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INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PACKET/TEACHING UNIT

The Crucible

ARTHUR MILLER



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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Crucible

by Arthur Miller

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The Crucible

Cast of Characters

REVEREND PARRIS

BETTY PARRIS

TITUBA

ABIGAIL WILLIAMS

SUSANNA WALCOTT

MRS. ANN PUTNAM

THOMAS PUTNAM

MERCY LEWIS

MARY WARREN

JOHN PROCTOR

REBECCA NURSE

GILES COREY

REVEREND JOHN HALE

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

FRANCIS NURSE

EZEKIEL CHEEVER

MARSHAL HERRICK

JUDGE HATHORNE

DEPUTY GOVERNOR DANFORTH

SARAH GOOD

HOPKINS

The Crucible

A Note on the Political Context

As World War II ended, the Russians took over one country after another in Eastern Europe. In Asia, the Chinese Communists were driving the Nationalists off the mainland and into the sea. In Western Europe, the democratic Greek government was fighting for its life against communist insurgents. In France and Italy communism was gaining power in the voter's booth. To many, it appeared that communism was successfully taking over the world. Few doubted that the United States would be involved in a life-and-death struggle with the communist world, if it were not for the fact that America had the Atomic Bomb and the communists did not.

To our dismay, however, American traitors, lifelong communists, gave the secret nuclear power to the Russians. America was in grave peril. In Korea, Americans were fighting a shooting war with the communists, but the most dangerous threat seemed to some to be the communist conspiracy at home. To root out this communist conspiracy, the U.S. Congress turned to one of its investigative bodies, *The House Un-American Activities Committee*. Later, taking its name from the committee chairman, it came to be known as the McCarthy Hearings.

Senator Joseph McCarthy's mission, as seen by him and his supporters, was to root out the "communist conspiracy." These supporters included most of the country's citizens, who applauded his goals but had reservations about his methods. This committee had the power to bring before it and question anyone it chose. If the person refused to answer the questions, he or she could be cited for contempt of Congress and faced a three to five-year prison sentence.

The first question the committee usually asked was, "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" The second question was, "Do you know of anyone who is or was a communist?" Because guilt by association was so strong, a "Yes" answer to the second question could be as deadly as a "Yes" to the first. Overnight, a career you had worked to build all your life could be destroyed, and frequently was, by one "Yes" answer. But to say "No" to the committee was futile, because someone else had already told the committee that you had been seen at a Communist Party activity fifteen years earlier.

Then in their forties, many of the people questioned had been involved with or had known communists fifteen or twenty years earlier. In the 1930's America was in the grip of the Depression and social iniquity was blatant. Communism, which many considered fashionable in the thirties, was seen as a possible remedy for these social injustices. Many could answer honestly, "No," that they were not communists, but would have to answer "Yes", that they had been involved in some communist-sponsored activities and had known some communists.

With an admission of this kind, the person risked being fired and/or blacklisted, but the persecution did not stop there. The next directive to the witnesses was “Give us the names of other people who were present at these Communist party activities you attended. If you and they are innocent, you have nothing to fear.”

Imagine you are sitting in the witness stand. Here is your dilemma: You know, despite what the committee has said, any person you name is as good as convicted. Do you tell the committee that your sister Sue and your best friend Charlie attended those activities with you? If you do, there is a good chance that their careers, and possibly their lives, will be ruined. But if you refuse “to name names,” *you* face contempt charges and a possible jail sentence.

It was in this atmosphere of suspicion, fear, and false accusations that Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible*. The play opened in January, 1953; while the parallels between 1952 and Salem, 1692, were obvious to many, few people were interested in the play. It closed in a few months. Today, ironically, there are more productions of *The Crucible* than any of Miller’s other plays, including *Death of a Salesman*.

Despite the play’s short run, however, Miller did receive some attention; in 1956 he was called in front of the McCarthy committee. Because he refused “to name names,” he was cited for contempt; later, he would be exonerated by the courts.

As students of drama, however, what is of most interest to us is the fact that the play is still so popular, long after the political context that inspired it has faded. Putting aside its political implications, what makes this play good drama? Why is it much more popular today than when it was first produced? These are questions to keep in mind while reading.

The Crucible

Objectives

By the end of this unit the students will be able to:

1. write an essay in support of the following thesis: “Putting aside any contemporary, social concerns and any historical considerations, this play is, first and foremost, the story of one man’s personal crisis.”
2. relate the Salem witch hunts of 1692 to what was happening in the United States in the 1950’s.
3. define a tragic hero and state to what extent John Proctor does or does not measure up to the definition.
4. identify and discuss the following themes in this drama:
 - A. Authority: where it comes from and its proper and improper use
 - B. Justice and injustice
 - C. Courage, weakness, and truth
5. identify and discuss how the following elements fueled the plot in this drama:
 - A. Superstition
 - B. Greed and revenge
 - C. Mass hysteria
6. write a character analysis in which the actions are described and motivation revealed for each of the following characters:
 - A. John Proctor
 - B. Elizabeth Proctor
 - C. Abigail Williams
 - D. Rev. John Hale
 - E. Rev. Samuel Parris
 - F. Giles Corey
 - G. Governor Danforth
7. write an essay supporting or attacking the following thesis: “Despite their clothing, John Proctor, Elizabeth Proctor, and Abigail Williams are thoroughly modern people.”
8. identify and discuss those features that Miller suggests characterize the Puritan society and its thinking.

