

The Crucible
Review Packet

Name:

Period:



Arthur Miller (1915-2005)

by Robert Anderson

Arthur Miller, considered by many to be the pre-eminent American playwright of the second half of the twentieth century, was born in New York City. His father manufactured women's coats, and his mother was a schoolteacher. In high school, Arthur was more involved with sports than with literature. "Until the age of seventeen," Miller said, "I can safely say that I never read a book weightier than *Tom Swift* and *The Rover Boys*, and only verged on literature with some Dickens."

On graduation from high school, Miller applied to the University of Michigan, but his grades were not good enough for a scholarship, and the Depression left his father unable to finance his tuition. To earn money for college, Miller worked for two years in an automobile parts plant, where, incidentally, he read Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. The experience in the parts plant later supplied him with the material for his 1955 play *A Memory of Two Mondays*.

Miller eventually enrolled in the University of Michigan. To help finance his education, he took on various jobs. First, he was a mouse tender in the university science laboratory. Later, he moved on (and up) to become the night editor of the *Michigan Daily*. More important, he started to write plays.

After graduation, Miller returned to New York and, like many of us "playwrights-in-waiting," earned a living by writing radio scripts for such programs as *Cavalcade of America*, the *Columbia Workshop*, and *The Theatre Guild of the Air*.

Miller's first Broadway success, *All My Sons*, was produced in 1947 and won The New York Drama Critic's award for Best Play. That play struck a note that was to become familiar in Miller's work: the need for moral responsibility in families and society.

In 1949, with the production of his masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman* (written in a small studio he built with his own hands on his property in northwestern Connecticut), all promises were fulfilled. Miller instantly joined the pantheon of the great American playwrights.

It was totally in character that Miller's next play, produced in 1953, should be *The Crucible*—about a witch hunt that took place in 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts. In that witch hunt, Miller found parallels to the "Red hunt" being conducted in the 1950s Washington, D.C., by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Writers, actors, politicians—and all kinds of other people—were summoned to appear before McCarthy to answer the questions: "Are you now or were you ever a Communist?" Those summoned were required to inform on neighbors and friends or be sent to jail.

Three years after the production of *The Crucible* in New York, Miller was summoned before a congressional committee. He spoke freely about himself and his occasional attendance, years before, as a guest at Communist meetings; but he refused to name names of other people in attendance. Miller was found in contempt of Congress, but his conviction was later overturned by the Supreme Court.

The Crucible was not successful in its first production. Some critics questioned the comparison between the old witch-hunts and the contemporary hunt for Communists in government. In a later production, supervised by Miller himself, the play ran for over six hundred performances. It is now Miller's most produced play.

BACKGROUND for *The Crucible*

The setting for *The Crucible* is the Puritan community of Salem (now Danvers), Massachusetts, in 1692. The first Puritans were called by that name because they had attempted to “purify” or reform the Church of England by stripping away much of the ritual, ceremony, pomp, and terms. As they pared away what they considered the excesses of religion, the Puritans developed a lean, spare, somber form of religious worship.

Their *Doctrine of the Elect* taught that people were fated from birth to be among the elect and saved, or among the damned and doomed. There was *nothing* a person could do to become a member of the elect; it was totally predestined by God. In terms of *The Crucible*, if certain people can be predestined by God to be saved, then it followed that the Devil could select certain individuals to be bewitched. In Calvinistic tradition, the Puritans placed emphasis on the fate of “sinners in the hands of an angry God.”

The religious convictions of the Puritans filtered through all facets of their life, as the earliest settlers attempted to establish a form of government called a *theocracy*. In a theocracy God is the head of state, and religious authorities rule the state as God’s representatives. Ironically, many of those who came to America in search of religious freedom ended up on the side of religious authoritarianism and intolerance.

The witch trials that took place in Salem, Massachusetts, in the early 1690s resulted in the execution of some twenty individuals (nineteen people were hanged, along with two dogs, and one person was pressed to death). This attempt to eradicate the evil of a community or country by identifying and eliminating certain individuals for collusion with the Devil (or for involvement in satanic and sinful plots) has fascinated the American imagination ever since. Indeed, the term “witch hunt” is commonly heard today applied not to the area of religion but to politics—any search for a scapegoat who can be blamed for all the ills of society and whose removal will eliminate the problems.

