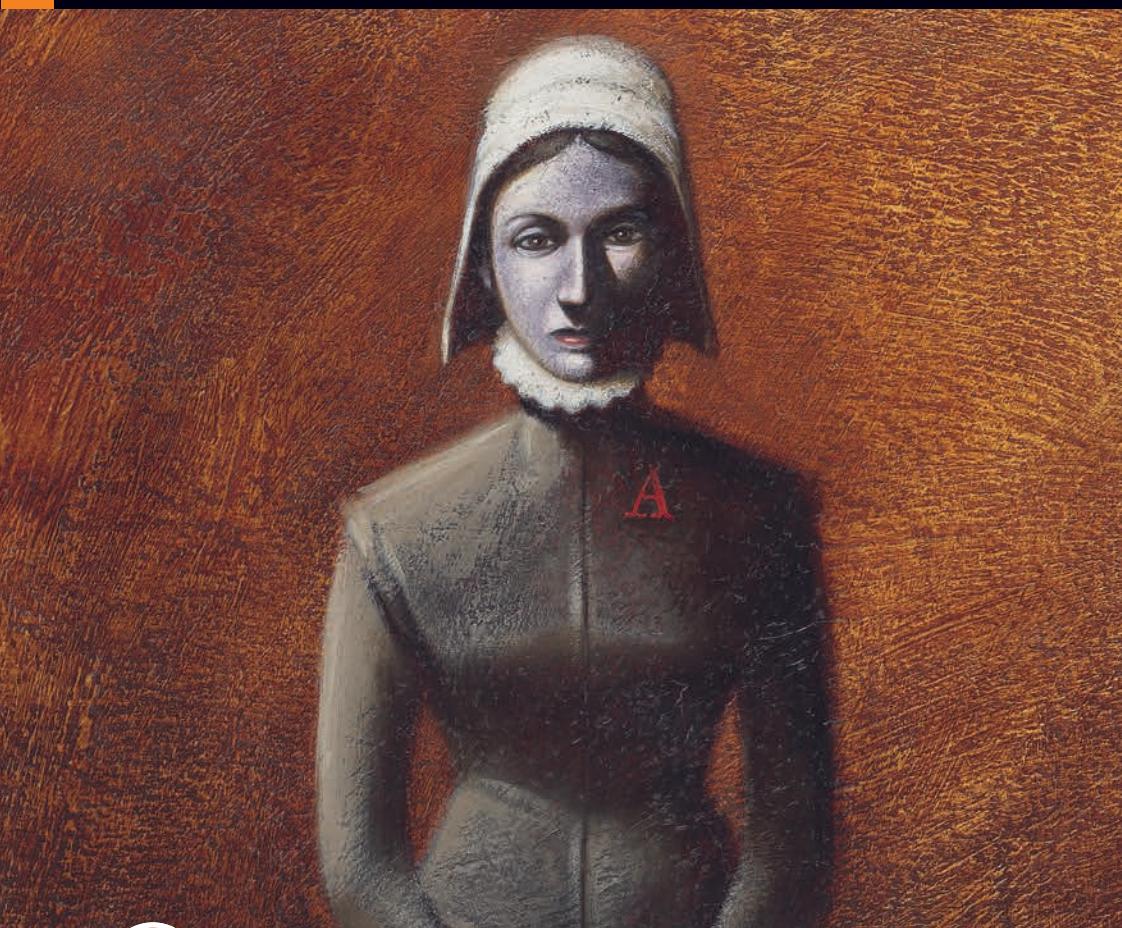


Nathaniel Hawthorne

# The Scarlet Letter

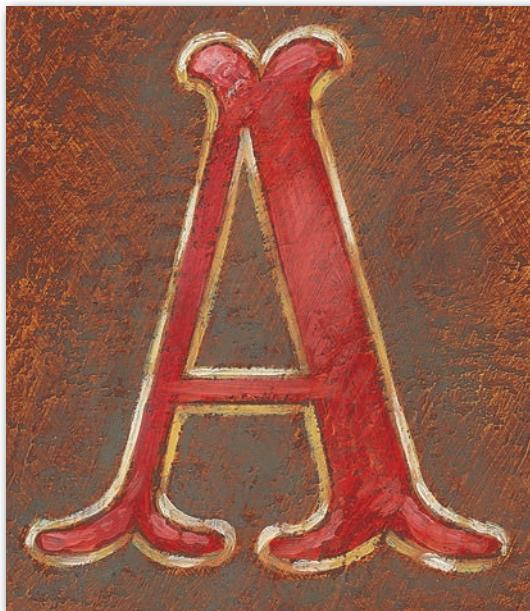


free Audiobook



Nathaniel Hawthorne

# *The Scarlet Letter*



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by **Gina D. B. Clemen**



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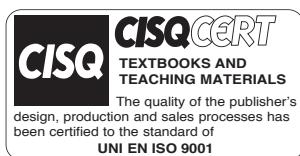
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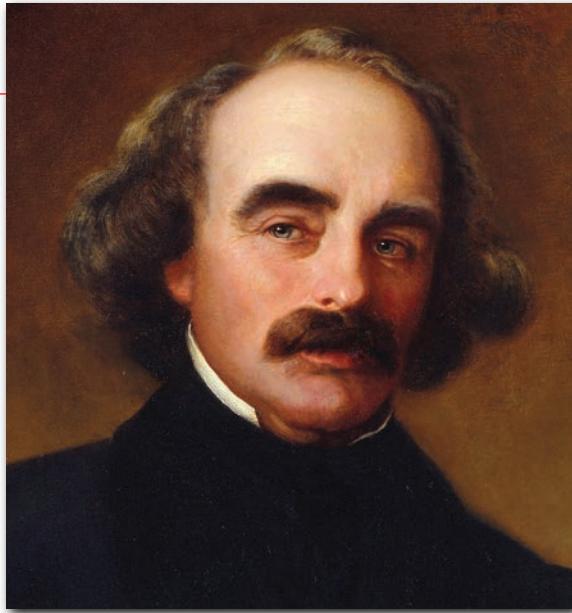


First Certificate in English Examination-style exercises

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These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the extracts linked to the listening activities.



Nathaniel  
Hawthorne (1862)  
by Emanuel  
Gottlieb Leutze.

## A Note on *Nathaniel Hawthorne*

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts, to an established New England family.

His ancestors took part in the Salem witch trials and the Quaker persecution. William Hathorne (Hawthorne added the "w"), who arrived in the New World in 1630, was the judge who sentenced a Quaker woman to be whipped through the streets of Boston. His son, also a judge, presided over the notorious Salem witch trials in 1692. A woman he condemned to death during the witch trials put a curse<sup>1</sup> on the Hawthorne family. There is no evidence that the curse had any effect on his family. However, Nathaniel Hawthorne was aware of this curse, and it came up in his writing.

1. **curse** : malediction; a word or sentence asking God or a spirit to bring evil or harm to someone.

His ancestry explains, in part, his interest in the Puritans, and in the concepts of sin, punishment and evil.

