

Levels of Understanding

Comprehension

These are basic questions to ascertain fundamental understanding of a text: plot, facts, character identification

1. What does the narrator claim are the first two structures built in a new colony?
2. What are the women discussing before Hester leaves the prison?
3. What is notable about the way Hester has stitched the scarlet letter?
4. Describe Hester's manner as she endures her punishment on the scaffold?
5. What catches Hester's attention and causes her to squeeze her infant?
6. What does the young minister ask Hester to do and how does she respond?
7. How does Chillingworth plan to seek revenge?

Reader's response

Asks reader to respond to the text by relating it to personal experience or by presenting an opinion on a character or event.

1. What do you think the wild rose bush symbolizes?
2. Do you think standing on the scaffold is a fitting punishment for Hester? Why or why not?
3. Do you agree that Hester's adultery is as much Chillingworth's fault as it is hers? Why or why not?

Analysis

These questions require you to study how various techniques and literary devices (diction, symbolism, imagery, metaphors, etc.) function in the text. Analysis questions do not ask you to merely identify a literary or rhetorical device.

1. What does the decorative embroidery surrounding the scarlet letter suggest about Hester's character?
2. How are the scarlet letter and the infant likened?
3. After Hester notices the stranger, she "fled for refuge as it were, to the public exposure." Where is the irony in that statement?
4. How does the narrator present the clergymen as unqualified to judge Hester?
5. Compare and contrast the description of Dimmesdale with the other clergymen on the balcony. What do these differences suggest about Dimmesdale's character?

Analysis cont.

6. How is Chillingworth's reply at the end of Chapter 4, "Not thy soul, not not thine," an example of foreshadowing?

Synthesis

These questions bridge the gap between analysis and evaluation questions. They will require you to look at other scenes in the text and draw conclusions about themes, motifs, or a writer's style. Often, a synthesis question will require you to draw on prior knowledge--what has been learned in class or through research--and or information from other sources other than the literary title being studied.

1. What is significant about the narrator's proclamation that the rose bush may have sprung up under the footsteps of Anne Hutchinson? What may this imply about the book's attitude toward the Puritan religion?

Synthesis cont.

2. How is Hester likened to the Virgin Mary? How is she contrasted with the Virgin Mary? What does this indicate about her character?
3. What is Hester referring to when she asks Chillingworth is he is like the Black Man, and why does she ask this?

Evaluation

Evaluation questions ask you to make a qualitative judgment on the text and determine whether a particular aspect of it is effective or ineffective.

1. Is Hester Prynne portrayed as a sympathetic character or as a symbol of sin?
2. What dramatic function does the stranger in the marketplace serve?
3. At this point, is Chillingworth presented more as a sympathetic character or as a villain.