

The Scarlet Letter

Chapters 4–8

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: apprehension, ascetic, caprice, emaciated, infamy, inscrutable, intangible, pristine, retribution, venerable

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 waited for the news with deep **apprehension**.

- A. fearful uneasiness
- B. restless impatience
- C. puzzled confusion

2. He admired the **ascetic** habits of the old philosopher.

- A. plain and self-denying
- B. strict and orderly
- C. odd and eccentric

3. Her every **caprice** had to be obeyed by the servants.

- A. a firm command
- B. a small request
- C. a sudden whim

4. Months of fever left him pale and **emaciated**.

- A. weak and exhausted
- B. scarred and disfigured
- C. very thin and wasted

5. The corruption scandal brought him lasting **infamy**.

- A. great wealth
- B. public disgrace
- C. public sympathy

6. The old gambler kept an **inscrutable** expression at the table.

- A. impossible to read
- B. cold and angry
- C. tense and nervous

7. A good reputation is valuable but **intangible**.

- A. quickly forgotten
- B. hard to grasp or define
- C. rarely earned

8. Long ago, **pristine** forests covered the entire continent.

- A. dense and shadowy
- B. perfectly clean
- C. original and unspoiled

9. The angry crowd called for **retribution**.

- A. punishment for a wrong
- B. a public apology
- C. a fair settlement

10. Students rose to their feet as the **venerable** professor entered.

- A. famous and wealthy
- B. deeply respected
- C. stern and demanding

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

pearl of great price — a biblical allusion (Matthew 13:45–46) to something of supreme value worth giving up all else for; here, Pearl as Hester's costly only treasure

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY
1	A
2	A
3	C
4	C
5	B
6	A
7	B
8	C
9	A
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 “Hester repelled the offered medicine, at the same time gazing with strongly marked apprehension into his face.”

As it is used in the passage, the word “apprehension” most nearly suggests that Hester feels...

- A. a sudden grasp of his meaning
- B. irritation at his commands
- C. fearful uneasiness about his intent

2 “He bears no letter of infamy wrought into his garment, as thou dost, but I shall read it on his heart.”

The passage most strongly suggests that, unlike Hester, the man Chillingworth seeks...

- A. bears his guilt secretly
- B. feels no guilt at all
- C. is admired as honorable

3 “... having also the passes of the dark, inscrutable forest open to her, where the wildness of her nature might assimilate itself with a people whose customs and life were alien from the law that had condemned her ...”

The author most likely calls the forest “inscrutable” in order to present it as...

- A. a mysterious, unreadable refuge
- B. a physically impassable barrier
- C. a place of lawful order

4 “... whatever other intangible circumstance was then, as now, sufficient to bestow ...”

The passage most strongly suggests that the demand for Hester’s needlework arose partly from...

- A. a minor, unimportant whim
- B. a cause too vague to define
- C. a sudden, brief fashion craze

5 “Hester sought not to acquire anything beyond a subsistence, of the plainest and most ascetic description, for herself ...”

Which statement about Hester’s way of living is best supported by the passage?

- A. She spent freely on herself
- B. She denied herself all comfort
- C. She lived in hidden luxury

6 “Sometimes the red infamy upon her breast would give a sympathetic throb, as she passed near a venerable minister or magistrate, the model of piety and justice, to whom that age of antique reverence looked up, as to a mortal man in fellowship with angels.”

The ironic use of “venerable” most strongly hints that the revered minister...

- A. may hide sin beneath his dignity
- B. deserves his great reverence fully
- C. is too old to lead effectively

7 “As to any other kind of discipline, whether addressed to her mind or heart, little Pearl might or might not be within its reach, in accordance with the caprice that ruled the moment.”

In the passage, little Pearl is characterized as a child governed by...

- A. careful, reasoned choices
- B. sudden, unpredictable whims
- C. strict, settled routines

8 “At that epoch of pristine simplicity, however, matters of even slighter public interest, and of far less intrinsic weight than the welfare of Hester and her child, were strangely mixed up with the deliberations of legislators and acts of state.”

In context, the phrase “pristine simplicity” emphasizes that the colony was in...

- A. an early, unspoiled stage
- B. a strict, disciplined order
- C. a spotlessly clean condition

9 “See ye not, she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a millionfold the power of retribution for my sin?”

In Hester’s plea, the word “retribution” primarily functions to present Pearl as...

- A. a stranger to Hester’s heart
- B. a reward for Hester’s virtue
- C. a punishment for Hester’s sin

10 “He looked now more careworn and emaciated than as we described him at the scene of Hester’s public ignominy ...”

The passage most strongly suggests that the minister’s “emaciated” appearance reflects...

- A. his advanced old age
- B. a long physical illness
- C. deep inner suffering

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY	NOTE
1	C	'Apprehension' here is the dread sense, not the 'understanding' sense one distractor invokes.
2	A	
3	A	
4	B	
5	B	
6	A	Theme comprehension. The letter's 'sympathetic throb' near a seemingly holy man hints he too may harbor secret sin.
7	B	
8	A	'Pristine' here carries its older sense of original and unspoiled, not the modern 'spotlessly clean.'
9	C	Character comprehension. Pearl is both Hester's only treasure and her living punishment; the line fuses love and penalty.
10	C	Character comprehension. The minister is Dimmesdale, whose secret guilt — not mere illness — wastes his body.

Teacher Context: Chapters 4–8

Chillingworth visits Hester in prison as her physician, and she refuses to name her fellow sinner. Released, Hester settles at the edge of town, supports herself with her needle, and raises the willful child Pearl; the authorities consider taking Pearl from her until Dimmesdale intervenes. Section ends before the focus shifts to Chillingworth's life inside the minister's household.