

## **The Scarlet letter (1850)**

*Ester Prynne* is a young woman condemned by the Puritan community of her town to go around wearing the scarlet letter A, for adulteress. She is in fact the mother of a little girl, Pearl, she secretly had with the young respected minister, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. Mentally tortured by Hester's husband, who has reappeared, Dimmesdale will make public confession of his paternity before dying.

*This is the passage that describes when Hester Prynne appears in front of the crowd with the letter on her breast.*

When the young woman-the mother of this child-stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fastened into her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbours. On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore, and which was of a splendour in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony.

The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam; and a face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was ladylike, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; characterised by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace which is now recognised as its indication. And never had Hester Prynne appeared more ladylike, in the antique interpretation of the term, than as she issued from the prison. Those who had before known her, and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped. It may be true that, to a sensitive observer, there was some thing exquisitely painful in it. Her attire, which indeed, she had wrought for the occasion in prison, and had modelled much after her own fancy, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity. But the point which drew all eyes, and, as it were, transfigured the wearer--so that both men and women who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne were now impressed as if they beheld her for the first time--was that SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself.

### **Comprehension**

#### **1. Answer the following questions**

- 1) What is the first impulse of Hester in front of the crowd?
- 2) What does she decide to do afterwards?
- 3) How does the letter appear to be?
- 4) How does Hester appear on the scaffold?
- 5) How do the people expect her to appear?
- 6) What attracts people most?
- 7) What is the effect?

### **Vocabulary**

**2. Describe Hester's physical aspect completing the following passage with the words listed below:**

dark, dignity, elegant, glossy, ladylike, marked, regular, rich, state, tall

Hester was .....tall, with an ..... figure. She had ..... , abundant and .....hair. Her face had ..... features and complexion, she had .....dark eyes and ..... brow. She was ....., and characterised by a certain.....and .....-

**Language**

**3. Writing**

Read again the second paragraph and write the impression Hester has on the people looking at her .