

“Young Goodman Brown” Response

Please answer all three prompts below intelligently, and incorporate at least 4 quotations total from the story to support your claims. (Note: You may not use either of the quotations that are already used in the questions below.)

1. The Protagonist - Near the end of the story, the narrator asks the following: “Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?.... Be it so, if you will” (444).

What is the answer, and how do the story’s details suggest this answer to you? Moreover, *if Goodman Brown’s visions come out of his own dreams* (i.e., his own *subconscious mind*), what do his visions tell us about him?

2. An Antithesis: Corruption & Evil vs. Purity and Goodness - While it remains ambiguous whether Goodman Brown’s vision of humanity’s evil is an actual occurrence or only a bad dream, one thing the author makes clear is that, for the rest of Goodman Brown’s life, this vision transforms Goodman Brown into “[a] stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man” (444). From the moment he returns to his town and home, Brown is convinced that everyone he thought to be pure and good is actually corrupt and evil. Reread the story’s final paragraph and notice that Goodman Brown sees no good in anyone in his community and trusts in the goodness of no one. Then discuss these questions:

- **Why does Goodman Brown see corruption and evil in everyone around him, but apparently does not see any corruption or evil within himself? Is there any irony to the fact that Brown doesn’t count himself among the corrupt and evil?**
- **Moreover, why does Brown’s “fearful dream” completely destroy his faith in human goodness and make it impossible for him to see any goodness in the people he knows—even the goodness in his wife and children, whom he should love? In this regard, why does Brown’s vision of others’ evil seem to destroy his capacity to love others?**
- **Ultimately, Brown expects *other people* to be completely pure, and then he judges and condemns them for being impure or corrupt. In this regard, does Hawthorne want us to think Brown is a wise man or a fool? Moreover, does Hawthorne suggest that Brown is a hypocrite, or not? Explain your reasoning.**

3. Symbolism

This story is often considered an *allegory* or a *parable*—a work that communicates meaning on a symbolic level, in addition to its literal level of meaning. **What are the main elements of the story that function as symbols, and how do these elements work together as symbols to communicate an allegorical or parabolic meaning? What lessons or principles does Hawthorne aim to illustrate through the story, and how does Hawthorne do so? Are the story’s lessons simple and direct, or complex and ambiguous?**

-Consider the two main characters and their names (Goodman Brown & Faith) and these two important statements: “I’ll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven” (parag.7) and “Faith kept me back awhile” (parag.12).

-Also consider the dual settings of the story, Salem village and the forest; as well as sunset and night; the witches’ ceremony; the marriage to Faith; shadows and darkness; and any other elements that strike you as potentially symbolic.