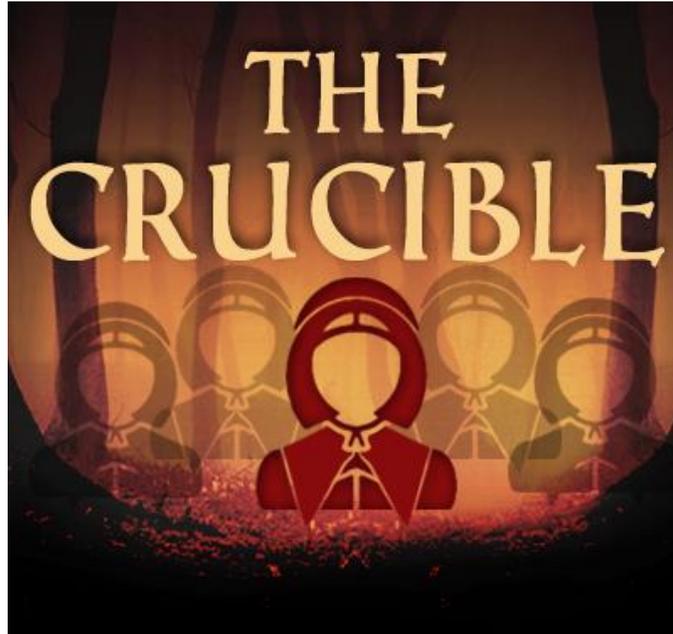


Sacramento Theatre Company

Study Guide



The Crucible

By: Arthur Miller

Study Guide Materials Compiled by Anna Miles

Sacramento Theatre Company

Mission Statement

The Sacramento Theatre Company (STC) strives to be the leader in integrating professional theatre with theatre arts education. STC produces engaging professional theatre, provides exceptional theatre training, and uses theatre as a tool for educational engagement.

Our History

The theatre was originally formed as the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre in 1942, an ad hoc troupe formed to entertain locally-stationed troops during World War II. On October 18, 1949, the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre acquired a space of its own with the opening of the Eaglet Theatre, named in honor of the Eagle, a Gold Rush-era theatre built largely of canvas that had stood on the city's riverfront in the 1850s. The Eaglet Theatre eventually became the Main Stage of the not-for-profit Sacramento Theatre Company, which evolved from a community theatre to professional theatre company in the 1980s. Now producing shows in three performance spaces, it is the oldest theatre company in Sacramento.

After five decades of use, the Main Stage was renovated as part of the H Street Theatre Complex Project. Features now include an expanded and modernized lobby and a Cabaret Stage for special performances. The facility also added expanded dressing rooms, laundry capabilities, and other equipment allowing the transformation of these performance spaces, used nine months of the year by STC, into backstage and administration places for three months each summer to be used by Broadway Sacramento for Music Circus.

Sacramento Theatre Company can accommodate 292 patrons in the proscenium-style auditorium of its Main Stage, while the Pollock Stage offers a more intimate experience with only 87 seats in a black box-style theatre. Both provide good acoustics and sight-lines. This professional, Equity theatre presents seven professional productions per season with a reputation for excellent stage adaptations of classic literature. Three annual productions in the Cabaret Stage, which seats 100, round out the experience with high-quality Broadway musical revues.

The Young Professionals Conservatory, a training program for young theatre artists, was founded in 2003. The program, as well as the entire STC School of the Arts, is directed by Michele Hillen-Noufer.

For further information about the Sacramento Theatre Company please visit us online:

<http://www.sactheatre.org>

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*Written by Anna Miles for the Sacramento Theatre Company

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The Crucible and Arthur Miller

Opening at the Martin Beck Theatre on Broadway in 1953, *The Crucible* was not immediately a smash hit. Although it got good reviews, some critics either compared it too heavily to the political instability of the McCarthy Hearings, or to Miller's masterpiece *Death of a Salesman*. Forging through a rocky beginning, *The Crucible* has had 65 years of consistent revivals, the most recent being an alternative contemporary 2016 revival, and has become a staple in both American literature and high school curriculum.

Arthur Miller was born in 1915 in New York and died in 2005 in Connecticut. During the Great Depression, Miller's family was put into despair as his father, a manufacturer, was financially ruined. Miller worked in a warehouse after he graduated from high school and then went on to college at the University of Michigan. By age 30, Miller published his first widely successful novel *Focus* which was about anti-Semitism. In 1947, Miller won a Tony Award for his play *All My Sons*. In 1949 he won a Tony Award and the Pulitzer Prize for *Death of a Salesman*--arguably his most famous and well-acclaimed work. In 1953, Miller won the Tony Award for best play for *The Crucible*.

