

The Scarlet Letter

Chapters 20–24

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: blasphemous, convulsive, gratuitous, inferred, preternatural, probity, repudiate, repugnance, transmuted, vicissitude

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. The worshippers gasped at his **blasphemous** outburst.

- A. loud and angry
- B. irreverent toward God
- C. boastful and proud

2. A **convulsive** sob shook her shoulders.

- A. sudden but brief
- B. deep and mournful
- C. violent and uncontrollable

3. His **gratuitous** rudeness to the waiter shocked everyone at the table.

- A. rough and unpolished
- B. boldly outspoken
- C. uncalled-for and needless

4. From the muddy boots by the door, she **inferred** that he had been hiking.

- A. guessed without any evidence
- B. concluded from clues
- C. stated plainly and directly

5. She solved the riddle with **preternatural** ease.

- A. beyond what is natural
- B. practiced and skillful
- C. calm and patient

6. The old judge was admired for her unbending **probity**.

- A. honesty and integrity
- B. strict discipline
- C. sharp intelligence

7. The senator rose to **repudiate** the false charges against him.

- A. reject and disown
- B. explain in detail
- C. downplay or excuse

8. He could not hide his **repugnance** as he watched them cheat.

- A. growing anger
- B. intense disgust
- C. mild surprise

9. The old anger had **transmuted** over the years, leaving something gentler behind.

- A. changed in nature
- B. weakened slowly
- C. spread more widely

10. He met every **vicissitude** with the same steady calm.

- A. test of one's courage
- B. long stretch of hardship
- C. sudden change of fortune

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

escutcheon — a shield-shaped emblem bearing a coat of arms; here, the heraldic design carved on a tombstone

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Preview

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

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 “So great a vicissitude in his life could not at once be received as real.”

As it is used in the passage, the word ‘vicissitude’ most nearly suggests that...

- A. a profound change had upended his life
- B. his quiet routine had resumed
- C. a long-hoped reward had arrived

2 “... it was only by the most careful self-control that [Dimmesdale] could refrain from uttering certain blasphemous suggestions that rose into his mind, respecting the communion-supper.”

Why does Dimmesdale struggle not to voice these suggestions?

- A. they might embarrass him before the congregation
- B. they would insult a sacred religious rite
- C. they might disrupt the order of the service

3 “And the infectious poison of that sin had been thus rapidly diffused throughout his moral system. It had stupefied all blessed impulses, and awakened into vivid life the whole brotherhood of bad ones. Scorn, bitterness, unprovoked malignity, gratuitous desire of ill, ridicule of whatever was good and holy, all awoke to tempt, even while they frightened him.”

The phrase “gratuitous desire of ill” suggests that Dimmesdale is tempted to...

- A. wish harm without being provoked
- B. punish those who have wronged him
- C. protect himself from further harm

4 “...buccaneer on the wave might relinquish his calling and become at once, if he chose, a man of probity and piety on land...”

Which statement about the buccaneer is best supported by the passage?

- A. He stayed an outlaw wherever he went
- B. He earned respect through his wealth
- C. He could become an honest man on land

5 “...Far and deep in its own region, busying itself, with preternatural activity, to marshal a procession of stately thoughts that were soon to issue thence...”

In context, the word ‘preternatural’ emphasizes...

- A. the slow labor of his reasoning
- B. the calm drifting of his thoughts
- C. the abnormal intensity of his mind

6 “Wherever her walk hath been—wherever, so miserably burdened, she may have hoped to find repose—it hath cast a lurid gleam of awe and horrible repugnance round about her.”

The reference to ‘repugnance’ in the excerpt primarily functions to...

- A. convey the disgust the letter inspires
- B. trace the paths Hester wandered
- C. convey the reverence she inspires

7 “With a convulsive motion, he tore away the ministerial band from before his breast. It was revealed!”

The author calls the motion ‘convulsive’ in order to underscore...

- A. the violent anguish of his confession
- B. the failing of his weakened body
- C. the calm relief of a planned act

8 “...the holiest amongst us has but attained so far above his fellows as to discern more clearly the Mercy which looks down, and repudiate more utterly the phantom of human merit...”

The passage most strongly suggests that even the holiest person must...

- A. look upward with aspiring pride
- B. disown all pride in human merit
- C. earn salvation through good merit

9 “Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!”

According to the passage, the dying counsel ‘Be true’ urges a person to...

- A. conceal one’s worst from the world
- B. confess every sin aloud in public
- C. let the world deduce one’s hidden faults

10 “In the spiritual world, the old physician and the minister—mutual victims as they have been—may, unawares, have found their earthly stock of hatred and antipathy transmuted into golden love.”

In this comment about what may happen after death, the narrator imagines that hatred and antipathy might...

- A. remain unchanged in the spiritual world
- B. be transformed into love
- C. be hidden beneath an appearance of love

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary in Context

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#	KEY	NOTE
1	A	
2	B	Character comprehension. The section shows this corruption is new -- born of his forest bargain with sin -- not a lifelong trait.
3	A	Students often misread 'gratuitous' as merely 'free'; here it means uncalled-for, without cause.
4	C	
5	C	
6	A	The key turns on 'repugnance' as disgust, distinct from the 'awe' the passage also names.
7	A	Event comprehension. He had tottered feebly, making 'failing body' tempting; the act is his willed, violent revelation of the hidden letter.
8	B	
9	C	The key hinges on 'inferred' as deduced from a clue -- not openly confessed, nor hidden.
10	B	

Teacher Context: Chapters 20–24

Dimmesdale returns to town transformed and wrestles with strange new impulses as the community gathers for a holiday and election sermon. The procession leads to the scaffold and a final public revelation, followed by the fates of Hester, Pearl, and Chillingworth. Section runs to the end of the novel.