The Crucible

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND ESSAY

1. In what way is John Proctor the tragic hero in this play?
2. What does this play say about “authority”? Be sure to consider the significance of Proctor’s death at the end in your answer.
3. Prove the following statement: “This play is essentially about courage, weakness and truth.”
4. Why is Governor Danforth *not* a monster in this play?
5. Although touching on many other points, this play is foremost a drama depicting the relationship between John and Elizabeth Proctor. Trace this relationship as it develops throughout the play.
6. Identify how each of the following contributed to the insanity of Salem: greed and revenge, mass hysteria, and superstition.
7. Identify and discuss at least three points in this play that have a relevance to what was happening in the United States in the 1950’s.
8. Describe the personal strengths and weaknesses of the following people: Elizabeth Proctor, Giles Corey, Rev. Hale, and Rev. Parris.
9. Abigail’s faults are quite obvious, but if you were given the job of her defense attorney, what arguments could you make in her favor?
10. A crucible is a pot which, because it can withstand great heat, is used to melt iron and other metals. The word “crucible” is also used to describe a severe test or a hard trial. Finally, “crucible” is also used as an adjective to describe a very high grade steel. With these possibilities in mind, why do you suppose Miller called his play *The Crucible*?

The Crucible

Test

I. Multiple Choice

- _____ 1. Proctor does not like Rev. Parris because he thinks that Parris
- A. is a lecher.
 - B. is too superstitious.
 - C. is too concerned with money and expensive items for the church.
 - D. spends too much time talking hell-fire and damnation.
 - E. Both C and D
- _____ 2. At the opening of the play, Tituba confesses to witchcraft because
- A. she is frightened for her life.
 - B. she plans to get even with Rev. Parris.
 - C. she doesn't understand what it is that Rev. Hale has asked her.
 - D. she is trying to save the girls.
 - E. Both B and D
- _____ 3. Elizabeth Proctor is not hanged because
- A. the judges wish to use her to get her husband to confess.
 - B. she confesses that she was a witch.
 - C. the judges doubted Abigail's story.
 - D. she is pregnant.
 - E. John saves her.
- _____ 4. After confessing to witchcraft, John Proctor
- A. refuses to give the names of others he saw with witches.
 - B. laughs uncontrollably as he hands them his signed confession.
 - C. accuses Giles Corey of also being a witch.
 - D. implicates Rev. Parris in a conspiracy to overturn the court.
 - E. begs forgiveness for having seduced Abigail.
- _____ 5. John Proctor tries to rationalize his confession by saying
- A. he is innocent but wants to live.
 - B. he has a family to support.
 - C. that many people are confessing to save their lives, so he will too.
 - D. that two wrongs do not make a right in this instance.
 - E. he is a sinner and his death as a heroic figure would be a fraud.

- _____ 6. Who is described as “strikingly beautiful . . . with an endless capacity for dissembling”?
- A. Elizabeth
 - B. Abigail
 - C. Mary
 - D. Betty
 - E. Tituba
- _____ 7. By the end of the play, Giles Corey
- A. is hanged.
 - B. is pressed to death.
 - C. confesses to witchcraft.
 - D. changes from a supporter to an opponent of the trials.
 - E. Both C and D
- _____ 8. It is a characteristic of Abigail, when attacked,
- A. to whine and complain.
 - B. to blame others for the problem.
 - C. to attack her attackers or someone else.
 - D. to cry and to plead innocence.
 - E. Both A and D
- _____ 9. Putnam is accused of
- A. trying to over throw the court.
 - B. having his daughter denounce people so he can get their land.
 - C. causing the death of nine infants.
 - D. desiring to get Rev. Parris removed from his post.
 - E. giving false testimony to the court.
- _____ 10. Rev. Hale’s authority is said
- A. to rest on all the books he has studied.
 - B. to come as a divine right from the King.
 - C. to be a result of common sense and a sharp intellect.
 - D. to be contested by Rev. Parris.
 - E. Both A and C
- _____ 11. Abby denounces Elizabeth because
- A. she truly believes that Elizabeth is evil.
 - B. Elizabeth has accused her of thievery.
 - C. Elizabeth has been talking about her behind her back
 - D. Abby wants to get rid of Elizabeth so she can have John.
 - E. Elizabeth has become a threat to her own safety.