Hawthorne decided to become a writer while at Bowdoin College in Maine. One of his classmates was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who later became a famous American poet.

For over a decade after graduation, he studied the Puritans and their history. In 1828, he published his first anonymous novel, *Fanshawe*, which was not a success. In later life, he never mentioned this work. In 1837, he published an excellent collection of short stories, *Twice-Told Tales*.

He married Sophia Peabody in 1842, and they had three children. In 1846, he published another successful collection of short stories, *Mosses from an Old Manse*.



Salem (c. 1771) by Frederic Leizelt.

After leaving his employment at the Salem Customhouse in 1849, he began writing *The Scarlet Letter*, his masterpiece, which was published in 1850.

After *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne published *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852). *The House of the Seven Gables* tells about a family that lives under a curse of a man condemned to death for witchcraft.

Following the election of Franklin Pierce as President of the United States in 1853, Hawthorne was appointed U.S. Consul in Liverpool and Manchester, England. After leaving this post, he traveled through Europe with his family, and lived in Italy for two years. There he wrote his last novel, *The Marble Faun* which was published in 1860 when he and his family returned to the United States.

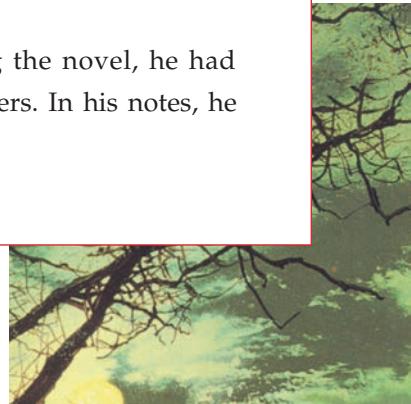
He died away from home, on May 19th, 1864, while on a brief vacation with his friend, Franklin Pierce. He left several unfinished works.