In the early 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy (1909-1957) as chairman of a Senate investigating committee conducted such a hunt for, as he put it, pinkos, radicals, and communists, in and out of government. In the process, many innocent and talented people suffered damaged reputations and ostracism. Arthur Miller set *The Crucible* back in the Puritan period at the time of the witch trials, but his audiences know that his play was really about the McCarthy Senate hearings of the 1950s.

McCarthyism, the term derived from the senator’s name, developed during the cold war, a period after World War II in which there was a contest for power between the communist nations headed by the Soviet Union and the nations of the West headed by the United States. Today, McCarthyism is sometimes used to refer to the policy or practice of publicly accusing, in a reckless manner, suspected individuals or groups of political disloyalty and subversion.

Puritan History

In 1608 a group of Puritan separatists, attempting to escape religious persecution, fled England for the Netherlands. They remained there until 1620, but, fearing that they were losing their cultural identity, they decided to settle in Delaware in the New World. A mixed group of Puritan emigrants (the "Pilgrims") and adventurers from England sailed to America on the Mayflower and landed, accidentally, on Cape Cod in November 1620. Within five months half of the original 101 colonists were dead. During the course of the early seventeenth century, however, increasing numbers of immigrants, many but by no means all of them Puritans, managed to establish a group of autonomous North American colonies, including Plymouth (1620), Massachusetts (1628), New Hampshire (1629), Connecticut (1633), Maine (1635), Rhode Island (1636), and New Haven (1638). Like their counterparts in Britain they were extreme Calvinistic Protestants who viewed the Reformation as a victory of true Christianity over Roman Catholicism. They believed that the Universe was God-centered, and that man, inherently sinful and corrupt, rescued from damnation (if indeed he was) only by arbitrary divine grace, was duty-bound to do God's will, which he could understand best by studying the Bible and the universe which God had created and which he controlled.

Their isolation in the New World, their introversion, the harshness and dangers of their new existence, their sense that they were a new Chosen People of God destined to found a New Jerusalem -- a New City of God in the midst of the wilderness -- insured that American Puritanism would remain more severe (and, frequently, more intellectually subtle and rigorous) than that which they had left behind. The American Puritan tended to interpret the Bible, which had supreme literary value because it was the perfect word of God, even more literally than did his British counterparts. Though many of the original American Puritans -- many of whom were both preachers and authors -- had attended English Universities, they tended to form religious oligarchies and sought to establish a purified church -- which meant the frequently harsh imposition of religious uniformity upon an unwilling populace.

It was to escape Puritan religious persecution that Roger Williams, a minister from Salem, established his colony in Rhode Island in 1636. The overt remnants of Puritanism did not die out in New England until well into the nineteenth century, and it echoes in American society today. In coming to the New World in the first place, Puritans altered the course of history, for better or for worse. There were approximately 4,000,000 English-speaking people in the entire world in 1603: less than four centuries later there are over seventy-five times that number.

Concepts of Puritanism in *The Crucible*

Some basic tenets of Puritanism are important to the full understanding of *The Crucible*. The first is the Doctrine of the Elect. The Puritans believed that when a person was born or at any given time later, he might be chosen by God to become one of the Elect, that is, one of the people who would receive divine salvation. There is nothing that man himself could do to achieve this state; instead, it was entirely predestined by God. Even though the Puritans never emphasized it, it was assumed that those who were not among the Elect would not receive divine salvation. The choice of who would be among the elect was completely arbitrary and no amount of good works, righteous living, or moral behavior could help a person achieve this status of being Elect. This concept is also called **predestination**. An individual could never tell whether he was among the Elect; therefore, he lived a righteous life so as to be prepared for being elected when the day came. It was furthermore assumed that if a person was among the Elect, he could do no wrong. The paradox in this type of belief is that if he were actually among the Elect, he could do wrong and would still be saved because once a person is elected, then he is saved forever.

In terms of *The Crucible*, if God can then elect certain people to be saved, it was highly possible that the Devil could select certain people to be bewitched. For the Puritans, the Devil was not some abstract figure, but was a vivid and active enemy of mankind. Many stories tell of the “Black Man” who was lurking just outside the village gates or hiding in the forest waiting to trap a man and bring him into the ways of the Devil. The Puritans accepted that story that the Devil was one of God’s angels who had fallen from grace. After being thrown from heaven for betraying God, the Devil set up a continual campaign to destroy the designs of God. This concept is used in *The Crucible* when Reverend Hale mentions that the Devil’s ways are manifold and if the Devil were able to deceive God, then it would be easy for him to deceive man.

