

# Symbols and Symbolism Essay - Symbolism in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter

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## Symbolism in the Scarlet Letter

Symbolism plays an important role in the Scarlet Letter. The scarlet "A" is used to represent sin and anguish along with happiness. The "A" has different meanings to people other than what was originally intended. The scaffold is used as a place of repentance and judgment by God. Pearl is another major symbol used as a reminder of the scarlet letter.

The scarlet "A" is the most important symbol in the Scarlet Letter. The letter "A" does not have a "universally symbolic relationship" with [adultery](#). The letter "A" was the first letter of adultery and the Puritans put the negative connotation on the letter. The community interprets the cosmic "A" as Angel, signifying the passing of Governor Winthrop. The letter on Hester's bosom represented the sin of adultery, yet as that it meant different things to Hester, Dimsdale, Pearl, Chillingworth and the Puritan community. To Hester it represented "alienation and unjust humiliation" .

"Hester looked, by way of humoring the child; and she saw that, owing to the peculiar

effect of this convex mirror, the scarlet letter was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed absolutely hidden behind it."

This shows how the community saw a sinner and the "A", not Hester. The women sneered and jested at her in public and wanted to take Pearl from her. The prison also symbolizes isolation and alienation. Hester lives in a prison of alienation and Dimsdale in his guilt. Yet later as Hester shows signs of humbleness by embroidering [items](#) for others and still wearing dim colored clothing, the community says her "A" is for able. To Dimsdale, the letter represents his guilt and [agony](#). It constantly torments him throughout the book. It reminds him of his undeclared sin and also how Hester suffers for him. For Chillingworth, the letter is his need for revenge and he wants what is on the minister's chest unveiled to the community. He did not want this to happen as fast as it happened for the letter was Chillingworth's life, and he died shortly afterward Dimsdale's death because he had nothing to do with his life.

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