- _____ 12. In looking for a relevance between this play and the year 1952, the trials in the play may be compared to
- A. the communist menace.
 - B. the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings.
 - C. the Spanish Inquisition.
 - D. The Scopes Monkey Trial.
 - E. Both B and D
- _____ 13. A needle got in the poppet's belly because
- A. Abigail put it there to get Elizabeth into trouble.
 - B. Elizabeth put it there to cause pain in Abigail.
 - C. Elizabeth put it there quite innocently.
 - D. Mary Warren left it there for safekeeping after she had finished making the poppet.
 - E. Giles Corey had put it there as a joke on his wife and it backfired.
- _____ 14. By Act IV Rev. Parris is worried because
- A. he fears that the rebellion in Andover may spread.
 - B. he suspects that his daughter is lying.
 - C. Abigail has disappeared and may have been the victim of foul play.
 - D. he is convinced that he has lost his position.
 - E. John Proctor has threatened to get him.
- _____ 15. Abigail gets Mary Warren to rejoin her and the girls in the denunciations by
- A. threatening to tell the judge that Mary danced naked in the forest.
 - B. threatening her with physical harm.
 - C. frightening Mary after she pretends that Mary is sending out evil spirits to harm her.
 - D. attacking John Proctor.
 - E. Both B and A

II. Identify the speaker of the following quotes:

- _____ 16. "God is dead!"
A. John Proctor
B. Elizabeth Proctor
C. Abigail
D. Rev. Hale
E. Gov. Danforth
- _____ 17. "I'll not be ordered to bed no more, Mr. Proctor. I am eighteen and a woman..."
A. Elizabeth
B. Abigail
C. Mary Warren
D. Tituba
E. Mercy Lewis
- _____ 18. "No uncorrupted man may fear this court, Mr. Hale. None."
A. John Proctor
B. Governor Danforth
C. Rev. Parris
D. Giles Corey
E. Thomas Putnam
- _____ 19. "I will not give you no name. I mentioned my wife's name once and I'll burn in hell long enough for that. I stand mute."
A. John Proctor
B. Thomas Putnam
C. Rev. Hale
D. Giles Corey
E. Rev. Parris
- _____ 20. "Spare me. You forget nothing and forgive nothing. Learn charity woman."
A. John Proctor
B. Thomas Putnam
C. Giles Corey
D. Rev. Parris
E. Gov. Danforth

III. Essay - Answer any two.

1. By referring to incidents and comments in the play, prove that this play has a relevance to what was happening in the United States in the early 1950's.

2. Question #1 notwithstanding, this play has to succeed or fail on its own merits. That is, any play must have a believable protagonist whom we care about, and this protagonist must be involved in some action which is significant. To what extent is this play successful in this regard?

3. Compare and contrast the two leading female figures in this play, Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail Williams. Be sure to mention something of each one's personality and character.

The Crucible

Test Answers

1. E	6. B	11. D	16. A
2. A	7. B	12. B	17. C
3. D	8. C	13. D	18. B
4. A	9. B	14. A	19. D
5. E	10. A	15. D	20. A

The Crucible

Study Guide Teacher's Copy

The setting is Salem, Massachusetts, in the year 1692. Someone once said of the Puritans that they did not leave Europe because they were persecuted, but that they were thrown out of Europe because they persecuted everyone else. As you read Miller's stage direction in the opening of Act I, how do you suppose he would respond to that statement?

Act I

Vocabulary

abomination – something detestable; something despised
abrogation – abolishment; annulment
abyss – nothingness; point of no return
anarchy – lawlessness
antagonistic – hostile
arbitrate – decide
ascertain – determine
atomization – reduction to small particles
autocratic – absolute
blatantly – in an offensively obvious manner
calumny – false charges calculated to damage another's reputation
canny – clever; shrewd
confirm – verify
congerie – collection
contention – point advanced in a debate; also, rivalry
contiguous – next to; adjacent
corroborating – agreeing with and supporting
cosmology – theory of the natural order of the universe
covenanted – pledged
dallied – lingered; dawdled
darkling – dark
defamation – damaging another's reputation
deference – the respect due an elder or superior
defiled – dirtied; fouled
diametrically – extremely; oppositely
Dionysiac – frenzied; festive and wild
discomfits – embarrasses; thwarts
dissembling – putting on a false appearance; concealing something
ecclesiasts – clergymen
fetishes – objects believed to have magical power
formidable – massive; considerable
ideology – system of beliefs
incubi – evil masculine spirits that come to women while women sleep
inculcation – implanting; brainwashing
inert – still; not moving

iniquity – wickedness; sin
 innate – inborn
 intimations – suggestions; hints
 junta – group controlling a government after seizing power
 ken – range of perception or understanding
 klatches – gatherings, usually characterized by casual conversation
 lascivious – lustful
 licentious – lewd
 magistrates – local officials
 malevolence – ill will
 malign – speak evilly of; utter false things about
 manifestation – embodiment
 marauded – raided
 mores – moral attitudes, manners, and customs
 naïve – not worldly
 naught – nothing
 paradox – something with seemingly contradictory elements
 parochial – narrow-minded
 perverse – corrupt
 predilection – preference
 prodigious – strange; extraordinary
 propitiation – appeasement; atonement
 providence – divine guidance
 rankle – irritate
 scourge – cause of widespread affliction
 smirched – dirtied; stained
 sniveling – whining and sniffing
 speculation – wondering
 subservient – cringingly submissive
 succubi – evil female spirits that come to men while men sleep
 theocracy – government by divine guidance
 titillated – excited and intrigued
 trepidation – apprehension
 vindictive – vengeful
 writ – formal written document
 yeomanry – middle class land-owners; farmers

1. In his stage directions, what are some good and bad points that Miller observes about the Puritans?

They led strict, somber lives with devotion to prayer and without any real diversions.

