

# First Paragraphs

## The Scarlet Letter

Nathaniel Hawthorne 1850

*A throng of bearded men, in sad-coloured garments, and grey, steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women, some wearing hoods and others bare-headed, was assembled in front of a wooden edifice, the door of which was heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes.*

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What does the opening paragraph of the novel tell us about the attitudes and social organization of the Puritans?

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Look at language style, word choice, sequence, viewpoint.

1. What does *sad-coloured* reveal?
2. Why is the door *timbered* instead of *wooden*? Why *oak*?
3. Why is *edifice* used? Why not *building*?
4. What do the *steeple-crowned* hats suggest?
5. Why is the door *studded with iron spikes*?
6. How are gender differences expressed?
7. How important is use of third person viewpoint?