

**First Session: *Scarlet Letter*, Chapters 1-4 Contrasts, Isolation, Concealment, Exposure**

**Questions to consider as you read:**

1. Chapter 1, "The Prison Door" – what is the invitation to the reader? What are the **contrasts** set forth in this chapter? What is the author's tone?

2. What do you think is meant by the offer of the rose to the reader?

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3. Chapter 2, "The Market Place," how is the setting of the chapter staged? (Hawthorne having read deeply into Shakespeare follows Shakespeare's dramatic structure. These first four chapters are pure exposition – all the main characters are here – there are even, if you look for them, set directions.)

4. The winking baby...explain how this is an odd adjective since the reader might expect to describe the baby as blinking in the strong sunlight. What are the connotations of "winking?"

5. What do you think Hawthorne means by associating Hester and her babe with the Divine Maternity?

6. How many **contrasts** do you note while reading this chapter? (the condemnation of the beefy Puritan wives vs the young wife's sympathy, the beadle's black shadow darkening the sunshine, the embroidered badge vs what Hester's judges expected her to wear, etc.)

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1. Chapter 3 "The Recognition" With Hawthorne we will see characters, isolated, alienated, whether by choice or circumstance. Who is the character whose emergence from **isolation** unsettles Hester? What image does Hawthorne associate with this man – recall the same image in "Young Goodman Brown."

2. What physical defects does Hawthorne associate with the man who has emerged from the forest?
  3. Recognition is the result of “looking into something.” Recognition means *seeing* something, even understanding something – how many times do some of these characters “look” at each other? Is anything revealed by these searching looks? Anything brought out into the open? Anything being hidden?
  4. The novel’s exposition continues with descriptions of the judges looking down on Hester. What is Hawthorne’s tone in his description of each?
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1. Chapter 4 “The Interview” – Hawthorne keeps his characters free of the flatness of allegory. Clearly, we are picking up hints that Chillingworth is a villain, but what about some of his surprising actions in this chapter? How do they deepen his character? What word would you use to describe him so far?
2. In these four chapters Hawthorne has been playing with the themes of exposure and concealment. One sinner and her sin have been identified. Are there others? Hester agrees to conceal that Chillingworth is her husband. What is her great fear?