They worked together and helped each other.

They spied on each other.

They were snobs and stole land from the Indians.

They persecuted any other people whose views they did not like.

They were disciplined and dedicated and this enabled them to survive in a harsh, physical environment.

Their discipline and dedication which is a plus, is also a negative because these traits are what made them intolerant of others.

2. Who is Betty and what is wrong with her?

She is Rev. Parris' daughter, and she seems to be in some kind of trance.

3. When Abigail enters, she is described as “a strikingly beautiful girl...with an endless capacity for dissembling.” What does the phrase an “endless capacity for dissembling” suggest?

She lies frequently and rather convincingly.

4. Why does Rev. Parris become upset at the thought that Betty's illness is a result of unnatural causes?

As a minister, he feels it would be scandalous if his daughter is ill as a result of witchcraft.

5. What negative aspect of his character does this reveal?

He is self-centered and, at this point, more concerned about his image than the health of his daughter.

6. What innuendo does Rev. Parris make about Abigail's character?

He questions whether her reputation is entirely unblemished. He asks if there is any gossip about her and why she was put out of the Proctor household where she had worked as a mother's helper.

7. How does Abigail respond?

She attacks Elizabeth Proctor and calls her a liar.

8. How does Goody Putnam move the plot along?

“Goody” is a term of address much like our “Mrs.” It is short for “Goodwoman.”

She is the one who blatantly attributes Betty's illness to witchcraft.

9. What motivation is Miller attributing to Thomas Putnam's actions?

He presents him as a vengeful, embittered man. The Putnam's daughter Ruth is similarly stricken, and it seems to be their intent to link Ruth's illness and Betty's condition with witchcraft. They seem to want Parris to support this idea.

10. What do we learn from the conversation that Mercy, Abigail, and Mary Warren have while alone?

We find out that in the forest they did dance and conjure up spirits. Mercy ran around naked and Abigail drank a charm of blood to kill John Proctor's wife.

11. How do we see that Abigail is the acknowledged leader of this group?

She is the oldest, strongest, and most determined. The others defer to her and seem to be kept in line by her. She threatens physical harm ("a pointy reckoning") if they tell more than she says they should.

12. In his stage directions, Miller tells us that despite, or perhaps due to, his upright appearance, John Proctor feels he is a fraud because he knows he is a sinner. What does his conversation with Abigail tell us about the nature of his sin?

He appears to have had an affair with Abigail. He wishes to put it behind him, but She still claims to love him and maintains that he still loves her.

13. As Abby flirts with John Proctor, what is her opinion of Betty's illness?

She thinks that Betty is just being silly.

14. What seems to be the attitude of Giles Corey and the others gathered in the house?

They seem extremely curious. He and the others would like to see Betty fly, which they have heard she can do.

15. Rebecca Nurse, who walks to Betty's bed and quiets her with her own calming presence, is a voice of reason and rationality. To what does she attribute Betty's condition?

She says it is her "silly season." In effect, Betty is going through a childish phase in her life and, if it is ignored, it will pass.

16. Who is Rev. Hale, and why was he sent for? Why does Rebecca Nurse tell Parris that Hale should be sent home rather than allowed to see Betty?

Rev. Hale is a minister from a nearby town, who has gotten a reputation as an expert on witchcraft. Rev. Parris has sent for him, under pressure, and probably as a way to keep suspicions away from himself. Rebecca, however, recognizes that in bringing him to the village, they run the danger of giving credence to the idea of witchcraft and all that it implies. She concludes that they should blame themselves for Betty's condition, rather than the devil.

17. Why are the Putnams unwilling to accept this?

They seem drawn to the idea of witchcraft for several reasons. In addition to their daughter's own condition, the Putnams experienced the deaths of seven babies. Witchcraft probably will cause problems for Parris; they do not like him and seem willing to use him for their own purposes.

18. Why do Putnam and Proctor get into an argument?

Proctor says it is not in Putnam's powers to command. Decisions are made by voting in meetings. Putnam responds that Proctor has not been to any meetings lately, so he has no rights to talk.

19. How does Proctor's subsequent comment on Parris' fiery sermons cause an outburst from Rev. Parris?

Proctor had said that he is sick of all the sermons on hellfire and damnation and that is why he and others are staying away from the church. Rev. Parris takes exception to the comment and angrily explains his grievances about salary and future security.

20. In this argument the theme of authority explicitly arises. What are the two points of view?

Parris says that, as the minister, he is the final authority on what is good for the soul and what isn't. Proctor argues that the individual heart and conscience are his authority.

21. In what way do the two men find themselves aligned regarding the congregation's opinion of Parris?

They both believe that there is a faction opposed to Rev. Parris, "and all authority."

22. Who is Giles Corey and how does Proctor treat him?

Giles is a cantankerous, old man whom Proctor likes, but cannot resist teasing for his idiosyncrasies.

23. How is Putnam's materialistic ambition further revealed in his argument with Proctor?

Putnam wants to claim most of the land around them.

