

## Independent Reading Assignment

### *The Scarlet Letter*

Answer the following questions in complete sentences. While there is not a word count for your answers, make sure that all questions are answered completely with support from the novel. Make sure you cite the page number where you are pulling your support from in your answer. Make sure you label your work and your work organized when you turn it in.

#### Before Reading:

1. How do you expect society to treat a person who has broken one of its most basic laws? Why?
2. Who is worse, the known sinner or the hidden sinner? Explain.
3. What is conscience? What role does conscience play in the choices you make in your life?

#### Chapters 1 – 5

1. What one idea about Hester became most clear to you as you read Chapters 1 – 5?
2. Hawthorne sets up a deliberate pattern of *ambiguity*, or uncertainty of meaning, in the novel.
  - Is Hester a sinner or a saint?
  - Does the scarlet letter bring good as well as evil?

These questions and many more raise issues that Hawthorne wants you to think about.

- Notice the ambiguities that Hawthorne presents. Then explain two important examples of ambiguity that you find.
3. Do you think that saying in Boston will purify Hester and leave her a better person? Why?

#### Chapters 6 – 10

1. What does Chillingworth see when he thrusts aside Dimmesdale's shirt?
2. The *theme* of appearance versus reality runs through the entire novel. Hawthorne supports this theme by associating images of light and dark – sunlight or shadows – with each of the major characters. Answer these questions about the imagery.
  - a. Which character is most often associated with sunlight? Why is this significant?
  - b. Which characters are associated with darkness and shadows? Why is this significant?
  - c. In which scenes was the contrast of light and dark most obvious to you?
3. With which character in the novel do you identify most closely? Which character do you admire the least? Why?

### Chapters 11 – 15

1. What one idea became most clear to you as you read Chapters 11-15?
2. The *conflicts* within the novel are especially complex and deep rooted. Use the Character chart to organize for yourself the interior and exterior conflicts that beset Arthur Dimmesdale.
3. What have you learned from these chapters about the effects of guilt and the power of conscience? Do you agree or disagree with Hawthorne's beliefs?

### Chapters 16 – 19

1. What one idea became most clear to you as you read Chapters 16 – 19?
2. The *theme* presents the message that the writer wants you to get from reading his or her book. Often a number of subthemes support and help define the main theme. Complete the Theme chart by briefly explaining each subtheme. Then state Hawthorne's main theme.
3. Why is Hester so much stronger than Dimmesdale at this point in the novel? Do you agree or disagree with Hawthorne's reasons for making her so? Explain.

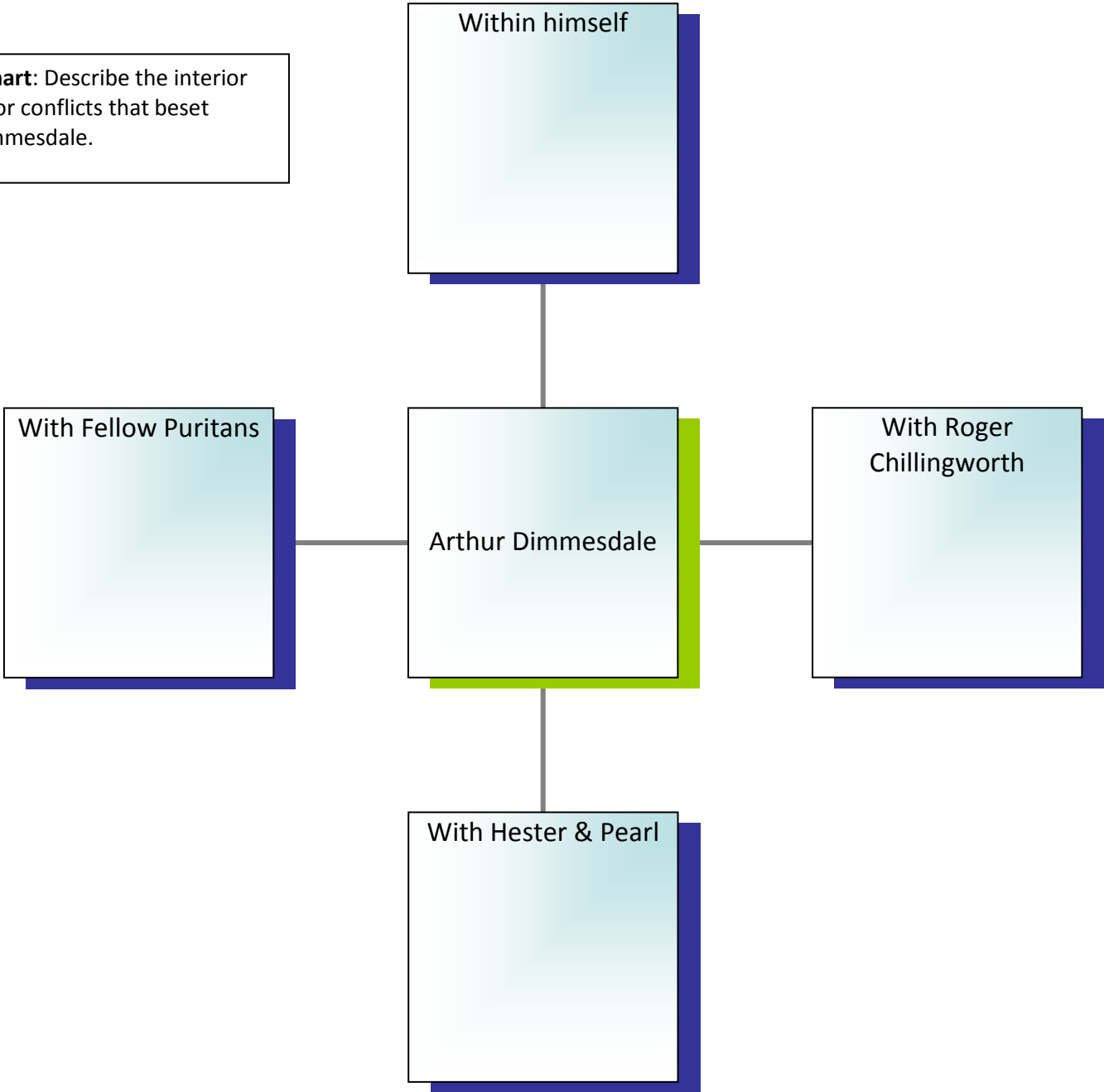
### Chapters 20 – 24

1. What one idea became most clear to you as you read Chapters 20 – 24?
2. A *symbol* is something that stands for something else. Help yourself understand the symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter* by completing the Symbol chart. Explain the meaning of each person or object below in the context of the novel.
3. Did Dimmesdale have to die? If you were Hester, would you have returned to Boston? Explain.

### After Reading:

1. What in Hawthorne's message has relevance to the contemporary reader? Why?
2. What ideas has reading *The Scarlet Letter* made you feel more strongly about?

**Conflict Chart:** Describe the interior and exterior conflicts that beset Arthur Dimmesdale.



**Theme Chart:** Briefly explain each subtheme. Then state Hawthorne's main theme.

<i>Subtheme:</i> Sin	<i>Subtheme:</i> Suffering
<i>Subtheme:</i> Appearances versus reality	<i>Subtheme:</i> The nature of evil
<b>Main Theme:</b>	

**Symbolism Chart:** Complete the following chart about symbolism from the book. Explain the meaning of each person or object below in the context of the novel.

The rose outside the jail	Sunlight
The scaffold	Pearl
The scarlet letter	Chillingworth