The Crucible was criticized by many people for being a play that fell short of their expectations after the great *Death of a Salesman*. Miller states in a New York Times article from 1958 that he never intended *The Crucible* to be another *Death of a Salesman*. He stated that he wanted to write something completely different for the audience to connect to and understand human nature. Miller also believed that *The Crucible* was less successful in the beginning because audience members and critics drew too many comparisons to McCarthyism. While Miller certainly drew inspiration from the McCarthy trials--as he himself was accused and refused to give names to the House Un-American Activities Committee-- he never intended for *The Crucible* to be a pure allegory for the McCarthy Trials.

Miller conducted extensive research for *The Crucible*. Miller began researching/writing the play in the spring of 1952. He went to the Salem courthouse and read through the town records. He states that all characters in his play played similar roles in real life. Miller toured what was Salem Village, spending time visiting the home of Rebecca Nurse, walking the street where Reverend Parris' house was meant to be, etc. He was appalled and bewildered that other people that visited the Salem museum or who walked through the streets were not as deeply affected by the history as he was. This is why Miller really wanted to write a historical play that spoke to the travesties of human nature.

Miller based some of this conflict of human nature on his own life. John Proctor's struggle over still desiring Abigail even though he is married to Elizabeth can be compared to Miller's own struggle with his affair with Marilyn Monroe while he was still married. Miller eventually left his wife and married Marilyn.

In 1991 Miller gave a speech in Salem, MA at the 300th anniversary event for the Salem Witch Trials. He talked about why he wrote the play and what people could learn from it.

Synopsis: *The Crucible*

The play opens on Reverend Parris fretting over the well-being of his afflicted daughter, Betty, and how her sudden illness will affect his reputation in the village. Reverend Parris' refugee niece, Abigail Williams, tries to console him about his fears and what he saw in the woods (the girls dancing around a cauldron). Abigail is one of the older girls in the village. After being suddenly let go as the servant from the Proctor household, she developed a reputation amongst the villagers. Although she is a bully, the other girls that surround her admire her shocking behavior and fearless attitude. Abigail has had a secret affair with John Proctor. When Proctor enters the room to check on Betty, Abigail is noticeably flustered by his appearance.

Villagers such as Thomas and Ann Putnam, Mercy Lewis, and Rebecca Nurse also come to check on Betty. Reverend Parris has called the reputable Reverend Hale from Beverly to come and evaluate her. Reverend Hale specializes in determining whether witches and evil spirits are at work in a community. Upon questioning by Rev. Hale, the house servant Tituba breaks and admits to being in league with the Devil. Tituba, Abigail, and the newly awakened Betty begin naming the names of other women in the village who they claim they have also seen "with the devil".

Over the next couple of weeks, countless members of the village are named by the girls, with Abigail as their leader, of being witches—including John Proctor's wife, Elizabeth. Mary Warren, the current servant in the Proctor household has become swept up in the hysteria of the girls and the power that comes with being a member of the court and testifying against the accused witches. Mary, another refugee, is a shy 18 year old who is easily influenced and curious about things outside the norm of her daily life. The trials allow her to have a voice and to be respected by members of the community. Although she is an active member in the trials, when Abigail accused Elizabeth of being a witch, Mary stood up for Elizabeth. However, Elizabeth is still collected by officials of the court and taken to jail.

John Proctor makes it his mission to free his wife—both because he knows she is innocent and to atone for his sin of cheating on Elizabeth with Abigail. John goes to Abigail in the woods one night to try and convince her that she needs to tell the truth and stop the facade of the trials. Abigail who admitted to John that it was all a facade in the first scene, now tries to persuade John that the trials need to happen because the village is full of hypocrites. Abigail is unmoved by John's sentiment and Elizabeth's trial proceeds.

At Elizabeth's trial, John Proctor pleads to Judge Hawthorne and Deputy Governor Danforth to free his wife. He admits to his affair with Abigail and pleads with the court to free his wife because she is falsely accused. After John claims that Elizabeth cannot tell a lie, Elizabeth is brought in and questioned about John and Abigail's affair. Elizabeth, seeking to protect the honor of her husband, lies and condemns herself. John Proctor is also condemned and sent to jail. This is the turning point in the trials. Reverend Hale who believes John to be an honest and true man sees the trials for what they are and tries to end them.

The final scene is set in the Salem jail. The accused Tituba and Sarah Good drink with the guard, Willard, and joke about the devil taking them away. Elizabeth and John are brought to one another so that Elizabeth might try and persuade John to lie and say he was working with the devil—which would allow him to be set free and forgiven of his sin. John, who has had enough of lying, struggles with the decision to sign his name to a document that claims he is a witch—another lie. As a last act of saving his dignity and dying an honest man, John chooses to hang.

