



EDEXCEL INTERNATIONAL GCSE (9–1)

ENGLISH LITERATURE

Student Book

Greg Bevan, Samantha Brunner, James Christie, David Farnell, Fleur Frederick,
Shaun Gamble, Peter Inson, Robert O'Brien, Pam Taylor

eBook
included

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is written for students following the Pearson Edexcel International GCSE (9–1) English Literature specification. This Student Book covers both years of the course.

The course has been structured so that teaching and learning can take place in any order, both in the classroom and for independent learning. The book contains five chapters: Reading Skills, Writing Skills, Paper 1, Paper 2 and Paper 3. The Reading Skills and Writing Skills chapters cover fundamental areas of these two key areas of English Literature. They build on and reinforce what students already know and develop essential skills that will allow them to succeed at this course. They can be taught as blocks at the start of the course or integrated into relevant sections of the texts being studied.

Learning objectives

Chapters and Units are carefully tailored to address key assessment objectives central to the course.

Skills

Each activity and set of questions has been assigned with the key skills gained from undertaking them, allowing for a strong focus on particular academic qualities.

Stretch your thinking

Exercises to push able students beyond content covered in the course and stimulate further thought and discussion.

64 PAPER 1 READING POETRY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson will help you to:

- analyse individual poems
- provide a general introduction to the process of reading and understanding poetry.

KEY POINT

There are two essential questions that you should ask when approaching any poem. Firstly, what does the poem mean and/or what feelings does it generate? Secondly, what techniques are used to communicate those meanings and feelings?

MAKING SENSE OF POETRY

The first thing to think about is what meaning you can take from the poem. What is the poem *saying*, if you had to summarise it? Sometimes the answer is fairly clear. Rudyard Kipling's 'If –', for example, is clearly talking about what it takes to be a good and successful man. Many poems, however, might express more than one meaning or contain hidden meanings. Other poems are based on the communication of feelings and sensations rather than an identifiable meaning. William Blake's 'The Tyger' is a good example of this. Your own personal response is important. How does the poem make *you* feel? What does it mean to *you*? Questioning your own thoughts and reactions is at the heart of analysing poetry and can make it an exciting and meaningful process.

ACTIVITY 1 A02 **SKILLS** CRITICAL THINKING, INTERPRETATION, COLLABORATION

DIFFERENT MEANINGS

Read 'Half-Caste' by John Agard. Discuss the poem in a small group. Make a list of all the meanings that you take from it, and another list of all the feelings and sensations that are part of your individual reactions to it.

FINDING EVIDENCE

When analysing poetry, your personal response will never be enough on its own. To succeed in the exam, you need to take the next step and ask how the poet communicates meaning and feelings. In other words, your personal response needs to be supported by evidence that you have noticed within the poem. There are several different dimensions that you should look at when finding this evidence. Many of these points are addressed in greater detail in the other sections in this unit. They include things like poetic imagery, rhythm and rhyme, poetic structure and form, and the poet's choice of language.

ACTIVITY 2 A02 **SKILLS** ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION

EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS

Look at the first stanza of John Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'.

O WHAT can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.


Make a list of the feelings and meanings that you take from the stanza and then make a parallel list of the techniques that communicate them. Compare your list to the one provided below (don't read this list until you have completed your own).

PAPER 1 READING POETRY 65

MEANING/FEELING	TECHNIQUE
Feeling of melancholy and sadness	Lots of long vowel sounds: lots of 'a's and 'o's and 'e's. 'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms, / Alone and palely loitering?'
Feeling that things have gone wrong; the natural order has been disturbed	This creates an effect of slowness and helps to produce the sense of a melancholy wasting and fading away. The use of words that suggest sickness and the decay of nature, such as 'withered', 'ail' and 'palely'. The final line is much shorter than the others and therefore disturbs the rhythm that has been established in the first three lines. This creates a feeling of strangeness and disturbance in the usual order of things.
Setting feels medieval/very old	The choice of archaic words that are not widely used today, such as 'thee', 'knight-at-arms' and 'sedge'.

HIDDEN MEANINGS AND FEELINGS

Another thing which will improve your answer in the exam is to look for meanings and feelings that are *implicit* and below the surface, as well as those which are more obvious.



▲ Photos can have implicit and explicit meanings.

'War Photographer' by Carol Ann Duffy is literally about a photographer developing photographs. However, you need to work harder to think about what Duffy might be trying to say through her descriptions of the photographer. Is the poem talking about the horrors of war, the psychological damage done to the photographer or the coldness of Western societies which only access war through newspapers? You need to argue in support of one of these interpretations by using evidence from the poem. If you can access implicit as well as explicit meaning in this way, it will help to improve the quality of your response.

ACTIVITY 3 A02 **SKILLS** CRITICAL THINKING, INTERPRETATION, CO-OPERATION

EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT MEANING

Working with a partner, pick one of the poems in the Anthology. One person writes down what they consider the explicit or literal meaning of the poem to be. The other person writes down any implicit meanings or ideas they can find. Compare what you have written. Do both pieces together produce a comprehensive description of the poem's meaning?