## Hawthorne and *The Scarlet Letter*

In 1976, a family living in Colorado discovered an old notebook among some papers. The notebook had been kept between 1835 and 1841 by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Like any writer's notebook, it was a collection of words, fragments of sentences and ideas. It was the notebook where Hawthorne had jotted down<sup>1</sup> the first thoughts for his future masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*.

In 1838, eleven years before he began writing the novel, he had already created sketches of some of his characters. In his notes, he

1. **jotted down** : written down quickly.





wrote about “spiritual diseases and diseases of the body,” and about “a sin that could cause a sore<sup>1</sup> to appear on the body.” The novel was taking shape in his mind. At a later date, he decided to tell the story of a woman condemned to wear the letter “A” as a sign of her adultery.

Was *The Scarlet Letter* a true story? In “The Custom House”, Hawthorne’s introductory writing to *The Scarlet Letter*, he wrote that while working at the Customhouse in Salem, he found a mysterious package.

Inside the package he found a fine red cloth, which was worn<sup>2</sup> and faded. There were traces of gold embroidery<sup>3</sup> on it. After examining



**Boston (c. 1833)** by William James Bennet.

1. **sore** : painful, infected place on the body.
2. **worn** : damaged or thin because it is old.
3. **embroidery** [imbrɔɪdəri] : patterns, designs sewn onto material.

it carefully, he noticed that it was a capital letter "A". Each leg of the A measured exactly 3 3/4 inches (about 6 cm) in length.

There were also several sheets of faded paper in the mysterious package. They had been written long ago by Surveyor Pue, who knew the tragic story of the scarlet letter and its owner.

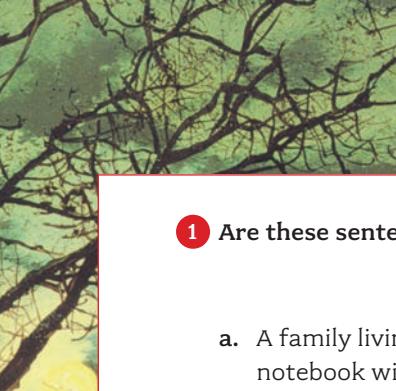
After further investigation, Hawthorne was able to gather more information regarding the life and sufferings of the woman who was condemned to wear the scarlet letter. The story took place in the Puritan settlement of Boston, between 1642 and 1649.

Finally in 1850, *The Scarlet Letter* was published and was immediately recognized as a classic destined to fame. It has constantly remained in print ever since its first publication.

The fact that *The Scarlet Letter* involves universal themes such as love, sex, sin, evil, punishment, rebellion, hypocrisy, revenge and hate makes it a novel that cannot be forgotten by any generation.



**Puritans going to church (1867) by George Henry Boughton.**



1 Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)? Correct the false ones.

T	F
---	---

a. A family living in Colorado discovered an old notebook with the story of *The Scarlet Letter*.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

b. The notebook was a collection of drawings of Hawthorne's trips abroad.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

c. Eleven years before Hawthorne began writing *The Scarlet Letter*, he had already created some of the characters.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

d. In his notes Hawthorne wrote about "spiritual diseases and diseases of the body."

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

e. While working at the Customhouse in Salem, he found a mysterious notebook.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

f. The old, faded red cloth with gold embroidery was a capital letter "A".

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

g. Surveyor Pue was the original author of *The Scarlet Letter*.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

h. The story is about a woman who is condemned to wear the scarlet letter in the Puritan settlement of Salem, between 1624 and 1649.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

i. The novel, which was published in 1850, was immediately recognized as a classic, and has constantly remained in print.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

## Before you read

1 The concepts of love, sex, sin, evil, punishment, rebellion, hypocrisy, revenge and hate are the underlying themes of *The Scarlet Letter*. How much do you know about them?

Choose the correct definition (1-9) and write it below. Then tick the correct box to indicate how often teenagers are involved with that feeling or action.

1. harm, badness, wickedness	6. strong feeling of fondness or attraction
2. harm done to someone in return for harm received	7. imposed suffering for a fault or crime
3. strong feeling of dislike, hostility	8. disobedience to God, or to religion
4. disobedience to authority	9. saying one thing and doing or thinking another, having two faces
5. physical intimacy	

Definition	Never	Sometimes	Often
a. Love: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Sex: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Sin: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Evil: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Punishment: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Rebellion: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Hypocrisy: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Revenge: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Hate: .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 What other novels have you read that involve one or more of the themes in question 1?

.....  
.....



