

# The Crucible Study Guide

## The Crucible by Arthur Miller

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# Plot Summary

The Crucible is a dramatic work by American playwright Arthur Miller. The play, first produced on Broadway in 1953, illustrates the story of the Salem witch trials of 1692-1693. Miller's tragic drama follows the protagonist John Proctor and his plight for justice amongst mass hysteria, and metaphorically examines the motivations and corruption of the McCarthy era in Miller's own time.

The play opens with Reverend Samuel Parris standing over the bedside of his daughter, Betty, who has fallen into a comatose-like state. The night before, Reverend Parris discovered Betty, her cousin Abigail, and several other village girls dancing in the woods with Parris's slave, Tituba. Reverend Parris questions Abigail as to the night's events, and Abigail denies any claims of witchcraft, insisting the girls were only dancing. Parris requests Beverly summon Reverend Hale, an expert in the subject of the demonic arts, to examine Betty for signs of the Devil.

When the adults leave the room, Abigail, along with Mercy Lewis, attempt to rouse Betty. When Betty awakens, she is hysterical and claims Abigail drank blood the night before in a ritual designed to kill Elizabeth Proctor. Abigail slaps and threatens Betty into submission, and tells the rest of the group if they admit anything happened that night besides dancing, she will hunt them down in the night and do them great harm.

John Proctor arrives and chastises his servant, Mary Warren, for being away from his home and her duties. When Proctor and Abigail are left alone, Abigail pleads to Proctor to give her a "soft word" and alludes to a previous affair between the two (Act I, p. 22). Proctor resists Abigail's advances, telling her it is over between them, which leads Abigail to rail against Proctor's wife, claiming she is slandering her in the town.

Betty again awakens in hysterics upon hearing a psalm sung below, and several townspeople rush to her room. Rebecca Nurse, an older respected woman in the community, stands above Betty until she returns to sleep, and then comments that the child is likely only experiencing a passing illness, and rushing to the conclusion of witchcraft is a dangerous action.

Reverend John Hale arrives and examines Betty, consulting a number of books to determine if she is marked by the Devil. The Putnams, another family in Salem, also have an afflicted child, and Hale goes to examine Ruth Putnam as well. Upon hearing of Reverend Parris's discovery the night before, Reverend Hale insists upon questioning Abigail. Hale bombards Abigail with questions about the actions and events which took place during the girls' "ritual," and eventually Abigail breaks down and names Tituba as a conjurer of the Devil.

Tituba is brought forward and is beaten and threatened with hanging for her evil deeds until she too finally breaks and begins naming the names of those she believes to be possessed by the Devil. Abigail joins in and soon all of the girls are hysterical and exclaiming the names of everyone they believe to be witches in Salem.



John Proctor and his wife, Elizabeth, discuss the events and the fact that fourteen people have been arrested for witchcraft in the town. Elizabeth begs John to go to Ezekiel Cheever, a town authority, and reveal the information he learned from Abigail—that the dancing had nothing to do with witchcraft. When Elizabeth discovers Proctor was alone with Abigail when she told him this information, she turns cold with distrust. Proctor's internal battle over his past affair haunts him and he claims it has been seven months since Abigail left as their servant and he has not seen her since then. Mary Warren returns from court and is lambasted by Proctor for abandoning her duties at home. Mary, though, asserts she is now an official of the court and her duties are of a higher cause.

Reverend Hale arrives at the Proctor home to question Elizabeth and John Proctor regarding their moral character, as Elizabeth's name has been mentioned in the court. Shortly afterward, Cheever and Herrick arrive to arrest Elizabeth, claiming Abigail Williams fell ill due to Elizabeth's having put a curse on her with the use of a poppet.

John Proctor convinces Mary Warren to stand in court against Abigail and the others, claiming their accusations were false. Mary and Proctor present evidence to the court, but Abigail's power has grown stronger, and she and the other girls begin seeing "visions" and chaos breaks out in the courtroom. Proctor confesses to his affair with Abigail, but when Elizabeth is summoned to verify the claim, she refuses to denounce her husband and so lies, discrediting Proctor's confession. Abigail psychologically regains control over Mary Warren, who then turns against Proctor, calling him an agent of the Devil. Proctor is arrested and incarcerated.

The following fall, twelve prisoners have been executed and seven remain in jail. Reverend Hale has denounced the trial and stands by those accused, attempting to get them to confess in order to save their lives. Elizabeth is brought to Proctor's cell in the hope she will convince him to confess and save himself. Proctor decides to lie in order to save his life and family, but when faced with the fact that his confession will be nailed to the church doors, he retracts his confession and chooses to die an honest man.



# Act I: Scene 1, The Crucible

## Act I: Scene 1, The Crucible Summary

The Crucible is an award-winning allegorical play by American playwright Arthur Miller, and was first produced on Broadway in January, 1953. The tragic drama relates the story of the Salem witch trials which took place between 1692 and 1693 in Salem, Massachusetts, metaphorically reflecting the spread of McCarthyism during the 1950s in America.

Act I: Scene 1. Act I opens in the bedroom of Reverend Samuel Parris's home in Salem, Massachusetts. It is the spring of 1692. The curtain rises to reveal Reverend Parris kneeling beside a bed in which his daughter Betty, age 10, sleeps. Tituba, Reverend Parris's Negro slave, enters, asking about Betty's condition and Reverend Parris chases her from the room in a fury before breaking down into sobs.

Abigail Williams, age seventeen, enters and relates the news that the rumors of witchcraft have exploded in the town and her own intention to go deny them. Reverend Parris claims he cannot go before the congregation, as it was he who found Abigail and Betty, among others, dancing in the forest with the slave Tituba. Abigail denies any allegations of witchcraft and insists the girls only danced in the woods. Abigail claims Betty collapsed from shock when Reverend Parris leapt from the bushes.

Mrs. Ann Putnam enters, described as "a twisted soul of forty-five, a death-ridden woman, haunted by dreams" (Act I, p. 12). Mrs. Putnam is followed by her husband, and they remark upon Betty's condition and rumors the child was seen flying like a witch. The Putnams insist their child, Ruth, is also touched by the Devil, and ask about the arrival of Reverend Hale, a man with much experience in the demon arts. Reverend Parris begs the Putnams not to leap to the conclusion of witchcraft, but it appears to be too late.

Mercy Lewis, the eighteen-year-old servant of the Putnams, enters, claiming to see how Betty is doing. The Putnams plead with Reverend Parris to come down and pray with the congregation, but Parris refuses, claiming he needs solitude for a time. When Mercy and Abigail are left alone, Abigail reveals that Reverend Parris saw Mercy naked in the forest and tells her to reveal nothing about the encounter.

Mary Warren, described as "seventeen, a subservient, naive girl," enters, exclaiming the whole country is crying witchcraft and they must do something (Act I, p. 18). Betty then begins to stir and claims Abigail drank blood, after which Abigail drags Betty back to the bed, telling her never to repeat herself. Betty claims Abigail drank a charm to kill John Proctor's wife, and Abigail slaps her forcefully. Abigail turns to the group of girls as Betty sobs, and tells them, "Now look, you. All of you. We danced. And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam's dead sisters. And that is all. And mark this—let either of you breathe a word,



or the edge of a word about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you." (Act I, p. 20).

## Act I: Scene 1, The Crucible Analysis

The opening of Act I establishes the exposition which drives the entire play. Reverend Parris has discovered his daughter and niece dancing in the woods with several other girls and his slave, Tituba. Tituba was speaking in her native language, singing, over a bubbling kettle, and Reverend Parris believes he saw one of the girls running naked in the forest. This information is revealed through the dialogue of Reverend Parris and Abigail Williams, and sets up the narrative for the central events.