GENERAL VOCABULARY

implicit: suggested or understood without being told directly

EXAM-STYLE QUESTION

A02 A03

SKILLS CRITICAL THINKING, ANALYSIS, ADAPTIVE LEARNING, CREATIVITY

HINT

Try to apply the methods you have used in the activities above to answer the question.

Discuss the representation of nature in John Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'.

In your answer, you should consider the poet's:

- descriptive skills
- choice of language
- use of structure and form.

Support your answer with examples from the poem. **(30 marks)**

Activities

A wide range of varied activities to encourage understanding and embed understanding as an individual, as well as in larger groups to establish cross-peer learning and communication.

Exam-style questions

Questions tailored to the Pearson Edexcel specification to allow for practice and development of exam writing technique.

Subject vocabulary and General vocabulary

Useful words and phrases are colour coded within the main text and picked out in the margin with concise and simple definitions. These will support understanding of key subject terms and support students whose first language is not English.

The Paper 1 and Paper 2 chapters cover all of the content required by the course, mirroring the two exam papers for those taking this route. The information in the Paper 2 chapter will also work for anybody taking the coursework route. This is then supplemented by the Paper 3 chapter, which gives advice on this paper for those taking this route. For each section or text, information is supported with activities in order to put learning into practice and exam-style questions to help you prepare and practise for the exam. Other features help to expand your knowledge and reinforce your learning. All Anthology texts are reproduced in full, with detailed analysis and questions for each text.

Hint
Useful support and advice addressing common mistakes or difficult content.

Key points
Easy to understand, core points to be taken away from sections or texts.

Pearson Progression
Sample student answers have been given a **Pearson Step** from 1 to 12. This tells you how well the response has met the criteria in the **Pearson Progression Map**.

180 PAPER 1 MODERN PROSE

KEY POINT
In *The Joy Luck Club* no single character has a perspective which takes priority over the others. Instead, the reader is allowed to see all of the different perspectives of the characters, which are presented as equal and balanced. It is therefore the reader themselves who gains the kind of complete understanding of everything in the book, which is denied to the characters.

EXAM-STYLE QUESTIONS

AD1 AD4

SKILLS PROBLEM SOLVING, REASONING, INTERPRETATION

HINT
In the exam, you will have 45 minutes in which to write your essay. There will be a choice of two questions on the paper. Use these exam-style questions to practise exam technique and timing. Remember to consider language, form and structure and refer to the context of the novel in your response.

FURTHER READING
If you choose to read any of these works, you should compare and contrast them with the piece you have studied and how they add to your understanding of it. You should think about language, style, format, themes, plot, characters and context.

- *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion* (1998) edited by E.D. Huntley
- *Amy Tan* (1996) by Barbara Kramer
- *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001) by Amy Tan

PAPER 1 MODERN PROSE 181

THINGS FALL APART
CHINUA ACHEBE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT
Chinua Achebe was born in 1930 in the African country of Nigeria, which at the time of his birth was a colony under British rule. A member of the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria, Achebe was brought up with a mixture of traditional and European influences. His parents were converts to Christianity and while they respected Igbo traditions and raised him in its storytelling tradition (which would later heavily influence his writing), they also introduced him to Western literature. Achebe's exposure to Western literature was then further deepened through his elite English-language education. During colonial times, European novels about Africa tended to be escapist adventures depicting Africans as ignorant savages, and a growing resentment of this portrayal helped to fuel Achebe's decision to become a writer.

Achebe came to prominence thanks to the impact of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Written in English, it has been read and studied throughout the world and translated into 50 different languages. *Things Fall Apart* now stands as a leading work of post-colonial literature, which explores the colonial experience and its aftermath from the perspective of the colonised people. Set in the Igbo ('Ibo' in the novel) region during the years leading up to the establishment of British colonial rule in 1900, the story follows Okonkwo, a village leader and frightening warrior, whose life gradually unravels as change surrounds his homeland. It conveys the African view of colonialism that Achebe found so absent from European portrayals. Igbo proverbs and fables are incorporated into a narrative structure which is still familiar and easily approachable to readers of Western literature. Having now sold more than 8 million copies worldwide, prompted numerous critical studies and served as an inspiration for many African writers, *Things Fall Apart* is arguably the most important work of modern African literature.

SUBJECT VOCABULARY
post-colonial literature literature written about countries and cultures which are, or had been, governed under colonisation, usually by European countries and Britain in particular; post-colonial writers often come from heavily colonised regions such as Africa, India or Ireland

DID YOU KNOW?
Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* as a response to a famous novel of 1899 by the Polish writer, Joseph Conrad, called *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's novel is also about European colonialism in Africa, but Achebe thought that the representation of native African life was racist and overly simplified. Achebe did not want Conrad's views about colonialism to become dominant, so he wrote *Things Fall Apart* to provide what he thought was a more accurate portrait.

Sources and adaptations / Other media / Further reading
When novels, plays or poetry have been adapted, some examples are listed to allow for a wider understanding of literary interpretations. Extra texts and supporting media are also suggested to encourage a wider understanding and promote a broader range of reading.

Student answers
Higher- and lower-level written answers annotated with marker comments to encourage understanding of the marking criteria.

