Learning Modalities
Visual/Spatial Learners
Invite students to create a picture that evokes the eerie atmosphere of this story. Have the students draw or paint a scene such as a chance meeting between the minister and a parishioner on a village street. Remind students to decide what emotion the person will feel when confronted by the veiled minister: Will he or she betray feelings of fear, surprise, curiosity, or terror?

About the Selection
In this parable, Mr. Hooper, a highly respected minister in a small Puritan community, suddenly appears wearing a black veil, a mask he vows never to remove. The veil has a powerful, gloomy effect on his parishioners; they are stunned and unable to ask him directly why he is wearing it. Even Hooper’s fiancée turns from him because of the veil. The veil’s symbolic meaning—a reminder of the secret sins each soul carries to the grave—is revealed through the speech and actions of Hooper and his parishioners, as well as in his deathbed explanation.

Background
Set in the 1600s, in a typical Village of Puritan New England, this story reflects Hawthorne’s deep awareness of his Puritan ancestry. The Puritans lived stern lives, emphasizing hard work and religious devotion. They believed that only certain people were predestined by God to go to heaven. This belief led Puritans to search their souls continually for signs that God had chosen them. At the same time, those who behaved unusually were often thought to be controlled by evil forces. This attitude contributed to the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692, during which at least twenty accused witches were executed. In this story, Hawthorne explores how such attitudes probably led to other, more commonplace acts of cruelty.

The sexton stood in the porch of Milford meetinghouse, pulling busily at the bell rope. The old people of the village came stooping along the street. Children, with bright faces, tripped merrily beside their parents, or mimicked a graver gait, in the conscious dignity of their Sunday clothes. Spruce bachelors looked sidelong at the pretty maidens, and fancied that the Sabbath sunshine made them prettier than on week days. When the throng had mostly streamed into the porch, the sexton began to toll the bell, keeping his eye on the

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Reverend Mr. Hooper’s door. The first glimpse of the clergyman’s figure was the signal for the bell to cease its summons.

“But what has good Parson Hooper got upon his face?” cried the sexton in astonishment.

All within hearing immediately turned about, and beheld the semblance of Mr. Hooper, pacing slowly his meditative way towards the meetinghouse. With one accord they started, expressing more wonder than if some strange minister were coming to dust the cushions of Mr. Hooper’s pulpit.

“Are you sure it is our parson?” inquired Goodman Gray of the sexton.

“Of a certainty it is good Mr. Hooper,” replied the sexton. “He was to have exchanged pulpits with Parson Shute, of Westbury; but Parson Shute sent to excuse himself yesterday, being to preach a funeral sermon.”

2. Goodman title of respect similar to “Mister.”
The cause of so much amazement may appear sufficiently slight. Mr. Hooper, a gentlemanly person, of about thirty, though still a bachelor, was dressed with due clerical neatness, as if a careful wife had starched his band, and brushed the weekly dust from his Sunday’s garb. There was but one thing remarkable in his appearance. Swathed about his forehead, and hanging down over his face, so low as to be shaken by his breath, Mr. Hooper had on a black veil. On a nearer view it seemed to consist of two folds of crape, 3 which entirely concealed his features, except the mouth and chin, but probably did not intercept his sight, further than to give a darkened aspect to all living and inanimate things. With this gloomy shade before him, good Mr. Hooper walked onward, at a slow and quiet pace, stooping somewhat, and looking on the ground, as is customary with abstracted men, yet nodding kindly to those of his parishioners who still waited on the meetinghouse steps. But so wonderstruck were they that his greeting hardly met with a return.

“I can’t really feel as if good Mr. Hooper’s face was behind that piece of crape,” said the sexton.

“Tl don’t like it,” muttered an old woman, as she hobbled into the meetinghouse. “He has changed himself into something awful, only by hiding his face.”

“Our parson has gone mad!” cried Goodman Gray, following him across the threshold.

