

# The Minister's Black Veil

## Literary Focus: Symbol

A **symbol** is something that has meaning in itself but also stands for something more than itself. You've seen the dove used as a symbol of peace. Uncle Sam symbolizes the United States, and the four-leaf clover is a symbol of luck. What other symbols can you think of?

## Reading Skill: Making Inferences

When you make an **inference** about a character or event, you are making an educated guess. This guess is based on clues in the text and on your own knowledge and experience. You make inferences in everyday life too. For example, your neighbor gets a new puppy. How would you infer what your neighbor is feeling?

### My Experience

I would love to have a puppy.

### Clue I Observe

I see my neighbor playing with the puppy and laughing.

### Inference

My neighbor is very happy.

## Into the Short Story

This story is set in a New England town during Puritan times. It is about a young minister who shocks his congregation by wearing a black veil over his face when he preaches the Sunday sermon. The minister won't say why he is wearing the veil, and he won't take it off. The veil affects characters in the story in different ways. The story looks at how the veil affects the minister's congregation, his social standing, his relationship with his fiancée, and his entire life.



BASED ON THE SHORT STORY BY

**Nathaniel  
Hawthorne**

# The Minister's Black Veil

**A Parable**



## Here's HOW

### SYMBOL

My teacher said that the black veil is the central symbol of this story. I have to figure out why the minister is wearing it.

## Here's HOW

### MAKING INFERENCES

In lines 15–20, everybody is staring at the minister. I would be too. They're trying to figure out why he's wearing the veil. He's hiding something, but I don't know what. Maybe there is something wrong with his face. But if that were all, I'd expect him to explain.

## Your TURN

### MAKING INFERENCES

In lines 27–29, the audience reacts to the minister's words and appearance. Do you think the minister planned to have this effect? Write your answer on the line below. Then, underline the sentence in lines 24–29 that supports your answer.

**O**n a bright Sunday morning the good people of Milford were on their way to church. They paused outside and waited for their minister to appear. When they saw him walking slowly along the road, they were startled to see that he wore a black veil over his face.

5 On a nearer view the veil seemed to be two folds of crape,<sup>1</sup> which entirely covered his features except for the mouth and chin. He must have been able to see through it, however, because he walked with a steady pace and nodded to some of the people.

10 “I can’t really feel our good Mr. Hooper’s face is behind that piece of cloth,” said one man.

“I don’t like it,” muttered an old woman. “He has changed himself into something awful by hiding his face.”

“Our parson has gone mad!” cried Goodman<sup>2</sup> Gray, following the minister into the meetinghouse.

15 There was a general bustle when the minister entered, and everyone stared at him. He approached the pulpit and stood face to face with his congregation, except for the black veil. The veil shook with his breath as he gave out the psalm, read the Scriptures, and looked up to God in prayer. Was the minister trying to hide his face  
20 from God as he prayed?

A few people were so upset they had to leave. Perhaps the faces of the congregation were as fearful to the minister as his black veil was to them.

Mr. Hooper was a good preacher, though his method was mildly  
25 persuasive rather than thunderous. He spoke softly now of the secret sins that lie in the hearts of all people, those we hide from our nearest and dearest and even try to hide from ourselves. Every listener, even the most innocent, felt that the preacher had crept up on them and discovered their hidden sins.

1. **crape** (krap): a kind of black cloth worn as a sign of mourning.

2. **Goodman**: form of polite address similar to *Mister*.

30 After the service the people rushed from the church in confusion. They noticed that they felt better when they lost sight of the black veil. Some whispered together, but others went home in silent thought. Others talked and laughed loudly. Some believed they could figure out the mystery. Others said there was no mystery at all, 35 but only that the minister's eyes were weak and needed to be shaded from the light.

The minister treated everyone with his usual kindness and respect. No one competed for the honor of walking beside him, however, and old Squire<sup>3</sup> Saunders forgot to invite him home for 40 dinner as he usually did. As the minister returned to the parsonage, he noticed all the people staring at him, and a sad smile gleamed faintly from beneath the veil.

"How strange," said a lady, "that a simple black veil should become such a terrible thing on Mr. Hooper's face!"

45 "Something must be wrong with his mind," said her husband, the town doctor. "That simple veil makes him seem like a ghost."

"I would not be alone with him for the world," said the lady. "I wonder he is not afraid to be alone with himself!"

"Men sometimes are so," said her husband.

50 The minister presided that afternoon at the funeral of a young lady. Here his black veil seemed appropriate. As he bent over the dead young woman, it seemed that he held the veil so that even she could not see his face. Mr. Hooper gave a tender prayer, full of heartbreak and sorrow and yet filled with divine hope. The people 55 trembled when he prayed that everyone might be ready, as he trusted this young maiden had been, for the dreadful hour that would snatch away the veil from their faces. After the funeral the mourners proceeded to the graveyard with Mr. Hooper following. It seemed to some, as they looked back, that the minister and the dead girl's spirit 60 were walking hand in hand behind the procession.

