

The Crucible

by Arthur Miller



A unit for Higher English

THE CRUCIBLE

Aims and objectives:

- ❖ The aim of this unit is to provide you with a general introduction to The Crucible.
- ❖ You will look at both historical contexts for the play.
- ❖ You will be guided through the four acts, and will look at the key characters.
- ❖ You will analyse the language used in the dialogue of the play.

At the end of this unit you will:

- ❖ understand the social background to the play.
- ❖ know something about Arthur Miller's own life.
- ❖ be able to contextualise some of the major themes of The Crucible.
- ❖ have a clear understanding of the key characters, relationships and conflicts.
- ❖ have sufficient understanding to write a broad-ranging essay in the Higher examination.



THE PLOT

The Crucible is a play about mass hysteria, based on authentic records of witchcraft trials in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. It seeks to explain how respected citizens came to be hanged for "crimes they did not commit. It examines the motives of those who made accusations, and those who signed false confessions.

The conflicts of characters, emotions, and principles are brought out in dramatic scenes, building to a climax where the strongest man, John Proctor, is broken into "confessing" but refuses to betray his own integrity by implicating others.

He will not budge from this proud and angry position, even to save his own life.



ARTHUR MILLER: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Arthur Miller was born in New York in 1915. His father ran a clothing shop specialising in ladies' coats, but the family business was a victim of the Depression and folded in 1929.

We know few details of Miller's childhood apart from the fact that he would rise at 4.30 a.m. to deliver bread before school. When he looked back on his youth, Miller took a particular pride in the fact that his former teachers were not able to remember him. Like many young people he considered sport to be more important than studying.

But the trauma of the Depression left an indelible mark on Miller and remained a point of reference in his future writing. Miller has described how on one occasion he withdrew his small amount of savings from the bank to buy a secondhand bike. Outside the same bank the following day he witnessed angry crowds unable to withdraw their own money. Any smugness he experienced soon gave way to an appreciation of the sheer scale of the economic disaster that had befallen America.

Miller graduated from high school in 1932 but as his family could not afford to send him to college, he took a variety of jobs to pay for his own education. He worked in an automobile parts warehouse for fifteen dollars a week, drove trucks, and turned his hand to waiting in restaurants. He entered the University of Michigan to study economics and history. While he was there, he kept body and soul together by working as a night editor on a local paper. He also won a playwriting competition for undergraduates, worth 250 dollars. Modestly, Miller claims that at this stage in his life he had only been to the theatre twice.

In 1940, Miller married Mary Slattery, his first wife. In the same year, he was refused entry to the army on medical grounds, so worked instead as a dock-yard fitter. During this period his career blossomed and *All My Sons* was produced in New York in 1947. It describes the downfall of a man who profits financially by selling faulty aircraft components during the war. The play deals with the pursuit of success, financial pressures and family guilt. It was followed two years later by *Death of a Salesman*.

Miller's marriage failed and he divorced in 1956. The following year he married the famous actress Marilyn Monroe. It seemed to many an unlikely match but, for a time at least, it brought Miller some stability.

At this time America was undergoing a profound crisis. Anti-communist hysteria, largely orchestrated by Senator Joseph McCarthy, contributed to a climate of suspicion and accusation. Writers and artists with liberal or unorthodox political views were put under close scrutiny and Miller himself appeared before the Congressional UnAmerican Activities Committee. He had earlier been refused a passport to travel to Europe for a premiere of his third play, *The Crucible*, on the grounds that he was a communist sympathiser. The play itself cleverly transposes the hysteria of the times to the times of the witch-hunt trials in Salem, Massachusetts in the 1690s.

Miller was imprisoned for 30 days in 1957. He appealed against the sentence and won his case. He finally separated from Marilyn Monroe in 1960.

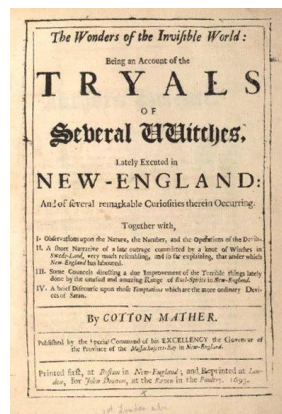
Miller died of a heart failure following a fight with cancer in 2005.

TASK ONE

*1. Now that you know something of the playwright's life and times, in the space below, write down four events that you think would have made the biggest impression on him in the years leading up to the writing of *The Crucible*.*

2. Suggest some possible themes in the work of a man influenced by these particular events.

3. When you have thought about these points, and written down your ideas, turn the page and compare your list with the one given there.