Another concept of Puritanism that is important is the view of theocracy. The Puritans believed in a government that was totally controlled by the church. If a person was not a member of the church, he could not vote in elections, much less hold offices. During the earliest history of the church, the ministers were also the main officers and administrators of the civil government. This, if a person like John Proctor did not attend church, he could be punished and excommunicated from the church, thereby losing all of his property and rights. Furthermore, a man who did not know the catechism of the church also became suspect. The church was very powerful and the minister of the church wielded much authority.

While the Puritan views about sin were strict, they also thought that every man was constantly being tempted by the Devil toward some sin. Part of the church belief was that once a man sinned he must first openly confess his sin, then repent and finally perform some act of penance. Without open confession, a person had no chance of ever being saved.

In general, the Puritans were a sober and fearful group who felt that anything pleasant was inspired by the Devil. Women were forbidden to dress prettily; children were not expected to play games; theaters were forbidden as being the breeding place of the Devil; and dancing of any kind was a cardinal sin.

Puritan Concepts of the Devil and Witches found in *The Crucible*

During the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth century, belief in the reality of witches was widespread both in America and in Europe. Thousands of people were executed during the period; and few people questioned the actual existence of witches. The only problem to the seventeenth-century mind was how to identify a witch.

The concept of the Devil grew out of basic tenets of Puritan religion. The Puritans accepted completely the doctrine of original sin and many sermons emphasized that man was born depraved and sinful. He was depicted as existing on the verge of eternal damnation and was seen as a potential colleague of the Devil. Given the view that man is on the verge of damnation and is born evil and depraved, it was then easy for the Puritan to see a devil hiding behind every tree ready to trap and ensnare man. For the Puritan, the Devil did not work alone. He employed many legions of helpers which were generally referred to as witches.

The Puritan felt that the Devil had concentrated all of his attention upon destroying the New World. This view is a result of the Puritan belief that their religion was the new and only religion approved by God and that soon there would be a New Canaan in New England. Consequently, the Devil could most effectively destroy God's purpose by attacking his new "chosen people" in the New Canaan. They also believed that the Devil held his strongest foothold in the New World because of the vast regions of forests and the vast numbers of barbarous savages existing in America.

Knowing that the Devil's time in which he could fulfill his destructive aims was limited, the Puritans could then readily accept the fact that he would employ legions of helpers—witches—to attack the New Canaan. They thought they had found his center of attack when they discovered so many witches in Salem, Massachusetts, a center of Puritanism. The Puritans were ready to accuse anyone of being a witch and accept anyone else's accusation because they know that the Devil had to employ many witches to accomplish his goal before God's kingdom was ultimately established.

What a witch actually is and how to discover one was never solved by the Puritans. The Devil used witches to help him gain his goal and a person became a witch by entering into some type of covenant with the Devil. Once a person entered into this contract with the Devil, then that person would attack other innocent people. The identification becomes more complex when we realize that a witch could be invisible and could enter a person's body without that person knowing it.

Additional difficulties arise in discovering a witch when we realize that the Puritans also believed that the Devil or one of his agents could assume the shape of an innocent person and then torment another person. The tormented person then would automatically accuse the innocent person of being a witch and this innocent person would be punished for being in league with the Devil. By this subtle means, the Devil would gain his end of tormenting an innocent person and of bringing confusion into God's world.

Character study: For each of the following characters, write who she/he is, what relationship to other characters, any important character or personality traits and any other important information.

	Who is he/she?	Relationship to whom?	Problem? Acts of courage/cowardice?
Reverend Samuel Parris			
Betty Parris			
Abigail Williams			
Tituba			
Mrs. Ann Putnam			

Thomas Putnam			
John Proctor			
Elizabeth Proctor			
Rebecca Nurse			
Reverend John Hale			

Think of what you mean when you use the words "honor," "truth," "justice," or "courage." Choose one character that exemplifies your idea of one of these ideals and explain how he/she lives up to your standards (or do the reverse: fails to live up to your standards).