3. **Squire:** a gentleman; the main landowner of a village.



## Here's HOW

### VOCABULARY

The word *parsonage* in line 40 looks familiar. I recognize the root word *parson* as meaning a "minister," so I would guess the parsonage is the minister's home. I checked a dictionary, and I was right.

## Your TURN

### VOCABULARY

Use context clues in the surrounding sentence to figure out what *presided* (line 50) means. Write your answer on the lines below.

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## Your TURN

### SYMBOL

In lines 54–57, what veil do you think Mr. Hooper is referring to? Write your answer on the lines below.

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## Your TURN

### VOCABULARY

The word *toast* can mean “browned bread.” It can also mean “to warm,” and it can mean “drink in honor of.” Which of these meanings do you think *toast* has in line 67? Write your answer on the line below.

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## Here's HOW

### MAKING INFERENCES

I wonder why no one asked the minister about his black veil. When I read lines 75–80, though, I think that the village people don't really want to find out. I think they are afraid the veil is hiding something terrible.

## Here's HOW

### VOCABULARY

I don't know what *mortal* means in line 88. The dictionary says *mortal* comes from a Latin word meaning “death.” But “death” or “dead” doesn't work here. As I read further in the dictionary, I think the correct meaning is “living person.” All living persons will eventually die, so they are “mortal.”

That evening, the handsomest couple in Milford village were to be married. The guests at the wedding awaited the minister's arrival with impatience. When Mr. Hooper came, the first thing that their eyes rested on was the same horrible black veil, which had added

- 65 deeper gloom to the funeral and could mean nothing but evil to the wedding. Everyone felt as though a dark cloud had settled over the joyous occasion. As the minister raised a toast to the couple, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. He himself was now horrified at the sight of the black veil. He shuddered—his lips grew  
70 white—and spilled the wine upon the carpet. Then he rushed out into the night where the Earth, too, had on her Black Veil.

The next day, everyone in the village spoke of nothing but the black veil. One playful child put a black hanky over his face, frightening both his playmates and himself.

- 75 Nobody had the courage to ask the minister about the veil, although he had always welcomed people's concerns. Finally, a group was chosen to question him, but once they were in his presence, they were unable to speak. The black veil seemed to hang down over the minister's heart, the symbol of a fearful secret between  
80 him and them.

The only person in the village who had courage enough to ask him about the veil was Elizabeth, the young woman he had promised to marry. “There is nothing so terrible in this veil,” she said, “except that it hides a face I am glad to look upon. Lay it aside, and tell  
85 me why you put it on.”

“There is an hour to come,” he said, “when all of us shall cast aside our veils. Beloved friend, I will wear this piece of cloth till then. I have vowed to wear it always,” he continued. “No mortal eye will see it withdrawn, even you.”

- 90 “What terrible thing has happened to you?” Elizabeth asked. “It is a sign of mourning,” replied Mr. Hooper. “People will whisper that you hide a secret sin,” said Elizabeth.

"If I hide my face for sorrow," he said, "there is reason enough. And if I cover it for secret sin, who might not do the same?"

95 After pleading with him for some time, Elizabeth finally fell silent. The tears rolled down her cheeks. As she looked at him, the terrors of the black veil soon took the place of sorrow. She stood before him, trembling.

"And do you feel it then at last?" he said mournfully.

100 She did not reply but turned and started to leave the room. "Have patience with me," he cried. "It is but a mortal veil—it is not for eternity. Oh! You know not how lonely I am and how frightened to be alone behind my black veil. Do not desert me!"

"Lift the veil just once," said she, "and look me in the face."

105 "Never! It cannot be!" he replied.

"Then, farewell," said Elizabeth, and she left.

From that time no more attempts were made to remove the minister's black veil or to discover the secret it was supposed to hide. But the minister could not walk about with peace of mind. The

110 timid would avoid him, and others would throw themselves purposely in his way. Children ran off when they saw him coming. He gave up his usual walk at sunset to the burial ground, for there were always faces behind the gravestones, peeping at his black veil. It was noticed that he himself hated the sight of the veil and avoided mirrors. This

115 convinced some people that he had committed a terrible crime. The minister seemed to walk in a cloud of sin or sorrow. Love or sympathy could never reach him.

The black veil had one desirable effect. It made him a more effective clergyman. Sinners converted to belief because they felt they

120 had been with him behind the veil, and the dying begged him to come to them. Strangers came from far away to attend his church. He was even asked to preach the election sermon for the governor's administration.<sup>4</sup>

4. "election sermon for the governor's administration": Hawthorne is referring to Governor Jonathan Belcher, who governed Massachusetts from 1730–1741.



