

the scarlet letter novel summary

the scarlet letter novel summary provides an insightful overview of Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic work, a cornerstone of American literature. This novel explores themes of sin, guilt, and redemption set against the strict moral backdrop of 17th-century Puritan Massachusetts. The story revolves around Hester Prynne, a woman condemned for adultery, who is forced to wear a scarlet letter "A" as a symbol of her shame. Through complex characters and rich symbolism, Hawthorne delves into the human condition and societal judgment. This article will offer a detailed summary of the plot, analyze key themes, introduce the main characters, and discuss the novel's lasting impact on literature and culture. Readers will gain a comprehensive understanding of the scarlet letter novel summary, including its narrative structure and moral questions.

- Plot Overview of The Scarlet Letter
- Main Characters and Their Roles
- Key Themes and Symbolism
- Historical and Cultural Context
- Literary Significance and Legacy

Plot Overview of The Scarlet Letter

The scarlet letter novel summary begins with a detailed recounting of the story's plot, which centers on Hester Prynne, a young woman living in a strict Puritan settlement. Hester has borne an illegitimate child and is publicly shamed by being forced to wear the scarlet letter "A" on her chest, symbolizing

adultery. The narrative unfolds as Hester faces social ostracism while raising her daughter, Pearl, alone. The story also follows Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, the secret father of Pearl, who struggles with his hidden sin and guilt. Meanwhile, Hester's long-lost husband, Roger Chillingworth, arrives in town and assumes a false identity to seek revenge. The novel traces the emotional and psychological consequences of sin, secrecy, and repentance for all involved characters.

Beginning: Hester's Punishment and Public Shaming

At the start of the novel, Hester is led out of prison to the scaffold where she must stand before the townspeople, holding her infant daughter. The scarlet letter "A" is sewn onto her dress as a mark of disgrace. Despite the humiliation, Hester remains dignified and refuses to reveal the identity of Pearl's father, which intensifies the mystery and tension within the community.

Middle: Dimmesdale's Torment and Chillingworth's Revenge

As the story progresses, Reverend Dimmesdale suffers from intense guilt and physical decline due to his concealed sin. Chillingworth becomes his physician, using this position to psychologically torment Dimmesdale. Meanwhile, Hester supports herself through needlework and raises Pearl, who symbolizes both the consequences of sin and a source of hope.

Ending: Confession and Redemption

The climax occurs when Dimmesdale publicly confesses his sin during a sermon, revealing the scarlet letter on his own chest. This act brings a complex resolution to the characters' moral struggles. Dimmesdale dies shortly afterward, while Hester and Pearl leave town for some time before eventually returning. The novel closes with Hester resuming wearing the scarlet letter, now as a symbol of experience rather than shame.

Main Characters and Their Roles

The scarlet letter novel summary cannot be complete without an introduction to the central characters whose interactions drive the narrative forward. Each character represents different facets of human nature and societal norms within the Puritan community.

Hester Prynne

Hester is the protagonist, a strong-willed woman who endures public disgrace with resilience. Her character embodies the struggle between individual identity and societal judgment. Through her, Hawthorne explores themes of sin, punishment, and redemption.

Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale

Dimmesdale is a revered minister whose hidden sin and resulting guilt cause him great mental and physical suffering. His internal conflict contrasts with Hester's outward punishment, highlighting the theme of secret versus public guilt.

Roger Chillingworth

Hester's estranged husband, who arrives in the colony under an assumed name. His obsessive quest for vengeance transforms him into a figure of evil and symbolizes the destructive power of revenge and obsession.

Pearl

Pearl is Hester's daughter, a living symbol of her mother's sin but also a source of innocence and vitality. Her behavior and characteristics often reflect the tension between nature and society in the novel.

Other Supporting Characters

- Governor Bellingham – Represents the Puritan authority and social order.
- Mistress Hibbins – Symbolizes witchcraft and the supernatural within the Puritan context.
- Various townspeople – Serve to illustrate the collective judgment and moral rigidity of the society.

Key Themes and Symbolism

The scarlet letter novel summary also addresses the profound themes and rich symbolism woven throughout the text. Hawthorne uses these literary devices to deepen the moral and psychological complexity of the story.