The setting is likewise established in this opening scene, and the reader/audience immediately senses the state of oppression in which the Puritans of 1692 lived. Women had little to no rights, and the governmental system established in Salem was that of a theocracy, in which official policy is to be governed by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided.

A great deal of foreshadowing is also revealed in this early scene in the play. Reverend Parris's reaction to Tituba's entrance foreshadows her later denouncement as a witch. The discussion between Ann Putnam and the others foreshadows her own integration into the witch hunt, and establishes her motivation as a character, driven by grief from having lost seven babies. Mary Warren's terror at the situation and inclination to confess immediately foreshadows her role later in the courtroom, in which she attempts to defy Abigail to no avail.



# Act I: Scene 2, The Crucible

## Act I: Scene 2, The Crucible Summary

Act I: Scene 2. As Act I continues, John Proctor, a farmer in his mid-thirties, enters. Upon seeing Mr. Proctor, Mary Warren explains she was just going home. Proctor demands to know if Mary is deaf, as he forbade her to leave the house, and asks what it is he is paying her for. Mary exits, followed by Mercy, and Proctor goes to Betty on the bed, asking Abigail what mischief is going on.

Abigail dismisses the rumors of witchcraft, telling Proctor she and the other girls were dancing in the woods when her uncle discovered them the previous night. As Proctor turns to go, Abigail springs into his path, asking him to give her a "soft word," but Proctor refuses, saying "No, no, Abby. That's done with" (Act I, p. 22).

Abigail fights Proctor's resistance, reminding him of their nights of passion together in the past. Abigail begins to weep and clutches desperately at Proctor, but he sympathetically and firmly pushes her away. Abigail then lashes out at Proctor, claiming his wife Elizabeth is slandering her in the town.

As the words "going up to Jesus" are heard in the psalm from below, Betty awakens and begins screaming, causing Reverend Parris, Mr. and Mrs. Putnam, and Mercy to rush into the room (Act I, p. 24). Mrs. Putnam believes Betty cannot bear to hear the Lord's name and marks it for a sign, as Reverend Parris sends Mercy to the doctor to relate the news.

Rebecca Nurse, age seventy-two, enters, and the Putnams and Reverend Parris beg her to go to Betty. Giles Corey, age eighty-three, also enters, saying he's heard the girl can fly. As Rebecca stands over Betty, her whimpering quiets. Rebecca reveals her thoughts that Betty will wake in some time, and her experience as a mother of eleven children has shown her patience. Rebecca also tells Reverend Parris he should send Reverend Hale back as soon as he arrives. "This will set us all to arguin' again in the society, and we thought to have peace this year" (Act I, p. 28).

An argument breaks out between Reverend Parris and the townspeople regarding voting rights, the methods of Reverend Parris's preaching, and fairness of salaries. This argument escalates, with Putnam accusing Proctor of taking lumber from his land and squabbling over boundaries. Giles and Proctor begin to exit as Putnam threatens to have a writ clapped on Corey for abetting a theft.

## Act I: Scene 2, The Crucible Analysis

The entrance of John Proctor marks an important moment in Act I, not only because Proctor is the protagonist of the narrative, but because his interaction with Abigail in this scene establishes one of the central conflicts in the play. There is a tangible attraction



between Proctor and Abigail, and Abigail's statements about their past together indicate they were once intimate. One of Miller's most powerful examples of imagery is also illustrated in this scene with Abigail's line, "I know how you clutched my back behind your house and sweated like a stallion whenever I come near!" (Act I, p. 22). This scene establishes the internal conflict of the play's hero, and this conflict will resurface in Act II, between Proctor and his wife, Elizabeth.

Betty's awakening at the psalm and the reaction of Mrs. Putnam illustrate just how willing the people of Salem are to believe in the supernatural and the will of the Devil. Mrs. Putnam exhibits this superstition the greatest, likely due to her obsession over her lost children. Rebecca Nurse is also introduced in this section, and Rebecca proves to be the opposite of Mrs. Putnam. Rebecca dismisses Betty's illness as a common ailment that will go away in time and warns against leaping to conclusions of the supernatural. This foreshadows the fact that Rebecca will later become one of the accused herself, quite possibly castigated due to jealousy over her successes in life. Rebecca also warns, correctly, about the dangers of bringing Reverend Hale into Salem.

The arguments that ensue at the end of this section indicate an important element in the town of Salem: underneath the surface of this small Puritan community, there are constant squabbles regarding land rights, community organization, and the church. All of these underlying conflicts will play a major part in the accusations of witchcraft that are to arise.





# Act I: Scene 3, The Crucible

## Act I: Scene 3, The Crucible Summary

Act I: Scene 3. In the third section of Act I, Reverend John Hale of Beverly enters. Reverend Hale is described as "nearing forty, a tight-skinned, eager-eyed intellectual" (Act I, p. 32). Hale enters carrying a half dozen heavy books, which he claims are "weighted with authority" (Act I, p. 36).

Introductions are made amongst the townspeople and Reverend Hale; John Proctor leaves alone to tend to his lumber. Parris leads Hale to his daughter, explaining she has tried leaping from the window and was found this morning waving her arms on the highroad as if she could fly. Reverend Hale responds to the signs of witchcraft, stating, "We cannot look to superstition in this. The Devil is precise; the marks of his presence are as definite as stone, and I must tell you all that I shall not proceed unless you are prepared to believe me if I should find no bruise of hell upon her" (Act I, p. 38).

Reverend Hale asks when the strangeness with Betty was first discovered, and Reverend Parris responds, explaining he had discovered the girl with ten or so others and the slave Tituba dancing in the forest. Mrs. Putnam interjects that she sent her daughter to learn from Tituba who murdered her sisters.

Rebecca leaves the room as Giles begins to question Hale about his wife's habit of reading strange books, an action he finds discomforting. "I'm not sayin' she's touched the Devil, now, but I'd admire to know what books she reads and why she hides them" (Act I, p. 41). Hale dismisses Giles, saying they'll discuss it further, and then goes about observing Betty. Betty remains limp and unconscious on the bed, and Hale turns to Abigail.

Cornered by the questions of Reverend Hale and Reverend Parris, Abigail finally confesses it was Tituba who conjured the Devil during their ritual in the woods. Tituba is sent for and upon her entrance, Abigail exclaims, "She makes me drink blood!" (Act I, p. 44). Tituba responds that Abigail makes her conjure for her, and Reverend Hale demands Tituba awaken Betty.

Tituba, threatened with hanging and beating, breaks down, telling the Reverends she believes someone else is bewitching the children. Reverend Hale presses further, offering Tituba forgiveness and God's protection if she confesses to witchcraft and names those she believes are working as the Devil's agents. Tituba names Sarah Good and Goody Osburn as the agents of evil.

Suddenly, Abigail exclaims as if enraptured, and confesses her sins of dancing for the Devil. "I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil!" (Act I, p. 48). Betty stands up and joins in, "I saw George



Jacobs with the Devil! I saw Goody Howe with the Devil!" (Act I, p. 48). Betty and Abigail continue to chant the names of more and more townspeople as the curtain falls.

## Act I: Scene 3, The Crucible Analysis

The introduction of John Hale in Act I demonstrates many examples of foreshadowing. One of these examples is in Hale's description of his books as "weighted with authority" (Act I, p. 36). It has been established at this point that John Proctor opposes authority, and particularly corrupt authority and the authority of the church. Hale's books, therefore, represent an opposing force which Proctor will have to reckon with. Hale's initial warning to not leap to conclusions regarding witchcraft is two-sided when he states "the marks of his presence are definite as stone" (Act I, p. 38). This indicates the presence of evil is something that can be found in concrete evidence, when in actuality, the "evidence" used in the coming frenzy will be based on hearsay alone.

