AP US History Book Report

*The Scarlet Letter* Plot Overview

*The Scarlet Letter* is begun by a nameless narrator who was the surveyor of a house in Salem, Massachusetts. While surveying the house, he stumbles upon a cloth with the letter “A” stitched onto a cloth in the color of gold. As well, he finds a manuscript that has detailed events that occurred about 200 years before his time. The narrator decides to write a fictional account of the manuscript; this end product is *The Scarlet Letter*.

The actual story opens up with Hester Prynne being led from the town prison with her infant daughter with the “A” on her chest. A nearby villager says that she is being punished for adultery. The story goes that her husband sent her from England while he was finishing business; and while he was traveling for Salem, he was lost at sea. Hester is being led to the nearby scaffold and the town-fathers will begin asking her who the father of the child is. She refuses to tell who the father is.

Hester’s missing husband, who calls himself Roger Chillingworth, is actually in the crowd watching the public accusation. He now seeks revenge. That night Chillingworth visits Hester in a holding place and makes her swear now to tell anyone of his true identity. Out of fear of something occurring to her daughter, she agrees to the demand. Several years pass and now Hester is supporting herself and Pearl, her daughter. Dimmesdale, a community official and Puritan leader, begins showing psychological distress. Chillingworth, being the new towns ‘Doctor’ suspects that Dimmesdale could be the father of Pearl and attaches himself to him. He eventually moves in with Dimmesdale. Chillingworth thinks that the minister’s torment and Hester’s sin have a connection. Chillingworth discovers a mark on the minister’s chest and is convinced that his suspicions are right. Chillingworth now slowly torments him psychology to bring more torment to his soul.

Hester trying to intervene with what Chillingworth is doing, meets Dimmesdale in the forest to reveal who Chillingworth really is, her husband. The former lovers now decide to flee to Europe and like together. The day before they were going to leave, Dimmesdale gives his most “eloquent sermon”. Meanwhile, Hester soon discovers that Chillingworth has discovered their plan and will be traveling with them. After the sermon Hester, Dimmesdale and Pearl all stand on the scaffold. Dimmesdale now pronounces his sin publicly. He falls dead after this.

Chillingworth dies in frustrated, Pearl marries an aristocrat, and Hester lives in Boston until she dies. She is buried next to Dimmesdale. Both of their tombs bear a scarlet letter “A”