Sin and Redemption

The novel examines both public and private aspects of sin, demonstrating how individuals cope with guilt and seek forgiveness. Hester's scarlet letter transforms from a mark of shame to a symbol of personal growth and resilience.

Identity and Society

Hester's struggle highlights the conflict between personal identity and societal expectations. The rigid Puritan community enforces strict moral codes, often punishing individuals harshly for deviations.

Hypocrisy and Judgment

Through characters like Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, the novel criticizes the hypocrisy embedded in religious and social institutions, where outward appearances mask inner corruption or suffering.

Symbolism of the Scarlet Letter

The scarlet letter itself is the central symbol, representing adultery, guilt, and at different points, able to signify able, angel, or even admirable. Other symbols include Pearl, the forest (representing freedom and natural law), and the scaffold (a place of both punishment and confession).

Historical and Cultural Context

The scarlet letter novel summary benefits from understanding the historical and cultural background against which Hawthorne wrote. The novel is set in the 17th-century Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony but was published in 1850, reflecting 19th-century American concerns.

Puritan Society

Puritanism emphasized strict moral conduct, communal conformity, and harsh punishment for sin. The novel critiques these values by illustrating the damaging effects of excessive judgment and lack of compassion.

Romanticism and Transcendentalism

Hawthorne's work is influenced by the Romantic literary movement, focusing on emotion, individualism, and nature. The scarlet letter also engages with transcendentalist ideas, especially in its exploration of personal conscience and spiritual redemption.

Author's Personal Context

Nathaniel Hawthorne's ancestors were involved in the Salem witch trials, which informs his critical perspective on Puritanism and moral rigidity in the novel.

Literary Significance and Legacy

The scarlet letter novel summary concludes with the novel's enduring impact on American literature and culture. It remains a vital study of sin, punishment, and the complexities of human nature.

Critical Reception

Upon publication, the novel received mixed reviews but quickly became a classic due to its psychological depth and moral complexity. It is widely studied in academic settings for its literary merit and thematic richness.

Influence on Literature and Popular Culture

The scarlet letter has inspired numerous adaptations, including films, theater productions, and literary works. Its themes continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, addressing timeless questions about judgment, identity, and morality.

Modern Interpretations

Modern critics often analyze the novel through various lenses such as feminist theory, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial studies, revealing new dimensions in Hawthorne's narrative and characters.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main plot of The Scarlet Letter?

The Scarlet Letter follows Hester Prynne, a woman in Puritan New England who is condemned to wear a scarlet letter 'A' for adultery. The novel explores themes of sin, guilt, and redemption as Hester deals with public shame while protecting the identity of her lover, Reverend Dimmesdale.

Who are the central characters in The Scarlet Letter?

The central characters include Hester Prynne, the protagonist; Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, her secret lover; Roger Chillingworth, Hester's estranged husband; and Pearl, Hester's daughter born out of wedlock.

What is the significance of the scarlet letter 'A'?

The scarlet letter 'A' symbolizes adultery and public shame imposed on Hester Prynne. Over time, it also comes to represent her strength, resilience, and ability to overcome societal judgment.

How does The Scarlet Letter address themes of sin and redemption?

The novel portrays sin as a complex human experience rather than a simple moral failing. Characters like Hester and Dimmesdale struggle with guilt and secret sin, while ultimately seeking redemption through personal growth and acceptance.

What role does Pearl play in The Scarlet Letter?

Pearl, Hester's daughter, symbolizes the living consequence of her sin but also acts as a catalyst for Hester's emotional growth. Pearl's wild nature and innocence highlight the novel's themes of freedom and societal constraint.

How does Nathaniel Hawthorne use symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter*?

Hawthorne employs symbolism extensively, with the scarlet letter 'A,' Pearl, the forest, and the scaffold representing concepts like sin, innocence, nature, and judgment, enriching the novel's moral and psychological depth.

What is the historical and social context of *The Scarlet Letter*?

Set in 17th-century Puritan Massachusetts, *The Scarlet Letter* critiques the rigid moral codes and harsh punishments of the time, exploring conflicts between individual identity and societal expectations.

