

## The Scarlet Letter AP Practice

Use the following passage from Chapter 13 of *The Scarlet Letter*, "Another View of Hester," to answer questions 1-8.

1 It was only the darkened house that could contain her. When sunshine came again, she was not there. Her shadow had faded across the threshold. The helpful inmate had departed, without one backward glance to gather up the meed of gratitude, if any were in the hearts of those whom she had served so zealously. Meeting them in the street, she never raised her head to receive their greeting. If they were resolute to accost her, she laid her finger on the scarlet letter, and passed on. This might be pride, but was so like humility, that it produced all the softening influence of the latter quality on the public mind. The public is despotic in its temper; it is capable of denying common justice, when too strenuously demanded as a right; but quite as frequently it awards more than justice, when the appeal is made, as despots love to have it made, entirely to its generosity. Interpreting Hester Prynne's deportment as an appeal of this nature, society was inclined to show its former victim a more benign countenance than she cared to be favored with, or, perchance, than she deserved.

2 The rulers, and the wise and learned men of the community, were longer in acknowledging the influence of Hester's good qualities than the people. The prejudices which they shared in common with the latter were fortified in themselves by an iron framework of reasoning, that made it a far tougher labor to expel them. Day by day, nevertheless, their sour and rigid wrinkles were relaxing into something which, in the due course of years, might grow to be an expression of almost benevolence. Thus it was with the men of rank, on whom their eminent position imposed the guardianship of the public morals. Individuals in private life, meanwhile, had quite forgiven Hester Prynne for her frailty; nay, more, they had begun to look upon the scarlet letter as the token, not of that one sin, for which she had borne so long and dreary a penance, but of her many good deeds since. "Do you see that woman with the embroidered badge?" they would say to strangers. "It is our Hester,--the town's own Hester,--who is so kind to the poor, so helpful to the sick, so comfortable to the afflicted!" Then, it is true, the propensity of human nature to tell the very worst of itself, when embodied in the person of another, would constrain them to whisper the black scandal of bygone years. It was none the less a fact, however, that, in the eyes of the very men who spoke thus, the scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun's bosom. It imparted to the wearer a kind of sacredness, which enabled her to walk securely amid all peril. Had she fallen among thieves, it would have kept her safe. It was reported, and believed by many, that an Indian had drawn his arrow against the badge, but that the missile struck it, and fell harmless to the ground.

3 The effect of the symbol--or rather, of the position in respect to society that was indicated by it--on the mind of Hester Prynne herself, was powerful and peculiar. All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up by this red-hot brand, and had long ago fallen away, leaving a bare and harsh outline, which might have been repulsive, had she possessed friends or companions to be repelled by it. Even the attractiveness of her person had undergone a similar change. It might be partly owing to the studied austerity of her dress, and partly to the lack of demonstration in her manners. It was a sad transformation, too, that her rich and luxuriant hair had either been cut off, or was so completely hidden by a cap, that not a shining lock of it ever once gushed into the sunshine. It was due in part to all these causes, but still more to something else, that there seemed to be no longer any thing in Hester's face for Love to dwell upon; nothing in Hester's form, though majestic and statue-like, that Passion would ever dream of clasping in its embrace; nothing in Hester's bosom, to make it ever again the pillow of Affection. Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman. Such is frequently the fate, and such the stern development, of the feminine character and person, when the woman has encountered, and lived through, an experience of peculiar severity. If she be all tenderness, she will die. If she survive, the tenderness will either be crushed out of her, or--and the outward semblance is the same--crushed so deeply into her heart that it can never show itself more. The latter is perhaps the truest theory. She who has once been woman, and ceased to be so, might at any moment become a woman again, if there were only the magic touch to effect the transformation. We shall see whether Hester Prynne were ever afterwards so touched, and so transfigured.

4 Much of the marble coldness of Hester's impression was to be attributed to the circumstance that her life had turned, in a great measure, from passion and feeling, to thought. Standing alone in the world,--alone, as to any dependence on society, and with little Pearl to be guided and protected,--alone, and hopeless of retrieving her position, even had she not scorned to consider it desirable,--she cast away the fragments of a broken chain. The world's law was no law for her mind. It was an age in which the human intellect, newly emancipated, had taken a more active and a wider range than for many centuries before. Men of the sword had overthrown nobles and kings. Men bolder than these had overthrown and rearranged--not actually, but within

the sphere of theory, which was their most real abode--the whole system of ancient prejudice, wherewith was linked much of ancient principle. Hester Prynne imbibed this spirit. She assumed a freedom of speculation, then common enough on the other side of the Atlantic, but which our forefathers, had they known of it, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter. In her lonesome cottage, by the sea-shore, thoughts visited her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England; shadowy guests, that would have been as perilous as demons to their entertainer, could they have been seen so much as knocking at her door.

1. Which of the following words, if substituted for the word despots in paragraph 1, would most change the tone of the paragraph?
  - a. dictators
  - b. autocrats
  - c. governors
  - d. tyrants
2. The men of the town tell strangers about Hester's shameful past because they--
  - a. have not truly forgiven her
  - b. know that they, too, are guilty
  - c. believe newcomers have a right to know
  - d. give in to the natural tendency to gossip
3. The reader can infer that the rulers of the community--
  - a. are not as intelligent as the ordinary citizens
  - b. know their attitudes affect and influence others
  - c. will never soften their harsh judgment of Hester
  - d. disapprove of the prejudices held by the majority of people
4. In paragraph 3, the narrator makes the generalization that women who experience severe hardship--
  - a. must harden themselves in order to survive
  - b. tend to lose their friends and companions
  - c. are changed permanently
  - d. cope in the same way men do
5. Which of the following does the narrator seem sure about?
  - a. Hester's reason for pointing at the scarlet letter
  - b. the attitude of the townspeople toward Hester
  - c. whether or not Hester has cut her hair
  - d. the fact that Hester will find love in the future
6. In Paragraph 4, the "broken chain" most likely refers to--
  - a. Hester's relationship with others
  - b. traditional Puritan thought
  - c. an old piece of jewelry
  - d. Hester's passion and feeling
7. Hester is not punished for her speculation because the community leaders--
  - a. consider her previous sin to be much worse
  - b. have softened in their attitude toward her
  - c. are not aware of it
  - d. share her interest in new ideas
8. This passage is mainly about--
  - a. the attitudes and prejudices of the Puritan community
  - b. Hester's scorn for Puritan society
  - c. the new light in which the scarlet letter is seen
  - d. the changes in Hester and in the community's view of her