## Here's HOW

### VOCABULARY

There's the word *mortal* again, in line 101. It meant "living person" on the previous page. It can't mean that here because Mr. Hooper is talking about a veil. I think here he means a veil "for this lifetime."

## Your TURN

### SYMBOL

The black veil affects Mr. Hooper's life in many ways. In lines 107–117, circle two ways in which he changes his habits after he starts wearing the veil.

## Your TURN

### MAKING INFERENCES

Re-read lines 118–123. Why do you think the veil makes Mr. Hooper a better minister?

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## Here's HOW

### VOCABULARY

Lines 124-125 contain the phrase "lonely and shrouded in suspicions." I think *shrouded* means something like "covered." The dictionary agrees and also says another meaning of *shroud* is a "cloth used to cover a dead person."

## Your TURN

### MAKING INFERENCES

In line 130, Hawthorne calls the human heart the "saddest of all prisons." How could the heart be a prison?

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## Your TURN

### SYMBOL

In lines 142-143, Mr. Hooper claims to see a black veil on every face. What do you think he means? Write your answer on the lines below.

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And thus Mr. Hooper spent a long life, lonely and shrouded in  
125 suspicions. He was kind and loving, though unloved. People ignored  
him when they were healthy and joyous, but they summoned him  
when they were dying.

Finally, Mr. Hooper lay dying. Elizabeth came to take care of him,  
and church members surrounded him. He still wore the black veil that  
130 had kept him in that saddest of all prisons, his own heart.

His mind was confused now and wavered between the past  
and the present. But still he would not let the veil be removed. At  
last, the attending minister announced that death was near. "Are  
you ready," he asked Mr. Hooper, "to lift the veil that shuts in time  
135 from eternity?"

"Never," the veiled man cried. With a mighty effort he sat up  
and spoke. "Why do you tremble at me alone?" he said. "Tremble  
also at each other! Have men avoided me, and women shown no  
pity, and children screamed and fled, only for my black veil? What  
140 has made this piece of cloth so awful? When all are open and  
honest and pure with each other, showing their inmost selves, then  
call me a monster. I look around me and, lo, on every face I see a  
Black Veil!"

And so he died. They laid him, still veiled, in his coffin and bore  
145 him to his grave. Grass has grown for many years on that grave,  
and the burial stone is grown over with moss. The minister's face is  
dust; but awful still is the thought that it rotted beneath the Black  
Veil!

## Symbol

A **symbol** is something that has meaning itself but also stands for something more than itself. In Hawthorne's story you have read about the black veil. It is a symbol that separates its wearer from the world. As the story unfolds, the veil takes on different meanings, including sin and sorrow.

You see many symbols every day. Red traffic lights mean "stop." Two fingers forming a V means "victory." In the left-hand column below are descriptions of common symbols you probably have seen before. Match them with their meanings in the right-hand column. Draw a line from each symbol to its meaning. One symbol has already been done for you.

Symbol	Meaning
1. an American flag	a. surrender
2. scales held up by blindfolded woman	b. freedom; welcome to all
3. Statue of Liberty	c. patriotism
4. a white flag	d. international cooperation; athletic achievement
5. the five Olympic rings	e. fairness; justice

### Theme

Underline at least “Earth . . . shall claim/Thy growth, to be . . . earth again . . . To mix forever with the elements,/To be a brother to the . . . rock/And to the . . . clod.”

### Page 48

#### Vocabulary

*Vales* means “valleys.” The context clue is that the vales stretch between the hills.

### Theme

Some students may find it comforting to be in such great company. Others may find no comfort in the thought, preferring a happier vision of an afterlife.

### Page 49

#### Theme

Possible response: Live your life well, so you will die happily and without fear.

### Page 51

#### Graphic Organizer: Theme Chart

Lines 1–17. Answer provided.

Lines 17–30. When you die, you become one with nature.

Lines 31–57. When you die, you join everyone who ever lived in a great tomb, which is all of nature.

Lines 58–72. Answer provided.

Lines 73–81. Live your life so you will welcome death unafraid.

**Overall theme:** Death is not frightening because it is a natural part of all life.

## From Self-Reliance Page 52

### Page 54

#### Understanding Metaphors

Possible answer: When plucked, iron strings vibrate powerfully. Emerson compares that vibration to how people feel about the idea “Trust yourself.” It is very powerful.

#### Understanding Metaphors

Circle “blindly.” Emerson is comparing people who accept society’s beliefs and customs without thinking about them and deciding for themselves whether or not they are right to people who cannot see.