Additional Resources

1. *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

This classic novel explores themes of sin, guilt, and redemption in a strict Puritan society. The story follows Hester Prynne, who is publicly shamed and forced to wear a scarlet "A" after bearing an illegitimate child. Through vivid symbolism and rich character development, Hawthorne delves into the complexities of morality and human nature.

2. *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller

Set during the Salem witch trials, this play examines the destructive power of mass hysteria and rigid moral codes. Like *The Scarlet Letter*, it focuses on how a strict Puritan community deals with accusation, shame, and the consequences of sin. The characters' struggles highlight the tension between individual conscience and societal expectations.

3. *Young Goodman Brown* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

This short story by Hawthorne explores themes of faith, doubt, and the nature of evil within a Puritan context. Goodman Brown's journey into the forest symbolizes a confrontation with sin and hypocrisy, echoing the moral conflicts found in *The Scarlet Letter*. It provides insight into the psychological and spiritual battles faced by individuals in a repressive society.

4. *The House of the Seven Gables* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

A novel that intertwines themes of guilt, retribution, and atonement within a New England setting. The Pyncheon family's dark history and the haunted ancestral home reflect the lingering consequences of past sins. Like *The Scarlet Letter*, it explores how personal and collective guilt shape identity and destiny.

5. *Hester* by Margaret Oliphant

This historical novel reimagines the life of Hester Prynne, providing a broader context to her character beyond the original story. It delves into the societal pressures and personal resilience of a woman marked by scandal. The book offers a fresh perspective on themes of female strength and social judgment similar to those in *The Scarlet Letter*.

6. *Letters from an American Farmer* by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur

This collection of letters provides insight into early American society, including the Puritan communities that form the backdrop of *The Scarlet Letter*. It reflects on themes of identity, morality, and the clash between Old World traditions and New World realities. The work helps contextualize the social and cultural environment of Hawthorne's novel.

7. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Although focused on slavery, this novel shares with *The Scarlet Letter* an emphasis on morality, social judgment, and the human capacity for compassion and cruelty. Stowe's portrayal of societal sins and individual redemption complements Hawthorne's exploration of personal and public morality. Both works challenge readers to confront uncomfortable truths.

8. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë

This novel centers on a woman's struggle for identity and autonomy in a restrictive society, paralleling Hester Prynne's challenges in *The Scarlet Letter*. Themes of love, morality, and social stigma are intricately woven through Jane's journey. The book highlights the resilience of women confronting societal constraints and personal transgressions.

9. *The Minister's Black Veil* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

A short story that examines themes of secret sin and public shame through the mysterious black veil worn by a Puritan minister. It reflects on the nature of hidden guilt and the community's response to perceived sin, much like *The Scarlet Letter's* exploration of visible punishment and internal torment. The story deepens understanding of Hawthorne's preoccupation with sin and redemption.

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the scarlet letter novel summary: *The Scarlet Letter* Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2000-09-19
Introduction by Kathryn Harrison Commentary by Nathaniel Hawthorne, W. D. Howells, and Carl Van Doren A stark tale of adultery, guilt, and social repression in Puritan New England, *The Scarlet Letter* is a foundational work of American literature. Nathaniel Hawthorne's exploration of the dichotomy between the public and private self, internal passion and external convention, gives us the unforgettable Hester Prynne, who discovers strength in the face of ostracism and emerges as a heroine ahead of her time. As Kathryn Harrison points out in her Introduction, Hester is "the herald of the modern heroine." Includes a Modern Library Reading Group Guide

the scarlet letter novel summary: The Scarlet Letter Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2013-04-03 A throng of bearded men, in sad-coloured garments and grey steeple-crowned hats, inter-mixed with women, some wearing hoods, and others bareheaded, was assembled in front of a wooden edifice, the door of which was heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes. The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognised it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison. In accordance with this rule it may safely be assumed that the forefathers of Boston had built the first prison-house somewhere in the Vicinity of Cornhill, almost as seasonably as they marked out the first burial-ground, on Isaac Johnson's lot, and round about his grave, which subsequently became the nucleus of all the congregated sepulchres in the old churchyard of King's Chapel. Certain it is that, some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age, which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front. The rust on the ponderous iron-work of its oaken door looked more antique than anything else in the New World. Like all that pertains to crime, it seemed never to have known a youthful era. Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass-plot, much overgrown with burdock, pig-weed, apple-pern, and such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilised society, a prison. 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, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him.

