

The Scarlet Letter

Introductory and Chapters 1-3

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: alacrity, benevolence, exhort, frailty, haughty, ignominy, imbue, iniquity, luxuriance, sagacity

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Vocabulary Preview 2

Answer Key — Preview 3

Caution: share only if self-checking

OPTIONAL POST-READING QUIZ

Vocabulary in Context 4

Answer Key — In Context 5

Caution: do not share with students

About the Pre-Reading Activity (open-dictionary; ungraded or completion grade):

Students preview 10 words from the upcoming reading, each in a sentence that supports understanding. They choose the best meaning from 3 choices.

About the Optional Post-Reading Quiz (use after reading, or skip):

Same words, now in real excerpts from the text, with questions that build reading and analytical skills.

Vocabulary Sections for this Book:

Section 1 • Introductory and Chapters 1-3 • Hester and the scarlet letter

Section 2 • Chapters 4-8 • Hester's needle and her child

Section 3 • Chapters 9-13 • The physician and the minister

Section 4 • Chapters 14-19 • Hester and the old physician

Section 5 • Chapters 20-24 • The minister returns to town

Bold = this section. Other sections are available at verbalworkout.com.



verbalworkout.com
(all resources free)

Vocabulary Preview

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Read each prompt. Then choose the best meaning for the bold word.

1. She accepted the invitation with **alacrity**.

- A. eager readiness
- B. polite caution
- C. calm patience

2. The old doctor treated poor patients with great **benevolence**.

- A. kindly goodwill
- B. careful skill
- C. strict discipline

3. Coaches often **exhort** their players to never give up.

- A. strongly urge
- B. gently remind
- C. openly praise

4. The story forgives its hero's **frailty** instead of condemning it.

- A. physical weakness
- B. lasting sorrow
- C. moral weakness

5. He gave a **haughty** nod and walked past without a word.

- A. quick and impatient
- B. arrogantly proud
- C. tired and distracted

6. Losing in the final round felt like an **ignominy** he would never forget.

- A. bitter disappointment
- B. unfair punishment
- C. public shame and disgrace

7. Great mentors **imbue** their students with curiosity.

- A. train in a useful skill
- B. fill deeply with a quality
- C. reward for good behavior

8. The preacher warned his town against every kind of **iniquity**.

- A. wickedness or sin
- B. idle gossip
- C. foolish waste

9. The **luxuriance** of the garden in summer amazed every visitor.

- A. costly luxury
- B. bright color
- C. rich abundance

10. The judge was admired for her **sagacity** in difficult cases.

- A. tireless energy
- B. keen wisdom
- C. firm fairness

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

beadle — a minor town officer who keeps order and carries out punishments

pillory — a wooden frame with holes for the head and hands, used to expose an offender to public scorn

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Preview

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#	KEY
1	A
2	A
3	A
4	C
5	B
6	C
7	B
8	A
9	C
10	B

Vocabulary in Context

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____ Score _____ / 10

Read each excerpt carefully. Then choose the best answer to each question.

1 "... nothing could exceed the vigilance and alacrity with which they proceeded to lock, and double-lock, and secure with tape and sealing-wax, all the avenues of the delinquent vessel."

As it is used in the passage, the word 'alacrity' most nearly suggests that the officers secured the ship with...

- A. quick, eager promptness
- B. anxious caution
- C. painstaking thoroughness

2 "... and of benevolence which, fiercely as he led the bayonets on at Chippewa or Fort Erie, I take to be of quite as genuine a stamp as what actuates any or all the polemical philanthropists of the age."

In the passage, the old General is characterized as...

- A. ruthless in war and in peace
- B. gentle and unsuited to battle
- C. fierce in war yet genuinely kind

3 "Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other."

The passage most strongly suggests that, in this 'neutral territory,'...

- A. ordinary objects lose all meaning
- B. the imaginary overpowers the real
- C. the real and imaginary blend together

4 "But on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush, covered, in this month of June, with its delicate gems ... It may serve, let us hope, to symbolise some sweet moral blossom that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow."

In context, the word 'frailty' emphasizes humanity's...

- A. weakness and leaning toward sin
- B. physical sickness and decay
- C. short and fragile life

5 "... she took the baby on her arm, and with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbours."

In the passage, Hester Prynne is characterized as...

- A. proud and defiant despite her shame
- B. fearful and longing to hide
- C. humbled and eager to repent

6 "On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore ..."

The author most likely stresses the letter's 'gorgeous luxuriance' to show that Hester...

- A. meant to flaunt her wealth and rank
- B. tried to soften the letter's meaning
- C. made the badge a work of defiant art

7 "A blessing on the righteous colony of the Massachusetts, where iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine!"

Which statement is best supported by the beadle's exclamation?

- A. the colony brings sin into public view
- B. the colony has rid itself of all sin
- C. the colony pardons sin once confessed

8 "... the stern and tempered energies of manhood and the sombre sagacity of age; accomplishing so much, precisely because it imagined and hoped so little."

It can reasonably be inferred that the colony's strength came from...

- A. warm sympathy and openness
- B. hard-won wisdom, not youthful hope
- C. bold imagination and ambition

9 "It behoves you; therefore, to exhort her to repentance and to confession, as a proof and consequence thereof."

According to the Governor, Dimmesdale's duty is to...

- A. pardon Hester for her offense
- B. press Hester to repent and confess
- C. pronounce Hester's sentence

10 "Heaven hath granted thee an open ignominy, that thereby thou mayest work out an open triumph over the evil within thee and the sorrow without."

It can reasonably be inferred that the minister urges Hester to...

- A. give up her ruined reputation
- B. turn her public shame into triumph
- C. hide her shame from the crowd

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary in Context

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#	KEY	NOTE
1	A	
2	C	
3	C	Hawthorne's celebrated 'neutral territory' theory of romance -- the Actual and Imaginary mingle by moonlight.
4	A	Here 'frailty' is moral weakness (sin), not physical fragility -- the sense the novel turns on.
5	A	
6	C	Character comprehension. 'Luxuriance' here is exuberant richness of invention, not material luxury.
7	A	Event comprehension.
8	B	
9	B	
10	B	

Teacher Context: Introductory and Chapters 1–3

Begins with Hawthorne's lengthy 'Custom-House' introductory sketch, then opens the novel proper: Hester Prynne is led from prison to the scaffold to be publicly shamed for adultery, her infant Pearl in her arms and the scarlet 'A' on her breast. In the crowd she recognizes her long-absent husband, who hides his identity and takes the name Chillingworth. The break falls after Chapter 3 to keep the opening scaffold scene and the recognition as one unit; note that the included Custom-House essay makes this section long.