Mrs. Putnam's revelation that she sent her daughter Ruth to Tituba in order to conjure the spirits of her dead children represents the duality of spirituality during that era. While "witch doctors" or conjurers were considered to be an abomination of Christianity, many villagers during the period sought out their help for medicine, fortune telling, and healing. Thus, a paradox is in place wherein heathens were both castigated and feared, but also sometimes depended upon.

Giles Corey's questioning about his wife's reading habits foreshadows the fact that she will later be apprehended as one of those accused of witchcraft. While Giles's inquiries are seemingly innocent, he is, in fact, presenting evidence that will be used against her in the future. Ironically, it is Giles who suffers the greatest at the hands of his tormenters in order to preserve his family and his land.

Abigail's naming of Tituba and the events that immediately follow mark the rising action of the narrative. Tituba's subsequent beating and the threat of hanging lead to her naming others in the town, although it should be noted that Tituba is fed the names by Mrs. Putnam and the others. The frenzy which arises from Abigail and the other girls marks the beginning of the central conflict of the narrative and also demonstrates the power Abigail has over her peers.



# Act II: Scene 1, The Crucible

## Act II: Scene 1, The Crucible Summary

Act II: Scene 1. Act II opens in the common room of John Proctor's home, eight days later. As the curtain rises, Elizabeth Proctor is heard singing to the children. John Proctor enters, carrying his gun, and washes his face as Elizabeth enters.

Elizabeth questions why her husband is home late, and Proctor responds he was planting by the forest edge. A sense of separation can be felt as Elizabeth turns away, and then confronts Proctor, saying she thought he was late because he had gone to Salem. Elizabeth reveals Mary Warren has been in Salem today and Proctor exclaims he had forbidden Mary to leave. Elizabeth says that Mary has been named an official of the court. When Proctor asks what court, Elizabeth explains they have established a proper court now and they've sent four judges from Boston and at the head sits the Deputy Governor of the Province.

Elizabeth pleads to her husband to go to Salem and reveal that Abigail is a fraud, and asks him to go to Ezekiel Cheever and tell him what Abigail confessed at her uncle's house. When Proctor replies there were no witnesses to his conversation with Abigail, Elizabeth silently accuses him of rekindling their previous affair. An argument ensues between the two, with Proctor declaring he has done nothing to harm his wife since Abigail left seven months ago.

The argument between John Proctor and Elizabeth is interrupted with the arrival of Mary Warren, who attempts to slip into the room unnoticed. Proctor lunges at Mary, grabbing her cloak and forbidding her from leaving the house again. Mary begs forgiveness and goes to Elizabeth, giving her a poppet doll which she made in court during the proceedings. Mary reveals thirty-nine people are now arrested, and that Goody Osburn will hang, but not Sarah Good because she confessed.

Proctor is outraged upon hearing the details of the testimony, declaring that the court is convicting citizens with no proof, and then demands Mary not go back to court again. Mary insists she will be gone every day now and then exclaims she saved Elizabeth's life today. When questioned further, Mary reveals Elizabeth is accused as well, but that Mary herself gave testimony on her behalf and the court dismissed the allegations.

Mary storms from the room and Elizabeth and John Proctor discuss their fate. Elizabeth is convinced Abigail will attempt to have her hung in order to resume her relationship with John, and Proctor agrees to go and speak with Ezekiel Cheever. Elizabeth pleads with Proctor to go to Abigail and speak with her, telling her she has no chance of becoming his wife, should something happen to Elizabeth.



## Act II: Scene 1, The Crucible Analysis

The internal conflict of John Proctor resurfaces in Act II, as Proctor and his wife discuss the trial and Abigail Williams. Elizabeth begs John to go to Ezekiel Cheever and reveal what Abigail told him about the dancing having nothing to do with witchcraft, but when John reveals he was alone with Abigail when she confessed this information, Elizabeth immediately returns to distrust of her husband. It is clear the relationship between Proctor and his wife is strained, and this stress is based upon Proctor's previous adulterous affair. While Elizabeth struggles to give her husband the benefit of the doubt, Proctor struggles with his own guilt.

The central point of this internal battle of John Proctor's is the fact that he could potentially end the witch hunt by discrediting Abigail, but in order to do so, he would also incriminate himself for having committed lechery. Thus, John Proctor's fatal flaw as a tragic hero is his pride and concern for reputation. This flaw will later be tested in the courtroom in Act III, but at that point, the whirlwind of the witch trials is in full swing and he is too late.

The transformation of Mary Warren is also important in this scene. Mary Warren, initially described as a lonely and naive girl, has evolved into a demanding and impertinent young woman, swayed by Abigail's influence and her growing power as an official of the court. Mary represents symbolically those individuals who came to power during the McCarthy era and abused that power in naming others. Additionally, Mary Warren's gift of the poppet to Elizabeth foreshadows Elizabeth's arrest in the second half of the Act. Although Mary appears innocent in this gesture, the audience/reader is left to question whether she was directly or indirectly involved in Abigail's plot to have Elizabeth eliminated.



# Act II: Scene 2, The Crucible

## Act II: Scene 2, The Crucible Summary

Act II: Scene 2. Interrupting the argument between John and Elizabeth Proctor, Reverend Hale suddenly appears in the doorway. Reverend Hale enters, revealing that Elizabeth's name has been mentioned in the court, and he is going from door to door, speaking with those who have been accused.

Hale questions Proctor's absence from church services, to which Proctor replies his wife has been sick during the winter and he has cared for her. Proctor goes on to insinuate Reverend Parris's extravagance in obtaining golden candlesticks for the church has hindered his prayers. "I labor the earth from dawn of day to blink of night, and I tell you true, when I look to heaven and see my money glaring at his elbows - it hurt my prayer, sir, it hurt my prayer" (Act II, p. 65).

Reverend Hale proceeds to ask Elizabeth and John Proctor if they know the Ten Commandments, and asks John to recite them for him. Proctor recites the amendments, stumbling and forgetting the last one, which Elizabeth gently reminds him, "Adultery, John" (Act II, p. 67). Reverend Hale begins to depart showing apparent misgivings, and Elizabeth desperately pleads with her husband to reveal what he knows.

Proctor concedes and reveals to Reverend Hale that Abigail Williams told him the dancing in the woods had nothing to do with witchcraft. Hale denies the claim, stating the convicted women have already confessed to Devil worship, and Proctor replies, "There are them that will swear to anything before they'll hang; have you never thought of that?" (Act II, p. 69).

Hale asks John and Elizabeth Proctor whether they believe in witches, and despite knowing this is critical, Elizabeth claims she cannot believe in them. Suddenly, Giles Corey appears in the doorway, claiming they have taken his wife. Following him is Francis Nurse, who exclaims they have also taken Rebecca.

Ezekiel Cheever enters next, along with Marshal Herrick. Cheever presents a warrant for the arrest of Elizabeth Proctor, claiming she was charged by Abigail Williams. Cheever asks for any poppets that Elizabeth may have, and when he spies the poppet Mary gave her earlier, he examines it and reveals a long needle sticking from beneath the skirt.

Cheever reveals that Abigail Williams fell to wailing at dinner. When Reverend Parris went to save the girl, he found a needle in the flesh of her belly. Abigail claimed Elizabeth's spirit pushed the needle inside of her. Elizabeth enters with Mary Warren and Proctor demands she declare how the poppet entered their home. Mary confesses



to making the poppet and placing the needle inside, claiming Abigail sat beside her in the court as it was made.

Despite John Proctor's protestations and this evidence, Elizabeth is taken by Herrick and Cheever. As she disappears, chains are heard and Proctor screams at them not to chain his wife. Left alone with Mary Warren, Proctor demands she go to court with him and testify, but Mary claims she cannot charge murder on Abigail. Mary sobs and the curtain falls as she exclaims, "I cannot, I cannot, I cannot" (Act II, p. 81).