A rumor of some unaccountable phenomenon had preceded Mr. Hooper into the meetinghouse, and set all the congregation astir. Few could refrain from twisting their heads towards the door; many stood upright, and turned directly about; while several little boys clambered upon the seats, and came down again with a terrible racket. There was a general bustle, a rustling of the women’s gowns and shuffling of the men’s feet, greatly at variance with that hushed repose which should attend the entrance of the minister. But Mr. Hooper appeared not to notice the perturbation of his people. He entered with an almost noiseless step, bent his head mildly to the pews on each side, and bowed as he passed his oldest parishioner, a white-haired great-grand sire, who occupied an armchair in the center of the aisle. It was strange to observe how slowly this venerable man became conscious of something singular in the appearance of his pastor. He seemed not fully to partake of the prevailing wonder, till Mr. Hooper had ascended the stairs, and showed himself in the pulpit, face to face with his congregation, except for the black veil. That mysterious emblem was never once withdrawn. It shook with his measured breath, as he gave out the psalm; it threw its obscurity between him and the holy page, as he read the Scriptures; and while he prayed, the veil lay heavily on his uplifted countenance. Did he seek to hide it from the dread Being whom he was addressing?

Such was the effect of this simple piece of crape, that more than one woman of delicate nerves was forced to leave the meetinghouse.

3. crape (kräp) n. piece of black cloth worn as a sign of mourning.

6 Literary Analysis
Parable and Symbol

Remind students that when an object takes on significance outside itself and stands for something greater, it is being used as a symbol.

Ask one or more student volunteers to read aloud carefully the passage beginning “That mysterious emblem.” Urge students to take note of how Hawthorne has chosen to describe the effect of the veil.

Ask students the second Literary Analysis question: The passage beginning “That mysterious emblem” is the first suggestion that the veil is a symbol. What might the veil symbolize? Answer: Hawthorne’s descriptions delineate how the veil creates an “unnatural” separation between Hooper and the subject of his current attention (speaking the psalm, reading the page of the Bible, looking up to God). Thus the veil may symbolize something that has come between the minister and ordinary life.

Enrichment

Veils

A veil can be defined as “a piece of light fabric, as of net or gauze, worn especially by women over the face or head or draped from a hat to conceal, protect, or enhance the face.” Traditionally veils have been worn for a variety of reasons in different cultures. Often they are worn at weddings, funerals, and other religious ceremonies. People may wear veils to express modesty or mourning.

Have students do research to find out more about why, when, how, and by whom veils are worn in different cultures. When students complete their research, they may share their findings with their classmates during a class discussion.
Yet perhaps the palefaced congregation was almost as fearful a sight to the minister, as his black veil to them.

Mr. Hooper had the reputation of a good preacher, but not an energetic one: he strove to win his people heavenward by mild, persuasive influences, rather than to drive them thither by the thunders of the Word. The sermon which he now delivered was marked by the same characteristics of style and manner as the general series of his pulpit oratory. But there was something, either in the sentiment of the discourse itself, or in the imagination of the auditors, which made it greatly the most powerful effort that they had ever heard from their pastor’s lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of Mr. Hooper’s temperament. The subject had reference to secret sin, and those sad mysteries which we hide from our nearest and dearest, and would fain conceal from our own consciousness, even forgetting that the Omniscient can detect them. A subtle power was breathed into his words. Each member of the congregation, the most innocent girl, and the man of hardened breast, felt as if the preacher had crept upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity of deed or thought. Many spread their clasped hands on their bosoms. There was nothing terrible in what Mr. Hooper said, at least, no violence: and yet, with every tremor of his melancholy voice, the hearers quaked. An unsought pathos came hand in hand with awe. So sensible were the audience of some unwonted attribute in their minister, that they longed for a breath of wind to blow aside the veil, almost believing that a stranger’s visage would be discovered, though the form, gesture, and voice were that of Mr. Hooper.

