In *The Scarlet Letter,* Hawthorne uses nature to compare a person’s perception on the light and dark contrasts throughout the town, the forest, and in people.

The town was perceived mostly in the dark, with little connection to nature. In the beginning of the book the town is being described as it was built only years before, still brand new. “Certain it is, that, some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age, which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front” (45). The town was already dreary, ugly, and dark. Not much time had passed and the town had become no place of beautiful nature. The jail hadn’t helped in making the town any more pretty. “Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass-plot, much overgrown with burdock, pigweed, apple-peru, and such unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilized society, a prison” (45-46). The prison is like a black flower to society because it’s supposed to keep the townspeople sin-free and safe. The jail is described as black because it’s a place for sinners to go, but also a flower because it’s protecting the city and scaring them to keep them pure and good, because nature is pure and good.

The forest is perceived as an evil place by most townspeople, but nature is supposed to be good. The perception of a person can really play a role in how something may be. There is a point in the story where Hester and Dimmesdale find themselves talking in the forest, sharing their deepest feelings of how they hurt and want to be together. “…thou art my better angel! I seem to have flung myself-sick, sin-stained, and sorrow blackened-down upon these forest leaves, and to have risen up all made anew, and with new powers to glorify Him that had been merciful” (182) Although the townspeople thought of the forest as a dark place, Dimmesdale was able to confess his sin out loud to God in the forest, and finally feel freedom. There were also other great burdens being lifted off Hester’s shoulders in the woods as well. “She undid the clasp that fastened the scarlet letter, and taking it off her bosom, threw it to a distance among the withered leaves.” (182) Hester had felt freedom and felt it was right for her to once smile and be happy again. She knew she no longer had to feel like the A was a punishment. Hester and Dimmesdale were finally together and happy, and they knew God was watching over them. “All at once, as with a sudden smile of heaven, forth burst the sunshine.” (183) At this point, both Hester and Dimmesdale could feel the presence of God and his approval towards their decisions. Although they were in the forest, which the town people perceived as bad, light had shown through, and nature had been related back to good for Hester and Dimmesdale.

The Puritans who lived in the town would never have gone into the forest thinking to find God, however. To them that’s where people met The Black Man, but to Dimmesdale, that’s where his spirit was lifted. After his encounter with Hester he was filled with enthusiasm as he entered back into the sad town… with an upbeat attitude. “I am not the man for whom you take me! I left him yonder in the forest.” (195) It appeared that the town was actually darker than the forest had been. The forest was lit up over Reverend Dimmesdale, and as he walked t the town he was still filled with energy from the light God had shined onto him. “The excitement of Mr. Dimmesdale’s feelings,…lent him unaccustomed physical energy, and hurried him townward at a rapid pace” (194). Everyone thinks the forest is evil and dark, but really it’s what people make of it. Nature is supposed to be good and beautiful. Pearl had been conceived in the forest, in nature, which was a natural thing. She grew into her own personality, and had not been swayed to be a certain way because of her mother’s sins. She was her own person, and light would show on her wherever she was, just for being herself; free and wild like the nature she was made in. On one specific day when Hester and Dimmesdale had met in the forest seven years after Pearl was born, she went off to play, just like any other child. “One little gray bird, with a white breast, Pearl was almost sure, had been hit by a pebble, and fluttered away with a broken wing. But then the elf child sighed and gave up on her sport; because it grieved her to have done harm to a little being that was as wild as the sea breeze, or as wild as Pearl herself” (160). Pearl had sinned, and also felt remorse in the forest. These actions showed light in the forest, and that the perception of only sinners in the forest was a myth, because Pearl had just proved that myth wrong.