## **Act II: Scene 2, The Crucible Analysis**

The entrance of Reverend Hale in Act II symbolically marks the beginning of John Proctor's major battle against authority and corruption. Hale's mission is to visit those whose names have been mentioned, but not necessarily accused, to test their moral character. This represents the invasiveness of the church in its effort to dig up hidden sin.

When Proctor is asked to name the Ten Commandments, it is both ironic and telling that the one he forgets relates to adultery, the one major sin he himself has committed. Proctor makes clear during this discussion, however, his own reservations regarding Reverend Parris and his tendency for extravagance. No doubt, this reservation is one shared by others within the community, although none might be as forthright as John Proctor in stating those thoughts.

The arrival of Giles Corey and Francis Nurse and the news that Martha and Rebecca have both been incarcerated marks the beginning of a change in the character of Reverend Hale. While Hale was largely in control of the proceedings before, he clearly did not know or expect that Rebecca would be arrested this evening. When Cheever arrests Elizabeth, Hale's doubts begin to evolve further, especially when Mary Warren's admission about the poppet is overlooked and Elizabeth is arrested regardless.

The end of Act II leaves the reader/audience hanging in suspense, unsure whether Mary Warren will agree to testify against Abigail in court or not. It appears as though Mary is Proctor's only hope to save his wife and maintain his own reputation.



# Act III Summary, The Crucible

## Act III Summary, The Crucible Summary

Act III. Act III opens in the vestry room of the Salem meeting house, which now serves as the anteroom of the General Court. Judge Hathorne's voice can be heard questioning Martha Corey. Martha Corey denies being a witch, claiming she does now know what a witch is.

Giles Corey's voice breaks through the crowd as he shouts Thomas Putnam is reaching out for land. Giles asks to present his evidence before the court and is brought into the court by Herrick as Deputy Governor Danforth enters, followed by Ezekiel Cheever and Reverend Parris. Giles breaks down before the court, claiming he only wanted to know the reason for his wife's obsession with reading books and not that he accused her of witchcraft. Danforth insists Giles must present his evidence in a proper affidavit, and sends him from the court.

Francis Nurse follows Giles into the courtroom, also demanding to be heard in regard to his wife's condemnation. Soon Mary Warren enters the court with John Proctor and all eyes turn to them. Proctor leads Mary before the court, and exclaims Mary never saw spirits, but Mary appears unable to speak. Proctor produces a deposition signed by Mary to Danforth, who instantly declares he accepts no depositions. Reverend Parris claims Proctor is attempting to overthrow the court.

Mary admits to Danforth that the accusations by the girls were pretense, while Reverend Parris states, "Excellency, you surely cannot think to let so vile a lie be spread in open court!" (Act III, p. 89). Ezekiel Cheever steps forward to state when he came to take Proctor's wife, John Proctor damned the court and ripped up the warrant. Soon, charges against Proctor arise from the townspeople, who claim he doesn't attend church and that he plows on Sundays.

Danforth reveals to Proctor that Elizabeth has sent him a claim that she is pregnant, but that they have examined her body and found no sign of it. Danforth states he will let her be kept another month and if she shows signs of pregnancy, she will live another year until she is delivered. Danforth asks if Proctor will drop his claim, but Proctor insists on presenting the deposition in order to save the other innocent wives on trial.

Proctor produces several papers, including a testament of ninety-one landowners and members of the church declaring their good opinion of Rebecca Nurse, Martha Corey, and Elizabeth Proctor. Parris declares the testament to be a clear attack on the court and says every person on the list should be summoned for questioning. Danforth hands Mr. Cheever the paper and tells him to draw warrants for the examination of everyone listed.





Giles Corey presents his deposition, and an uproar ensues between Giles and Thomas Putnam. John Proctor presents Mary Warren's deposition to Danforth, and after squabbling with Reverends Parris and Hale, Danforth sends for the children to be brought before the court. Soon Susanna Walcott, Mercy Lewis, Betty Parris, and Abigail Williams enter, and Danforth explains to them the confession in Mary Warren's deposition and the gravity of their crimes should Mary's testimony be proven true.

Abigail Williams rises before the court and claims there is no truth to Mary's testimony. Mary comes under the scrutiny of Danforth and the Reverends, and when Danforth turns to question Abigail, suddenly she begins looking about in the air and clasping her arms as though cold. Abigail claims a cold wind has come and looks to Mary Warren. The other girls follow suit, and begin exclaiming wildly that Mary is cursing them. Mary runs hysterically to Proctor, collapsing, as Proctor leaps toward Abigail, grabbing her by her hair and calling her a whore.

Proctor, trembling, reveals his history with Abigail before the court, astonishing everyone. "She thinks to dance with me on my wife's grave! And well she might, for I thought of her softly. God help me, I lusted, and there is a promise in such sweat. But it is a whore's vengeance, and you must see it; I set myself entirely in your hands, I know you must see it now" (Act III, p. 110).

Danforth, astounded, sends for Elizabeth Proctor to be brought before the court. When Danforth questions Elizabeth as to whether or not her husband is a lecher, she refuses to slander her husband and answers that he is not. Elizabeth is taken away as Proctor exclaims he's already confessed. Hale suddenly stands up against Abigail, declaring the girl has always struck him as false, but Abigail and the girls begin screaming at the ceiling. Abigail begins speaking to an unseen bird in the sky, asking Mary why she is committing this sin. Proctor insists the girls are pretending, but Danforth becomes horrified by the spectacle and demands Mary withdraw her spirit from the girls.

Mary pleads with Abigail and the others to stop their performance, but becomes "overwhelmed by Abigail's - and the girls' - utter conviction, starts to whimper, hands half raised, powerless, and all the girls begin whimpering exactly as she does" (Act III, p. 116). Danforth begins pounding accusations and questions at Mary, who finally, in her hysteria, turns on Proctor and accuses him of being the Devil's man. Parris and the girls cheer "Praise God!" as Mary confesses Proctor's alliance with the Devil (Act III, p. 118). Proctor and Giles Corey are taken by the court to the jail as Reverend Hale denounces the proceedings and quits the court.

## **Act III Summary, The Crucible Analysis**

Act III introduces the characters of Judge Hathorne and Deputy Governor Danforth, both of whom represent supreme authority and governance. In the opening of the act, Giles Corey is pleading for his wife, but Danforth refuses to hear him without the proper documentation. This emphasizes the bureaucratic approach of Danforth, but also





presents his hypocrisy when later he refuses to accept the deposition presented by John Proctor.

Reverend Parris's objections during the trial illustrate his desperation in continuing the witch hunt, regardless of the accuracy or fairness to those accused. The evidence Proctor presents to the court ends up being used against him and the witnesses who attested for those believed innocent. This likewise demonstrates the losing cause for truth in the narrative.

The climax of the drama occurs when John Proctor faces his own guilt and loss of reputation by revealing his illicit affair with Abigail Williams. However, when Elizabeth denies her husband's lechery, Proctor's confession is overlooked, essentially damning him and leading the narrative into the falling action. Abigail's performance in the courtroom wins over Mary Warren, leading her also to turn against Proctor and accuse him of witchcraft, for which he is arrested. Reverend Hale's transformation is fulfilled in this scene, as he finally sees through the coercion of Abigail and the falseness of the accusations. He takes a stand by denouncing the trial and refusing further participation in the witch hunts.



# Act IV Summary, The Crucible

## Act IV Summary, The Crucible Summary

Act IV. Act IV opens in a cell of a Salem jail the following fall. As the curtain rises, Marshal Herrick enters with a lantern, nudging a bundle of rags and calling out for Sarah Good. Herrick calls to Tituba and Sarah to vacate the cell for a north cell, as this one is being occupied. Tituba resists, calling out for the Devil to come take her home, and Sarah follows suit, exclaiming, "Tell him I'm goin', Tituba! Now you tell him Sarah Good is goin' too!" (Act IV, p. 123).