the scarlet letter novel summary: The Scarlet Letter Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1906 In the puritan atmosphere of colonial New England, Hester Prynne is forced to wear a scarlet A (for adultery) for giving birth to an illegitimate daughter. The child's father, the minister Arthur

Dimmesdale, knows peace only after he has been shamed into confessing. Hester, however, acknowledging no sin, cannot find such peace. Here is a masterful account of religious and sexual oppression, hypocrisy, and intrigue by one of the giants of American fiction.

the scarlet letter novel summary: *Prentice Hall Library* Nathaniel Hawthorne,

the scarlet letter novel summary: The Scarlet Letter Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2019-10-14 In this book summary, study guide, character list, glossary are included as bonus. In June 1642, in the Puritan town of Boston, a crowd gathers to witness an official punishment. A young woman, Hester Prynne, has been found guilty of adultery and must wear a scarlet A on her dress as a sign of shame. Furthermore, she must stand on the scaffold for three hours, exposed to public humiliation. As Hester approaches the scaffold, many of the women in the crowd are angered by her beauty and quiet dignity. When demanded and cajoled to name the father of her child, Hester refuses. As Hester looks out over the crowd, she notices a small, misshapen man and recognizes him as her long-lost husband, who has been presumed lost at sea. When the husband sees Hester's shame, he asks a man in the crowd about her and is told the story of his wife's adultery. He angrily exclaims that the child's father, the partner in the adulterous act, should also be punished and vows to find the man. He chooses a new name - Roger Chillingworth - to aid him in his plan.

the scarlet letter novel summary: The Scarlet Letter . Novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne (Considered to Be Hawthorne's Masterpiece) Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2016-11-06 The Scarlet Letter: A Romance is an 1850 work of fiction in a historical setting, written by American author Nathaniel Hawthorne. The book is considered to be his masterwork.[1] Set in 17th-century Puritan Boston, Massachusetts, during the years 1642 to 1649, it tells the story of Hester Prynne, who conceives a daughter through an affair and struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. Throughout the book, Hawthorne explores themes of legalism, sin, and guilt. In June 1642, in the Puritan town of Boston, a crowd gathers to witness the punishment of Hester Prynne, a young woman found guilty of adultery. She is required to wear a scarlet A (A standing for adulteress) on her dress to shame her. She must stand on the scaffold for three hours, to be exposed to public humiliation. As Hester approaches the scaffold, many of the women in the crowd are angered by her beauty and quiet dignity. When demanded and cajoled to name the father of her child, Hester refuses. As Hester looks out over the crowd, she notices a small, misshapen man and recognizes him as her long-lost husband, who has been presumed lost at sea. When the husband sees Hester's shame, he asks a man in the crowd about her and is told the story of his wife's adultery. He angrily exclaims that the child's father, the partner in the adulterous act, should also be punished and vows to find the man. He chooses a new name - Roger Chillingworth - to aid him in his plan.

the scarlet letter novel summary: The Scarlet Letter Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2019-12-17 The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne is a real classic. You should grab it and read it to experience it yourself. Here's a simple plot to The Scarlet Letter: In Puritan Boston, Massachusetts, a crowd gathers to witness the punishment of Hester Prynne, a young woman who has given birth to a baby of unknown parentage. She is required to wear a scarlet A on her dress when she is in front of the townspeople to shame her. The letter A stands for adulteress, although this is never said explicitly in the novel. Her sentence required her to stand on the scaffold for three hours, exposed to public humiliation, and to wear the scarlet A for the rest of her life. As Hester approaches the scaffold, many of the women in the crowd are angered by her beauty and quiet dignity. When demanded and cajoled to name the father of her child, Hester refuses. As Hester looks out over the crowd, she notices a small, misshapen man and recognizes him as her long-lost husband, who has been presumed lost at sea. When the husband sees Hester's shame, he asks a man in the crowd about her and is told the story of his wife's adultery. He angrily exclaims that the child's father, the partner in the adulterous act, should also be punished and vows to find the man. He chooses a new name, Roger Chillingworth, to aid him in his plan. The Reverend John Wilson and the minister of Hester's church, Arthur Dimmesdale, question the woman, but she refuses to name her lover. After she returns to her prison cell, the jailer brings in Roger Chillingworth, a physician, to calm Hester and her child with his roots and herbs. He and Hester have an open conversation regarding their