You may have written down some of the following events and themes but don't worry if your lists are not the same as those given below: your ideas may be equally valid.

Significant Events

- ❖ The Depression in general, and the failure of the family business in particular
- Having to take a variety of jobs
- ❖ Winning the play-writing competition/being rejected by the army
- ❖ Marriage
- ❖ The McCarthy "witch-hunt"

Possible Themes

- ❖ Financial hardship
- ❖ The world of work
- ❖ Success/failure
- ❖ Relationships
- ❖ The individual in society/the power of the State
- ❖ Justice



LANGUAGE

TASK TWO

Look at the words in bold type. Check that you understand their meanings, as used here, then complete the definitions in the box below.

Naturalism is a term applied to a drama which unfolds before our eyes with events following on **chronologically** from each other, with characters talking more or less in a life-like manner, in settings that seem realistic. Most soap-operas are naturalistic in these terms.

The *Crucible* is a naturalistic play in this sense, but Miller has made the audience aware, through his language, that *this is not modern America*. He helps to establish the **setting** by using words and phraseology which denote clearly the period in which the events took place.

The **dialogue** has a quality that could not be achieved in a naturalistic play of the present time. The characters are given a certain **dignity** and distance by **archaic** turns of phrase and peculiarities of grammar (mainly survivals in America of early uses in England).

Naturalist drama is...

Chronological means...

Setting is...

Dialogue is...

Dignity is...

Archaic means...

TASK THREE

Read the following information, then complete the box below.

BACKGROUND

An understanding of the historical and political background to the play is essential for the audience/reader.

In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers arrived in America - outcasts from Britain for their religious beliefs. They settled in Massachusetts, where they were able to live in the way they wished.

Their religious beliefs were strong - perhaps what would be called today **fundamentalist**. They believed totally in the Bible as the word of God, and that **the Devil really did exist**. (You will see this referred to in Proctor's condemnation of Rev. Parris' sermons, and in the villagers' instant acceptance that the Devil was walking the streets.)

Their intensely Puritanical outlook frowned on fun and even religious festivities at Christmas were forbidden as ungodly.

The facts of the case:

In 1692, the village of Salem experienced a hysterical outburst of witch-hunting and twenty people were hanged as witches. All the characters in the play existed, though some were altered by Miller for dramatic purposes.

Miller was always interested in the Salem story, and recognised similar issues in the events of the early 1950s in the USA

Give three ways in which our modern, Scottish society differs from that of seventeenth century Salem:

TASK FOUR

MODERN PARALLEL: McCARTHYISM

In the 1950s, Miller saw the power and corruption of a witch-hunt. From 1950 to 1954, Senator Joseph McCarthy presided over the investigations of the Senate Committee on Un-American Activities.

McCarthy was as ruthlessly determined to root out Communists from the higher levels of government in the same way as the inhabitants of Salem were to root out "witches".

McCarthy claimed to have a list of "Communists" who were shaping policy in government, and "traitors" throughout America who were spying for the U.S.S.R. McCarthy often made accusations (and convictions) which were not based on any real evidence.

Like the Salem judges, he sought first of all to extort confessions, then names of alleged associates. Refusal to denounce others could be punished as an attempt to protect the guilty.

Many Americans, even if not convicted, were ruined by their appearance before the Committee, even as witnesses.

"It was a fact that a political, **objective**, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming a holy resonance ... the terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered, and yet all they knew was terror. That so interior and **subjective** an emotion could have been so manifestly created from within was a marvel to me. It underlies every word of *The Crucible*."

(Miller: *Ibid.*)

The women in Salem, or real Communists in the 1950s, could no doubt do some harm, but not as much as the witch-hunting hysteria which afflicted a whole community, which could destroy the integrity of every individual and pervert justice and truth on a huge scale.

What might be the consequences if our courts of law began to believe every accusation brought by its citizens?

THE THEMES OF THE PLAY

A **theme** is the underlying message of a novel, poem, play or short story.

Aspects of **character**, **structure**, **setting** and **plot** do not exist independently of the theme.

For example, a particular character may be used to illustrate the theme by his or her actions or behaviour.

Think about these statements:

"I believe when statesmen forsake their own private conscience for the sake of their own public duties - they lead their country by a short route to chaos ..
"

"What is an oath, then, but words we say to God?"