24. The Rev. Hale enters. From his comments, where may we infer that he believes that authority resides, and what does this say of his personality?

He finds authority in the books he brings with him. This may indicate that he is a bookish man, who is more comfortable with books and abstractions than with people.

25. Who is Tituba and of what does Abigail accuse her?

She is a black slave from Barbados, and Abigail accuses her of forcing Betty and herself to drink blood.

26. Why has Abigail turned on Tituba and accused her of these things?

She wants to remove the suspicion from herself.

27. What does Putnam say that terrifies Tituba and causes her to say that she told the devil she did not want to work for him?

He says that Tituba should be hanged. She is so frightened that she will say anything to shift the blame and save her own life.

28. Why does Tituba come up with the names Goody Good and Goody Osburn as the two women she saw consorting with the devil?

Putnam supplied Tituba with both those names.

29. In your opinion, what motivates Abby and Betty to begin denouncing everyone?

We have been told that Abby is a great dissembler so, presumably, she is “naming names” for sport and the power it gives her over other people. She is also redeeming herself through confession, so she won't be punished for other things she has done. Betty may be following Abigail's lead, but it seems more likely that Betty is simply caught up in the hysteria of the situation.

Act II

Vocabulary

ameliorate – to make better or more tolerable

contempt – disdain

daft – crazy; idiotic

falter – hesitate

indignant – angry over something unjust

ineptly – incompetently; foolishly

lechery – sexual indulgence

pious – faithfully religious

poppets – dolls

pretense – pretending; “an act”

1. In what way has Mary Warren changed and what changed her?

She used to be meek and quiet, but she no longer is so. Because she is an official of the court, she thinks of herself as being important.

2. How would you describe the relationship between John and Elizabeth Proctor at the beginning of this scene?

John tries to please Elizabeth, but Elizabeth remains separated from him. She appears somewhat aloof or withdrawn. This distance is obviously due to John's infidelity.

3. What is it she wants him to do?

She tells her husband to go to the officials and tell them what Abigail had said about the witchcraft having been made up.

4. Why can't John prove what Abigail told him? Why does Elizabeth pick up on this?

Abigail and John were alone when she told him. The fact that they had been alone is disturbing news for Elizabeth because John had said Abigail was in a crowd. Elizabeth immediately becomes suspicious again.

5. Of what does John accuse Elizabeth?

He says that she lacks charity. It has been seven months since he had been with Abigail and, apparently, he admitted it to her, yet his wife still cannot put it behind them.

6. As he is about to whip Mary Warren, John stops short. What was it she told him?

She saved Elizabeth's life by saying she has never seen any evidence of witchcraft.

7. Who does Elizabeth think called out her name and why?

She believes that Abigail denounced her in order to have John as a husband.

8. What does Elizabeth want John to do now?

John should go to Abigail and call her a whore. Elizabeth hopes Abigail will see the futility of trying to get him.

9. Why is he reluctant to do so?

He says that he had never made Abigail any promises; the affair was not out of love, but to do as Elizabeth asks is deceitful.

10. Why has the Rev. Hale come to their house?

He is a stranger in town and is trying to get a better understanding of the citizens, particularly those who have been under suspicion, or at least the ones whose names have been given in court. It is an official visit and, as such, shows him to be truly concerned and, perhaps, a little uneasy because Elizabeth's name was mentioned that day.

11. Reverend Hale says, "This is a strange time." How might that comment have applied equally to the McCarthy Hearings?

Hale believes that "the powers of the dark are gathered in monstrous attack upon this village." In 1952 many Americans felt that way about the growing Communist threat.

12. As proof of witchcraft, Rev. Hale points out that a number of people have already confessed to being witches. What is Proctor's response?

Proctor knows that the people confessed to it because the alternative was hanging.

13. Who stuck the pin in Abigail's belly and why?

She did it herself to point suspicion at Elizabeth. Abby apparently got the idea after she watched Mary Warren make the poppet and stick the pin into it.

14. To what does Hale attribute the calamity that has befallen Salem?

He says that its cause must be God's punishment for some terrible sin that was committed and kept secret.

15. What does this mean to Proctor?

He knows his hidden, secret sin is one of adultery. God might punish the village for Proctor's sin. Ironically, adultery was the one commandment he couldn't remember when reciting them for Rev. Hale.

16. What will Abby do if Proctor goes into court to denounce her, according to Mary Warren?

She will charge him with lechery (adultery), which is a capital offense.

17. What is Proctor's response?

He says, "Good." It will end Abigail's "saintliness" and put an end to the madness. Although it will mean death for him, it will free Elizabeth and probably free him from the guilt he has been feeling.

18. Why is Mary afraid to say anything in court?

She is afraid of Abigail.