Characters: *The Crucible*

At the center of the Salem tragedy were real people - the “bewitched” young girls, the townspeople who fell prey to the hysteria and the innocent individuals accused of witchcraft. Whether they helped create the witch-hunt or were at the mercy of the events, these people made up a community consumed by jealousy, fear, hysteria, superstition and hypocrisy.

Reverend Parris- Pastor of the church in Salem. He is the father of Betty, uncle of Abigail Williams, and master of Tituba. He believes that he is being persecuted and that the townspeople do not respect his position as a man of God. The people have ousted the last few pastors and Parris fears the same fate. He chooses to believe the girls, because to do otherwise would mean that the trouble would be connected to his own household. If this happened, he may not be trusted by the village.

Tituba- slave to the Parris family, brought by Parris from Barbados. She secretly aids Abigail and the other young girls in making love potions and conducting séances. After being named a witch by Abigail, Tituba confesses and is imprisoned.

Abigail Williams- A tormented character; she is the ‘mass murderer’ whose actions bring about the death of so many innocent people. She was deeply in love with John Proctor and now that love has been taken away from her, her vengeance is powerful. She wants revenge. But her life is not an easy one. She is an orphan whose parents were murdered by the Wabanaki, (see pg. 9). She has raised herself, feeling somewhat on the edge of society, and observing all the manipulation and hypocrisy around her. Her power comes from her intelligence, empathy and courage. She’s like an animal, instinctual and strong. She knows what she has to do to get what she wants.

Susanna Walcott- a teenage girl in Salem; friends with Abigail.

Ann Putnam- a member of Salem's elite, rich and well-connected. She has only one daughter, Ruth, having lost her seven other children to infant illness.

Thomas Putnam- Ann's husband, and one of the richest and most powerful men in Salem.

Betty Parris- The ten-year-old daughter of Samuel Parris. The first girl to become afflicted, and one of the primary accusers in the trials.

Mercy Lewis- Another teenage friend to Abigail and accuser.

Mary Warren- a servant in the Proctor household and used by Abigail to accuse Proctor’s wife, Elizabeth. John takes Mary to the court, hoping she will confess to the girls’ pretense. But Mary fears Abigail, and when Abigail leads the other girls against her, Mary turns on Proctor and accuses him.

John Proctor- A deeply honest man, who is troubled by his act of lechery with Abigail. Driven by guilt, Proctor becomes the hero of this play, but he is painfully human. His fall from grace is part of his humanity. He is weak and undecided, full of contradictions, and yet he makes heroic choices. He is a man who can be easily understood because he is imperfect. Part of this imperfection is the knowledge that his bond with Abigail is not completely ended. His choices are difficult but in the end, heroic.

Giles Corey- a friend of Proctor's who believes that the trials are being used to steal land from the so-called "witches." He finds evidence of this, but when the court demands to know how he got the evidence, he refuses to tell them and is sentenced to be pressed to death.

Rebecca Nurse- Sentenced to death for witchcraft despite being an elderly, respected member of the Salem community.

Reverend John Hale- “a tight-skinned, eager-eyed intellectual. This is a beloved errand for him; on being called here to ascertain witchcraft he has felt the pride of the specialist whose unique knowledge has at last been publicly called for” (Miller). As the play progresses, however, Hale experiences a transformation. His belief in witchcraft falters, as does his faith in the law.

Elizabeth Proctor- A good woman who has been treated badly and who pays the ultimate price. Her love and understanding of her husband John is powerful, but if she accepted his adultery, she did not intend to let it continue. She is no fool and understands Abigail's intentions well, better than Proctor himself. She is a loving mother, and is sent to prison even though she carries a child. She is described as being cold, but is perhaps merely accepting of her life.

Ezekiel Cheever- Salem's General Court's clerk- writes up warrants demanding the arrest of accused witches.

John Willard- one of Herrick's deputies.

Judge John Hathorne- One of the two judges presiding over the court; a deeply pious man who does not question the existence of witchcraft.

Deputy Governor Danforth- the Deputy Governor of Massachusetts and the presiding judge at the witch trials. Honest and scrupulous, Danforth is a tough Boston lawyer who is basically fair, honest and scrupulous but overconfident in his ability to judge the truth. He is always right, at least in his own mind, and is convinced that he is doing right in rooting out witchcraft. Danforth feels that it is his duty and destiny to purge society of evil and establish the Kingdom of Christ on earth.

