jung was probably right; many of the symbols and patterns that occur over and over again in literature seem to be universal.

1. Which of these words or phrases would be a more effective transition in sentence 7?
 - A. Likewise,
 - B. Therefore,
 - C. Nevertheless,
 - D. In fact,
2. The following detail needs to be added to the third paragraph (sentences 13-17).

We quickly realized that light and darkness are important in the story.

Where is the most logical place to insert this sentence?

- A. At the beginning of the paragraph
- B. After sentence 14
- C. After sentence 16
- D. After sentence 13

ESSAY WRITING PROMPTS

Persuasive Writing

At the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter* one of the women in the community declares that Hester “has brought shame upon us all” with her sin.

Think carefully about this statement.

Write an essay stating your position on whether you believe that the actions of one person reflect on all the people with whom that person associates.

Be sure to —

- state your position clearly
- use appropriate organization
- provide specific support for your argument
- choose your words carefully
- edit your writing for grammar, mechanics, and spelling