

Example Scarlet Letter Paragraph with In Text Citation

Prompt: How was the scaffold used as symbol throughout the novel. Write a paragraph with a quote to support your view.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, author of *The Scarlet Letter*, uses the scaffold to symbolize the inward shame and guilt the main characters, Hester and Dimmesdale, feel as an outward expression of their repentance. The scaffold is in the middle of town near the marketplace and next to the prison, where most of the story takes place. The Puritans used it to publicly shame and punish people who were caught in sin. The colors of the scaffold were black and gray, symbolizing darkness and sin. The reader's first introduction to the scaffold takes place when Hester is punished for committing adultery and sentenced to wear a scarlet letter 'A' that has been sewn onto her bosom. This scene takes place during the daylight, as opposed to the next scaffold scene, where Hester; her daughter, Pearl; and Pearl's father, Arthur Dimmesdale choose to stand on the scaffold as a penance for their sin in the darkness with no public witnesses. While he stood on the scaffold, Dimmesdale "was overcome with a great horror of mind, as if the universe were gazing at a scarlet token on his naked breast, right over his heart" (Hawthorne 127). This represented the inner pain Dimmesdale felt for committing a sin he was too afraid to expose. Hawthorne's final use of the scaffold as an outward symbol for the inner turmoil of keeping sin a secret was when Hester carried Dimmesdale up to the scaffold as he was dying. This allowed Dimmesdale to finally be free of the burden of his sin by publicly confessing the secret that was quite literally killing him. This scene brings the use of the scaffold as a symbol for the shame and guilt of sin full circle.