"When a man takes an oath he is holding his own self in his hands. Like water. And if he opens his fingers then - he needn't hope to find himself again ... "

"I wished for a way to write a play that would be sharp, that would lift out of the mass of subjectivism the squirming, single, defined process which would show that the sin of public terror is that it divests man of conscience, of himself. It was a theme not unrelated to those that invested the previous plays (All My Sons and Death of a Salesman). In The Crucible, however, there was an attempt to move beyond the discovery and unveiling of the hero's guilt, and guilt that kills the personality ... It was no longer enough for me to build a play, as it were, upon the revelation of guilt, and to rely solely upon a fate which exacts payment from the culpable man, Now guilt appeared to me no longer the bedrock under which the probe could not penetrate. I saw it now as a betrayer, as possibly the most real of our illusions, but nevertheless a quality of mind capable of being overthrown."

(Arthur Miller - Introduction to his Collected Plays)

Miller is interested in several things in this play. He is interested in how the children came to be so dominant, how some villagers came to confess their "guilt" so freely, how others - like Proctor and Rebecca Nurse - refused to confess to witchcraft, and how the men in authority treated these characters.

Key themes in this play include:

- The importance of integrity
- The value of a reputation
- The abuse of power
- The damage caused by hysteria
- The dangers of theocracy

Act One



FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PLAY

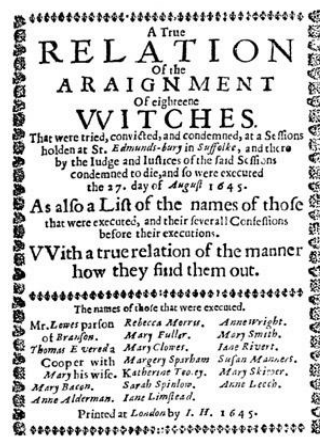
Read very carefully the information given about the village of Salem in pages 1 - 5 of the play. This is very important as it gives us an insight into Arthur Miller's thoughts as he sat down to write.

TASK FIVE

1. What do you learn from these pages about the religious beliefs and society of the people of Salem?

2. What motives for calling witchcraft against individuals are suggested in these pages?

3. Miller has given clear directions for a room of "clean spareness". How does this fit in with your impression of the people of the village?



TASK SIX

Read the first act of the play, then answer the following questions:

1. In what state of mind is Parris when we first meet him?

2. What condition is Betty in?

3. What has brought about Betty's condition?

4. Why is Parris so concerned that the villagers should not know what Abigail and Betty have been doing?

5. What did Parris actually see going on in the forest?

6. What is Abigail's explanation for leaving the Proctors' service and for finding no work since?

7. What is Ruth Putnam's condition?

8. How was Mrs Putnam involved in the events in the forest?

9. What do we learn after the adults leave the room about what the girls were doing the previous evening?

10. How does Abigail threaten the other girls to make them keep silent?

11. What do we gather about the previous relationship between Abigail and Proctor?

12. How does Rebecca Nurse explain the children's strange behaviour?

13. What reasons does John Proctor give for staying away from church?

14. What evidence is there that Parris is unhappy with the way he is treated by his congregation?

15. What is the argument about lumber between Proctor and Putnam?

16. Why has the Reverend Hale come to Salem? What does he hope to do?

17. What more do we learn about events in the forest from Hale's questioning of Abigail?

18. What does Tituba add to this story?

19. What does Hale want Tituba to confess? How does he achieve this?

20. What do the girls do in the last few minutes of Act One?

Look at Abigail's words to John Proctor and her obvious admiration on Proctor's entrance. (page 17):

"Gah! I'd almost forgot how strong you are, John Proctor!"

Proctor wishes that Abigail should forget their affair and "Wipe it out of mind" (page 18)

Abigail seems to think *she has reason to hope that John still loves her*, and when he rejects her she begs, in tears:

"I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! I never knew what pretence Salem was, I never knew 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! You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet! John, pity me, pity me!"

If there is anywhere in the play that the audience feels sympathy for Abigail, this is it.

TASK SEVEN

Write a paragraph explaining how, in your opinion, we have reason to sympathise with Abigail, and why we have reason to be suspicious of her:

TASK EIGHT

Write a short analysis for each of these quotations; you should refer to as many of the following aspects as possible:

Characterisation; conflict; poetic technique; theme; motif; tension; historical context; punctuation; tone; symbolism...