The Puritans and The Salem Witch Trials

The Trials

Seeking reprieve from the strict and narrow ways of Puritan life, several girls from Salem secretly met in the woods to hear the exotic tales told by Tituba, a slave from Barbados. In February, 1692, the Reverend Parris discovered the girls participating in one of these forbidden sessions. Afterwards, Betty Parris and others began having 'fits' that defied all explanation. Doctors and ministers watched in horror as the girls displayed catatonic symptoms and signs of the devil. Unable to find a natural explanation, the Puritans turned to the supernatural - the girls were bewitched. Prodded by Parris and others, the girls named their tormentors: a beggar named Sarah Good, the elderly Sarah Osburn, and Tituba herself. Each woman was in some way, a village outcast. Tituba claimed, "The devil came to me and bid me serve him." Villagers sat spellbound as Tituba spoke of the devil's mischief and how she was coerced into signing the devil's book. She said there were several undiscovered witches who seek to destroy the Puritans. Discovering and eliminating witches became a crusade – not only for Salem but all Massachusetts.

In June of 1692, the special Court of Oyer (to hear) and Terminer (to decide) sat in Salem to hear the cases of witchcraft. Presided over by Chief Justice William Stoughton, the court was made up of magistrates and jurors. The first to be tried was Bridget Bishop of Salem who was found guilty and was hanged on June 10.

By October of that year, thirteen women and five men from all stations of life were hanged before the court was disbanded by Governor William Phipps. A new court, (the Superior Court of Judicature), was formed which did not allow spectral evidence. This belief in the power of the accused to use their invisible shapes or spectres to torture their victims, sealed the fates of those tried by the Court of Oyer and Terminer. The new court released those awaiting trial and pardoned those awaiting execution. In effect, the Salem witch trials were over.

The Puritans

Puritanism is a Christian faith which originated in England during the early seventeenth century. The ideals, which separate Puritans from other Christians include their strict belief in predestination. This term refers to the idea that God has previously chosen those who will be saved, and an individual can do nothing to change this status. The Puritan Covenant of Grace calls for all Puritans to be actively faithful. The Covenant of Works is the belief that those who follow God's moral codes will be blessed with eternal life.

The Puritans split from the Church of England in 1633. When William Laud became the new Archbishop of Canterbury, the new beliefs he brought were unacceptable to those members who sought to "purify" the Church. These central beliefs*, along with an extreme emphasis on preaching and the laws contained within the Bible itself formed the strict ideals of American Puritanism. These new beliefs included emphasis on individual acceptance or rejection of God's grace, tolerance for a variety of religious beliefs, and the incorporation of "high church" symbols.

The Puritans wished to rid their religion of all Catholic influence. Early in the seventeenth century, groups of Puritans began leaving Europe to travel to the American colonies. The New England region became the center for Puritans, but the group was spread throughout the area north of Virginia. The main goal of these immigrants was to form a religious community

in which their "pure" ideals could be central. The radical beliefs of the Puritans flourished in the New World. By keeping a strong connection between Church and State, the Puritans were able to control most of the colonies' activity until the end of the seventeenth century.

***The Puritans: Five Basic Beliefs**

- 1.) Total Depravity:** By virtue of the original sin of Adam, when one is born, he has no right to salvation.
- 2.) Unconditional Election:** Some are chosen for salvation, some are not. There is nothing one can do to change his status.
- 3.) Limited Atonement:** The extent to which one can please God with acts is limited.
- 4.) Irresistible Grace:** God showers one with a quality of grace, and one cannot resist it.
- 5.) Perseverance:** Once one has been saved, nothing he does will change that fact.

The Mystery of Salem

Scholars have been writing about the Salem Witch Trials for three hundred years, with various theories as to why the girls 'cried out'. Sexual repression, a male dominated society, fear, intolerance, an austere religious doctrine have all been suggested. Here are some findings through the centuries:

17th Century: scholars believed the accusers were actually possessed by the devil and operating as witches against the Christian community of Salem.

18th Century: religious fervour and the popularity of 'extreme conversion' seemed a more likely explanation for the fits and delusions of the accusers.

19th Century: Theories of "womb-centred" female psychology suggested that the girls were 'hysterical, carried away in a collective consciousness'. (This theory continued with adherents of Freud and Jung) .

20th Century: Science experts propose that the girls were under the influence of natural poisons such as ergot or suffering from an encephalitis epidemic. Bernard Rosenthal proposes that they were malicious adolescents drunk on power.

21st Century: Contemporary scholarship refocuses the spotlight away from the accusers to the judges and the larger cultural context of war, making a case that the accusers were traumatized refugees.

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The Political Stage

McCarthyism grew out of the Second Red Scare that began in the late 1940s and is named after U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy, a Republican of Wisconsin with a particular zeal in uncovering the 'reds'. Many parallels exist between McCarthyism and Miller's depiction of the Salem witch trials. When *The Crucible* opened on Broadway on January 22, 1953, audiences were well aware of the symbolism it represented. McCarthyism took place during a period of intense suspicion in the United States primarily from 1950 to 1954, when the U.S. government was actively countering alleged American Communist Party subversion, its leadership, and others suspected of being Communists or sympathizers. During this period people from all walks of life, but especially the arts, became the subject of aggressive "witch-hunts," often based on questionable evidence. Paranoia reached a peak of hysteria.