Danforth and Judge Hathorne enter the jail, followed by Cheever. It is revealed that Reverend Hale has been at the jail, going among those who are to hang, and praying with them along with Reverend Parris. Reverend Parris enters, stating that Reverend Hale has returned to bring Rebecca Nurse to God. Hale has been attempting to get those accused to confess their crimes to God in order to be saved. Reverend Parris also reveals his niece, Abigail, has vanished with Mercy Lewis after breaking into his strongbox and stealing thirty-one pounds. Parris is now penniless and breaks down sobbing.

Reverend Parris suggests to Danforth he postpone these hangings for a time, as he fears the backlash from the community when upstanding citizens like Rebecca Nurse and John Proctor are executed. Danforth insists there will be no postponement.

Reverend Hale enters, steeped in sorrow and exhausted. Hale asserts to Danforth that he must pardon the accused, as they will not budge. Hale begs for more time to convince the accused to confess, but Danforth reasserts: "I cannot par-don these when twelve are already hanged for the same crime. It is not just" (Act IV, p. 129).

The conversation turns to John Proctor, who is the one soul Hale has not yet attempted to persuade. Danforth questions Reverend Paris whether the sight of Proctor's expecting wife might sway him to confess and save him, and Parris leaves to summon Elizabeth. When Elizabeth arrives, Reverend Hale begs for her to plead with her husband to confess and not throw his life away for pride. Elizabeth makes no promise, but quietly asks to speak with John.

Herrick enters with John Proctor, and Hale summons the others to leave the couple alone. Alone with her husband, Elizabeth reveals there are a good many who have confessed and been freed, but Giles Corey died by pressing. John tells Elizabeth he has been thinking of confessing and asks what her thoughts are. Elizabeth replies "I cannot judge you, John" (Act IV, p. 135). "Whatever you will do, it is a good man does it" (Act IV, p. 137).

Elizabeth reasserts her love and faith in her husband as Hathorne enters, asking for Proctor's confession. When Proctor tells him he will confess, Hathorne rushes from the



room in joy. Hathorne reenters with Danforth, Cheever, Parris, and Hale, and presents Proctor with pen, ink, and paper. Proctor questions why his confession must be written, and Danforth explains it is for the good instruction of the village. The confession will be posted on the church door.

Proctor is questioned and confesses, but when he is questioned regarding the other accused, including Rebecca Church, Proctor denies any charges of witchcraft against them, saying, "They think to go like saints. I like not to spoil their names" (Act IV, p. 141).

As Proctor signs his name to the written confession, Danforth reaches for the paper and a wild terror consumes Proctor. He tears the paper and crumples it as Reverend Parris exclaims hysterically and Hale cries, "Man, you will hang! You cannot!" (Act IV, p. 144). Proctor responds, "I can. And there's your first marvel, that I can. You have made your magic now, for now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs" (Act IV, p. 144).

From outside, a drumroll marks the opening of the hangings. Parris pleads with Elizabeth to go after her husband, but she stands away and moves to the window. Elizabeth responds to Hale's hysteria, saying, "He has his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!" (Act IV, p. 145). The final drumroll crashes, and Hale weeps in frantic prayer as the curtain falls.

## Act IV Summary, The Crucible Analysis

In Act IV, Governor Danforth further illustrates his hypocritical yet resolute stance by refusing to pardon or even to delay the executions of the remaining seven prisoners because it would be unfair to those already hung. In examining the play as a metaphor for the McCarthy era and the Red Scare, this can be equated with the government realizing it has gone too far, but finding itself unable to turn back for fear of admitting its own mistakes, as in the trials of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.

Reverend Parris's fears reflect his selfishness as a character. Unlike Reverend Hale, who appears to express sincere guilt over his involvement in sentencing innocent people to death, Reverend Parris is more concerned about uprisings in the nearby communities, his loss of money, and his reputation.

Proctor's potential confession is therefore an overwhelming victory for Parris and the government, in that it may sway others to confess and thus save themselves, and in effect end the uprisings and danger of governmental overthrow. When John Proctor chooses instead to die in order to protect the truth and the innocence of himself and the others accused, he commits a heroic act. Proctor dies still claiming innocence, and the Salem witch trials go into history as one of its greatest examples of mass hysteria and wrongful persecution.



# Characters

## Mercy Lewis

Mercy Lewis is the servant of Thomas and Ann Putnam. Mercy is described by the author as "a fat, sly, merciless girl of eighteen" (Act I, p. 16). Mercy was among the girls found dancing in the woods by Reverend Parris, and later becomes one of the "officials of the court" which cast accusations of witchcraft upon the townspeople. In Act IV, Abigail runs away from Salem with Mercy Lewis, after breaking into Reverend Parris's strongbox and stealing thirty-one pounds.

## Deputy Governor Danforth

Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth is described by the author as "a grave man in his sixties, of some humor and sophistication that does not, however, interfere with an exact loyalty to his position and his cause" (Act III, p. 85). Danforth is staunch and stern in his approach to the law, and refuses to back down and release the prisoners when Reverends Hale and Parris beg him to do so after the rebellions begin rising in nearby towns. Danforth stands by his convictions for principle alone, stating, "Postponement now speaks a floundering on my part; reprieve or pardon must cast doubt upon the guilt of them that died till now. While I speak God's law, I will not crack its voice with whimpering" (Act IV, p. 129).

## Thomas Putnam

Thomas Putnam is husband to Ann Putnam, father of Ruth Putnam, and master to the servant, Mercy Lewis. Thomas Putnam lives and owns land near Giles Corey, with whom he has constant squabbles over land borders. Giles Corey accuses Thomas Putnam of attempting to steal land from him by having Ruth accuse his wife, Martha Corey, of witchcraft.

## Rebecca Nurse

Rebecca Nurse, wife of Francis Nurse, is seventy-two and described as "white-haired, leaning upon her walking-stick" when she enters in Act I (Act I, p. 25). Francis Nurse "was called upon to arbitrate disputes as though he were an unofficial judge, and Rebecca also enjoyed the high opinion most people had for him" (Act I, p. 25). Rebecca states her opinions against bringing in Reverend Hale, as she believes it will cause more strife within the community. Later in the play, Rebecca is accused of witchcraft by Ruth Putnam, an apparent act of greed on the part of the Putnam family. Rebecca refuses to confess, and is one of those executed along with John Proctor in the end of Act IV.



## Marshal Herrick

Marshal George Herrick is responsible for serving warrants to those summoned to the court for questioning in the play. Herrick's character is more sympathetic than others in authority, as he shows regret for his actions and befriends those whom he must guard in the jail.

## Ezekiel Cheever

In Act II, Elizabeth Proctor begs her husband to go to Ezekiel Cheever and reveal what Abigail confessed to Proctor at her uncle's house in order to stop the witch trials from going forward. Cheever, however, proves to be a weak character who later denounces Elizabeth as a witch upon seeing the evidence of the poppet doll when he serves a warrant to arrest her. Cheever represents a turncoat, in that once the accusations begin to explode in the town, Cheever is one of the first to present evidence against his friends and neighbors.

## Reverend John Hale

Reverend John Hale is a minister from Beverly who is reputed to be an expert of the occult. Reverend Parris sends for Reverend Hale to examine the possibility that the Devil has infested Salem after discovering his daughter and niece dancing in the forest with the slave Tituba. According to the author, Hale is described as "nearing forty, a tight-skinned, eager-eyed intellectual. This [arriving in Salem] is a beloved errand for him; on being called here to ascertain witchcraft he felt the pride of the specialist whose unique knowledge has at last been publicly called for" (Act I, p. 32).

