

Symbols and Symbolism - The Letter A in The Scarlet Letter

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Symbolism of the Scarlet Letter

Authors sometimes use symbols in their novels to represent different objects, people or ideas. One example is the S on Superman's uniform, which symbolizes him being super. In "The Scarlet Letter" Nathaniel Hawthorne creates the symbolism of the letter "A" to have different meanings. As the novel unfolds, the meanings of the letter "A" on Hester Prynne's bosom changes, from [adultery](#) to able to angel. In the beginning of the novel, Hawthorne describes the letter "A"

that lies on Hester's bosom as a symbol of adultery. Hester is made to [wear](#) the letter "A" once the town's people see, that she committed adultery by [bearing](#) a child by some other soul than her husband Roger Chillingworth. Since she has worn this letter, she now has a label on her that she is sinful. She is brought out in public to show everyone what is embroidered on her chest. The narrator shares, "When the young women- the mother of this child-stood fully revealed before the crowd...On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread..."(50-1). Many people there to see her when she reveals the "A" on her chest. Most of the town people are astonished and startled on her beauty still shone. Even though the big red letter on her chest stood for adultery.

As the novel progressed the meaning as the "A" made a change for the better in Hester's life. In chapters before of the novel the letter "A" on Hester's bosom had negative meaning, but this time Hawthorne turns the meaning around in the story to mean able. Now that she has given many hours of time and service to the sick, poor and troubled she began to gain respect from some of the town's people who once looked down on her. This time the author shares, "Such helpfulness was found in her-so much power to do and power to sympathize-that many people refused to interpret the scarlet "A" by it's original signification. They said that it meant "Able"...(158). Hester still held up her head and did not appear to be down. She was trying to become herself again slowly. Once again the letter on

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