The Language

Miller used the ‘colour’ of language in *The Crucible* to help create the tone of 17th century Salem with dialect choices imbedded in the script. He chose a rustic, colloquial sound, partly based on Salem records, with echoes of the King James bible; not unlike a dialect still heard today in rural southern England. Miller achieved his effect by changing verb tenses, linking words unusually and by the use of archaic words and double negatives, (e.g. ‘not’ with ‘no’, or ‘never’).

“You should surely know that Cain were an upright man, and yet he did kill Abel.” (Parris, Act 3)

“He cannot discover no medicine for it in his books.” (Susanna, Act 1)

Old-fashioned words set the tone from the beginning: bid for ‘told’, unnatural for ‘supernatural’, witched for ‘bewitched’, sport for ‘fun’, aye and nay for ‘yes and no’. And as Puritans, the characters often quote or allude to the Bible, which Miller uses to remind us of the strict religious code they lived by:

‘Abigail brings the other girls into the court, and where she walks the crowd will part like the sea for Israel.’ (Elizabeth, Act 2)

The Title

Definitions of the word "Crucible":

1. A severe test, as of patience or belief; a trial.
2. A place, time, or situation characterized by the confluence of powerful intellectual, social, economic, or political forces.
3. A metal container used to heat material to a very high temperature.
4. A hollow area at the bottom of a furnace where metal collects

Study Question: Given these definitions, why do you think Arthur Miller called his play *The Crucible*?

Humanity as Nuance: Morality in *The Crucible*

By Anna Miles

“The Devil is precise.”

So Reverend Hale tells the other characters, and us, in Act One, Scene One.

“Like Reverend Hale...we conceive of the Devil as a necessary part of a respectable view of cosmology. Ours is a divided empire in which certain ideas and emotions and actions are of God, and their opposites are of Lucifer. It is as impossible for most men to conceive of a morality without sin as of an earth without ‘sky’.”

So Arthur Miller tells us about Reverend Hale, and about us.

As human beings, we tend to gravitate towards black-and-white thinking; towards the easily understandable binaries, toward the idea that there exists in this world both pure evil and pure good. We gravitate toward the tidy narratives, the comforting beginnings-middles-endings, the stories with resolutions, where everything has an explanation. We want everything to have an explanation. We want it all to make sense. We want to believe we will recognize evil when it breeches our neighborhood, and that our seemingly normal neighbors will not cause us harm.

Arthur Miller takes two communities - 1692 Puritan Massachusetts, and 1953 Cold-War-Era America, both consumed with rooting out the evil they perceive to be breeching their neighborhoods - and challenges them to find the nuances within their morality. In Miller’s universe, a man can be good and honest, and an adulterer. Another can be convinced the devil has visited Salem, and also doubt his beliefs when he begins to see the harm those convictions have caused. John Proctor is not guiltless, but nor is he evil- he deserves punishment, perhaps, but not hanging. In refusing to sign his name to his confession, Proctor refuses to sacrifice his humanity to the comforting, uncomplicated morality tale his community is trying to force him into. In Miller’s universe, moral nuance is synonymous with humanity.

It is ironic then that in many ways, Miller’s play critiquing our general over-simplification of human behavior falls into these same over-simplifying patterns. While developing his idea for *The Crucible*, Miller wrote in his notebook that he was attracted to the “dramatic potential” of the historical events, because “Salem [was] one of the few dramas in history with a beginning, a middle and an end.” “It is Shakespearean,” Miller wrote, “Parties and counter-parties. There must be a counter-party Proctor and others. It has got to be basically Proctor’s story.” So far as Proctor is Miller’s primary symbol for humanity and moral nuance within the play, he also stands as the ultimate symbol of “goodness”- for nuanced though it may be, it is still ultimate goodness: Proctor is often referred to as “good” and “honest” throughout the play, and he represents the author’s perspective in his righteous refusal to participate in his society’s communal paranoia. As invested as Miller is in challenging our black-and-white viewpoint of good vs. evil, within his comforting beginning-middle-ending story, Miller is equally as invested in maintaining Proctor as a shining example of a tragic hero. As Miller says himself, in order for Proctor to be a villain, there must also be a villain.

So in walks Abigail, strikingly beautiful.

