

## *The Scarlet Letter* Introduction: The Meaning Behind “The Custom House”

After writing *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne recognized a couple issues – Hawthorne thought that he needed to balance the dark tones of the story, while his publisher said that the text was too short to market as a stand-alone novel. To make his text more marketable to a wider audience, Hawthorne wrote the semi-autobiographical short story, “The Custom House”, as an introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, ameliorating his text’s length and tone issues.

Even though Hawthorne wrote this short story as an after-thought and a reader can understand *The Scarlet Letter* without reading the introduction, “The Custom House” provides depth to the tone, themes, and influences of the story that you are about to read.

Today, you will analyze key passages from “The Custom House” to derive meaning from the text.

**Directions:** Read from the bottom of page 29 to the first paragraph on page 32. Fill in the chart by answering the questions – for some questions, you will need to read passages from *The Scarlet Letter*’s introduction.

Topic	Question about “The Custom House”	Quotation (supports answer)	Analysis (explains quotation)
Learning about the Scarlet Letter Last Paragraph on Page 29 to page 30 & Bottom of Page 31	How did the Surveyor learn about the Scarlet Letter?		
Surveyor’s Response to Scarlet Letter Page 31	How does the Surveyor respond to the physical Scarlet Letter?		
Hester Prynne Pages 31-2	Who is Hester Prynne?		