Did you know?
Interesting facts to encourage wider thought and understanding around course texts.

'BLESSING' IMTIAZ DHARKER

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Imtiaz Dharker was born in Pakistan in 1954 and grew up in the UK. In addition to being a poet, she is also an artist and a documentary film maker. It is possible to see the influence of her filmmaking and her painting in the poem 'Blessing', through its focus on striking visual images and pictures. 'Blessing' is set in the city of Bombay (known today as Mumbai) in India during the dry season. It describes the effect of water being given to the people through a burst pipe. It is a political poem about poverty and drought, as well as a beautiful description of the physical experience of water.



▲ Drought-stricken earth

like a pod(1) the voice of a kindly god(6) crashes to the ground(9) Use of figurative language such as simile and metaphor.

drip(3) splash, echo(4) roar(11) screaming(19) highlights(20) light(21) sings(22) Use of sense experience, for example, sound, touch, taste.

The skin cracks like a pod.
There never is enough water.

Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.

the voice of a kindly god(6) the flow
has found / a roar of tongues(10/11)
Personification of the water.

tin(5) silver(9) brass, copper,
aluminium(15) polished;(21)
flashing(21) Use of imagery related
to metal.

kindly god(6) congregation(12)
blessing(22) Religious imagery.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

municipal owned and operated by the
government

congregation a religious gathering of
people, often an audience attending a
church service

Sometimes, the sudden rush
of fortune. The **municipal** pipe bursts,
silver crashes to the ground
and the flow has found
a roar of tongues. From the huts,
a **congregation**: every man woman
child for streets around
butts in, with pots,
brass, copper, aluminium,
plastic buckets,
frantic hands,

10

and naked children
screaming in the liquid sun,
their highlights polished to perfection,
flashing light,
as the blessing sings
over their small bones.

15

20

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

FORM

Notice the unusual structure that Dharker uses, dividing the poem into four stanzas all of different lengths. This seems to be done in quite a random way, with no obvious reason for the position of the breaks between stanzas. Perhaps this apparently random structure reflects the idea of the water bursting out and spreading itself across the earth in a free and disordered way. Another possible reason for the irregular stanza length (very short – long – slightly shorter) is to reflect the idea of the water dripping out slowly before bursting into a huge torrent and then falling away again.

Look at the way that sentences are organised to reflect the experience that the poem describes. The opening lines use a lot of very short, simple sentences such as 'There never is enough water'. The third stanza, however, uses much longer sentences that very quickly add more and more things, frantically describing 'pots, brass, copper, aluminium, plastic buckets, frantic hands'. This reflects the idea of moving from a state where very little is happening and the water only comes in small drips to a state where the water rushes out very fast.

CONTENT

Dharker uses lots of different images to describe the water, but they are all designed to make it feel exciting and powerful. Figurative language is used to describe water as being like a god, like money, like precious metal and like the sun. Techniques that make something that is not alive seem like it is and gives it a personality are called personification. This idea of the water as a living force is crucial to the effect of 'Blessing'. Try listing the techniques which are used in this poem to bring to life the world it describes.

ACTIVITY 1

A02

SKILLS ANALYSIS, CREATIVITY, COLLABORATION

▼ ANALYSING LANGUAGE

Work with a partner and select key phrases from the poem, adding them to the table. These may:

- show how Dharker portrays the scene
- focus on features of the descriptive language used and its effect in creating vivid imagery
- pick out the effect of words that seem striking or unusual, and of words that convey Dharker's ideas.

▼ LANGUAGE	▼ COMMENT ON MEANING/EFFECT
'There never is enough water.'	This bold statement acts to label water as precious. The use of punctuation enforces this.
'silver crashes to the ground'	This image of liquid metal is vivid, portraying the water as something valuable and beautiful.

LINKS WITH OTHER POEMS

This poem is about poverty. In the last stanza it also focuses on the importance and experience of children and in particular on children who are suffering. 'Blessing' is also a very sensual poem, focusing extensively on the significance of vivid experiences of sight, sound and touch. In addition, 'Blessing' is a poem that makes something that might not seem very important at first (for example, a water pipe bursting) seem very significant and beautiful. All of these features provide strong potential links with other poems.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ Look specifically at words in the poem which refer to sounds, for example, 'drips' or 'roar'. What is the significance of sound in 'Blessing'?
- ▶ What might Dharker be trying to communicate to the reader about the children in her description of them in the final stanza? Why does she focus on the children rather than the men and women mentioned earlier in the poem?
- ▶ Highlight all the places where alliteration is used in 'Blessing' and think in each case about why the poet has chosen to use it.

EXAM-STYLE QUESTIONS

A02

A03

SKILLS ANALYSIS, DECISION MAKING, INNOVATION

SKILLS ANALYSIS, DECISION MAKING, INNOVATION

1 Re-read 'Blessing' and 'The Tyger'.

Explore how religion is presented in 'Blessing' and 'The Tyger'. You should make reference to language, form and structure.

Support your answer with examples from the poems.

