

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

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Use of Symbols in The Scarlet Letter

In World Book Dictionary, a symbol is defined as something that stands for or represents something else, especially an idea, quality, or condition. Symbols can be objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent ideas or concepts. In the novel *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, there are many symbols that are throughout the novel. While symbols can be created, such created symbols are subjective and must be given meaning within their context and because the context is different among individuals and societies and can vary over time. Some symbols that are used in the novel *The Scarlet Letter* is the scarlet letter, the [meteor](#), Pearl, the rosebush next to the prison door, and the scaffold.

The scarlet letter is a symbol that is a symbol of shame, Instead it becomes a power of identity to Hester. As time passes the letter's meaning on Hester's [chest](#) shifts also. "..that many people refused to interpret the scarlet "A" by its original signification. They said that it meant "Able"; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength" (145). From the

beginnings the scarlet letter intended to mark Hester as an adulterer and eventually it comes to stand for able. It marks her as a person of importance. As Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl in Chapter XII, a red "A" appears in the night sky. "..looking upward to the zenith, beheld there the appearance of an immense letter -the letter "A"-marked out in lines of dull red light" (140). To Dimmesdale, the meteor implies that he should [wear](#) the mark of shame just as Hester Prynne. The meteor is interpreted differently from the rest of the community. The c...

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... of the meeting house. The minister went up the steps" (132). The scaffold is a place of public confession for Reverend Dimmesdale. Whoever mounts the scaffold draws attention of the public.

In the novel *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, there were several symbols used in the novel. The scarlet letter was meant to be a symbol of shame but it became a power of identity for Hester. The meteor, for Dimmesdale meant he should be wearing the scarlet letter just like Hester. To the town, the meteor meant "angel" which meant that the Governor entered the gates of heaven. Pearl was a symbol that was a living version of her mother's sin. The rosebush by the prison door represents the ability of nature to endure and outlasts a man's activities. The scaffold is a place of public confession and alludes back to the sin of adultery.

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