### Page 56

#### Graphic Organizer: Metaphor

1. Imitation destroys a person’s individuality.
2. People have a powerful positive response to the idea of trusting themselves.
3. Answer provided.
4. Unthinking people are scared into always behaving the same way.

### Page 57

#### Vocabulary Development: Developing Vocabulary

Students’ sentences will vary. Sample sentences:

1. I show self-reliance when I do my chores without being reminded.
2. Juliana shows her individuality in the way she dresses.
3. Getting along with others in school requires some conformity of behavior.
4. Class rules are constraints on individual behavior.
5. Answer provided.

## From Resistance to Civil Government

### Page 58

### Page 60

#### Paradox

Thoreau sees a contradiction in his neighbors’ stated opposition to slavery and the war in Mexico while they support these causes with their tax dollars.

### Page 61

#### Asking Questions

Sample questions: How can just one person change a big country like the United States? How will it change society if I don’t pay my taxes and get in trouble with the IRS?

### Page 62

#### Paradox

Possible answers: Yes, when you are away in nature, you are free from governmental authority. No, the government is in control everywhere, with laws about behavior, land use, and so on.

#### Asking Questions

Sample questions: How do you think our government needs to change to become the government you imagine? Is such an ideal government really possible?

### Page 63

#### Graphic Organizer: Paradox

1. Thoreau felt more free than his townsman because he was standing up for his beliefs.
2. The purpose of a government is to govern.
3. Thoreau paid his debt to society by going to jail.

## The Minister’s Black Veil Page 64

### Page 66

#### Making Inferences

Students could answer “yes” or “no.” If yes, underline “good preacher” (line 24). If no, underline “his method was mildly persuasive” (lines 24–25) and “He spoke softly” (line 25).

### Page 67

#### Vocabulary

*Presided* means “was in the position of authority at an event.”

## Symbol

Possible response: I think Mr. Hooper is referring to death—when God sees and judges all your secret sins.

## Page 68

### Vocabulary

*Toast* means here a “drink in honor of someone or something.”

## Page 69

### Symbol

Circle “gave up his usual walk” and “avoided mirrors.”

### Making Inferences

The veil convinced people that Mr. Hooper understood sin and death and could help them overcome sin and face death.

## Page 70

### Making Inferences

Possible response: The heart can be a prison if a person is alone or feels guilt.

### Symbol

Possible answer: Mr. Hooper means that everyone is hiding their sins and not being open and honest.

## Page 71

### Graphic Organizer: Symbol

1. c
2. e
3. b
4. a
5. Answer provided.

## The Pit and the Pendulum Page 72

## Page 74

### Symbolic Meaning

The dark place deep below the earth may symbolize a grave, death, Hell, or despair.

## Page 75

### Retelling

The narrator is strapped to a wooden rack with only his head and an arm free so he can eat spicy food without anything to drink. Overhead there is a huge pendulum with a sharp blade that is swinging faster and faster and getting closer and closer to slicing the narrator in half.

### Symbolic Meaning

At first, the rats symbolize horror, decay, and death, but after they gnaw through the narrator’s straps, they may symbolize freedom or escape.

## Page 76

### Retelling

After the pendulum went away, the figures on the walls start to glow. The walls get fiery hot. Fearing he will burn up, the narrator rushes to the pit in the center of the room. He shrieks when he sees that the pit is full of rats gnawing bones. He weeps.

## Symbolic Meaning

The arrival of the French army may symbolize freedom or God’s pardoning of the damned.

## Page 77

### Graphic Organizer: Symbolic Meaning

1. Hell, death, a grave, despair
2. Death, punishment
3. Prison, torture
4. Answer provided.
5. Death, hellfires, torture

**Symbolic meaning of the story:** Poe is describing the inhumanity of the Spanish Inquisition and of any government that uses torture.

## The Raven Page 78

## Page 81

### Sound Effects

Circle “whispered” and “murmured.”

## Page 82

### Sound Effects

Circle “ebony,” “bird,” “beguiling” and “sad,” “fancy,” “smiling.”

## Page 83

### Sound Effects

Circle “muttered.”

### Interpreting a Poem

The speaker means that the Raven will leave in the morning, just as his other friends and all his hopes have already left him.

## Page 84

### Sound Effects

Draw arrows connecting “fowl” with “fiery” and “burned” with “bosom’s.”

### Vocabulary

*Methought* sound like the words *me* and *thought*. *Methought* means “I thought.”

## Page 85

### Interpreting a Poem

The speaker gets angry because the Raven said he will not be reunited in heaven with his beloved Lenore.

### Vocabulary

*Quoth* reminds me of the word *quote*. *Quoth* means “quoted, or said.”

## Page 86

### Interpreting a Poem

The raven never leaves and the speaker’s spirits will never be lifted. This may symbolize the speaker’s despair at the death of the woman he loves.