

The Minister's Black Veil

Literary Analysis

A **parable** is a simple story that teaches a moral lesson. However, Hawthorne's parable teaches a moral lesson that is full of **ambiguity**, or uncertain meaning. Much of the ambiguity comes from the story's use of **symbols** that may have different interpretations. A symbol is something that has meaning as itself but also stands for something greater. The main symbol in Hawthorne's story is an unusual piece of clothing that the main character will not remove. The meaning of this symbol is open to interpretation.

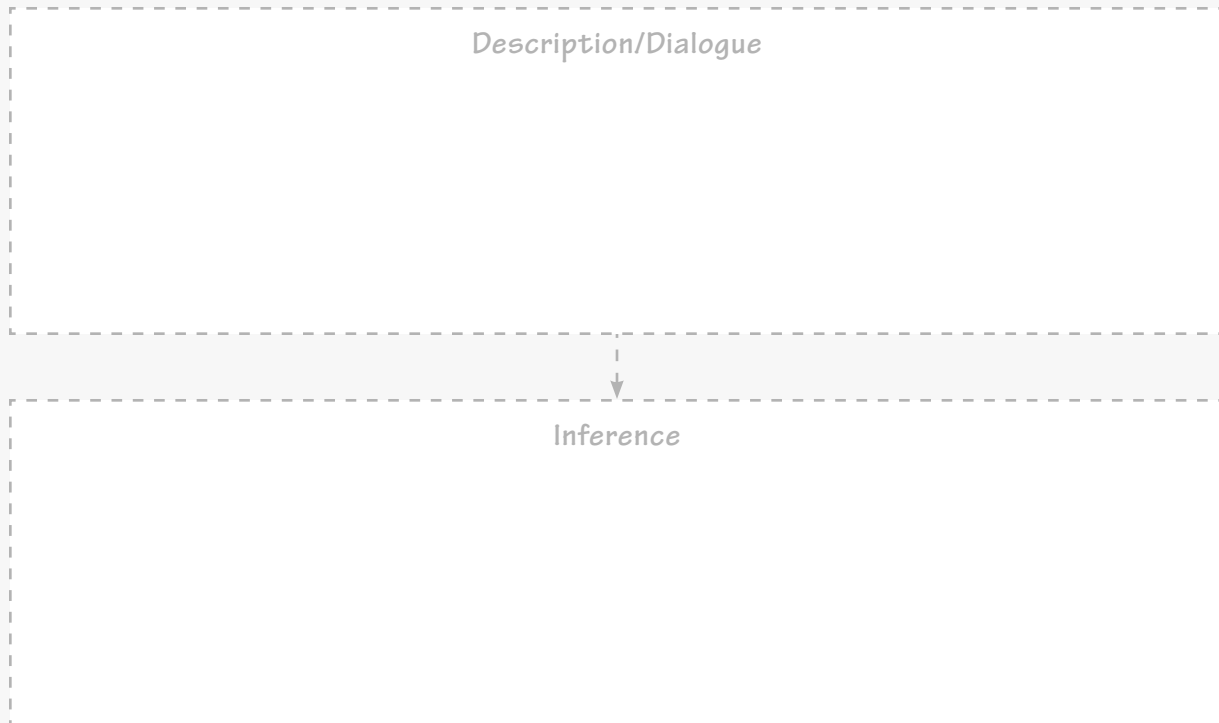
Reading Strategy

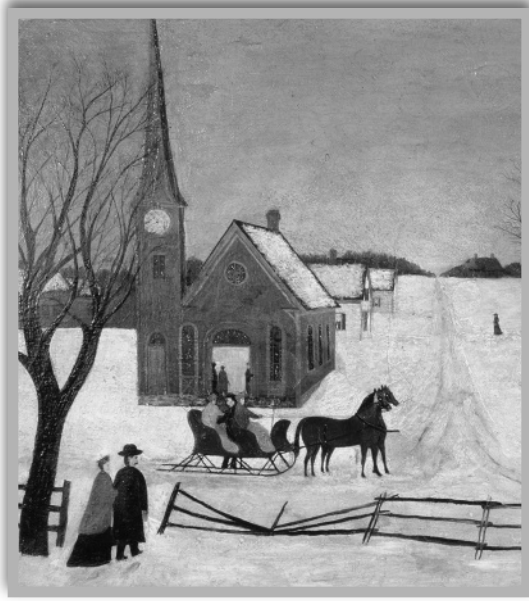
Often, the message of a story is presented indirectly. To understand the message, you must **draw inferences**. Drawing inferences means you must read details carefully in order to figure out what they mean.

Many kinds of information can help you draw inferences:

- descriptions
- your own experiences
- dialogue
- symbols

Use this chart to list inferences that you draw from the story.





