

“The Minister’s Black Veil” is a short story written by Nathaniel Hawthorne and was published in the 1836 edition of *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir*. Like many of Hawthorne’s works, the setting of the story is an 18th century town in Puritan New England. The scene provides a psychological exploration of the themes of sin, repentance, and morality. Hawthorne may have been inspired by a true event. A clergyman named Joseph Moody of York Maine, nicknamed “Handkerchief Moody,” accidentally killed a friend when he was a young man and wore a black veil from the man’s funeral until his own death.

The Symbolism of “The Black Veil: The black veil symbolizes secret sin, and the symbolic representation that all that is inward manifests itself outwardly. The funeral and the wedding also stand as symbols of death and life and the evil that resides in the human heart pervades even the most sacred events.

Irony: It is ironic that the minister, more than likely one of the more holy men in town, feels the need to outwardly display his secret sins.

Mood: Hawthorne tints the narrative with dark shades by summoning forth the references to everyone’s --the congregation’s, Hooper’s, perhaps even the reader’s -- secret sins, the characterization of Hooper as the Spirit of Death, and by explicitly connecting the veil with darkness.

After finishing this short story, all students will be required to develop a thesis and write a paper.

## Discuss the Veil as a Symbol

- What is the meaning of the black veil? What does it symbolize, and what is Rev. Hooper's purpose in wearing it? How do you know? Find passages that reveal the veil's meaning as the story goes on. Make a judgment about how effective a symbol the veil is, and back up your opinion with events and passages in the story. If Rev. Hooper is seeking to teach his congregation a lesson, does it work? For whom does it work, and when?

## Compare "The Minister's Black Veil" to "The Stranger"

- Musician Billy Joel wrote a famous song titled "The Stranger," whose lyrics include these lines: "Well, we all have a face/That we hide away forever /And we take them out and show ourselves/When everyone has gone/ ... They're the faces of the stranger/But we love to try them on" (see Resources). Compare and contrast this song to "The Minister's Black Veil." What messages do the two works have in common? What do they each have to say about secrets, friendship and romance? How are they different, both in form and in content.

1. What do the congregation's comments reveal about the veil's effects?
2. What is the minister's usual style of preaching?
- 3) What is the significance of the topic of the first sermon?
- 4) What are the four things that Mr. Hooper does after the sermon?
- 5) What effect does the veil have on the minister's appearance, according to the village physician?

- 6) Why does the veil become an appropriate symbol in the afternoon service?
- 7) In the paragraph describing the afternoon service, count the number of terms that support Hawthorne's intended mood.
- 8) What did Mr. Hooper do when his veil swung forward while praying with the corpse?
- 9) What did an observer say happened then?
- 10) How does Hawthorne use "the wind"?
- 11) Two mourners comment that they imagined Mr. Hooper and the deceased young woman walking hand in hand in spirit. What larger meaning might this image have?
- 12) How does the veil affect people at the wedding?
- 13) Why does Hawthorne refer use Mr. Hooper at times, and Father Hooper at other times?
- 14) What do Father Hooper's final words disclose about his possible reasoning for wearing the veil?
- 15) What word can best take the place of "veil"?
- 16) Why does Mr. Hooper flee from the wedding reception?
- 17) What is referred to as "Earth's black veil"?
- 18) Think back on Mr. Hooper's behavior so far in this story. Why do you think he begins to wear the veil?

- 19) What is Mr. Hooper's response to Elizabeth's request?
- 20) His response has symbolic meaning. What do you think it means?
- 21) In what way did the veil make Mr. Hooper a popular minister?