“THE MINISTER’S BLACK VEIL”  
BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

**QUESTION GUIDE**

(1) p. 268 Why are people shocked when they see Mr. Hooper? He is wearing a black veil over his face.

(2) p. 268 Why is wearing the black veil out of character for Mr. Hooper? He is neat, thoughtful, and quiet. He is not the type of person who would call attention to himself.

(3) p. 268 Why do the townspeople react so negatively to his wearing the veil? It is so unusual and seems sinister. It causes them to believe that he is hiding something or feels guilty for something.

(4) p. 268 How does Mr. Hooper’s veil affect the way he views the world around him? What does this suggest about the veil as a symbol? He views the world as dark and shadowy.

(5) p. 268 Why would Mr. Hooper find his congregation a fearful sight? He is shy and fears their reactions; their uneasy response to his veil seems a sign of guilt to him.

(6) p. 269 What is the subject of Mr. Hooper’s sermon on the first day he wears the black veil? What connection does the congregation make between the sermon and the veil? The subject of the sermon is secret sin. The congregation suspects that Mr. Hooper has a secret sin.

(7) p. 269 What meaning does the comment “the black veil ... makes him ghostlike from head to foot” give to the symbolism of the veil, as well as the lady’s comment that she “would not be alone with him for the world,” and she wonders if “he is not afraid to be alone with himself”? These comments further strengthen the association of the veil with the spiritual identity of its wearer, emphasizing the weirdness of the effect of the veil and raising the alarming possibility that Mr. Hooper, when alone, is forced to face some sort of ghostly double.

(8) p. 271 What is Earth’s “Black Veil”? What effect does this reference have on the symbolism of the veil? Earth’s “Black Veil” is night. This reference heightens its associations with darkness, evil, nightmares, ghosts, and all the elements traditionally associated with nighttime.

(9) p. 271 What were the negative effects that Mr. Hooper experienced as a result of wearing the veil? The veil frightened children and timid people. It prompted bolder people to confront him. It surrounds him with sinister rumors.

(10) p. 271 How might the minister’s lack of trust in himself have led him to conceal his face? His lack of confidence might have made him wish to hide himself from the world around him.
Why will no one ask Mr. Hooper a direct question about his veil? The parishioners are unwilling to confront Mr. Hooper about it because they seem afraid to hear his response. Even the church delegates couldn’t bring themselves to question him about it.

When asked by Elizabeth why he wears the veil, Mr. Hooper replies that “there is an hour to come when all of us shall cast aside our veils.” How does this reply indicate another view of the veil’s meaning? His reply, which associates the veil with the separation of body and soul at death, seems to point to the veil as a symbol of mortal life.

Hawthorne closely links the minister’s black veil with his “sad smile.” How does this affect the meaning of the symbol? The minister’s “sad smile” seems to be a profound reflection of his personality. Its association with the veil emphasizes the symbolism of the veil as an element that obscures the deepest self.

Why do you think Elizabeth decides to break off her engagement with Mr. Hooper? She is repelled by his decision to wear the veil. She has made an important request of him, which he has refused. She has begun to share the fear (an emotion she despises) that the veil inspires in others.

One positive effect of Mr. Hooper’s veil was that it made him a very efficient clergyman, and its gloom “enabled him to sympathize with all dark affections.” What does the writer mean by “dark affections”? Why has Mr. Hooper come to understand or share these emotions? The “dark affections” are negative feelings such as guilt, remorse, and fear. Wearing the black veil has enabled Mr. Hooper to understand these feelings.

There are several instances of the narrator describing the movement of the veil caused by Mr. Hooper’s breath. What quality does this give to the symbol? Referring to the movement of the veil caused by the minister’s breathing makes the cloth seem like a living thing.

Describe the details of Mr. Hooper's death and burial. Deacons, distinguished church members, Rev. Clark and Elizabeth are all present at Mr. Hooper’s death, and he still wears the veil. Although Rev. Clark tries to get Mr. Hooper to remove the veil, Hooper refuses even to his last breath. At his death, he suggests the meaning of the veil when he says, “I look around me, and lo! on every visage a Black Veil!” Still, veiled, Mr. Hooper is buried.
Literary Elements

There are two basic types of symbols – traditional and original. Traditional symbols usually have a single meaning. For example, a heart is a traditional symbol that represents love. In contrast, writers often create original symbols that have no familiar meanings to readers. This allows writers more freedom to develop what symbols represent.