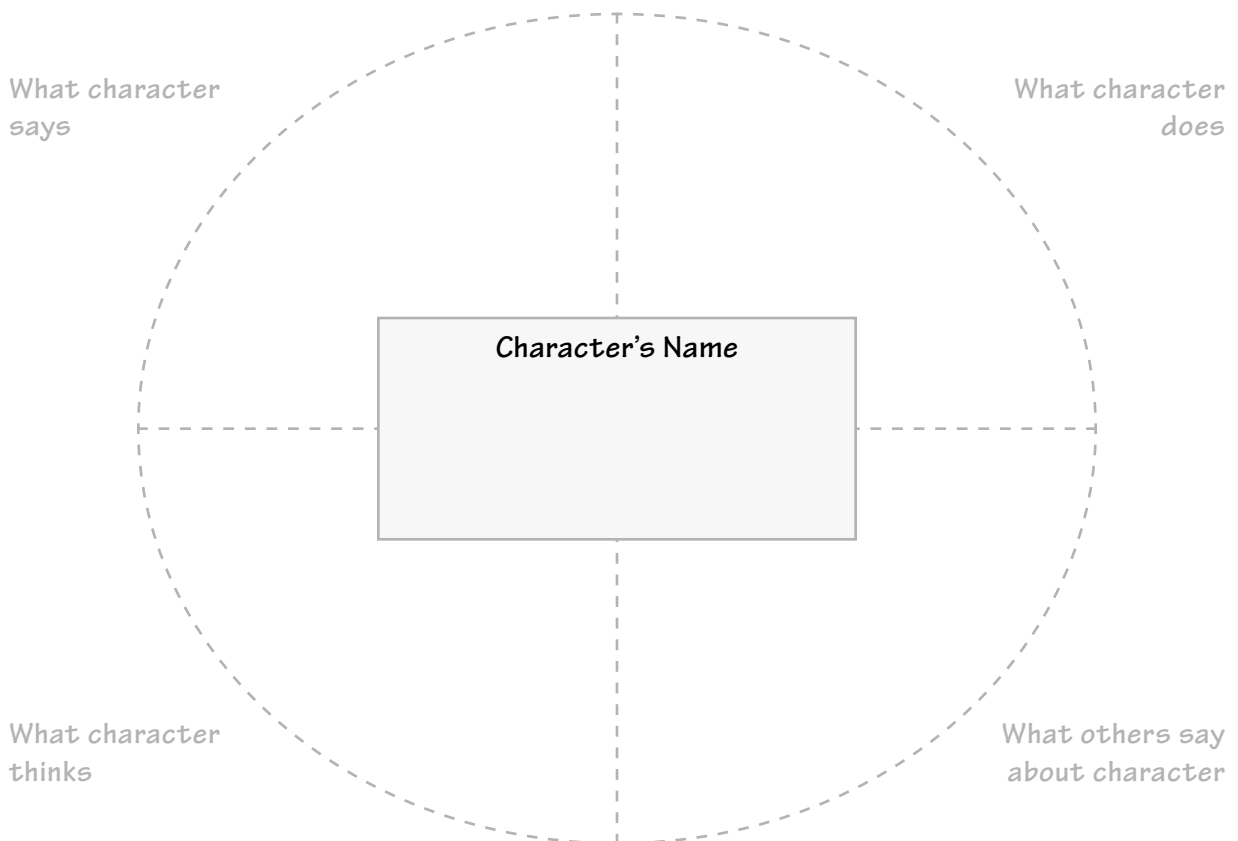
The Minister's Black Veil

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Summary The parson, Mr. Hooper, arrives at church wearing a black veil over his face. He wears the veil without explanation through his sermon, through the following sermon, and then through a funeral and a wedding. The congregation whispers among themselves. They fear the veil. Only Mr. Hooper's fiancée has the courage to ask him why he wears the veil. She does not understand the answer and leaves him. Mr. Hooper wears the veil for the rest of his life. In fact, he offers no other explanation for it until his death.

Note-taking Guide

Use this character wheel to record information about Reverend Hooper.



The Minister's Black Veil

1. **Interpret:** How does the veil affect Mr. Hooper's relationship with his congregation?

2. **Literary Analysis:** A **symbol** is something that represents something else. In the first column of this chart, write down two descriptions of the veil. In the second column, explain the symbolic meaning of each description.

Descriptive Detail	Symbolic Meaning

3. **Reading Strategy:** Use the villager's reactions to Mr. Hooper to **draw inferences** about what Hawthorne thinks about human nature.



Writing About the Essential Question

What is the relationship between place and literature? Does the portrait this story paints of Puritan New England seem too sympathetic, too harsh, or simply accurate? Explain.

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