At the close of the services, the people hurried out with indecorous confusion, eager to communicate their pent-up amazement, and conscious of lighter spirits the moment they lost sight of the black veil. Some gathered in little circles, huddled closely together, with their mouths all whispering in the center; some went homeward alone, wrapt in silent meditation; some talked loudly, and profaned the Sabbath day. Strange and bewildered looks repaid him for his courtesy. None, as on former occasions, aspired to the honor of sitting in the rear of his flock. Turning his veiled face from one group to another, Mr. Hooper’s eyes were so weakened by the midnight lamp, as to communicate their pent-up astonishment; while one or two affirmed that there was no mystery at all, but only that Mr. Hooper’s eyes were so weakened by the midnight lamp, as to require a shade. After a brief interval, forth came good Mr. Hooper also, in the rear of his flock. Turning his veiled face from one group to another, he paid due reverence to the hoary pastor’s lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with kind dignity as their friend and spiritual guide, greeted the audience of some unwonted attribute in their minister, that they longed for a breath of wind to blow aside the veil, almost believing that a stranger’s visage would be discovered, though the form, gesture, and voice were that of Mr. Hooper. Strange and bewildered looks repaid him for his courtesy. None, as on former occasions, aspired to the honor of sitting in the rear of his flock. Turning his veiled face from one group to another, Mr. Hooper’s eyes were so weakened by the midnight lamp, as to require a shade. After a brief interval, forth came good Mr. Hooper also, in the rear of his flock. Turning his veiled face from one group to another, he paid due reverence to the hoary pastor’s lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with kind dignity as their friend and spiritual guide, greeted the audience of some unwonted attribute in their minister, that they longed for a breath of wind to blow aside the veil, almost believing that a stranger’s visage would be discovered, though the form, gesture, and voice were that of Mr. Hooper.

4. Omniscient (əm nis’ ēnt) all-knowing God.
People might fear something that appears to be a mark of sin because it could signify damnation despite an individual’s apparent goodness or religious observance.

The Clergy

Like most members of the clergy—such as ministers, rabbis, and priests—Mr. Hooper is a central figure in his community. In addition to offering religious instruction and counseling to their congregations, the clergy preside over weddings, funerals, and other rites of passage. Many are involved in education and social service. Today, as in Hooper’s time, a minister is a public figure whose words and actions are observed by all.

Have students interview members of the clergy in your area to find out how they view the breadth of their responsibilities. Students might ask them to describe various interactions with their congregations and with other members of their communities. Students can compare notes to identify characteristics that are shared by effective clergy and to gain a better understanding of their leadership roles.
had been, for the dreadful hour that should snatch the veil from their faces. The bearers went heavily forth, and the mourners followed, saddening all the street, with the dead before them, and Mr. Hooper in his black veil behind.

“Why do you look back?” said one in the procession to his partner.

“I had a fancy,” replied she, “that the minister and the maiden’s spirit were walking hand in hand.”

“And so had I, at the same moment,” said the other.

That night, the handsomest couple in Milford village were to be joined in wedlock. Though reckoned a melancholy man, Mr. Hooper had a placid cheerfulness for such occasions, which often excited a sympathetic smile where livelier merriment would have been thrown away. There was no quality of his disposition which made him more beloved than this. The company at the wedding awaited his arrival with impatience, trusting that the strange awe, which had gathered over him throughout the day, would now be dispelled. But such was not the result. When Mr. Hooper came, the first thing that their eyes rested on was the same horrible black veil, which had added deeper gloom to the funeral, and could portend nothing but evil to the wedding. Such was its immediate effect on the guests that a cloud seemed to have rolled darkly from beneath the black crape, and dimmed the light of the candles. The bridal pair stood up before the minister. But the bride’s cold fingers quivered in the tremulous hand of the bridegroom, and her deathlike paleness caused a whisper that the maiden who had been buried a few hours before was come from her grave to be married. If ever another wedding were so dismal, it was that famous one where they tolled the wedding knell. After performing the ceremony, Mr. Hooper raised a glass of wine to his lips, wishing happiness to the new-married couple in a strain of mild pleasantry that ought to have brightened the features of the guests, like a cheerful gleam from the hearth. At that instant, catching a glimpse of his figure in the looking glass, the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His frame shuddered, his lips grew white, he spilt the untasted wine upon the carpet, and rushed forth into the darkness. For the Earth, too, had on her Black Veil.

The next day, the whole village of Milford talked of little else than Parson Hooper’s black veil. That, and the mystery concealed behind it, supplied a topic for discussion between acquaintances meeting in the street, and good women gossiping at their open windows. It was the first item of news that the tavernkeeper told to his guests. The children babbled of it on their way to school. One imitative little imp covered his face with an old black handkerchief, thereby so affrighting his playmates that the panic seized himself, and he well nigh lost his wits by his own waggery.