(1-) What kind of symbol – traditional or original – does Nathaniel Hawthorne use in “The Minister's Black Veil”? Explain. The author creates an original symbol because it represents more than one thing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTER</th>
<th>REACTION/OPINION OF VEIL (EVIDENCE IN STORY)</th>
<th>SYMBOLISM OF VEIL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Hooper</td>
<td><em>(p. 268)</em> Mr. Hooper views the world as dark and shadowy because he sees it through the veil. <em>(p. 268)</em> Mr. Hooper finds his congregation a fearful sight, and their uneasy response to his veil seems a sign of guilt to him. <em>(p. 272)</em> The minister's black veil is linked with his “sad smile,” which emphasizes the symbolism of the veil as an element that hides the deepest self. <em>(p.274)</em> Hooper refuses to remove the veil, even to his last breath. At his death, he suggests the meaning of the veil when he says, “I look around me, and lo! on every visage a Black Veil!”</td>
<td>guilt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td><em>(p. 272)</em> She breaks off her engagement with Mr. Hooper because he refuses to take off the veil. She begins to share the fear the veil just like the townspeople.</td>
<td>the unknowable secret of her fiancee</td>
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<tr>
<td>townspeople</td>
<td><em>(p. 268)</em> The townspeople react negatively to his wearing the veil because it is so unusual and seems sinister. It causes them to believe that he is hiding something or feels guilty for something. <em>(p. 269)</em> The subject of the sermon the day he wears the veil for the first time is secret sin, so the congregation suspects that Mr. Hooper has a secret sin. <em>(p. 271)</em> The veil frightened children and timid people. It prompted bolder people to confront him. It surrounds him with sinister rumors.</td>
<td>guilt, sin, madness, the terrifying unknown</td>
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(2-) Why do you think Hawthorne chose not to explain why Mr. Hooper wears the veil? How does this choice contribute to the power of the veil as a symbol? By providing no final explanation of what caused Mr. Hooper's decision, Hawthorne makes the veil a more mysterious symbol.
IDENTIFY THE ELEMENTS OF THIS SHORT STORY

(1) Setting: The story is set in a small town in Puritan New England in the early 1700s.
(2) Protagonist: Rev. Hooper
(3) Antagonist: the townspeople
(4) Point of View: third person limited
(5) Central Conflict: Rev. Hooper vs. the townspeople (external – man vs. society)
(6) Theme: Human beings fail to share or understand the dark secrets of the human soul; every human has an evil side that is kept hidden from the world; evil is a part of human nature; intolerance and rigid piousness isolate humans from one another.
(7) Plot
• Exposition: Rev. Hooper begins wearing a black veil over his face, and everyone reacts negatively.
• Rising Action: Rev. Hooper becomes an outcast because of his black veil; however, it makes him a very effective minister.
• Climax: Rev. Hooper refuses to remove the veil, even on his deathbed. He says, “I look around me, and lo! on every visage a Black Veil!”
• Falling Action: The people in the room step back, frightened, and Rev. Hooper falls back on his pillow and dies with a faint smile on his lips.
• Resolution: Still, veiled, Mr. Hooper is buried.

OTHER IMPORTANT LITERARY ELEMENTS

(1) How is this story an example of a parable? The lesson that the story teaches is complex. The minister’s statement, “lo! on every visage a Black Veil!” emphasizes the theme of disguised evil. Every human has an evil side that is kept hidden from the world. The parable teaches not only that evil is part of human nature, but also that intolerance and rigid piousness isolate humans from one another. Hooper's understanding of human nature, which should bind him to other humans, keeps him distant. Ironically, the story teaches that overemphasis on sin can both give people power over others and at the same time lead to their tragic isolation.

CONNECTION TO ROMANTICISM

(1) How does “The Minister’s Black Veil” contain elements of the strange/sinister? The black veil provides a strange and sinister feel to the story, mostly because Rev. Hooper refuses to reveal its meaning.
(1) How does “The Minister’s Black Veil” analyze the role of guilt in people’s lives? The meaning of the veil to various characters in the story has to do with the guilt of self and/or others.