Act III

Vocabulary

anteroom – “before room,” foyer
apparitions – ghosts; visions
base – low; vulgar
befuddled – confused; muddled
blanched – paled
callously – cruelly
denounce – to publicly pronounce something evil; to accuse
deposition – testimony under oath
effrontery – shameless boldness
immaculate – pure
ipso facto – “by that very fact;” therefore
partitioning – dividing
perjury – lying under oath
placidly – calmly
probity – uprightness
quail – to falter; to recoil
qualm – doubt; worry
remorseless – without a regret
slovenly – untidy
sublime – supreme; grand
unperturbed – not bothered; not upset
vestry – room used for church meetings and classes

1. Why does Giles say that he “broke charity” with his wife?

His statement that she reads books secretly has brought the court’s suspicion on his wife, so he is feeling guilty because he has hurt her and her reputation.

2. In what sense does the Corey’s’ situation reflect on John and Elizabeth Proctor?

Just as Giles feels guilty about his wife, John is feeling guilty for having been unfaithful to Elizabeth.

3. How has Rev. Hale changed since we last saw him?

He seems to be on the side of the doubters of witchcraft now.

4. Why is Mary Warren’s testimony critical for Hale, Proctor, Nurse, and Corey?

The state’s case rests solely on the testimony of the girls. If, as Mary Warren contends, the girls are not genuinely seeing spirits, then the state’s case against the accused falls apart, and the seventy-two people who have been condemned to hang are innocent.

5. What does Mary Warren tell Governor Danforth?

She says that all the accusations she and the other girls made “were pretense, sir.”

6. Why does Proctor not drop the charges against the court when he hears that his wife is pregnant and will be spared for at least a year?

The wives of his friends are still charged, and Proctor feels he cannot desert them. Proctor's refusal to drop the charges, however, seems to lend weight to Parris' comment that Proctor has come to overthrow the court.

7. Why does Proctor say that his wife must be pregnant if she has said so?

Proctor believes that his wife could not tell a lie. He also said this in the second act.

8. What happens to the ninety-one people who signed the petition in support of the accused?

They now are to be arrested and questioned. Speaking up in defense of any of the accused immediately makes someone a suspect. The McCarthy Hearings also did the same. Danforth says that those who are not on the side of the court in trying times are against the authority of the court and the church.

9. What is the charge that Giles Corey makes against Putnam?

Corey charges that Putnam has encouraged his daughter to cry out against neighbors who have large landholdings. The neighbors, once convicted of witchery, will forfeit their land to the state and then Putnam will be able to buy it cheaply.

10. What is Giles Corey's proof for his charge, and why will he not supply the proof to the court?

His proof is that another person heard Putnam speak of his intention to get George Jacobs' land. Corey will not divulge the name, however, because he doesn't want to endanger that person by revealing his name. In the McCarthy Hearings defendants were frequently forced to "name names." Miller himself was brought up on contempt charges because he refused to give the names of people who had attended meetings that he had attended.

11. Why does Danforth find it hard to believe that Abigail could be pretending and, in effect, be a murderer?

She looks young and innocent.

12. How does the questioning of Mary Warren differ from the questioning of Abigail? Why?

The court questions Mary Warren much more sharply. It would appear that they do not want to, or can't, believe that Mary Warren is now telling the truth when she claims that her earlier accusations of witches were "all a pretense."

13. Why can't Mary faint when asked by the court?

To do the pretense, she has to be caught up in the excitement.

14. When Abigail is questioned by Danforth, how does she respond?

As she has done in the past, Abigail goes on the attack when questioned. Then she begins the pretense again and accuses Mary Warren of "witching her."

15. In calling Abigail a whore, what charge and punishment does Proctor open himself to? Why has he made this confession?

He will now be charged with lechery; it is punishable by death. He accuses Abby to prove to the court that she brought the charges against his wife in order to get Elizabeth out of the way.

16. What test is Elizabeth given, and how does she fail it? Why?

She is asked if her husband is guilty of lechery with Abigail. To protect her husband, she lies and says, "No." The lie she now tells is especially damaging.

17. What finally causes Mary Warren to agree with Abigail?

Abigail and the girls put on such a show that Mary Warren becomes frightened, particularly of the judge, who now seems convinced by the girls' pretending. When he threatens to have Mary hanged, she accuses Proctor of bewitching her.

18. On what dramatic note does Act III end?

Proctor shouts that God is dead and the trial is a fraud. The Rev. Hale at this point also denounces the court and walks out.

Act IV

Vocabulary

adamant – unyielding; inflexible

beguile – to deceive

excommunication – exclusion from the church or community

gaunt – excessively thin

gibbet – gallows

purged – emptied

reprieve – stay of execution

retaliation – revenge

sibilance – a word having a *sss* or *shh* sound

tantalized – teased

1. What is the relationship between the rebellion in Andover and the flight of Abigail and Mercy Lewis?

In Andover townspeople were rebelling against the trials. Rev. Parris is suggesting that Abigail was feeling uneasy about the rebellion in Andover. He was afraid that this questioning of authority might spread to Salem. If it did, it would mean trouble for her.

2. Why is Parris upset?

When Abigail left, she stole all his savings and this has made him penniless. More than that, though, he seems to fear a rebellion if all the accused are hanged; most of those arrested are all highly respected people in the town. He worries for his life and is afraid to go outside at night because someone had left a dagger in his door.

3. Why is it important for the court to get one of the accused "respectable citizens," such as John Proctor or Rebecca Nurse to confess?

