

# The Scarlet Letter

## *Sample Analytical Paper Topics*

The following paper topics are designed to test your understanding of the novel as a whole and to analyze important themes and literary devices. Following each question is a sample outline to help get you started.

### TOPIC #1

Discuss Hawthorne's blend of realism, symbolism, and allegory in *The Scarlet Letter*.

#### **Outline**

**I.** Thesis Statement: *The Scarlet Letter is a blend of realism, symbolism, and allegory.*

**II. Realism in *The Scarlet Letter***

- A. Historical setting
- B. Psychological exploration of characters
- C. Realistic dialogue

**III. Symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter***

- A. The letter and its obvious manifestations
- B. Pearl as a human manifestation of the letter
- C. The settings as symbols
  - 1. The settlement
  - 2. The forest
  - 3. The scaffold
  - 4. The market-place

**IV. Allegory in *The Scarlet Letter***

- A. Definition
- B. Character types
  - 1. The beadle
  - 2. Hester
  - 3. Dimmesdale
  - 4. Chillingworth
  - 5. Pearl

### TOPIC #2

How are Puritans represented in *The Scarlet Letter*?

#### **Outline**

**I.** Thesis Statement: *Hawthorne's opinion of the Puritans may be understood by examining their actions within the novel and the narrator's comment on them.*

**II. Historical background on the Puritans**

**III. Hawthorne's ancestors as described in "The Custom-House" essay**

#### **IV. The Puritan's actions in *The Scarlet Letter***

- A. The ministers
- B. The common people
  - 1. Attitudes toward work and relaxation
  - 2. Attitudes toward their religious beliefs
  - 3. Attitudes toward Hester and Pearl

#### **V. The narrator's comments about Puritans**

- A. Negative comments
- B. Positive comments

### **TOPIC #3**

Discuss Hester Prynne's conflicts with herself, with others, and with Nature.

#### ***Outline***

**I.** Thesis Statement: *Hester Prynne has several conflicts, and as these are resolved, her character is revealed.*

#### **II. Types of conflict possible**

- A. Conflict with self
- B. Conflict with another
- C. Conflict with a group
- D. Conflict with Nature
- E. Conflict with the supernatural

#### **III. Hester in conflict with herself**

- A. Accepts her actions as wrong
- B. Retains a sense of pride

#### **IV. Hester in conflict with another**

- A. Settles initial conflict with Chillingworth
- B. Challenges Chillingworth about her promise
- C. Attempts to outmaneuver Chillingworth

#### **V. Hester in conflict with a group**

- A. Accepts the society's punishment with patience
- B. Fights the power structure and Dimmesdale to keep Pearl
- C. Her thoughts defy conventional teaching
- D. Resumes her punishment years later of her own choosing

#### **VI. Hester in conflict with nature**

- A. Resists the "Black Man of the Forest"
- B. Accepts the natural forest as promising freedom

#### **VII. Hester in conflict with the supernatural**

- A. Resists the "Black Man of the Forest"
- B. Allows God to judge her sin without any pleading for mercy