5. If . . . knell reference to Hawthorne’s short story “The Wedding Knell.” A knell is the slow ringing of a bell, as at a funeral.

Reading Strategy
Drawing Inferences About Meaning
What inferences can you draw from this dialogue about the veil’s intensifying impact on the villagers?

Vocabulary Builder

Word list:

waggery (wag or b) n., mischievous humor

tremulous (trem’ ŭ lús) adj., characterized by trembling

Critical Thinking
Compare and Contrast

• Ask students to brainstorm a list of words, phrases, ideas, and feelings they associate with the word wed-
ding.

• Ask students: Why might the fearful effect of the black veil be more intense at the wedding than at the funeral?

Possible response: People expect such dismal attire (as well as sadness) at a funeral. A wedding, however, is ordinarily a time of joy. Therefore, the minister’s black veil at the wedding inverts everyone’s sense of normalcy and makes the veil’s effect even more upsetting than it would be at a funeral.

Reading Check

Answer: In the context of a funeral, a black veil is appropriate as a symbol of mourning.

Support for Less Proficient Readers
Have students reread the dialogue near the top of p. 345, in order to discuss whether the lines suggest a link between the maiden’s death and Mr. Hooper’s wearing the veil. Help them understand that the mourners are only gossiping and that the remarks are pure speculation. You may wish to explain that Hawthorne may be invoking the Salem witch trials, in which innocent people were condemned by the specious and hysterical testimony of neighbors.

Enrichment for Advanced Readers
Hawthorne’s short story “The Wedding Knell” is one of the pieces Hawthorne chose to include in his first published volume, Twice-Told Tales. Have students choose another of Hawthorne’s short stories to read and analyze. Tales that are especially interesting in comparison and contrast to “The Minister’s Black Veil” include “The Maypole of Merry Mount,” “The Birthmark,” “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” and “Ethan Brand.”
It was remarkable that of all the busybodies and impertinent people in the parish, not one ventured to put the plain question to Mr. Hooper, wherefore he did this thing. Hitherto, whenever there appeared the slightest call for such interference, he had never lacked advisers, nor shown himself averse to be guided by their judgment. If he erred at all, it was by so painful a degree of self-distrust that even the mildest censure would lead him to consider an indifferent action as a crime. Yet, though so well acquainted with this amiable weakness, no individual among his parishioners chose to make the black veil a subject of friendly remonstrance. There was a feeling of dread, neither plainly confessed nor carefully concealed, which caused each to shift the responsibility upon another, till at length it was found expedient to send a deputation of the church, in order to deal with Mr. Hooper about the mystery, before it should grow into a scandal. Never did an embassy so ill discharge its duties. The minister received them with friendly courtesy, but became silent, after they were seated, leaving to his visitors the whole burden of introducing their important business. The topic, it might be supposed, was obvious enough. There was the black veil swathed round Mr. Hooper’s forehead, and concealing every feature above his placid mouth, on which, at times, they could perceive the glimmering of a melancholy smile. But that piece of crape, to their imagination, seemed to hang down before his heart, the symbol of a fearful secret between him and them. Were the veil but cast aside, they might speak freely of it, but not till then. Thus they sat a considerable time, speechless, confused, and shrinking uneasily from Mr. Hooper’s eye, which they felt to be fixed upon them with an invisible glance. Finally, the deputies returned abashed to their constituents, pronouncing the matter too weighty to be handled, except by a council of the churches, if, indeed, it might not require a general synod.6

But there was one person in the village unappalled by the awe with which the black veil had impressed all beside herself. When the deputies returned without an explanation, or even venturing to demand one, she, with the calm energy of her character, determined to chase away the strange cloud that appeared to be settling round Mr. Hooper, every moment more darkly than before. As his plighted wife,7 it should be her privilege to know what the black veil concealed. At the minister’s first visit, therefore, she entered upon the subject with a direct simplicity, which made the task easier both for him and her. After he had seated himself, she fixed her eyes steadfastly upon the veil, but could discern nothing of the dreadful gloom that had so overawed the multitude: it was but a double fold of crape, hanging down from his forehead to his mouth, and slightly stirring with his breath.