If just one such suspect confesses, it will discredit the others in the eyes of the townspeople.

4. Why is Rev. Hale telling the accused to lie?

He doesn't believe they are guilty, but he wants them to lie and confess, so that they may save their lives.

5. What is it that the court desires of Elizabeth Proctor?

The court wants Elizabeth to get her husband to confess.

6. How did Giles Corey die? Why?

He was pressed to death. By not even answering the indictment, as to his guilt or innocence, he died a Christian and his sons were able to inherit his property.

7. Why does Proctor call himself a fraud?

If he had not committed adultery, he would feel that his dying was noble. As it is, though, he feels his secret sin makes a mockery of his silence. This may, in part, be a rationalization because he obviously does not wish to die.

8. What responsibility does Elizabeth accept for Proctor's lechery? What does she advise him to do?

She says that because of her own insecurities, she had not been a passionate woman and this is what caused him to sleep with Abigail. She advises him to do what he thinks he must; whatever his decision, she will accept it.

9. After Proctor confesses to witchcraft what else does Danforth want from him?

First he asks Proctor to name other people who have been with the devil; then he wants Proctor to sign the confession so that it can be shown to the town. Proctor signs it, but then grabs it and tears it up. He feels he will have harmed his friends if he allows his confession to be put on the church door, since he realizes the courts simply wants to justify its verdicts.

The Crucible

Study Guide Student Copy

The setting is Salem, Massachusetts, in the year 1692. Someone once said of the Puritans that they did not leave Europe because they were persecuted, but that they were thrown out of Europe because they persecuted everyone else. As you read Miller's stage direction in the opening of Act I, how do you suppose he would respond to that statement?

Act I

Vocabulary

abomination – something detestable; something despised
abrogation – abolishment; annulment
abyss – nothingness; point of no return
anarchy – lawlessness
antagonistic – hostile
arbitrate – decide
ascertain – determine
atomization – reduction to small particles
autocratic – absolute
blatantly – in an offensively obvious manner
calumny – false charges calculated to damage another's reputation
canny – clever; shrewd
confirm – verify
congerie – collection
contention – point advanced in a debate; also, rivalry
contiguous – next to; adjacent
corroborating – agreeing with and supporting
cosmology – theory of the natural order of the universe
covenanted – pledged
dallied – lingered; dawdled
darkling – dark
defamation – damaging another's reputation
deference – the respect due an elder or superior
defiled – dirtied; fouled
diametrically – extremely; oppositely
Dionysiac – frenzied; festive and wild
discomfits – embarrasses; thwarts
dissembling – putting on a false appearance; concealing something
ecclesiasts – clergymen
fetishes – objects believed to have magical power
formidable – massive; considerable
ideology – system of beliefs
incubi – evil masculine spirits that come to women while women sleep
inculcation – implanting; brainwashing
inert – still; not moving
iniquity – wickedness; sin

innate – inborn
intimations – suggestions; hints
junta – group controlling a government after seizing power
ken – range of perception or understanding
klatches – gatherings, usually characterized by casual conversation
lascivious – lustful
licentious – lewd
magistrates – local officials
malevolence – ill will
malign – speak evilly of; utter false things about
manifestation – embodiment
marauded – raided
mores – moral attitudes, manners, and customs
naïve – not worldly
naught – nothing
paradox – something with seemingly contradictory elements
parochial – narrow-minded
perverse – corrupt
predilection – preference
prodigious – strange; extraordinary
propitiation – appeasement; atonement
providence – divine guidance
rankle – irritate
scourge – cause of widespread affliction
smirched – dirtied; stained
sniveling – whining and sniffing
speculation – wondering
subservient – cringingly submissive
succubi – evil female spirits that come to men while men sleep
theocracy – government by divine guidance
titillated – excited and intrigued
trepidation – apprehension
vindictive – vengeful
writ – formal written document
yeomanry – middle class land-owners; farmers

1. In his stage directions, what are some good and bad points that Miller observes about the Puritans?

2. Who is Betty and what is wrong with her?
3. When Abigail enters, she is described as “a strikingly beautiful girl...with an endless capacity for dissembling.” What does the phrase an “endless capacity for dissembling” suggest?
4. Why does Rev. Parris become upset at the thought that Betty’s illness is a result of unnatural causes?
5. What negative aspect of his character does this reveal?
6. What innuendo does Rev. Parris make about Abigail’s character?
7. How does Abigail respond?
8. How does Goody Putnam move the plot along?
9. What motivation is Miller attributing to Thomas Putnam’s actions?

10. What do we learn from the conversation that Mercy, Abigail, and Mary Warren have while alone?
11. How do we see that Abigail is the acknowledged leader of this group?
12. In his stage directions, Miller tells us that despite, or perhaps due to, his upright appearance, John Proctor feels he is a fraud because he knows he is a sinner. What does his conversation with Abigail tell us about the nature of his sin?
13. As Abby flirts with John Proctor, what is her opinion of Betty's illness?
14. What seems to be the attitude of Giles Corey and the others gathered in the house?
15. Rebecca Nurse, who walks to Betty's bed and quiets her with her own calming presence, is a voice of reason and rationality. To what does she attribute Betty's condition?
16. Who is Rev. Hale, and why was he sent for? Why does Rebecca Nurse tell Parris that Hale should be sent home rather than allowed to see Betty?
17. Why are the Putnams unwilling to accept this?