(30 marks)

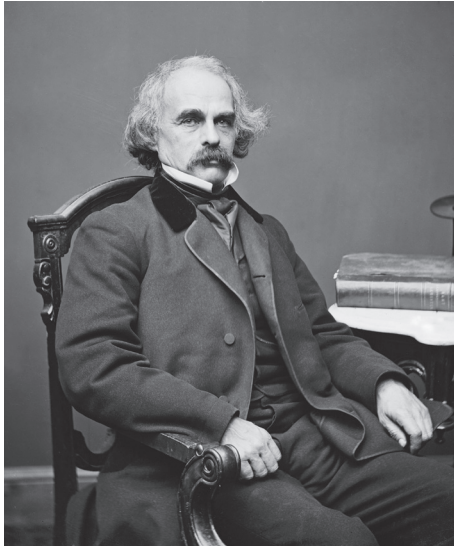
2 Re-read 'Blessing'.

How do the poets present sense experience, such as sound, sight, touch and smell, in 'Blessing' and one other poem from the Anthology?

You should make reference to language, form and structure.

Support your answer with examples from the poems.

(30 marks)



▲ Nathaniel Hawthorne

GENERAL VOCABULARY

Puritans a group of English people who were part of the Protestant denomination of the Christian church; they typically had very strict religious views on morality, especially sexuality

background someone's upbringing, family history and childhood experiences

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

autobiographical relating to a person's own life (in this case, Hawthorne's life)

narrator a character that tells the story in a novel, play, poem or film

THE SCARLET LETTER NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Scarlet Letter was published in 1850, but it is set 200 years earlier among a group of people called the **Puritans**. During the 17th century, the Puritans travelled from England to settle on the east coast of America, in an area now called New England. Puritan life was defined by a strict set of Christian morals and rules and by the need to establish a working civilisation in the relatively wild and natural landscape of America. These themes appear in Hawthorne's representation of Puritan life in *The Scarlet Letter*.

The Puritans are significant in American history because they established many aspects of American life as it was lived during the 19th century, when Hawthorne lived and wrote. In fact, in many ways, they established many aspects of modern American life as it continues to be lived today. This means that looking back at the Puritans is often a way in which writers like Hawthorne can examine the present day, whether that present day was in the 19th or 20th century. Although *The Scarlet Letter* is set 200 years before the time Hawthorne wrote it, he uses a representation of the politics and morality of the Puritans to reflect on the political and social issues that defined his own time. These include the political divisions and the disagreements over how best to organise society; these led to the American Civil War, which broke out ten years after *The Scarlet Letter* was published.

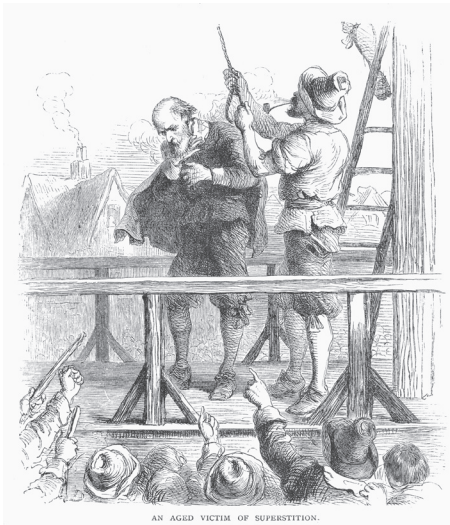
Hawthorne's representation of Puritanism, as well as other aspects of *The Scarlet Letter*, relate to his own **background**. Hawthorne's family history could be traced all the way back to the Puritan immigrants of the 17th century. He was born and spent much of his life in Salem, which is close to the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*, Boston. The introductory section of the novel, entitled 'The Custom-House', is particularly **autobiographical**. Like the **narrator** of 'The Custom-House', Hawthorne had worked in the Salem custom-house when he needed money and, like the narrator, he also lost his job due to changes in the politics governing the city. It is interesting to think about the ways in which this autobiographical element relates to *The Scarlet Letter* as a whole.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

Native Americans different groups of native people who lived in North America and South America before the arrival of European settlers

- ▶ Research Nathaniel Hawthorne's life and identify any events that you think may have influenced him when he was writing *The Scarlet Letter*. How useful do you think it is to consider the writer's own life when thinking about the stories that they write?
- ▶ There are several moments where **Native Americans**, who lived in New England before the arrival of the Puritans, appear or are mentioned in *The Scarlet Letter*. Find these moments and think about what purpose they serve in the novel.

PLOT



▲ A public scaffold

The Scarlet Letter begins with a section entitled 'The Custom-House', which does not contribute to the plot or introduce the characters. Instead, it sets out several of the novel's major themes. These include the relationship between the individual and society, the best form of political organisation and the idea of duty. This section is also highly autobiographical and reflects some events that took place in Hawthorne's own life.

The story itself begins in the centre of Boston, at the scaffold, which is a large public stage also used to hang criminals. A crowd is gathered and Hester Prynne is brought before them, carrying a child and wearing an **embroidered** scarlet 'A' on her chest. It is revealed that she is being punished for the crime of **adultery**, because she conceived her child while her husband was still in England. Her husband is now believed to be lost at sea, and Hester refuses to reveal the name of her child's father. The young and well-respected **minister**, Arthur Dimmesdale, asks her to reveal the name, but she still refuses.