“No,” said she aloud, and smiling, “there is nothing terrible in this piece of crape, except that it hides a face which I am always glad to

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6. synod (sin’d) n. high governing body in certain Christian churches.
7. plighted wife fiancée.
look upon. Come, good sir, let the sun shine from behind the cloud. First lay aside your black veil; then tell me why you put it on."

Mr. Hooper's smile glimmered faintly.

"There is an hour to come," said he, "when all of us shall cast aside our veils. Take it not amiss, beloved friend, if I wear this piece of crape till then."

"Your words are a mystery, too," returned the young lady. "Take away the veil from them, at least."

"Elizabeth, I will," said he, "so far as my vow may suffer me. Know, then, this veil is a type and a symbol, and I am bound to wear it ever, both in light and darkness, in solitude and before the gaze of multitudes, and as with strangers, so with my familiar friends. No mortal eye will see it withdrawn. This dismal shade must separate me from the world: even you, Elizabeth, can never come behind it."

"What grievous affliction hath befallen you," she earnestly inquired, "that you should thus darken your eyes forever?"

"If it be a sign of mourning," replied Mr. Hooper, "I, perhaps, like most other mortals, have sorrows dark enough to be typified by a black veil."

"But what if the world will not believe that it is the type of an innocent sorrow?" urged Elizabeth. "Beloved and respected as you are, there may be whispers that you hide your face under the consciousness of secret sins. For the sake of your holy office, do away this scandal!"

The color rose into her cheeks as she intimated the nature of the rumors that were already abroad in the village. But Mr. Hooper's mildness did not forsake him. He even smiled again—that same sad smile, which always appeared like a faint glimmering of light, proceeding from the obscurity beneath the veil.

"If I hide my face for sorrow, there is cause enough," he merely replied; "and if I cover it for secret sin, what mortal might not do the same?"

And with this gentle, but unconquerable obstinacy did he resist all her entreaties. At length Elizabeth sat silent. For a few moments she appeared lost in thought, considering, probably, what new methods might be tried to withdraw her lover from so dark a fantasy, which, if it had no other meaning, was perhaps a symptom of mental disease. Though of a firmer character than his own, the tears rolled down her cheeks. But in an instant, as it were, a new feeling took the place of sorrow: her eyes were fixed insensibly on the black veil, when, like a sudden twilight in the air, its terrors fell around her. She arose, and stood trembling before him.

"And do you feel it then, at last?" said he mournfully. She made no reply, but covered her eyes with her hand, and turned to leave the room. He rushed forward and caught her arm.

"Have patience with me, Elizabeth!" cried he, passionately. "Do not desert me, though this veil must be between us here on earth. Be mine, and hereafter there shall be no veil over my face, no darkness of a fearful secret sin. For the sake of your holy office, do away this scandal!"

Monitor Progress: Ask students what Mr. Hooper's question "what mortal might not do the same?" Help students see that Mr. Hooper expresses the belief (no doubt Hawthorne’s own) that people everywhere carry the consciousness of their own sins with them.

Possible response: He suggests that the veil possesses a deep, serious, and universal meaning. Moreover, he implies that its meaning relates to the contrast between his relationship with God and his relationship with human society.

Reading Check

Are the villagers able to confront Mr. Hooper directly about the veil? Why or why not?

Reading Strategy

Drawing Inferences About Meaning

Ask two students to read aloud the dialogue between Mr. Hooper and his fiancée.

Then ask students the Reading Strategy question: In his reply to Elizabeth, what does Mr. Hooper suggest about the veil's meaning?

Possible response: He suggests that the veil possesses a deep, serious, and universal meaning. Moreover, he implies that its meaning relates to the contrast between his relationship with God and his relationship with human society.

Monitor Progress: Ask students to explain what Mr. Hooper’s responses say about Hawthorne’s view of humanity.

Answer: Hawthorne seems to believe that people everywhere know sorrow, but more importantly, that they live burdened with secret sins.

Reading Check

Answer: The villagers see the veil as “the symbol of a fearful secret between him and them” and so are unable to confront him directly about it.
A Growing Nation (1800–1870)

[Image 26x27 to 701x829]

between our souls! It is but a mortal veil—it is not for eternity! O! you know not how lonely I am, and how frightened, to be alone behind my black veil. Do not leave me in this miserable obscurity forever!"