marriage and the fact that they were both in the wrong. Her lover, however, is another matter and he demands to know who it is; Hester refuses to divulge such information. He accepts this, stating that he will find out anyway, and forces her to hide that he is her husband. If she ever reveals him, he warns her, he will destroy the child's father. Hester agrees to Chillingworth's terms although she suspects she will regret it. Following her release from prison, Hester settles in a cottage at the edge of town and earns a meager living with her needlework, which is of extraordinary quality. She lives a quiet, somber life with her daughter, Pearl, and performs acts of charity for the poor. She is troubled by her daughter's unusual fascination with Hester's scarlet A. The shunning of Hester also extends to Pearl, who has no playmates or friends except her mother. As she grows older, Pearl becomes capricious and unruly. Her conduct starts rumors, and, not surprisingly, the church members suggest Pearl be taken away from Hester. Hester, hearing rumors that she may lose Pearl, goes to speak to Governor Bellingham. With him are ministers Wilson and Dimmesdale. Hester appeals to Dimmesdale in desperation, and the minister persuades the governor to let Pearl remain in Hester's care. Because Dimmesdale's health has begun to fail, the townspeople are happy to have Chillingworth, a newly arrived physician, take up lodgings with their beloved minister. Being in such close contact with Dimmesdale, Chillingworth begins to suspect that the minister's illness is the result of some unconfessed guilt. He applies psychological pressure to the minister because he suspects Dimmesdale is Pearl's father. One evening, pulling the sleeping Dimmesdale's vestment aside, Chillingworth sees a symbol that represents his shame on the minister's pale chest. Tormented by his guilty conscience, Dimmesdale goes to the square where Hester was punished years earlier. Climbing the scaffold, he admits his guilt but cannot find the courage to do so publicly.... .. The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne

the scarlet letter novel summary: The Scarlet Letter By Nathaniel Hawthorne Annotated Updated Novel Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2020-05-08 Nathaniel Hawthorne's THE SCARLET LETTER reaches to our nation's historical and moral roots for the material of great tragedy. Set in an early New England colony, the novel shows the terrible impact a single, passionate act has on the lives of three members of the community: the defiant Hester Prynne; the fiery, tortured Reverend Dimmesdale; and the obsessed, vengeful Chillingworth. With THE SCARLET LETTER, Hawthorne became the first American novelist to forge from our Puritan heritage a universal classic, a masterful exploration of humanity's unending struggle with sin, guilt and pride. Set in Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony during the years 1642 to 1649, the novel tells the story of Hester Prynne who conceives a daughter through an affair and then struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. Containing a number of religious and historic allusions, the book explores themes of legalism, sin, and guilt. The Scarlet Letter was one of the first mass-produced books in America. It was popular when first published and is considered a classic work today. It inspired numerous film, television, and stage adaptations.

the scarlet letter novel summary: The Scarlet Letter By Nathaniel Hawthorne The New Annotated Book Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2020-04-13 Nathaniel Hawthorne's THE SCARLET LETTER reaches to our nation's historical and moral roots for the material of great tragedy. Set in an early New England colony, the novel shows the terrible impact a single, passionate act has on the lives of three members of the community: the defiant Hester Prynne; the fiery, tortured Reverend Dimmesdale; and the obsessed, vengeful Chillingworth.