- ▶ What do you think the scaffold represents in *The Scarlet Letter*?

An elderly male observer in the crowd signals to Hester not to speak by putting his finger over his lips. It is later revealed that this man is Roger Chillingworth, who is a **scholar** and doctor and also Hester's husband. He visits Hester in prison and makes her promise to keep the secret about his identity as her husband. He says that he understands her reasons for committing adultery but that he blames the man with whom she was adulterous.

Hester is released from prison and several years pass. She lives a **virtuous** life and makes a living through her embroidery, but is treated as a social outcast because of her crime and the 'A' around her neck. Her daughter Pearl grows up wild and uncivilised due to her lack of contact with the rest of society. At one point, the town authorities try to take Pearl away from Hester, fearing that she is being brought up in an ungodly way, but Arthur Dimmesdale **intervenes** to protect Hester and Pearl. Dimmesdale becomes ill, seeming to gradually become weaker despite his youth and popularity in the town. This leads Roger Chillingworth, as the town doctor, to become increasingly close to him. Eventually, Chillingworth moves in with Dimmesdale in order to treat his illness. Chillingworth begins to suspect that Dimmesdale may be Pearl's father and confirms this to himself one afternoon when he sees Dimmesdale sleeping.

One night, Hester and Pearl see Dimmesdale standing on the scaffold out of guilt for his crime. They join him and the three stand together as a family, but Dimmesdale refuses to acknowledge their relationship in public, insisting that it must stay secret. A **meteor** crosses the sky and spells out the letter 'A'.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

embroidered decorated by sewing a pattern, picture, or words on it with coloured threads

adultery having a sexual relationship with someone other than one's husband or wife

minister a member of the clergy, typically in Christian churches

scholar specialist on a specific subject

virtuous behaving in a very honest and moral way

intervenes becomes involved

meteor a piece of rock or metal that travels through space, and makes a bright line in the night sky when it falls down towards the Earth.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

sermon a talk given as part of a religious service, usually on a religious or moral subject

scarred wounded or cut, leaving a permanent mark on the person's body
charity kindness or sympathy that you show towards other people

Hester asks Chillingworth to stop adding to Dimmesdale's troubles by being constantly present in his life, but Chillingworth refuses. She fears that Chillingworth is about to reveal the secret and she and Dimmesdale decide to flee with Pearl to Europe to begin a new life. The day on which they plan to sail from Boston is an important Puritan holiday and, feeling that he is about to be released from his torment, Dimmesdale gives a particularly inspiring **sermon** to the townspeople. However, Hester learns that Chillingworth knows of their plan and is going to ruin it by accompanying them. If they refuse to let him go with them, he will reveal their secret. In desperation, Dimmesdale climbs on to the scaffold and confesses his crime. He reveals a red 'A' **scarred** into his chest, which the reader assumes is what Chillingworth saw while Dimmesdale was sleeping, and then Dimmesdale dies.

Shortly afterwards, Chillingworth also dies. Hester and Pearl leave Boston for many years. One day, Hester returns alone and moves back into her old cottage. She continues to wear the 'A', but is now respected throughout the town for her good works and **charity**. She receives letters and expensive gifts which suggest that Pearl has married into wealth, but this is never confirmed. When Hester eventually dies, she is buried alongside Dimmesdale under a grave marked with an 'A'.

► **Why does Hawthorne not confirm what has happened to Pearl at the end of *The Scarlet Letter*, instead just hinting that she has married well and is sending Hester gifts and letters?**

CHARACTERS

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

protagonist the main character in a piece of literature

GENERAL VOCABULARY

taunting trying to make someone angry or upset by saying unkind things to them

HESTER PRYNNE

- the **protagonist**
- the most complex character in *The Scarlet Letter*
- beautiful and good-natured
- willing to protect and care for Dimmesdale despite the fact that he has treated her unfairly and refuses to publicly admit it
- devoted to charity work
- an outcast from society because she disobeyed Boston's strict Puritan morals
- a representation of the conflict between society and the individual

PEARL

- the daughter of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale
- presented as a wild force of nature raised outside the rules and conventions that govern Boston society
- considered a devil at times by Boston's religious rulers
- sometimes cruel, **taunting** her mother about her 'A'
- loving and affectionate, coming to love Arthur Dimmesdale and publicly kissing him before he dies

ARTHUR DIMMESDALE

- Pearl's father and Hester's co-adulterer
- an excellent public speaker
- uses his speaking skills to convince the town that he is a good man
- too cowardly to damage his reputation by telling the truth about what he has done
- morally aware of right and wrong, despite being a coward
- unable to ignore his moral awareness of right and wrong, which leads to his illness and death
- a weak person rather than an evil one

► *The Scarlet Letter* by Hugues Merle

► How do you think this painting represents Hester? Can you see anyone else in the painting? Who do you think they might be?