3 Listen to Chapter 1 and choose the best answer, A, B or C.

track 02

FCE

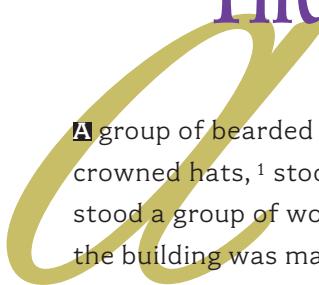
- 1 The founders of the colony set aside a portion of land for a prison and a cemetery because
  - they had orders to do so.
  - they were optimists.
  - they knew there would be crime and death.
- 2 How old was the settlement?
  - about 15 or 20 years old
  - older than any other one in the New World
  - in June it was one year old
- 3 The wooden prison looked very old because
  - the door was black.
  - the oak door was broken.
  - there was rust on the door.
- 4 The prison was seen as
  - the oldest building in town.
  - the black flower of society.
  - an ugly weed.
- 5 The wild rose bush offered its beauty to
  - prisoners and condemned criminals.
  - people who are frail.
  - the readers of the story.

Now read the text and check your answers.



## CHAPTER ONE

# The Prison Door



A group of bearded men, in sad-colored clothes and gray steeple-crowned hats,<sup>1</sup> stood in front of a wooden building. Beside them stood a group of women, some wearing hoods. The heavy door of the building was made of oak,<sup>2</sup> covered with iron spikes.<sup>3</sup>



The founders of a new colony, no matter how optimistic they were, always set aside a portion of land for a cemetery, and another portion for a prison. They probably built the first prison



1. **steeple-crowned hats** :
2. **oak** : type of wood.
3. **spikes** : thin, pointed pieces of metal.

# *The Scarlet Letter*

near Cornhill and the first burial ground on Isaac Johnson's land. It was around Johnson's grave that the old churchyard of King's Chapel grew.

Fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden prison was already weatherbeaten<sup>1</sup> and showed the evident signs of age. The rust on the iron-work of the oak door made it look older than anything else in the New World.

In front of this sinister building was a plot<sup>2</sup> of grass, covered with ugly weeds.<sup>3</sup> Evidently, there was something congenial in the soil outside a prison—the black flower of civilized society—something that encouraged ugly weeds to grow.

But on one side of the entrance, there was a wild rose bush. In the month of June, it was covered with delicate, fragrant roses. They offered their fragrance and beauty to the prisoner who entered the gloomy building, and to the condemned criminal who left it to meet his doom.<sup>4</sup>

Let us pick one of its flowers and give it to the reader.

Hopefully, this sweet flower will serve to soften the dark tones of a tale of human frailty<sup>5</sup> and sorrow.



end

1. **weatherbeaten** : damaged by the weather.

2. **plot** : small, marked piece of ground.

3. **weeds** : unwanted wild plants or grass.

4. **doom** : terrible fate, unavoidable death.

5. **frailty** : weakness.



D.

## Go back to the text

- 1 What kind of atmosphere is created in Chapter 1?
- 2 What words (nouns and adjectives) are used to create this atmosphere? After you have selected them, put them in the correct list. Two are done for you.

Nouns	Adjectives
cemetery	sad-colored

- 3 What colors are predominant in this description? Why?
- 4 Do black flowers exist? Why is the prison described as the “black flower” of society?

## Grammar

**FCE 5** Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given. You must use between two and five words, including the word given.

- 1 The women did not expect to find the men outside the prison.  
**surprised**  
The women ..... the men outside the prison.
- 2 The prisoner was being followed closely.  
**following**  
Someone ..... closely.

3 It is certain that they built the prison twenty years ago.

**must**

The prison ..... twenty years ago.

4 The old oak door will need much repair work.

**have**

The old oak door ..... much repair work.

5 It wasn't easy for the prisoners to stay in that gloomy building.

**difficulty**

The prisoners ..... in that gloomy building.

6 Jonathan regretted going to the New World.

**wished**

Jonathan ..... to the New World.

7 "Don't pick the flowers! It's not allowed," said the Puritan.

**said**

The Puritan ..... the flowers because it was not allowed.

## Themes for thought, discussion and writing

6 Is black considered a color of death, evil or sorrow in all societies?

7 Is white ever considered a color of death? If so, where?

8 Society often attributes colors to certain emotions, events or political tendencies. What do you attribute to these colors?

- a. red : .....
- b. pink : .....
- c. green : .....
- d. yellow : .....
- e. purple : .....
- f. black : .....
- g. white : .....
- h. blue : .....