In Act IV, however, Reverend Hale undergoes a change of heart after witnessing the corruption of the court and among the people of Salem. Hale denounces the witch trials and later spends his time in the prison with the accused, attempting to get them to confess in order to save their lives.

## Tituba

Tituba is a black slave from Barbados who has belonged to Reverend Parris since his days there as a merchant. Tituba cares for Betty, Reverend Parris's daughter, and tends to household duties. Tituba leads the ritual by the girls in the forest which is discovered by Reverend Parris, but later claims Abigail forced her to "conjure" for her. Tituba is the first to be accused of witchcraft in the play, and after beatings and threats of hanging, Tituba names Goody Good and Goody Osburn as witches at the suggestion of her accusers. Tituba's confession spurs Abigail and the other girls to begin naming names, erupting in chaos.



## Giles Corey

Giles Corey is a farmer in Salem and friend to John Proctor. Giles Corey's land abuts with that of Thomas Putnam, and the two have had ongoing feuds about ownership and boundaries. Giles Corey accuses Thomas Putnam of attempting to steal land from him by having his daughter Ruth accuse his wife, Martha Corey, of witchcraft. Giles Corey stands trial himself and refuses to commit a plea, resulting in his being crushed to death with stones.

Elizabeth Proctor relates the reasoning behind Giles' torturous death in Act IV, saying, "He were not hanged. He would not answer yes or no to his indictment; for if he denied the charge they'd hang him surely, and auction out his property. So he stand mute, and died Christian under the law. And so his sons will have his farm. It is the law, for he could not be condemned a wizard without he answer the indictment, aye or nay" (Act IV, p. 135).

## Elizabeth Proctor

Elizabeth Proctor is the wife of John Proctor. In Act II, it becomes evident to the reader/audience that there is a tension in the Proctor home which is rooted in a prior affair John Proctor had with Abigail Williams, their servant at the time. Elizabeth loves her husband dearly, but has been unable to let go of her suspicions and judgment based on the affair. When word of witchcraft starts to stir in Salem, Elizabeth begs John to go speak with Abigail, knowing that she is the ringmaster. Elizabeth believes Abigail wants her accused and out of the way so she can marry her husband.

Elizabeth does become one of the accused in Act II and is taken to the jail after Mary Warren's poppet is discovered in her home with a needle in it. Abigail Williams collapsed at the dinner table that evening with a needle in her flesh and accused Elizabeth of having sent spirits to murder her. In Act IV, when Elizabeth is summoned to convince her husband to confess and save his life, she stands by him, regardless of what he chooses. Elizabeth is a devoted wife, and is saved from hanging because she is pregnant when she stands trial.

## Mary Warren

Mary Warren is the servant of John and Elizabeth Proctor, and is described as "seventeen, a subservient, naive, lonely girl" (Act I, p. 18). When Mary first appears in Act I, she is frightened and willing to confess to what the girls did in the woods; however, Mary is threatened and bullied by Abigail and Mercy into silence. Mary gains momentum and power as a character when she becomes an "official of the court" and joins the other girls in making accusations of the townspeople. Mary gives Elizabeth Proctor a poppet she made in court, which is later used as proof of witchcraft against Elizabeth when Abigail claims she used it to harm her.



In Act III, John Proctor convinces Mary to sign a deposition stating that her accusations and those of the other girls are false, but when Mary faces Abigail in the court, she begins to falter. As Abigail and the others begin screaming and seeing "visions," Mary loses her power completely and joins in, denouncing John Proctor for soliciting the Devil and holding supernatural powers over her.

## John Proctor

John Proctor is the protagonist of *The Crucible*. Proctor is described by the author as "a farmer in his middle thirties. He need not have been a partisan of any faction in the town, but there is evidence to suggest he had a sharp and biting way with hypocrites" (Act I, p. 20). Through the narrative, the reader learns John Proctor has previously had an adulterous affair with Abigail Williams when she worked as a servant in his home. Proctor's wife, Elizabeth, released Abigail from service upon her discovery of the affair, and the relationship between John and Elizabeth has remained strained since its occurrence.

Proctor fulfills his role in the drama as a tragic hero, exhibiting courage and honesty against the forces of corruption, deception and hypocrisy. John Proctor's fatal flaw is his pride and his betrayal through adultery. Proctor has denounced his affair and resists the temptations of Abigail, but his pride prevents him from coming forward with the truth about his and Abigail's past until he is driven to do so by desperation during his wife's trial. In the end of the play, Proctor's decision to renounce his confession and go to execution demonstrates his loyalty to truth and to the truths of those convicted wrongly alongside him.

## Betty Parris

Betty Parris is the ten-year-old daughter of Reverend Paris. Betty was present at the ritual in the woods which was discovered by her father, and fell ill afterwards. It is Betty's comatose-like illness that prompts Reverend Parris to call Reverend Hale to Salem. Betty later accuses Abigail of drinking blood to kill the wife of John Proctor, but is immediately silenced by the bullying and threats of Abigail and the others.

## Ann Putnam

Ann Putnam is the wife of Thomas Putnam and the mother of Ruth Putnam. Ann is consumed with grief over the death of seven babies, either through miscarriage or stillbirth, and sends her daughter Ruth to Tituba to discover what evil has taken her children.





## Judge Hathorne

Judge Hathorne presides over the Salem Witch Trials. Author Arthur Miller describes Hathorne in the play as "is in his sixties, a bitter, remorseless Salem judge" (Act III, p. 85).

## Abigail Williams

Abigail Williams is the central antagonist of the play. Abigail is the niece of Reverend Parris, and is a seventeen-year-old orphan whose parents presumably were killed by Indians. Abigail worked as the Proctors' servant until Elizabeth Proctor discovered her husband was having an affair with the girl and put her out. Abigail is supported by her uncle.

In the opening of the play, Reverend Parris has discovered Abigail, his daughter Betty, and others dancing in the forest with the slave Tituba. Betty falls ill and Parris believes the Devil's hand is involved and sends for the help of Reverend Hale. Abigail is the ringleader among the girls in the town, and facing her own persecution for conjuring spirits, turns on Tituba and calls her out as a witch. Once Tituba calls out others, Abigail leads the girls into a whirlwind frenzy of accusations in Salem.

Abigail is driven, largely or wholly, by her desire for John Proctor and her jealousy of his wife, Elizabeth. The actions and accusations Abigail commits serve to harm Elizabeth and have her executed as a witch. Abigail oversees Mary Warren sewing a poppet doll for Elizabeth and later fakes supernatural illness, essentially framing Elizabeth for witchery. In the end of the play, Abigail, along with Mercy Lewis, has stolen thirty-one pounds from her uncle's strongbox and run away from Salem, presumably on a ship.

## Francis Nurse

Francis Nurse is the husband of Rebecca Nurse and is described by the author as "one of those men for whom both sides of the argument had to have respect. He was called upon to arbitrate disputes as though he were an unofficial judge" (Act I, p. 25).

## Reverend Samuel Parris

Reverend Samuel Parris is the town minister of Salem, Massachusetts. In Act I, Reverend Parris has discovered his daughter, Betty, and his niece, Abigail, dancing in the woods with the slave Tituba and several other girls. Parris sends for Reverend Hale of Beverly to examine his daughter, who has fallen ill since the incident, for signs that she has been cursed by the Devil.

Reverend Parris is criticized by many in Salem, including John Proctor, for his extravagant ways and apparent greed. According to the author's notes, "At the time of





these events Parris was in his middle forties. . . He believed he was being persecuted wherever he went, despite his best efforts to win people and God to his side. In meeting, he felt insulted if someone rose to shut the door without first asking his permission" (Act I, p. 3).

Reverend Parris shows his true selfish nature in Act IV, when he appears to be more concerned about the loss of his money, stolen by his niece, than the fate of the accused. Parris, as a character, is consumed with what others think and his own reputation and power.