ROGER CHILLINGWORTH

- Hester's husband
- a doctor and scholar in the town.
- understanding and forgiving regarding Hester's adultery
- able to recognise that he is much older than Hester and that their marriage was a bad idea
- always cruel to Dimmesdale
- often described as being like a devil in pursuing Dimmesdale's destruction

GENERAL VOCABULARY

satanic relating to practices that treat the Devil like a god

► Think about the character of Mistress Hibbins. What characterises the moment when she appears in the novel? What tends to happen in such moments? Is Mistress Hibbins aligned more with nature and the wilderness or with the forces of religious authority and civilisation?

MISTRESS HIBBINS

- Govenor Bellingham's sister
- widely believed to be a witch
- often associated with the forest where she interacts with the 'Black Man', who is presumed to be the devil
- willing to tempt Hester to join her in her **satanic** activities in the forest, but is unsuccessful

GENERAL VOCABULARY

hypocrite someone who publicly claims to hold certain beliefs while acting completely differently in their own private life

insincere publicly expressing feelings that are not actually felt

veiled hidden or disguised

GOVERNOR BELLINGHAM

- the political leader and authority figure of Boston
- the leader of Hester's punishment and tries to take Pearl away from her
- presented as a **hypocrite**, as he imposes strict Puritanism on everyone else while living in a luxurious mansion
- representative of the harsh, rigid and **insincere** morality of Boston's rulers

REVEREND JOHN WILSON

- Dimmesdale's superior in the church
- unable to recognise that, when he finds Dimmesdale standing on the scaffold at night, it is because Dimmesdale is guilty of a crime
- representative of the foolish, but ultimately well-meaning, nature of Boston's religious leaders

THE NARRATOR OF 'THE CUSTOM-HOUSE'

- a thinly **veiled** version of Hawthorne himself
- used to provide some explanation about how *The Scarlet Letter* came to be written
- distinct from the apparently less autobiographical narrative voice used in the rest of the novel; the connection between these narrative voices is strongly debated

THEMES

GENERAL VOCABULARY

the Ten Commandments ten rules of moral behaviour given in the Bible and followed by Christian churches

congregation the people who usually go to a particular church

preaching talking about a religious subject in a public place, especially in a church during a service

RELIGION

In the Puritan society of *The Scarlet Letter*, religion plays a very different role than it does in modern Western societies. There is no separation between church and state. Instead the law, political power and religion are all closely integrated. By committing adultery, Hester commits a religious sin because she has broken one of **the Ten Commandments**. However, she also commits a legal offence that is punished as a crime through the city's legal code. Religion in *The Scarlet Letter* cannot be separated from any aspect of society and its presence can be felt everywhere.

Hawthorne is generally critical of figures who have gained power or authority through this mixing of religion and politics. In particular, he often presents them as hypocritical because they do not obey the rules that they impose on the rest of society. For example, Arthur Dimmesdale is thought of as a good and moral man by his **congregation**, but in fact he is hiding his sin from the world. Similarly, Governor Bellingham is also presented as a hypocrite because he lives in a grand mansion while **preaching** strict Puritan values to the town. As the narrator states, 'the brilliancy [of the mansion] might have befitted Aladdin's palace, rather than the mansion of a grave old Puritan ruler'.

- **Why is Roger Chillingworth so often associated with the devil and described in this way? How does this treatment of his character relate to the theme of religion in the novel as a whole?**



▲ New England Puritans

► Research the reasons why the Puritans left England to settle in America.

THE INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SOCIETY

One of the most important themes of *The Scarlet Letter* is the relationship between the individual and society. Society, in the form of the city rulers or the townspeople, often seeks complete control over the individual. For example, they try to take Pearl away from Hester. They also try to extract the secret about Pearl's father from Hester. They do not recognise the right of individuals to possess any identity of their own that is separate from society.

In contrast, Hester Prynne often represents the desire of the individual to keep some independence from the crowd and from the town authorities. This can be seen when she first appears on the town scaffold. The women in the crowd are described as 'hard-featured' and 'coarse', but Hester is described as 'elegant', 'beautiful' and 'delicate', which marks her individuality and her separation from a society of people who are all the same. Hester comes to embrace the lonely, individualistic life that she lives in her cottage, which is separated from the rest of the town. She even chooses to live there after returning from her years abroad. She also raises Pearl as a child who is purely natural, existing as an individual outside society's rules and conventions.

DUTY

The theme of duty arises from this conflict between the individual and society. *The Scarlet Letter* particularly focuses on what happens when there is a conflict between different duties – for example, when Hester's duty to bring up Pearl comes into conflict with her duty to obey the town authorities who want to bring up Pearl themselves. Many different kinds of duty come into conflict with one another in this way throughout the course of the novel, including:

- duty to religious morals
- duty to social laws
- duty to oneself
- duty to one's child
- duty to one's legal husband
- duty to one's romantic lover.

One important way in which this idea of duty is expressed in *The Scarlet Letter* is through the use and presentation of secrets. Hester has a duty to Roger Chillingworth as her husband, but this duty conflicts with her duty to Arthur Dimmesdale, to keep his secret as she had promised to. In the same way, Hester also has a duty to Roger Chillingworth to keep his identity secret, as she promised to, but also a duty to protect Arthur Dimmesdale, which might involve revealing the secret of Chillingworth's identity to Dimmesdale. Therefore, this complex conflict between the duty to society and the duty to oneself and one's personal relationships is often represented through secrets.