the scarlet letter novel summary: *The Scarlet Letter "Annotated and Illustrated Book" For Children* Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2020-03-22 The Scarlet Letter opens with a long preamble about how the book came to be written. The nameless narrator was the surveyor of the customhouse in Salem, Massachusetts. In the customhouse's attic, he discovered a number of documents, among them a manuscript that was bundled with a scarlet, gold-embroidered patch of cloth in the shape of an A. The manuscript, the work of a past surveyor, detailed events that occurred some two hundred years before the narrator's time. When the narrator lost his customs post, he decided to write a fictional account of the events recorded in the manuscript. The Scarlet Letter is the final product. The story begins in seventeenth-century Boston, then a Puritan settlement. A young woman,

Hester Prynne, is led from the town prison with her infant daughter, Pearl, in her arms and the scarlet letter A on her breast. A man in the crowd tells an elderly onlooker that Hester is being punished for adultery. Hester's husband, a scholar much older than she is, sent her ahead to America, but he never arrived in Boston. The consensus is that he has been lost at sea. While waiting for her husband, Hester has apparently had an affair, as she has given birth to a child. She will not reveal her lover's identity, however, and the scarlet letter, along with her public shaming, is her punishment for her sin and her secrecy. On this day Hester is led to the town scaffold and harangued by the town fathers, but she again refuses to identify her child's father. The elderly onlooker is Hester's missing husband, who is now practicing medicine and calling himself Roger Chillingworth. He settles in Boston, intent on revenge. He reveals his true identity to no one but Hester, whom he has sworn to secrecy. Several years pass. Hester supports herself by working as a seamstress, and Pearl grows into a willful, impish child. Shunned by the community, they live in a small cottage on the outskirts of Boston. Community officials attempt to take Pearl away from Hester, but, with the help of Arthur Dimmesdale, a young and eloquent minister, the mother and daughter manage to stay together. Dimmesdale, however, appears to be wasting away and suffers from mysterious heart trouble, seemingly caused by psychological distress. Chillingworth attaches himself to the ailing minister and eventually moves in with him so that he can provide his patient with round-the-clock care. Chillingworth also suspects that there may be a connection between the minister's torments and Hester's secret, and he begins to test Dimmesdale to see what he can learn. One afternoon, while the minister sleeps, Chillingworth discovers a mark on the man's breast (the details of which are kept from the reader), which convinces him that his suspicions are correct. Dimmesdale's psychological anguish deepens, and he invents new tortures for himself. In the meantime, Hester's charitable deeds and quiet humility have earned her a reprieve from the scorn of the community. One night, when Pearl is about seven years old, she and her mother are returning home from a visit to a deathbed when they encounter Dimmesdale atop the town scaffold, trying to punish himself for his sins. Hester and Pearl join him, and the three link hands. Dimmesdale refuses Pearl's request that he acknowledge her publicly the next day, and a meteor marks a dull red A in the night sky. Hester can see that the minister's condition is worsening, and she resolves to intervene.

the scarlet letter novel summary: The Scarlet Letter Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2014-11-10 The Scarlet Letter. Nathaniel Hawthorne. A Classic Work of Romantic Fiction. The Scarlet Letter is an 1850 romantic work of fiction in a historical setting, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and is considered to be his magnum opus. Set in 17th-century Puritan Boston, Massachusetts during the years 1642 to 1649, it tells the story of Hester Prynne, who conceives a daughter through an affair and struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. Throughout the book, Hawthorne explores themes of legalism, sin, and guilt. It was long thought that Hawthorne originally planned The Scarlet Letter to be a shorter novelette which was part of a collection to be named Old Time Legends and that his publisher, James Thomas Fields, convinced him to expand the work to a full-length novel. This is not true: Fields persuaded Hawthorne to publish The Scarlet Letter alone (along with the earlier-completed Custom House essay) but he had nothing to do with the length of the story. Hawthorne's wife Sophia later challenged Fields' claims a little inexactly: he has made the absurd boast that he was the sole cause of the Scarlet Letter being published! She noted that her husband's friend Edwin Percy Whipple, a critic, approached Fields to consider its publication. The manuscript was written at the Peter Edgerley House in Salem, Massachusetts, still standing as a private residence at 14 Mall Street. It was the last Salem home where the Hawthorne family lived. The Scarlet Letter was published as a novel in the spring of 1850 by Ticknor & Fields, beginning Hawthorne's most lucrative period. When he delivered the final pages to Fields in February 1850, Hawthorne said that some portions of the book are powerfully written but doubted it would be popular. In fact, the book was an instant best-seller though, over fourteen years, it brought its author only \$1,500. Its initial publication brought wide protest from natives of Salem, who did not approve of how Hawthorne had depicted them in his introduction The Custom-House. A 2,500-copy