# Objects/Places

## Salem

Salem, Massachusetts, is the setting of *The Crucible*. Salem is the real-life setting of the historical Salem Witch Trials which took place during 1692-1693. Salem was founded in 1626, and "to the European world the whole province was a barbaric frontier inhabited by a sect of fanatics who, nevertheless, were shipping out products of slowly increasing quantity and value" (Act I, p. 4).

## Reverend Parris's Home

Act I takes place in the home of Reverend Parris, where he is found at the opening curtain kneeling beside the bed of his ten-year-old daughter, Betty. Reverend Parris's home is located near the town center, with the meeting hall nearby.

## Kettle

When Reverend Parris discovers his niece, Abigail, and daughter, Betty, dancing in the woods with several other girls and the slave Tituba, Tituba is standing over a boiling kettle. This insinuates a traditional vision of witchcraft, and Abigail is later questioned what was in the kettle and if any creatures were put in it. Abigail admits that a frog leapt in, but of its own accord.

## Barbados

The slave of Reverend Parris, Tituba, comes from the island of Barbados.

## Witchcraft

Witchcraft is the central motif in the drama. When Abigail and several other young girls are discovered dancing naked in the woods with the slave Tituba, accusations of witchcraft arise as the girls try to escape persecution themselves. Soon, a full-fledged frenzy explodes in the town, with neighbors accusing one another of witchcraft to avenge past squabbles, obtain land, and attain power.

## Books

In Act I, Giles Corey questions Reverend Hale, "Mr. Hale, I have always wanted to ask a learned man - what signifies the readin' of strange books?" (Act I, p. 40). Giles continues to explain his wife has a strange habit of reading, but does not reveal what



books she reads. Later in the play, this fact will be used against Martha Corey as basis of accusations of witchcraft.

## Proctor's House

Act II takes place in the common room of John Proctor's home. John Proctor owns 600 acres of land in the outskirts of Salem, and is a hard-working farmer.

## Poppet

When Mary Warren returns from her day in court in Act II, she gives a poppet, or small doll, to Elizabeth Proctor, saying, "I made a gift for you today, Goody Proctor. I had to sit long hours in a chair, and passed the time with sewing" (Act II, p. 56). This poppet is later used as evidence against Elizabeth Proctor when Marshal Herrick reveals a needle inside the doll. Abigail Williams, that evening, collapsed with pains in her stomach, revealing a needle, which she claims was placed there by the familiar spirit of Elizabeth Proctor.

## Boston

When the official court is formed in Salem for the persecution of witches, Elizabeth reveals four judges have been sent from Boston, "weighty magistrates of the General Court, and at the head sits the Deputy Governor of the Province" (Act II, p. 52).

## The Church

The church plays a central role in the play, as it is the religious leaders who encourage the hysteria and panic of the witch-hunt. Accusations against John Proctor include his obvious absence from church services during the past year. When John Proctor is asked to sign a confession, Reverend Parris reveals the confession will be posted on the church doors to remind the people of goodness and virtue.

## Golden Candlesticks

When John Proctor is defending his dislike for Reverend Parris in Act II, he describes Parris's greed, using golden candlesticks as an example: "Since we built the church there were pewter candle-sticks upon the altar; Francis Nurse made them, y'know, and a sweeter hand never touched the metal. But Parris came, and for twenty week he preach nothin' but golden candlesticks until he had them" (Act II, p. 65).

## The Ten Commandments

When John and Elizabeth Proctor are questioned by Reverend Hale in Act II, Hale asks John to recite the Ten Commandments. Proctor recites nine of the Commandments and stumbles on the tenth, which Elizabeth reminds him is the Commandment referring to Adultery.



# Themes

## Mass Hysteria

Mass hysteria is the spontaneous manifestation of similar hysterical symptoms by a group. The Salem witch trials are a notable example in history of this occurrence, and thematically, it is central to the plot of *The Crucible*. Crowd psychology is a branch of social psychology which examines how ordinary people can typically gain direct power by acting collectively. The correlations between psychological mind control and coercion are central in *The Crucible*, as it is through these means that Abigail Williams convinces a group of seemingly innocent village girls to convict their neighbors, friends and foes to execution for witchcraft.

Arthur Miller uses the theme of mass hysteria in the Salem witch trials to criticize the American government and particularly the actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy during the Second Red Scare in the United States. Miller's play is not overt in its metaphor of McCarthyism, because to have been so would have endangered Miller as a playwright in the U.S. Like William Shakespeare, Miller chooses instead to set his drama in a separate time and place, with only the theme resonating in his contemporary world. But in the world of the House Un-American Activities Committee, Hollywood blacklisting, and a call for individuals to stand and name names of those believed to be Communist sympathizers, it is hard not to see the correlations to the unjust persecution of innocent women and men for witchcraft hundreds of years before. Miller's theme resonates not only for the "witches" of Salem or McCarthyism, it stands strong today as an allegory reminding us of the dangers of mind control, chaos, and irrationality in dealing with what is perceived as a common enemy.

## Religious Persecution

The "Great Migration" took place between 1630-1640, in which a large number of Puritan families in England immigrated to the colonies of New England, supporting and founding the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The principle motivation for these settlers was the freedom to worship as they chose. These settlers did not simply cross the Atlantic to find another England awaiting them. The American landscape at this time was completely rugged and was still occupied by Native Americans, with whom the colonists fought bitter battles in order to establish their society.

Ironically, religious persecution, the driving force for the Puritans to come to America, is the backdrop of *The Crucible* and the Salem witch trials. The society developed in Salem was theocratic, meaning that the government and the Church were intrinsically tied. Therefore, a sin against God was perceived as a sin against society. This theocratic backdrop imposed a system of intolerance for deviation from the norm and was the justification for the persecution of those touched by the Devil.



While the McCarthyism of the 1950s was not based around religion, there is a direct correlation between the intolerance of Puritan society and the society that existed under the Second Red Scare. Religious deviance was just another "sign" that someone could be considered a Communist sympathizer, and indeed many of those who faced trial in the 1940s and 1950s were Jewish, atheist, or otherwise outside of the "Christian norm" for the time. Miller insinuates that intolerance of any form is dangerous and potentially deadly—not only to the individual, but to society as a whole.

## Truth and Deception

The theme of truth and lies is another central theme in *The Crucible*, and one which is illustrated through the actions of each character in the drama. John Proctor, the protagonist of the narrative, is internally conflicted over his own hypocrisy rooted in his adulterous affair with Abigail Williams. However, as Proctor states to his wife Elizabeth, "I should have roared you down when first you told me your suspicion. But I wilted, and, like a Christian, I confessed. Confessed!" It is clear that Proctor has chosen an honest path in the aftermath of his sin (Act II, p. 55).

Proctor faces the same battle of honesty versus deception in his dealings with Salem society. While Abigail represents deception on almost every level, Proctor struggles to reveal the truth, while not revealing the whole truth. In order to discredit Abigail, Proctor needs to also confess his guilt of lechery—but in doing so, he will discredit his own name in society and the name of his family as a whole. Proctor overcomes his fatal flaw twice in the narrative, first when he reveals his affair with Abigail to the court, and second when he retracts his confession and chooses to die as an honest man.

# Style

## Point of View

The *Crucible* is a dramatic work written in dialogue, or the exchange between actors onstage. The structure of dramatic texts often relies on first and second person point of view, as the characters speak directly to one another. In addition to dialogue, the author includes stage directions and notes regarding specific characters, the setting, and the general mood of the play. The first example of this is in the opening of Act I, where Miller describes the setting and actions of characters: "As the curtain rises, Reverend Parris is discovered kneeling beside the bed, evidently in prayer. His daughter, Betty Parris, aged ten, is lying on the bed, inert" (Act I, p. 3).