Act I

Summary: Act one takes place in the upstairs bedroom of Reverend Samuel Parris in Salem, Massachusetts, 1692. A group of girls dance in the woods and are caught by Reverend Parris. Two of the girls fall sick, and the doctor does not know what is wrong. Rumors that the girls are bewitched begin to spread around the town, and Reverend John Hale is called from Beverly to Salem. As the town begins to gather in the home of Reverend Parris, the backgrounds and conflicts between the adults in the town are brought to light. As the tension increases, the girls begin to panic and the first accusations occur as the act comes to an end.

Look up the word Crucible in the dictionary. What is the definition? Is there more than one? Which one best applies to the title? Write the definition below.

Important Quotes:

Abigail: 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! (~~pg. 87~~ p.1140)

- What does this quote tell us about Abigail's character?

Abigail: I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! I never knew what pretense Salem was, I never know the lying lessons I was taught by all these Christian women and their covenanted men! And now you bid me tear the light out of my eyes? I will not, I cannot! (~~pg. 839~~) × pg. 1140

- How does this relate to the idea of the public life versus the private life?

- What does Abigail mean by “tear the light out of my eyes?”

Mrs. Putnam: But I must! You think it God’s work you should never lose a child, nor a grandchild either, and I bury all but one? There are wheels within wheels in this village, and fires within fires! (~~pg. 844~~) × pg. 1143

- Who is Mrs. Putnam talking to?

- What is her motivation for the attack?

Hale: Have no fear now—we shall find him out if he has come among us, and I mean to crush him utterly if he has shown his face! (~~845~~) × pg.1150

- How does Reverend Hale see himself?

- What role does he think he will play in Salem?

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1. What was Samuel Parris's attitude toward children?

 2. Why do you think Rev. Parris has many enemies?

 3. After Parris begins to believe his daughter to be afflicted by witchcraft, what is Thomas Putnam's advice to him?

 4. What truths come out when the adults leave the girls alone?

 5. What's going on between Abigail and John Proctor?

 6. Why does Betty start screaming?

 7. Why are some people, including John Proctor, inclined to stay away from Sabbath meeting?

 8. Why does Hale believe the Devil would strike Rev. Parris's house?

 9. Though Rev. Hale is trying to get Tituba to name her accomplices, who is the first person to actually mention names?

 10. Why isn't it difficult for Ann Putnam to believe that Goody Osburn is a witch?

Dramatic Plot Structure: Draw a diagram of the dramatic plot structure and label the parts.

What part of the plot structure is Act One?

Act II

Summary: The setting is the farmhouse of John and Elizabeth Proctor, eight days after act one. The witch hunt is already in full gear. A court has been convened, with Abigail and the other girls as star witnesses, presenting new symptoms (and new accusations) daily. Elizabeth Proctor wants John to expose Abigail as a fraud, but he hesitates because of his past relationship with Abigail. Hale arrives to question the Proctors about their religious observance, but before he can finish, Elizabeth is arrested and jailed for the attempted murder of Abigail. The principle “evidence” is a doll with a needle in it, which Mary Warren has planted in the Proctor home on the same evening that Abigail has been discovered screaming, with a needle stuck in her belly. On this same evening, Rebecca Nurse is arrested, and Hale begins to doubt his mission.

1. What do you know about the relationship between John and Elizabeth Proctor from the stage action and opening dialogue of Act II? What is the cause of the tension in their relationship?
2. Describe the power Abigail has in the court room.
3. What motivates Mary to bring the poppet into the house?
4. What is the significance of Mary Warren standing up to John Proctor?

5. Though Mary Warren cannot say who accused Elizabeth Proctor, who do you believe accused her and why?
6. What commandment does John forget? Why is that important?
7. What changes do we see in Reverend Hale? How has his attitude changed from Act One? What do you think motivates this change?
8. Abigail is not physically present in this Act, but how does she make her presence known?
9. John Proctor seems to be the only voice of reason in the confusing end of Act II. What are some examples to support this idea?
10. Comment on Proctor's feelings at the end of Act Two. Does his view towards Elizabeth change? If so, what motivates that change? If not, why?
11. Why is Mary Warren afraid of telling the truth about Abigail, for herself and for John?

