

Chapter 20 Post Reading Handout

Directions: Reread Chapter 20 of *The Scarlet Letter* with a partner and answer the following questions.

1. Fill in the timeline with Dimmesdale's main actions in this chapter.

- *Dimmesdale leaves the forest, looking behind as he walks away and thinking of Hester and Pearl.*
- Dimmesdale begins to think about his and Hester's plans of departure.
- Dimmesdale was still so full of energy from his conversation with Hester that he began running through the forest.
- On his way home, Dimmesdale speaks to deacons, but he feels an urge to say inappropriate things.
- Dimmesdale spoke to an older female church member and couldn't think of an inspirational scripture to share with her.
- Dimmesdale chooses to ignore the newest member of the church because of his personal guilt.
- Dimmesdale converses with Mistress Hibbins, and their conversation makes him wonder if he has actually sold his soul to the devil.
- Dimmesdale touches his heart at the sight of Chillingworth, informing Chillingworth that he knows his secret identity.
- Dimmesdale tells Chillingworth that his help is no longer required.
- *Dimmesdale throws his election sermon in the fire and begins writing a new one.*

2. Dimmesdale moves a lot in this chapter. In the chart, first right down all the settings Dimmesdale inhabits. Then make notes as to his mental state in each setting.

Setting	Mental State
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• The forest • The town • His house	• He is happy and full of energy. • He begins to feel guilty, worried, and stressed. • He is worried about Chillingworth and obsessively stressed with his sermon.
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How does Hawthorne develop settings in this chapter to convey a central idea? Use the text to support your response.

Hawthorne develops setting to convey the idea of hypocrisy in the Puritan believers by showing freedom in the forest and conformity in the town. Hawthorne uses words like "excitement" and "real" to describe the forest. Hawthorne writes, "...his inner man gave him other evidences of revolution." This shows how Dimmesdale struggles with how he wants to act and how he has to act while in town.

3. Consider the transformation unfolding in Dimmesdale. What events illustrate his internal struggle? Use textual evidence to support your response.

Some events that illustrate his internal struggle are the meetings he has with the townspeople. When he meets the children in the town, he struggles against yelling profanities at them even though he knows that is an inappropriate thing to do.

What is the significance of Mistress Hibbins's conversation with him? Use textual evidence to support your response.

Mistress Hibbins's conversation with Dimmesdale creates guilty and confusion inside of him. He questions, "Have I sold myself..." After this conversation, Dimmesdale begins questioning if he actually has sold his soul to the devil.

4. In *The Scarlet Letter*, how does the Puritan society's definition of "sin" influence/ affect Dimmesdale? Hester? How does this convey a central idea of the text?

The Puritan definition of sin affects Dimmesdale by making him feel guilty and too scared to admit his personal sin. This definition affects Hester by making her feel ashamed and making her a social outcast. This conveys the central idea of the text by showing how the Puritan's views of sin are too strict and hypercritical.

5. **How do the events of chapter 20 demonstrate the interaction of hypocrisy and conformity in *The Scarlet Letter*? What does Hawthorne seem to be saying about this interaction?**

The events of chapter 20 demonstrate this interaction through Dimmesdale's internal struggles while seeing his church members. These interactions show the difference between what Dimmesdale thinks and what he actually does. Hawthorne seems to say that hypocrisy is caused by trying to conform to society or religious beliefs.