The Shaw Festival’s excellent study guide for *The Crucible* describes Abigail as “a tormented character who represents absolutely evil and The Devil.” Christopher Bigsby, in his introduction for the Penguin Classics edition of *The Crucible*, describes Abigail as a “straightforward case,” a girl intent on causing harm motivated simply by “a blend of vengeance and desire...Jealous of Elizabeth Proctor, she sees a way of removing her and marrying John.” “You will never cry witchery again, or I will make you famous for the whore you are!” says

Proctor, right before calling her a “mad, murderous bitch,” and Miller informs his readers in his postscript “Echoes Down the Corridor” that “legend has it that Abigail turned up later as a prostitute in Boston.” Abigail is the counter-party; the “others” who stand as a foil to Proctor’s character. “If Proctor emerges as a leader, it is inadvertently as he fights to defend the wife he has wronged and whose life he has placed in jeopardy because of his affair with Abigail” (Bigsby). She is a symbol and a prop in Proctor’s story more than she is her own character- a symbol of the evil he committed, an evil which is projected onto her until it consumes her, and becomes her nearly singular quality. It manifests in the play when she threatens to visit the other girls “in the black of some terrible night” to “bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder [them]” and “make [them] wish [they] had never seen the sun go down,” and when she admits to intentionally accusing Elizabeth Proctor, insisting that John is at that “moment singing secret hallelujahs that [his] wife will hang.” Miller’s macro-villain may be “the potentially tyrannical power of shared myths that appear to offer absolution to those who accept them” (Bigsby)- but Abigail becomes his micro-villain as the principle perpetuator of the harmful myths in Miller’s version of Salem.

So where, then, is Abigail’s nuance? It peeks out in the play when we learn about her background, a background full of horrors including becoming orphaned at a young age by violent means (“I saw Indians smash my dear parents’ heads on the pillow next to mine, and I have seen some reddish work done at night”), being forced into servitude as a teenager, and then enduring a sexual relationship with her much older, married master which, consensual though it may technically have been, still placed Abigail on the disadvantageous end of a striking relational power imbalance. After living such a life of violence and victimization, can’t her attachment to John, the only person to show her love, be empathized with? Can she, who has lived a life of powerlessness, be granted the benefit of nuance in her attempts to grab power wherever she possibly can?

Bigsby touches on this idea. “*The Crucible*,” he says, “is a study in power and the mechanisms by which power is sustained, challenged, and lost...those usually deprived of power — the black slave Tituba and the young children — suddenly gain access to an authority as absolute as that which has previously subordinated them. Those ignored by history become its motor force...To be a young girl in Salem was to have no role but obedience, no function but unquestioning faith, no freedom except a willingness to submit to those with power over her life.” But despite these concessions to Abigail’s human complication, she does not get the tragic hero’s ending John gets, nor does she get the moral high ground Elizabeth Proctor does. Instead, she disappears, probably to become a prostitute.

Elizabeth Proctor says to John, “You have a faulty understanding of young girls.” Perhaps the same could be said of Miller, and of *The Crucible*. But if this is an essay about moral nuance and the inherent complication of humanity, this is the paragraph in which we extend the “benefit of nuance” the Miller and his play, in the way we might wish he had done so with Abigail: just as a man can be good and guilty at the same time, a play can be problematic without its enduring impact and message being negated. We need not label *The Crucible* as wholly evil nor wholly good, but instead embrace its grayness, and extrapolate our own narratives between its beginning, middle, and end. We must ask ourselves, as Proctor asks Paris in the first scene of *The Crucible*, can we speak one minute without we land in Hell?

Aren’t we all a little sick of Hell?

Themes in *The Crucible*

Honesty and Hypocrisy

This play revolves around a community that is extremely conservative and religious. Puritans were Calvinists who believed in predestination with a person's outward fortune being a reflection of whether or not they were one of God's chosen people. There was no real way to atone for sins in this community—like how Catholics can go to confession. Therefore, Puritans tried to live their lives as perfectly as possible, which created a great deal of stress and anxiety in the village. Abigail and John Proctor both believe that people in the village are hypocrites. What does it mean to be a hypocrite, though, when as a Puritan everything is restricted? John views himself as a hypocrite for trying to live an upright life but secretly having an affair with Abigail. Some of the girls, like Mary Warren, believe they are doing honest work by participating in the trials, while others know it is all just a game led by Abigail. Many of the accused admit to working with the devil. Do they say this to save themselves from being hanged? Or do they say this because they actually believe that the devil slipped in somehow and influenced them to be a witch? Puritans believed that idleness, especially in women, was an opportunity for the devil to get inside a person—which is partially why idleness was made illegal in Puritan communities.

So who is being honest: the girls accusing others of being witches, those that admit to being witches, or those that refuse to submit and defend their piety?

