

THE SCARLET LETTER: MOVIE VERSION

Study Guide compares the book *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne to the movie *The Scarlet Letter* (1995) starring Demi Moore, Gary Oldman, and Robert Duvall. Screenplay by Douglas Day Stewart. Directed by Roland Joffe.



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THE SCARLET LETTER: MOVIE VERSION

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THE SCARLET LETTER: MOVIE VERSION

THE MOVIE VERSION OF *THE SCARLET LETTER* IS NOT LIKE THE BOOK by Nathaniel Hawthorne

RECOMMENDED MOVIE: *The Scarlet Letter* (1995) starring Demi Moore, Gary Oldman, and Robert Duvall. Screenplay by Douglas Day Stewart. Directed by Roland Joffe. The Demi Moore/Gary Oldman movie is the most accessible version of the book via DVD or streaming. The basic story doesn't start for 50 minutes into the film. Hang on! There are some wild plot inventions that aren't in the book, but the main characters and plot are fairly accurate.

HOW ACCURATE IS THE MOVIE VERSION OF THE BOOK?

Plot: ★☆☆☆☆ Characters: ★★☆☆☆ Setting: ★★☆☆☆

Structure: ★☆☆☆☆ Symbols: ★★☆☆☆ Theme: ★★☆☆☆

WHAT'S IN THE BOOK THAT'S NOT IN THE MOVIE?

The rose bush, the glove, Dimmesdale's hand over his heart, Hester's work as a seamstress and caretaker of the sick, the meteor shower and A in the sky, Dimmesdale's whipping himself, Hester and Dimmesdale's plan to sail to England, Dimmesdale's death . . .

WHAT'S IN THE MOVIE THAT'S NOT IN THE BOOK?

The Indian funeral ceremony, the red bird, Hester's bathtub, Dimmesdale's naked swim, Mituba, Major Dunsmuir, Johnny Sassamon, Reverend Stonehall and his wife and daughters, Dimmesdale's translation of the Bible, meetings of women at Mistress Hibbins' home, the arrest of Mistress Hibbins, Puritan attack on Indians, Indian rescue of prisoners, Chillingworth's murder of Major Dunsmuir, Chillingworth's tombstone, Pearl's red spot that indicates she's a witch, the drummer, Dimmesdale's confession that he is Pearl's father . . .

WHAT'S THE SAME?

The scarlet letter that Hester wears, Chillingworth's presence while Hester is on the scaffold, Chillingworth's capture and stay with Indians, Hester's condemnation by the community, Dimmesdale's guilt and self injury, Pearl's red dress, Hester, Dimmesdale, and Pearl on the scaffold and in the woods by the brook . . .

THE SCARLET LETTER: MOVIE VERSION

THE MOVIE: SUMMARY

The following is a scene-by-scene comparison of the movie to the corresponding chapters in the book.

THE MOVIE: THE CUSTOM HOUSE- INTRODUCTORY

OMISSION: *The Custom House prologue is not in the movie.*

NOTE: THE FIRST PART (50 MINUTES) OF THE MOVIE INCLUDES SOME DETAILS THAT ARE ACCURATE, BUT MOST OF THE CONTENT IS NOT IN THE BOOK.

THE MOVIE: OPENING SCENES

An Indian is running through the forest with a burning torch. (**ERROR:** *Not in the book. In the book the opening scene is a description of the prison where Hester has been incarcerated for adultery*) The torch bearer arrives at the funeral ceremony for Chief Massasoit. Governor Bellingham, Reverend Dimmesdale, and Johnny Sassamon are present at the funeral. Rev. Dimmesdale expresses his condolences to the chief's son Metacomet. Metacomet acknowledges that Dimmesdale is the only white man who has treated the Indians kindly. Metacomet has contempt for Governor Bellingham, telling him, "My father should have let you die." Johnny Sassamon, an Indian who lives with the Puritans, acts as translator. (**ERROR:** *The funeral, the Indian characters, the Indian translator Johnny Sassamon, and the dialogue are not in the book*)

The scene changes to a ship arriving at the Puritan harbor. The voice of Pearl, the narrator, is heard in the background. (**ERROR:** *In the book, the author is the narrator of The Custom House prologue. The novel is written in third person narration*) Pearl says that her mother's name is Hester Prynne and this is her story. She arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1666. (**ERROR:** *In the book Hester arrives in 1656*)