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A Miserable Beginning

Nathaniel Hawthorne uses descriptive, emotionally charged words and phrases in the initial chapters of *The Scarlet Letter* to establish a gloomy, depressing mood that evokes sympathy from the reader. The woeful mood stays consistent throughout the first few chapters and slowly increases the readers' sympathy for Hester. The first chapter establishes the mood of the dismal prison with descriptive words such as, "sad-coloured," "gloomy," and "ugly," (Hawthorne 41). Throughout the next chapter, this depressing mood becomes more intense when Hawthorne introduces Hester. One statement referring to Hester's punishment says, "the cruel weight and hardness of the reality," (Hawthorne 49). This phrase highlights the harshness of the Puritan community. The saddening mood becomes more evident as Hawthorne describes Hester's own thoughts and feelings. She continually rejects the thought of ever again experiencing happiness. In one chapter Hester directly states, "no more smile with the household joy," (Hawthorne 69). Hester insists that she will never again find happiness. She also decides that she and her child, Pearl, will remain isolated forever from society except for occasional trips to town. She claims, "the child comprehended her loneliness; the destiny that had drawn an inviolable circle round about her," (Hawthorne 76). Hester's acceptance of her eternal lack of joy causes the reader to pity her and to question if she deserves such an endless mark of shame.