second edition of *The Scarlet Letter* included a preface by Hawthorne dated March 30, 1850, that stated he had decided to reprint his introduction without the change of a word... The only remarkable features of the sketch are its frank and genuine good-humor... As to enmity, or ill-feeling of any kind, personal or political, he utterly disclaims such motives. *The Scarlet Letter* was also one of the first mass-produced books in America. In the mid-nineteenth century, bookbinders of home-grown literature typically hand-made their books and sold them in small quantities. The first mechanized printing of *The Scarlet Letter*, 2,500 volumes, sold out within ten days, and was widely read and discussed to an extent not much experienced in the young country up until that time. Copies of the first edition are often sought by collectors as rare books, and may fetch up to around \$18,000 USD.

the scarlet letter novel summary: *The Scarlet Letter* Evergreen Literature Books, Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2020-01-17 *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne is a real classic. You should grab it and read it to experience it yourself. Here's a simple plot to *The Scarlet Letter*: In Puritan Boston, Massachusetts, a crowd gathers to witness the punishment of Hester Prynne, a young woman who has given birth to a baby of unknown parentage. She is required to wear a scarlet A on her dress when she is in front of the townspeople to shame her. The letter A stands for adulteress, although this is never said explicitly in the novel. Her sentence required her to stand on the scaffold for three hours, exposed to public humiliation, and to wear the scarlet A for the rest of her life. As Hester approaches the scaffold, many of the women in the crowd are angered by her beauty and quiet dignity. When demanded and cajoled to name the father of her child, Hester refuses. As Hester looks out over the crowd, she notices a small, misshapen man and recognizes him as her long-lost husband, who has been presumed lost at sea. When the husband sees Hester's shame, he asks a man in the crowd about her and is told the story of his wife's adultery. He angrily exclaims that the child's father, the partner in the adulterous act, should also be punished and vows to find the man. He chooses a new name, Roger Chillingworth, to aid him in his plan. The Reverend John Wilson and the minister of Hester's church, Arthur Dimmesdale, question the woman, but she refuses to name her lover. After she returns to her prison cell, the jailer brings in Roger Chillingworth, a physician, to calm Hester and her child with his roots and herbs. He and Hester have an open conversation regarding their marriage and the fact that they were both in the wrong. Her lover, however, is another matter and he demands to know who it is; Hester refuses to divulge such information. He accepts this, stating that he will find out anyway, and forces her to hide that he is her husband. If she ever reveals him, he warns her, he will destroy the child's father. Hester agrees to Chillingworth's terms although she suspects she will regret it. Following her release from prison, Hester settles in a cottage at the edge of town and earns a meager living with her needlework, which is of extraordinary quality. She lives a quiet, somber life with her daughter, Pearl, and performs acts of charity for the poor. She is troubled by her daughter's unusual fascination with Hester's scarlet A. The shunning of Hester also extends to Pearl, who has no playmates or friends except her mother. As she grows older, Pearl becomes capricious and unruly. Her conduct starts rumors, and, not surprisingly, the church members suggest Pearl be taken away from Hester. Hester, hearing rumors that she may lose Pearl, goes to speak to Governor Bellingham. With him are ministers Wilson and Dimmesdale. Hester appeals to Dimmesdale in desperation, and the minister persuades the governor to let Pearl remain in Hester's care. Because Dimmesdale's health has begun to fail, the townspeople are happy to have Chillingworth, a newly arrived physician, take up lodgings with their beloved minister. Being in such close contact with Dimmesdale, Chillingworth begins to suspect that the minister's illness is the result of some unconfessed guilt. He applies psychological pressure to the minister because he suspects Dimmesdale is Pearl's father. One evening, pulling the sleeping Dimmesdale's vestment aside, Chillingworth sees a symbol that represents his shame on the minister's pale chest. Tormented by his guilty conscience, Dimmesdale goes to the square where Hester was punished years earlier. Climbing the scaffold, he admits his guilt but cannot find the courage to do so publicly.... .. *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

the scarlet letter novel summary: *The Scarlet Letter* "Annotated Book" Nathaniel Hawthorne,

