

### Essays Prompts for The Scarlet Letter

Remember: Essays consist of **multiple paragraphs**. The introductory paragraph should include a clear, concise thesis statement. Body paragraphs should have a clear topic sentence and textual evidence (CD's) accompanied by commentary. Only use plot summary when necessary for literary analysis or to make your point.

1. Hawthorne's novel is usually described as being an inquiry into the nature of sin. In an essay format, deal with the following questions: a) Does Chillingworth sin against Dimmesdale? Explain. B) What is Dimmesdale's sin? When does he decide to confess his sin publicly? c) Is Hester sinned against? If so, how? Whose sin does Hawthorne present as the greatest sin? Explain.

2. One consequence of sin in The Scarlet Letter is that the sinner acquires the ability to sense or recognize the sins of others. For example, in Chapter V, Hester realizes that the scarlet letter she wears gives her "a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sins in other hearts." Show how the same kind of insight is possessed by Chillingworth, Dimmesdale, and Mistress Hibbins.

3. Another consequence of sin in this novel is isolation. Discuss the many ways in which each major character is isolated and the consequences of that isolation. Finally, explain which character is most able to overcome this isolation and examine why.

4. At the beginning of the novel, Hester walks from the darkened prison into the sun. How do sunshine and shadow, light and darkness, or light in darkness **enhance the plot**? Are these elements symbolic? If so, how? Are both light and dark equally important in the book? Explain.

5. Explain how Hawthorne uses the scaffold scenes as a **structural device**. Include a brief explanation of what happens in each scaffold scene and the effect these scenes have on the characters. Explain what happens to Pearl in your discussion of the last scaffold scene.

6. Examine Hawthorne's use of irony. Discuss one example each of verbal irony, situational irony, and dramatic irony. **How** does the use of irony enhance the effect of the novel?