18. Why do Putnam and Proctor get into an argument?
19. How does Proctor's subsequent comment on Parris' fiery sermons cause an outburst from Rev. Parris?
20. In this argument the theme of authority explicitly arises. What are the two points of view?
21. In what way do the two men find themselves aligned regarding the congregation's opinion of Parris?
22. Who is Giles Corey and how does Proctor treat him?
23. How is Putnam's materialistic ambition further revealed in his argument with Proctor?
24. The Rev. Hale enters. From his comments, where may we infer that he believes that authority resides, and what does this say of his personality?
25. Who is Tituba and of what does Abigail accuse her?

26. Why has Abigail turned on Tituba and accused her of these things?
27. What does Putnam say that terrifies Tituba and causes her to say that she told the devil she did not want to work for him?
28. Why does Tituba come up with the names Goody Good and Goody Osburn as the two women she saw consorting with the devil?
29. In your opinion, what motivates Abby and Betty to begin denouncing everyone?

Act II

Vocabulary

ameliorate – to make better or more tolerable

contempt – disdain

daft – crazy; idiotic

falter – hesitate

indignant – angry over something unjust

ineptly – incompetently; foolishly

lechery – sexual indulgence

pious – faithfully religious

poppets – dolls

pretense – pretending; “an act”

1. In what way has Mary Warren changed and what changed her?
2. How would you describe the relationship between John and Elizabeth Proctor at the beginning of this scene?
3. What is it she wants him to do?
4. Why can't John prove what Abigail told him? Why does Elizabeth pick up on this?
5. Of what does John accuse Elizabeth?
6. As he is about to whip Mary Warren, John stops short. What was it she told him?

7. Who does Elizabeth think called out her name and why?
8. What does Elizabeth want John to do now?
9. Why is he reluctant to do so?
10. Why has the Rev. Hale come to their house?
11. Reverend Hale says, "This is a strange time." How might that comment have applied equally to the McCarthy Hearings?
12. As proof of witchcraft, Rev. Hale points out that a number of people have already confessed to being witches. What is Proctor's response?
13. Who stuck the pin in Abigail's belly and why?
14. To what does Hale attribute the calamity that has befallen Salem?

15. What does this mean to Proctor?
16. What will Abby do if Proctor goes into court to denounce her, according to Mary Warren?
17. What is Proctor's response?
18. Why is Mary afraid to say anything in court?

Act III

Vocabulary

anteroom – “before room,” foyer
apparitions – ghosts; visions
base – low; vulgar
befuddled – confused; muddled
blanched – paled
callously – cruelly
denounce – to publicly pronounce something evil; to accuse
deposition – testimony under oath
effrontery – shameless boldness
immaculate – pure
ipso facto – “by that very fact;” therefore
partitioning – dividing
perjury – lying under oath
placidly – calmly
probity – uprightness
quail – to falter; to recoil
qualm – doubt; worry
remorseless – without a regret
slovenly – untidy
sublime – supreme; grand
unperturbed – not bothered; not upset
vestry – room used for church meetings and classes

1. Why does Giles say that he “broke charity” with his wife?
2. In what sense does the Corey’s situation reflect on John and Elizabeth Proctor?
3. How has Rev. Hale changed since we last saw him?
4. Why is Mary Warren’s testimony critical for Hale, Proctor, Nurse, and Corey?
5. What does Mary Warren tell Governor Danforth?

6. Why does Proctor not drop the charges against the court when he hears that his wife is pregnant and will be spared for at least a year?
7. Why does Proctor say that his wife must be pregnant if she has said so?
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12. How does the questioning of Mary Warren differ from the questioning of Abigail? Why?

13. Why can't Mary faint when asked by the court?
14. When Abigail is questioned by Danforth, how does she respond?
15. In calling Abigail a whore, what charge and punishment does Proctor open himself to? Why has he made this confession?
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18. On what dramatic note does Act III end?

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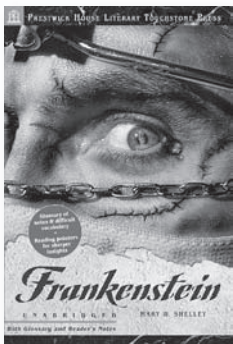
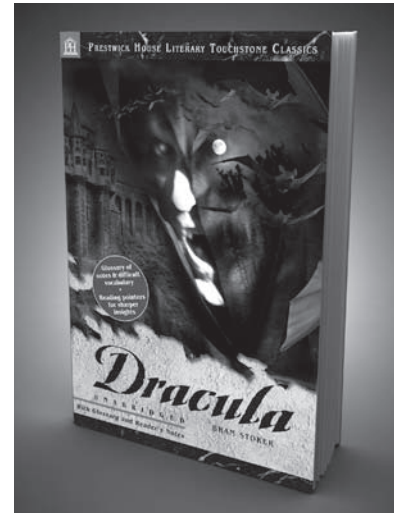
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