ACTIVITY 1

A01

SKILLS CRITICAL THINKING, REASONING

▼ THINKING ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

Copy and complete the table, making a list of the major characters in *The Scarlet Letter*. List all of the duties that each character has, either to themselves, to other individuals, to family or to society. Look out for points where duties contradict each other.

▼ CHARACTER	▼ DUTIES
Pearl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To her own nature as a free spirit. ■ To respect and later care for her mother.
Hester Prynne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To the puritan society of Boston and its rules. ■ To Roger Chillingworth, her husband. ■ To Arthur Dimmesdale, her lover. ■ To Pearl, her daughter.

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

symbol in literature, people, objects or events that have a meaning other than their literal meaning

CIVILISATION VERSUS THE WILDERNESS

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Boston is a new town, still in the process of being founded. This means that there is a very fine line between the civilisation being built, represented by the town, and the natural wilderness that the town is replacing. Boston is described as 'a little town, on the edge of the Western wilderness'.

The forest is an important **symbol** of the wilderness. It is located right on the edge of the town and often seems to threaten the town's Puritan values of civilisation and order. For example, it is where Mistress Hibbins is thought to communicate with the devil and where Dimmesdale and Hester meet in order to carry out their affair in secret.

The relationship between civilisation and wilderness is symbolised in an image in the first chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*: the image of the 'wild rose-bush' that grows outside the prison door. The bush and the prison represent nature and civilisation existing side by side. The fact that the prisoners are shown to be comforted by the roses before entering the prison may have been intended by Hawthorne to show the superiority of nature over human order.

AUTHOR'S CRAFT

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

irony using words to convey a meaning that is completely opposite to their apparent meaning

IRONY

Hawthorne uses **irony** throughout *The Scarlet Letter*. For example, in the chapter entitled 'The Elf-Child and the Minister', Governor Bellingham is described as very grand and important because he looks stern and wears grand clothes, but the actual effect communicated to the reader is that he is ridiculous and foolish. This effect is used to make fun of Boston's authority figures and townspeople throughout the novel.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

outcast someone who is not accepted by the people they live among

- Both in 'The Custom-House' and the main body of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne's narrative voice makes statements about the uselessness of writing and books. For example, the narrator says, 'I cared not, at this period, for books; they were apart from me'. How do statements such as this contribute to the role of irony in the novel?

Irony also involves the combination of qualities that contradict each other within a single person. It is ironic that Governor Bellingham preaches Puritanism to others while living in expensive and luxurious surroundings himself. It is ironic that Arthur Dimmesdale is such a skilful public speaker and yet is unable to speak the words that would free him from the suffering of keeping his secret. It is ironic that Hester Prynne is treated as an **outcast** by a strict Puritan society that values virtue despite the fact that she is one of the most virtuous characters in the novel.

ACTIVITY 2**A01****SKILLS** ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION▼ **UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT**

Copy and complete the table, listing the people or institutions in *The Scarlet Letter* that you think Hawthorne treats with irony. For each one describe how you think the effect of irony is achieved.

▼ SUBJECT OF IRONY	▼ HOW THE EFFECT IS ACHIEVED
Arthur Dimmesdale	By making him a great public speaker who will not state his most important secret in public.
Governor Bellingham	By having him preach strict Puritanism and the value of self-control while living in a grand mansion.

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

narrative the story or plot

NARRATIVE ORGANISATION

The Scarlet Letter is largely structured around the opposition between public and private spaces. It moves backwards and forwards between public scenes, set in places such as the town scaffold or the Governor's mansion, and private scenes, set in places like Hester's cottage or the forest. This alternating **narrative** structure plays an important role in communicating many of the novel's key themes, such as the opposition between individual and society, and the need to preserve secrets from public view.

The novel is also structured around the three scenes set on the scaffold:

- the scene in which Hester first emerges from prison before the crowd wearing her 'A'
- the scene where Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold at night and is joined by Hester and Pearl
- the scene in which Dimmesdale confesses and dies.

These scenes occur at the beginning, the middle and the end of the novel and they contain its most dramatic and important moments. This shows the significance in Puritan society of public spaces such as the scaffold, as well as the ideas of ceremony and of punishment that are associated with them.

LANGUAGE AND SYMBOLISM

GENERAL VOCABULARY

the Old Testament the first part of the Bible

LANGUAGE

Hawthorne has a particularly complex way of writing that can often be difficult to read. He uses strange, old-fashioned words like ‘ignominy’ and ‘verily’, and long sentences that are made up of many separate clauses. One reason he writes in this way is to produce a feeling of authority and importance. In particular, this kind of language echoes the language of **the Old Testament**, thus reflecting the religious world of Puritan New England. This important-sounding language is also key to producing irony and comedy. Ridiculous people like Mistress Hibbins or Governor Bellingham seem funnier if they are described in very grand language.

However, despite the complexity of Hawthorne’s language, one of the most important uses of language in *The Scarlet Letter* is silence or refusing to speak. Hester’s refusal to name Pearl’s father, either on the scaffold or later on, is far more powerful than any of her words could be. Likewise, Dimmesdale’s silence and his refusal to confess reveals his character far more effectively than his skilful speeches and sermons.