Who is being a hypocrite: those using the power of the trials for personal wealth which conflicts with the Puritan value of humility, or John Proctor who made a mistake by having an affair but otherwise tries to live an upright life?

Power vs. Powerlessness

In Puritan society, women were viewed as a tool of the devil to tempt men. Women were not allowed to be a part of the town meetings or church meetings. Women were to be married and have children. Often times, the role of a woman was to have children until she died. The trials were an event that not only suddenly gave women (girls) a voice, but a seemingly endless amount of power to influence the community.

The judges at the witch trials were the wealthy and powerful 1% of the colonies. With no official judicial training, the judges intermarried into powerful families, became government and military officials, and heavily invested in commerce. The destruction of the 2nd Indian War caused the judges to fear the status of their power. Not only did the judges lose their land and wealth in the war, but they were to blame for poor military and political decisions that affected the outcome of the war. The Salem Witch Trials were an opportunity for the judges to re-solidify their status by using the devil as a scapegoat. If the judges successfully “scrubbed the colony clean” then they might be put back in their rightful place, on top.

Mary Beth Norton puts the problem of power into words in her book *In the Devil's Snare*: “The strange reversal that had placed women on top was then righted, and young women were relegated once again to what contemporaries saw as their proper roles: servers, not served; followers, not leaders; governed, not governors, the silent, not the speakers. Those momentarily powerful became once more the powerless” (304).

Classroom Activities: *The Crucible*

Pre-Performance Questions:

1. What do you think constitutes a “witch hunt” in modern day society?
2. Do you think it is more important to adhere to social customs and norms or to stand up for what you believe is right—even if that means putting yourself in trouble?

Post-Performance Questions:

1. Do you think the girls were playing a game or do you think they really believed that the spirits of witches were attacking them?
2. Why do you think Reverend Parris felt so much anxiety about catching the girls dancing in the woods?
3. Do you think Elizabeth Proctor is to blame for John’s affair? Why?
4. Why do you think the other girls in the play look up to Abigail, even though she is an outspoken bully?
5. If you were accused of being a witch, would you confess to being one or stand firm in your belief that you are blameless?
6. How do you think losing the 2nd Indian War affected the outcome of the Salem Witch Trials?
7. Why do you think women were accused of being witches more than men?
8. How do you think being a young female refugee (from the 2nd Indian War) in the town (like Abigail Williams, Mercy Lewis, and Mary Warren) affected how others saw you. Remember, Puritans were skeptical of outsiders and anything that did not conform to their customs and community.

PERSPECTIVE WRITING— PERSONAL NARRATIVES

1. Describe what you believe to be a typical day in the life of a Puritan. Write about the day from moment to moment—including what you eat, what kind of work you do, who you see, etc.
2. Revise the personal narrative into a first person monologue about how you feel about your typical day as a Puritan. This needs to be appropriate for sharing with the class.
3. After everyone (or those willing) have shared their monologues with the class, have the class vote on one monologue that they can all add to to make the monologue richer and more evocative.
4. Discuss the similarities and differences that arose during the process. Was there general agreement or marked differences? If they were different why? Were they subtle or obvious variations? Did the class agree on what was important to include and why? If not how would the elimination of some elements change the way the story would be understood when read?

PERSPECTIVE WRITING – EULOGY

1. A eulogy is a speech or writing that praises a person that has recently died. Eulogies should not be confused with elegies, which are poems written in tribute to the dead; nor with obituaries, which are more similar to biographies.
2. After seeing the play, write a eulogy for John Proctor from your perspective.
3. Write a second eulogy for John Proctor from the perspective of Elizabeth Proctor, Abigail Williams, Reverend Hale, or Deputy-Governor Danforth.
4. Read and compare the eulogies in class. Discuss what information was important from the student's perspective? What information was important when writing from another character's perspective? What information did they leave out? Were there subtle or blatant differences from the different characters?

Study Guide Questions: Engage With the Play

By Anna Miles

Take charge of your theatre-going experience and make it your own by asking yourself questions before, during, and after watching a play.

Questions to ask before the play:

If you **HAVE** read the play:

How did you envision the set, or the visual world of the play, while reading?

How did you imagine the characters looked while reading the play?

What themes did you notice repeating throughout the play?

What images jumped out at you while reading the play?

How would you describe the central theme of the play in one sentence?

If you **HAVEN'T** read the play:

Do you know anything about the play? If so, what do you know?

In General:

When you think about "theatre," what impressions come to mind? What does "theatre" mean to you?

What do you expect your experience to be when you watch a play? Do you expect to be bored? Excited? Engaged? Curious? Angry? Tired?

Questions to ask after the play:

If you **READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT:**

How did the production set differ from what you had imagined while reading the play? How was it similar? How did these changes affect your understanding of the story?