In reading or watching the play, the strongest viewpoint is relayed through the character of John Proctor. It is Proctor's voice with whom the audience/reader is directed to sympathize with, and whose inner struggles cause the greatest tension. However, due to the naturalistic nature of Miller's writing, he includes no monologues to the audience or obvious exposition. The history of the characters, setting and plot are related through dialogue alone.

## Setting

The *Crucible* is set in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. In the author's notes in Act I, he describes the setting of Reverend Parris's home as having "stood in the 'town' - but we today would hardly call it a village. The meeting house was nearby, and from this point outward - toward the bay or inland - there were a few small-windowed, dark houses snuggling against the raw Massachusetts winter. Salem had been established hardly forty years before" (Act I, p. 4). The effects of this raw colonial setting can be seen in Abigail's description of her parents' murder: "I saw Indians smash my dear parents' heads on the pillow next to mine" (Act I, p. 20).

Religion plays a major role in the play, and this is directly linked to the drama's setting. The settlers of Salem, Massachusetts, and the characters depicted in the play were Puritans, and the Massachusetts government was dominated by conservative Puritan secular leaders prior to the 1680s. As the author notes in the text, "It was, however, an autocracy by consent, for they were united from top to bottom by a commonly held ideology whose perpetuation was the reason and justification for all their sufferings" (Act I, p. 6).

## Language and Meaning

Arthur Miller's language in *The Crucible* is suited to its characters, time and place. More formal than contemporary speech, the dialogue spoken by the characters reflects the formality within Puritan society during the 1600s in the American colonies. Likewise,



there are distinctions between the way upper class characters, such as Deputy Governor Danforth and Judge Hawthorne, speak versus their lower-class constituents.

Miller employs metaphor, simile and symbolism through his dialogue, in examples such as in Abigail's lines to Proctor: "I know how you clutched my back behind your house and sweated like a stallion whenever I come near! Or did I dream that?" (Act I, p. 22), and "I have a sense for heat, John, and yours has drawn me to my window, and I have seen you looking up, burning in your loneliness. Do you tell me you've never looked up at my window?" (Act I, p. 23).

Likewise, as in many dramas, characters often say what they do not mean. Subtext is content underneath the spoken dialogue, and Miller employs it throughout *The Crucible*, particularly between the characters of John and Elizabeth Proctor, and between John Proctor and Abigail Williams. Metaphorically, subtext can be found in the courtroom of the accused in Act III, as the reader may note some of the phrases as reflective of those used in the 1950s McCarthy hearings.

## Structure

*The Crucible* is an allegorical play set in four acts. Allegory is a literary device which communicates its message by means of symbolic figures, actions or metaphor. As such, the drama may be seen as an extended metaphor representing the era of McCarthyism and the "witch hunts" that it entailed during the 1950s.

*The Crucible* follows the structure of classical tragedies, exemplified both in the clear distinctions of hero and villain, and in the structure of the play itself. The exposition takes place in the beginning of Act I, where the events of Reverend Parris discovering the girls dancing in the woods are described through dialogue. The rising action begins with the first accusations of witchcraft, and builds to a climax in Act III, when Proctor attempts to save Elizabeth in court. The falling action of the drama is illustrated as Mary is overcome by Abigail's power in the court, and the denouement takes place in the jail cell at the end of the play.





## Quotes

"Abigail: Uncle, we did dance; let you tell them I confessed it - and I'll be whipped if I must be. But they're speakin' of witch-craft. Betty's not witched."

Act I, p. 10

"Parris, to the point: Abigail, is there any other cause than you have told me, for your being discharged from Goody Proc-tor's service? I have heard it said, and I tell you as I heard it, that she comes so rarely to the church this year for she will not sit so close to something soiled. What signified that remark?"

Act I, p. 12

"Mrs. Putnam, with vicious certainty: I'd not call it sick; the Devil's touch is heavier than sick. It's death, y'know, it's death drivin' into them, forked and hoofed."

Act I, p. 13

"Abigail: Now look you. All of you. We danced. And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam's dead sisters. And that is all. And mark this. Let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word, about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it; I saw Indians smash my dear parents' heads on the pillow next to mine, and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down!"

Act I, p. 20

"Abigail: I have a sense for heat, John, and yours has drawn me to my window, and I have seen you looking up, burning in your loneliness. Do you tell me you've never looked up at my window?"

Act I, p. 23

"Proctor: Can you speak one minute without we land in Hell again? I am sick of Hell!"

Act I, p. 30

"Hale: You have sent your spirit out upon this child, have you not? Are you gathering souls for the Devil?"

Act I, p. 44

"Elizabeth: The Deputy Governor promise hangin' if they'll not confess, John. The town's gone wild, I think. She speak of Abigail, and I thought she were a saint, to hear her."



Abigail brings the other girls into the court, and where she walks the crowd will part like the sea for Israel."

Act II, p. 52

"Proctor: Spare me! You forget nothin' and forgive nothin'. Learn charity, woman. I have gone tiptoe in this house all seven month since she is gone. I have not moved from there to there without I think to please you, and still an everlasting funeral marches round your heart. I cannot speak but I am doubted, every moment judged for lies, as though I come into a court when I come into this house!"

Act II, p. 54

"MARY Warren, backing from him, but keeping her erect posture, striving, striving for her way: The Devil's loose in Salem, Mr. Proctor; we must discover where he's hiding!"

Act II, p. 59

"Mary Warren: I - I cannot tell how, but I did. I - I heard the other girls screaming, and you, Your Honor, you seemed to believe them, and I - It were only sport in the beginning, sir, but then the whole world cried spirits, spirits, and I - I promise you, Mr. Danforth, I only thought I saw them but I did not."

Act III, p. 107

"Elizabeth: John, I counted myself so plain, so poorly made, no honest love could come to me! Suspicion kissed you when I did; I never knew how I should say my love. It were a cold house I kept!"

Act IV, p. 137

## Topics for Discussion

Who is Abigail Williams? What is the history behind Abigail's family? How did Abigail become orphaned? What relationship does Abigail have with John Proctor? What relationship does Abigail have with Elizabeth Proctor? Why was Abigail released from service in the Proctor home? What is Abigail Williams's principle motivation in the play?

In what ways is John Proctor like a classical tragic hero? What admirable characteristics does John Proctor embody? What is John Proctor's fatal flaw? How does Proctor relate to his society? How is Proctor viewed by others within the society? What motivates Proctor in the narrative? Is the ending of the narrative happy or tragic for Proctor? Why?

How is *The Crucible* structured? Is the structure traditional or non-traditional? In what ways? Where is the exposition illustrated in the narrative? Where are the rising action and the climax? What is the outcome for the main characters in the denouement of the narrative? Would the play be considered a comedy or drama? Why?

Who is Mary Warren? What transformation of character does Mary Warren undergo in the narrative? Why? What forces drive Mary Warren? What actions does Mary Warren take which help the Proctors? What actions does Mary Warren take which damage the Proctors? What is Mary Warren's emotional state at the end of the play?

In what ways does *The Crucible* reflect the Second Red Scare in the United States? What characters can symbolically be seen as interpretations of the McCarthy era? How do the play's themes relate to HUAC and the events during the 1950s? What is Arthur Miller's moral statement in the play?

How do grudges and personal rivalries play a role in the hysteria and accusations of the Salem witch trials in the narrative? Which characters are accused based upon these rivalries and by whom? How do these grudges relate to the theme of intolerance? In what ways do these underlying motivations serve to transform the character of Reverend John Hale in the drama?

How do the characters of Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail Williams compare in the narrative? How does sexuality relate to each of these characters and to the drama's themes? How does Elizabeth's relationship with John Proctor differ from Abigail Williams's relationship with John Proctor? How do the motivations and actions of Elizabeth and Abigail drive the course of the narrative?