Act III

The setting is the Salem meeting house. Giles, Francis Nurse, and John attempt to present a petition to exacting, arrogant Judge Danforth, which testifies to the pious character of Rebecca Nurse, Martha Corey, and Elizabeth Proctor. From the beginning, this plan begins to go astray as Parris and Judge Hathorne accuse the men of coming to overthrow the court and seek to call in the signers of their petition. Danforth, however, is interested in the claim that Proctor's servant, Mary Warren, has recanted her testimony and now swears the girls were feigning the effects of witchcraft. When Abigail haughtily denies this charge and begins to shrink from Mary's "spell," Proctor confesses his affair with Abigail. Danforth sends for the ever-truthful Elizabeth to corroborate John's claim, but insists that she be warned of nothing. Recognizing a trap of some kind and hoping to save her husband's life and reputation, Elizabeth denies the affair, destroying the last shreds of Proctor's case. As Abigail and the girls fall into another witchcraft trance, Mary Warren is overwhelmed and accused John himself of witchcraft.

1. _____ is accused of reading fortunes at the beginning of Act 3.
2. The name of the proud judge who is in charge of the court and who is not ready to have his authority challenged. _____
3. How many people has Deputy Governor Danforth jailed? _____
4. John Proctor is accused of _____ on Sundays.
5. Giles Corey believes that _____ is having his daughter accuse George Jacobs, so he can get more land.
6. Giles tells the judge that he has been a plaintiff in court _____ (number) times.
7. When questioned about seeing spirits, Mary Warren said she had _____.
8. _____ starts doubting the trials.
9. Mary Warren supposedly takes the shape of a _____ (color/animal) that wants to attack the faces of the other girls.
10. Judge Hathorne asks Mary Warren to _____, but she says she does not have a feel for it and she is unable to do it.
11. Elizabeth Proctor tells the court she is pregnant so her life is saved for _____ (amount of time).

12. What does John finally confess to everyone present in the court?

13. John Proctor tells the court that Elizabeth will not tell a _____.

14. In order to scare Mary Warren, Abigail and the other girls

15. _____ & _____ are taken to jail at the end of Act Three.

16. Why does Elizabeth lie about John's affair with Abigail?

17. What was the strongest motive behind Abigail's actions during the play?

18. _____ accuses John Proctor of forcing her to lie.

19. Over and over, Danforth says that the good have nothing to fear. What evidence can you give to show that the opposite is true?

20. Summarize the guidelines that Danforth gives for judging a witch.

21. Mary Warren's testimony is destroyed in the end because she cannot do something.

What? How does she explain the problem?

22. Finally, Proctor admits that he and Abigail have been lovers. This truth could be the end of Abigail's control. Why isn't it?

23. What is the importance of John Proctor's last speech (in Act III)?

Act IV

The summer passes and autumn arrives. The witch trials have caused unrest in neighboring towns, and Danforth grows nervous. Abigail has run away, taking all of Parris's money with her. Hale, who has lost faith in the court, begs the accused witches to confess falsely in order to save their lives, but they refuse. Danforth, however, has an idea: he asks Elizabeth to talk John into confessing, and she agrees. Conflicted, but desiring to live, John agrees to confess, and the officers of the court rejoice. But he refuses to incriminate anyone else, and when the court insists that the confession must be made public, Proctor grows angry, tears it up, and retracts his admission of guilt. Despite Hale's desperate pleas, Proctor goes to the gallows with the others, and the witch trials reach their awful conclusion.

1. According to Parris, what has happened to Abigail Williams and Mercy Lewis?

2. _____ & _____ urge Deputy Governor Danforth to postpone the trials because they fear rebellion.

3. Reverend Parris finds a _____ in his front door.

4. What does Reverend Hale ask Elizabeth to do?

5. How does Giles die?

6. Elizabeth blames herself for _____

7. What does keeping “a cold house” mean?

8. What does John plead for from Elizabeth?

9. Why won't Danforth delay the executions?

10. List what John Proctor admits to in his confession to the court.

11. Does Elizabeth tell John to confess? Why does she refuse?

12. Why does Giles not confess to save his life?

13. What does Proctor decide?

14. Proctor **will** / **will not** sign his name on the confession. (circle one)

15. What is Hale's mission in Act IV?

16. Parris tells Danforth, "You cannot hang this sort" (123). What does he mean?

17. Why won't Danforth pardon the prisoners?

18. Do you think Elizabeth Proctor would confess if she were in her husband's place?

Explain.

19. In the end, what is it that is of utmost importance to John Proctor?