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

"Never! It cannot be!" replied Mr. Hooper.

"Then farewell!" said Elizabeth.

She withdrew her arm from his grasp, and slowly departed, pausing at the door, to give one long shuddering gaze, that seemed almost to penetrate the mystery of the black veil. But, even amid his grief, Mr. Hooper smiled to think that only a material emblem had separated him from happiness, though the horrors, which it shadowed forth,

Critical Viewing

In what ways does the atmosphere in this painting reflect the mood of the story? [Connect]

Literary Analysis

Parable

• Read aloud the passage beginning “But even amid his grief.”

• Ask students the Literary Analysis question: What message is conveyed by the passage beginning “But even amid his grief”?

Answer: Hawthorne’s pessimistic view of human nature is revealed. Marital bliss is denied the minister and his fiancée because of his refusal to provide a direct answer about the veil. Thus, a “material emblem” destroys happiness. Hawthorne may be suggesting that true happiness is impossible in this imperfect material world.

Enrichment

Hawthorne

“The Minister’s Black Veil” reflects Hawthorne’s intense awareness of the distrustfulness and intolerance of his Puritan ancestors. You may wish to share with students this excerpt from Hawthorne’s celebrated introduction to The Scarlet Letter:

It is nearly two centuries and a quarter since the original Briton, the earliest emigrant of my name, made his appearance in the wild and forest-bordered settlement . . . The figure of that first ancestor, invested by family tradition with a dim and dusky grandeur, was present to my boyish imagination, as far back as I can remember. It still haunts me, and induces a sort of home-feeling with the past . . . He was a soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the Church; he had all the Puritanical traits, both good and evil. He was likewise a bitter persecutor . . . His son, too, inherited the persecuting spirit, and made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches, that their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him . . .
must be drawn darkly between the fondest of lovers. From that time no attempts were made to remove Mr. Hooper’s black veil, or, by a direct appeal, to discover the secret which it was supposed to hide. By persons who claimed a superiority to popular prejudice, it was reckoned merely an eccentric whim, such as often mingles with the sober actions of men otherwise rational, and tinges them all with its own semblance of insanity. But with the multitude, good Mr. Hooper was irreparably a bugbear. He could not walk the street with any peace of mind, so conscious was he that the gentle and timid would turn aside to avoid him, and that others would make it a point of hardihood to throw themselves in his way. The impertinence of the latter class compelled him to give up his customary walk at sunset to the burial ground; for when he leaned pensively over the gate, there would always be faces behind the gravestones, peeping at his black veil. A fable went the rounds that the stare of the dead people drove him thence. It grieved him, to the very depth of his kind heart, to observe how the children fled from his approach, breaking up their merriest sports, while his melancholy figure was yet afar off. Their instinctive dread caused him to feel more strongly than aught else, that a preternatural terror was interwoven with the threads of the black crape. In truth, his own antipathy to the veil was known to be so great that he never willingly passed before a mirror, nor stooped to drink at a still fountain, lest, in its peaceful bosom, he should be affrighted by himself. This was what gave plausibility to the whispers, that Mr. Hooper’s conscience tortured him for some great crime too horrible to be entirely concealed, or otherwise than so obscurely intimated. Thus, from beneath the black veil, there rolled a cloud into the sunshine, an ambiguity of sin or sorrow, which enveloped the poor minister, so that love or sympathy could never reach him. It was said that ghost and fiend consorted with him there. With self-shudderings and outward terrors, he walked continually in its shadow, groping darkly within his own soul or gazing through a medium that saddened the whole world. Even the lawless wind, it was believed, respected his dreadful secret, and never blew aside the veil. But still good Mr. Hooper sadly smiled at the pale visages of the worldly throng as he passed by.

Among all its bad influences, the black veil had the one desirable effect, of making its wearer a very efficient clergyman. By the aid of his mysterious emblem—for there was no other apparent cause—he became a man of awful power over souls that were in agony for sin. His converts always regarded him with a dread peculiar to themselves, affirming, though but figuratively, that, before he brought them to celestial light, they had been with him behind the black veil. Its gloom, indeed, enabled him to sympathize with all dark affections. Dying sinners cried aloud for Mr. Hooper, and would not yield their

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8. bugbear n. something causing needless fear.
9. preternatural (prē·tər·nər·ə·l) adj. supernatural.