2020-03-22 The Scarlet Letter opens with a long preamble about how the book came to be written. The nameless narrator was the surveyor of the customhouse in Salem, Massachusetts. In the customhouse's attic, he discovered a number of documents, among them a manuscript that was bundled with a scarlet, gold-embroidered patch of cloth in the shape of an A. The manuscript, the work of a past surveyor, detailed events that occurred some two hundred years before the narrator's time. When the narrator lost his customs post, he decided to write a fictional account of the events recorded in the manuscript. The Scarlet Letter is the final product. The story begins in seventeenth-century Boston, then a Puritan settlement. A young woman, Hester Prynne, is led from the town prison with her infant daughter, Pearl, in her arms and the scarlet letter A on her breast. A man in the crowd tells an elderly onlooker that Hester is being punished for adultery. Hester's husband, a scholar much older than she is, sent her ahead to America, but he never arrived in Boston. The consensus is that he has been lost at sea. While waiting for her husband, Hester has apparently had an affair, as she has given birth to a child. She will not reveal her lover's identity, however, and the scarlet letter, along with her public shaming, is her punishment for her sin and her secrecy. On this day Hester is led to the town scaffold and harangued by the town fathers, but she again refuses to identify her child's father. The elderly onlooker is Hester's missing husband, who is now practicing medicine and calling himself Roger Chillingworth. He settles in Boston, intent on revenge. He reveals his true identity to no one but Hester, whom he has sworn to secrecy. Several years pass. Hester supports herself by working as a seamstress, and Pearl grows into a willful, impish child. Shunned by the community, they live in a small cottage on the outskirts of Boston. Community officials attempt to take Pearl away from Hester, but, with the help of Arthur Dimmesdale, a young and eloquent minister, the mother and daughter manage to stay together. Dimmesdale, however, appears to be wasting away and suffers from mysterious heart trouble, seemingly caused by psychological distress. Chillingworth attaches himself to the ailing minister and eventually moves in with him so that he can provide his patient with round-the-clock care. Chillingworth also suspects that there may be a connection between the minister's torments and Hester's secret, and he begins to test Dimmesdale to see what he can learn. One afternoon, while the minister sleeps, Chillingworth discovers a mark on the man's breast (the details of which are kept from the reader), which convinces him that his suspicions are correct. Dimmesdale's psychological anguish deepens, and he invents new tortures for himself. In the meantime, Hester's charitable deeds and quiet humility have earned her a reprieve from the scorn of the community. One night, when Pearl is about seven years old, she and her mother are returning home from a visit to a deathbed when they encounter Dimmesdale atop the town scaffold, trying to punish himself for his sins. Hester and Pearl join him, and the three link hands. Dimmesdale refuses Pearl's request that he acknowledge her publicly the next day, and a meteor marks a dull red A in the night sky. Hester can see that the minister's condition is worsening, and she resolves to intervene. She goes to Chillingworth and asks him to stop adding to Dimmesdale's self-torment. Chillingworth refuses.

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fiery, tortured Reverend Dimmesdale; and the obsessed, vengeful Chillingworth. With THE SCARLET LETTER, Hawthorne became the first American novelist to forge from our Puritan heritage a universal classic, a masterful exploration of humanity's unending struggle with sin, guilt and pride. Set in Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony during the years 1642 to 1649, the novel tells the story of Hester Prynne who conceives a daughter through an affair and then struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. Containing a number of religious and historic allusions, the book explores themes of legalism, sin, and guilt. The Scarlet Letter was one of the first mass-produced books in America. It was popular when first published and is considered a classic work today. It inspired numerous film, television, and stage adaptations. Critics have described it as a masterwork and novelist D. H. Lawrence called it a perfect work of the American imagination.

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