Did the characters look different from how you envisioned them looking while reading the play? Did they sound different? Act differently? How did these changes affect your understanding and opinion of each character? How did these changes affect your understanding of the overall story?

How did the themes and images you noticed while reading translate to performance? Did the same themes and images jump out at you? Did you notice new ones?

Did this particular production seem to have the same central theme, or a different central theme from the one you discovered while reading? What elements of the staging, acting, or design helped convey the theme?

Did the play gain or lose anything in performance? Did you enjoy reading it more, or watching it?

If you **DIDN'T READ THE PLAY BEFORE SEEING IT:**

How did the play live up to your expectations? Did it turn out the way you thought it would? Was your knowledge of the play correct?

Were you able to follow the story?

Which part of the story did you most respond to? What themes and images jumped out at you?

Which character did you most relate to? Why?

In General:

How did this production change or confirm your original impressions of "theatre"?

How did your experience watching the play differ from how you expected it would go?

In your own words, how would you summarize the plot of the play? How is the plot different from the story, or the thematic implications, in the play?

Did you feel the story was relevant to your life? How and why?

Did you feel the story said something about our society, or about the world at large? If so, what?

Do you feel this story is an important one to tell and keep telling? How and why?

What kind of stories do you most respond to?

Theatre Etiquette

- Arrive at the theater on time.
- Visit the restroom before the performance begins.
- Turn off your cell phone. Do not speak on the phone or text during the performance.
- Pay attention to announcements that are made prior to the show about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
- Don't speak during the performance unless you are encouraged by the performers to participate.
- Remember that the Overture (introductory music) in musical theater is part of the performance, so be quiet when it begins.
- Do not take pictures during the performance. It can be very distracting to the actors and can cause a mishap. It can also be a violation of an actor's contract.
- Remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment.
- Do not eat or drink in the theater.
- Do not put your feet up on the seats or balcony and do not kick the seat in front of you.
- Don't put or throw anything on the stage.
- Do laugh when the performance is funny.
- Do applaud when it is appropriate during the performance.
- Do applaud when the performance is over... this tells the performers and crew that you appreciate their work.
- Stand and applaud if you really thought the show was great (a standing ovation).
- Do not whistle, stomp your feet, or scream out to the performers except for a Bravo or Brava.

Additional Reading Material

<http://www.etext.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft/>

This site provides a wealth of primary source documents, from trial transcripts to rare books and historical maps of Salem Village. Also features a helpful Q&A with the town archivist for Danvers (formerly Salem Village).

<http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/puritan/puritan.html>

This site contains Mary Easty's petition to the court asking them to please not shed any more innocent blood. The site also contains background historical information on the trials.

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/trials/salem/salem/.html>

Find a chronology of events, images, select trial transcripts and petitions, biographies, excerpts from Cotton Mather's Memorable Providences and more...

<http://www.salemweb.com/witches.html>

This site contains a brief historical introduction to the events of 1692-93 in Salem. This site also contains various links to more specific aspects of Salem and the trials.

<http://www.salemwitchmuseum.com/learn.html>

This site answers some commonly asked questions about the trials and witchcraft in the seventeenth century.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/features/97/salem>

An interactive trip through the hysteria that caused the witch hunt in Salem, offered from the perspective of one of the accused.

<http://www.jefferson.village.virginia.edu/~bcr/salem/salem.html>

An interactive map showing the locations of the accused and the accusers, as well as major roads, rivers, townships and households.

<http://earlyamerica.com/review/summer97/carey.html>

Although over 500 of the original legal documents from the trials still exist, one particular death warrant, known as the Carey Document, has been exposed as a fake. This site includes information on the discovery of the document with pictures.

<http://www.native-languages.org/wabanaki.html>

Peoples of the Wabanaki Indian Confederacy, with links to information about each Wabanaki nation and its language.

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/salem.html>

A chronology of important events surrounding the Salem witch trials.

About Shaw Festival

www.shawfest.com

Inspired by the spirit of George Bernard Shaw, the Shaw Festival creates unforgettable theatrical encounters. The Shaw Festival, home to Two-Way Theatre, is a place where people who are curious about the world gather to share the unique experience of live theatre.

About Pacific Conservatory Theatre (PCPA)

www.pcpa.org

Mission:

PCPA is a professional conservatory theatre, committed to reflecting and transforming our diverse community with the art of live theatre.

We believe that the theater has a vital role and responsibility in the community to enrich cultural literacy and improve the quality of life.

We commit to serving our current audience, cultivating our future audience and training the next generation of theatre professionals.

We aspire to adhere to the best theatrical traditions and to set new standards of excellent artistry, ethics, and professional practice for the future of the theatre.