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Reading Strategy

Drawing Inferences About Meaning

What can you infer about the people in the community based on their fear of Mr. Hooper’s veil?

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Literary Analysis

Parable Why is it significant that nature, as represented by the wind, respects the veil?

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Reading Check

How does Mr. Hooper feel about the veil?

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Support for Special Needs Students

Students may need help to understand why the black veil makes Mr. Hooper “a very efficient clergyman.” After reading aloud the paragraph beginning “Among all its bad influences,” use discussion to guide students to understand the effect the veiled minister has upon people who suffer from overwhelming guilt. For these people, the minister’s veil symbolizes their own sense of sin, suffering, and shame.

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Enrichment for Advanced Readers

Point out that Parson Hooper is a religious leader commanding the utmost respect. Yet his action throws the village into confusion and anxiety. Invite students to stage a debate on whether a leader has the right to take such an action. Should a leader publicly acknowledge his or her own wrongdoing while continuing to serve in an official capacity? Students may wish to conduct research to support their viewpoints. History provides ample evidence for and against the rights and responsibilities of leaders.
breath till he appeared; though ever, as he stooped to whisper consolation, they shuddered at the veiled face so near their own. Such were the terrors of the black veil, even when Death had bared his visage! Strangers came long distances to attend service at his church, with the mere idle purpose of gazing at his figure, because it was forbidden them to behold his face. But many were made to quake ere they departed! Once, during Governor Belcher’s administration, Mr. Hooper was appointed to preach the election sermon. Covered with his black veil, he stood before the chief magistrate, the council, and the representatives, and wrought so deep an impression that the legislative measures of that year were characterized by all the gloom and piety of our earliest ancestral sway.

In this manner Mr. Hooper spent a long life, irrepochachable in outward act, yet shrouded in dismal suspicions; kind and loving, though unloved, and dimly feared; a man apart from men, shunned in their health and joy, but ever summoned to their aid in mortal anguish. As years wore on, shedding their snows above his sable veil, he acquired a name throughout the New England churches, and they called him Father Hooper. Nearly all his parishioners, who were of mature age when he was settled, had been borne away by many a funeral: he had one congregation in the church, and a more crowded one in the churchyard; and having wrought so late into the evening, and done his work so well, it was now good Father Hooper’s turn to rest.

Several persons were visible by the shaded candlelight, in the death chamber of the old clergyman. Natural connections he had none. But there was the decorously grave, though unmoved physician, seeking only to mitigate the last pangs of the patient whom he could not save. There were the deacons, and other eminently pious members of his church. There, also, was the Reverend Mr. Clark, of Westbury, a young and zealous divine, who had ridden in haste to pray by the bedside of the expiring minister. There was the nurse, no hired handmaiden of death, but on e whose calm affection had endured thus long in secrecy, in solitude, amid the chill of age, and would not perish, even at the dying hour. Who, but Elizabeth! And there lay the hoary head of good Father Hooper upon the death pillow, with the black veil still swathed about his brow, and reaching down over his face, so that each more difficult gasp of his faint breath caused it to stir. All through life that piece of crape had hung between him and the world: it had separated him from cheerful brotherhood and woman’s love, and kept him in that saddest of all prisons, his own heart; and still it lay upon his face, as if to deepen the gloom of his darksome chamber, and shade him from the sunshine of eternity.

10. Governor Belcher  Jonathan Belcher (1682–1757), the royal governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, from 1730 to 1741.
11. Natural connections  relatives.
For some time previous, his mind had been confused, waveringly between the past and the present, and hovering forward, as if it were, at intervals, into the indistinctness of the world to come. There had been feverish turns, which tossed him from side to side, and wore away what little strength he had. But in his most convulsive struggles, and in the wildest vagaries of his intellect, when no other thought retained its sober influence, he still showed an awful solicitude lest the black veil should slip aside. Even if his bewildered soul could have forgotten, there was a faithful woman at his pillow, who, with averted eyes, would have covered that aged face, which she had last beheld in the comeliness of manhood. At length the death-stricken old man lay quietly in the torpor of mental and bodily exhaustion, with an imperceptible pulse, and breath that grew fainter and fainter, except when a long, deep, and irregular inspiration seemed to prelude the flight of his spirit.