ACTIVITY 3

A01

SKILLS

REASONING, INTERPRETATION, COLLABORATION, INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

▼ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Work with a partner to complete the following table. One of you lists all of the moments in the novel where speaking is important. The other lists all of the moments where not speaking and remaining silent is important. Then discuss what you have found with your partner. Consider the following questions.

- **Where do these events take place? Are there certain spaces where speech tends to happen and certain places where silence tends to happen?**
- **Do certain characters tend to speak and others to remain silent?**

▼ SPEAKING IS IMPORTANT

Arthur Dimmesdale confesses on the scaffold.

Pearl asks open and honest questions about Arthur Dimmesdale and his relationship with her and Hester.

▼ SILENCE IS IMPORTANT

Roger Chillingworth signals for Hester to remain silent when he sees her on the scaffold.

Hawthorne does not reveal what has happened to Pearl at the end of the novel.

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

symbolism using symbols to represent particular concepts or ideas

SYMBOLISM

Symbolism is used throughout *The Scarlet Letter*. For example, symbols of nature are consistently built up using flowers, the sea and the forest. This natural imagery plays an important role in terms of character and theme, for example, in the figure of Pearl, by defining her as a child of nature as opposed to a child of society. In contrast, the town is often associated with symbols of punishment and death, such as the scaffold or the prison and graveyard, which are mentioned in the early chapter entitled ‘The Prison-Door’.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

static not moving; fixed

SUBJECT VOCABULARY

symbolic where a person, object or event is used by a writer to convey a meaning beyond its literal meaning

The Scarlet Letter that hangs around Hester's neck is also a symbol. Indeed, it is a symbol that is repeated at significant points in the plot. First, it is repeated in the letter 'A' that the meteor makes in the sky as Hester, Dimmesdale and Pearl stand on the scaffold. Much later, it is repeated again in the letter 'A' carved on Hester and Dimmesdale's shared grave. The 'A' is a particularly interesting symbol because its meaning changes. It starts off as a symbol of Hester's crime and sin, but by the end of the novel it serves instead as a symbol of her goodness. This shows that, while some symbols are **static** and have fixed meanings, Hawthorne is also interested in the way that the meaning of symbols can shift and become a site of conflict. For example, when Hester uses her embroidery skills to make the letter beautiful and therefore contradict its original Puritanical purpose, this is a sign of this **symbolic** conflict.

ACTIVITY 4

A01

SKILLS

CRITICAL THINKING, ANALYSIS, REASONING, INTERPRETATION

▼ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Pick a theme of *The Scarlet Letter* and list the ways in which Hawthorne uses symbolism to communicate it. For example, you could say, 'The theme of the restrictiveness of Puritan society is communicated through symbols of punishment, such as the prison, the scaffold and Hester Prynne's scarlet letter.'

EXAM-STYLE QUESTIONS



A01

A02

A04

SKILLS

CRITICAL THINKING, ANALYSIS, REASONING, INTERPRETATION, ADAPTIVE LEARNING

HINT

In the exam, you will have 45 minutes in which to write your essay. There will be a choice of two questions on the paper. Use these exam-style questions to practise exam technique and timing. Remember to consider language, form and structure and refer to the context of the novel in your response.

¹ A01: This opening shows an understanding of text overall in relation to the question.

² A02: To comment more closely on Hawthorne's technique, could be it explained how she is a symbol?

³ A02: It is a good idea to mention a few relevant points in the introduction, before writing about them in detail later on. Can you think of any more symbols that could have been included?

⁴ A01: For good written style, you might need to think of synonyms for key words in the question. Can you think of any synonyms for 'symbol'?

- 1 Compare and contrast the characters of Roger Chillingworth and Arthur Dimmesdale. You must consider language, form and structure and refer to the context of the novel in your answer. **(30 marks)**
- 2 How does Hawthorne explore the conflict between society and the individual in *The Scarlet Letter*? You must consider language, form and structure and refer to the context of the novel in your answer. **(30 marks)**
- 3 Explore the relationship between Hester Prynne and Pearl. You must consider language, form and structure and refer to the context of the novel in your answer. **(30 marks)**
- 4 What is the significance of silence or the refusal to speak in *The Scarlet Letter*? You must consider language, form and structure and refer to the context of the novel in your answer. **(30 marks)**
- 5 Explore the significance of symbols in *The Scarlet Letter*. You must consider language, form and structure and refer to the context of the play in your answer. **(30 marks)**

5 There are a wide range of symbols present within *The Scarlet Letter*, making symbolism a very important technique for Hawthorne. ¹ The use of visual symbols often associated with nature allows for character development and the introduction of interesting metaphors. An example of this is Pearl who has grown up away from civilised society and is much closer to nature, making her a vibrant character. ² In contrast, the scaffold is a clear symbol of death within the story. ³ The letter from the book's title is another recurring symbol ⁴, described by the narrator as 'a mystic symbol'. By calling it this, the reader can understand that it is not just a symbol of shame as the townspeople want, but also has different meanings.

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ISBN 978-0-435-18258-8



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