

“The Minister’s Black Veil” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

## Literary Analysis: Setting and Allegory

An **allegory** is a literary work in which characters, events, settings, and other story elements have symbolic meaning. In “The Minister’s Black Veil,” the black veil serves as the central symbol of the sins of humanity.

Individual elements within the work also have symbolic meanings. One element that contributes to the symbolic meaning in an allegory is the setting, or the particular time and place in which the tale occurs. Setting includes details that fall into several categories, such as location, weather, geography, time of day, season, and atmosphere. Social and economic conditions are also an important aspect of a story’s setting.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read these passages from “The Minister’s Black Veil.” Each describes a setting. Explain what each setting symbolizes in the context of the story and how it contributes to the allegory as a whole. Respond on a separate piece of paper or via email.

1. 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 weekdays.
2. 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 duskily from beneath the black crape, and dimmed the light of the candles.
3. 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.

4. 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!