The minister of Westbury approached the bedside.

“Venerable Father Hooper,” said he, “the moment of your release is at hand. Are you ready for the lifting of the veil that shuts in time from eternity?”

Father Hooper at first replied merely by a feeble motion of his head; then, apprehensive, perhaps, that his meaning might be doubtful, he exerted himself to speak.

“Yea,” said he, in faint accents, “my soul hath a patient weariness until that veil be lifted.”

“And is it fitting,” resumed the Reverend Mr. Clark, “that a man so given to prayer, of such a blameless example, holy in deed and thought, so far as mortal judgment may pronounce; is it fitting that a father in the church should leave a shadow on his memory, that may seem to blacken a life so pure? I pray you, my venerable brother, let not this thing be! Suffer us to be gladdened by your triumphant aspect as you go to your reward. Before the veil of eternity be lifted, let me cast aside this black veil from your face!”

And thus speaking, the Reverend Mr. Clark bent forward to reveal the mystery of so many years. But, exerting a sudden energy, that made all the beholders stand aghast. Father Hooper snatched both his hands from beneath the bedclothes, and pressed them strongly on the black veil, resolute to struggle, if the minister of Westbury would contend with a dying man.

“Never!” cried the veiled clergyman. “On earth, never!”

“Dark old man!” exclaimed the affrighted minister, “with what horrible crime upon your soul are you now passing to the judgment?”

Father Hooper’s breath heaved; it rattled in his throat; but, with a mighty effort, grasping forward with his hands, he caught hold of life, and held it back till he should speak. He even raised himself in bed; and there he sat, shivering with the arms of death around him, while the black veil hung down, awful, at that last moment, in the gathered terrors of a lifetime. And yet the faint, sad smile, so often
there, now seemed to glimmer from its obscurity, and linger on
Father Hooper’s lips.

“Why do you tremble at me alone?” cried he, turning his veiled face
round the circle of pale spectators. “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, but the mystery which it
obscurely typifies, has made this piece of crape so awful? When the
friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best
beloved: when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator,
loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then deem me a mon-
stcr, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and die! I look around
me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!”

While his auditors shrank from one another, in mutual affright,
Father Hooper fell back upon his pillow, a veiled corpse, with a faint
smile lingering on the lips. Still veiled, they laid him in his coffin, and a
veiled corpse they bore him to the grave. The grass of many years has
sprung up and withered on that grave, the burial stone is moss-grown,
and good Mr. Hooper’s face is dust; but awful is still the thought that it
moldered beneath the Black Veil!

Critical Reading

1. **Respond**: How would you have reacted to the veil if you had been
   (a) a member of Mr. Hooper’s congregation or (b) another Puritan
   clergyman?

2. **Recall**:
   (a) His congregation regarded Mr. Hooper before he began wearing the veil?
   (b) Analyze: In what ways does the veil affect Mr. Hooper’s relationship with his congregation?

3. **Recall**:
   (a) The sermon’s subject is secret sin. (b) His sermon arouses feelings of guilt, fear, and remorse. (c) The minister’s wearing of an unexplained black veil is shocking and provocative, and it causes his listeners to react in unexpected, dramatic ways.

4. **Recall**:
   (a) The veil makes him a very efficient clergyman. (b) Students may say that the veil impels Hooper’s listeners to question why he wears the veil, to relate the words of his sermon to his wearing the veil, and to relate both the sermon and the veil to their private knowledge about their own secret sins.

5. **Recall**:
   (a) The veil has a powerful effect on people because it reminds them of their secret sins. (b) Students may respond that they do agree with the suggestion, because all people have some thoughts and concerns that they feel they have to keep to themselves.

6. **Recall**:
   Students may say that guilt could have benefits for a person if it led him or her to admit fault or to change destructive behavior.

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For additional information about Nathaniel Hawthorne, have students type in the Web Code, then select H from the alphabet, and then select Nathaniel Hawthorne.