1. *There are wheels within wheels in this village, and fires within fires! — Mrs. Putnam*

2. *My name is good in the village! Elizabeth Proctor is an envious, gossiping liar! - Abigail*

3. *“... mark this, if anyone breathe a word or the edge of a word about the other things, I will come to you in the black of some terrible night, and I will bring with me a pointy reckoning that will shudder you! And you know I can do it... I have seen some reddish work done at night. And I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down! – Abigail*

4. *I have trouble enough without I come five mile to hear him preach only hellfire and bloody damnation. Take it to heart, Mr. Parris. There are many others who stay away from church these days because you hardly ever mention God any more. — Proctor*

5. *Ah, you're wicked yet, aren't y'! – Proctor*

6. *I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! I never knew what pretence Salem was, I never knew 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! You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet! — Abigail*

7. *Abby, I may think of you softly from time to time, but I will cut off my hand before I reach for you again. We never touched. — Proctor*

8. *John Proctor: These are heavy books.*

Rev. John Hale: Well, they should be. They're weighted with authority.

9. *I want to open myself!... I want the light of God, I want the sweet love of Jesus! I danced for the Devil; I saw him, I wrote in his book; I go back to Jesus; I kiss His hand. I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil! —*

Act Two



TASK NINE

Read the second act of the play, then answer the following questions:

1. How much time has passed since the end of Act One?

2. Describe what Elizabeth is doing, off-stage, when John comes home.

3. Why does John put extra salt in the stew?

4. What has John been doing during the day?

5. How does John 'mean to please' Elizabeth?

6. What was Mary Warren's explanation for leaving the house and going into Salem that day?

7. Why does Elizabeth think that John should go to Ezekiel Cheever?

8. What makes her suspicious about John's behaviour?

9. Why does John regret that he told Elizabeth about his affair with Abigail?

10. What news does Mary Warren bring from town?

11. What had Mary Warren to do with the accusing of Goody Osburn?

12. What makes the Reverend Hale suspicious that John and Elizabeth are not good Christians?

13. John cannot remember the commandment about adultery. Explain the stage direction 'as though a secret arrow had pierced his heart'.

14. What is Hale's reaction when John tells him that Abigail and the girls had 'naught to do with witchcraft'?

15. What is Ezekiel Cheever's task on this particular night?

16. What happened to Abigail while she was at dinner?

17. What is Mary's explanation for the poppet having a needle stuck in it?

18. What does Proctor particularly object to about the way the women are arrested and held?

19. What advice does Hale leave with Proctor, Giles Corey and Francis Nurse?

20. Why does Mary feel that she cannot tell the court what she knows about Abigail?

ELIZABETH AND JOHN PROCTOR

Act Two opens eight days after the end of Act One (as you will have noted in the last task...). The scene has also changed, to the Proctors' house, and this is appropriate as it is the nature of the Proctors' relationship that is the main focus of this act.

The first pages of the Act show the tensions between Elizabeth and John Proctor. The reason for the tension is the affair which John had with Abigail to which reference was made in Act One.

TASK TEN

Write down any significance you find in the following lines of dialogue:

1. PROCTOR (page 42): It's winter in here yet.

2. ELIZABETH (page 44): You were alone with her?

3. PROCTOR (page 45): Let you look to your own improvement before you go to judge your husband any more.

4. PROCTOR (page 45): Spare me! You forget nothin' and forgive nothin' I cannot speak but I am doubted, every moment judged for lies, as though I come into a court when I come into this house! -

5. ELIZABETH (page 45): The magistrate sits in your heart that judges you.

6. ELIZABETH (page 50): She wants me dead. I knew all week it would come to this!

7. PROCTOR (page 51): When will you know me woman? Were I stone I would have cracked for shame this seven month!

REVEREND HALE

Hale impresses Proctor when he replies:

"Proctor, I cannot think God be provoked so grandly by such a petty cause. The jails are packed - our greatest judges sit in Salem now - and hangin's promised. Man, we must look to cause proportionate. Were there murder done, perhaps, and never brought to light? Abomination? Some secret blasphemy that stinks to Heaven? Think on cause, man, and let you help me to discover it. For there's your way, believe it, there is your only way, when such confusion strikes upon the world."

Proctor knows the cause and is prepared to sacrifice his reputation to save his wife. What form will this sacrifice take? Why is this such a major sacrifice? (Consider the setting of the play and the religious/moral implications.) Look at Francis Nurse's reaction to John's determination to speak out, on page 88. How does this tie in with the issue of name/reputation?

TASK ELEVEN

Choose quotations to complete the picture of Hale's conflicting characteristics:

Characteristic	Page	Supporting Evidence
Naïve	63	
Well-educated	30	
Sincere/ gentle	39	
Misguided	32	
Ignorant	52	
Confident	32	
Uncertain	64	
Guilty	64	Stage direction:

TASK TWELVE

Write a short analysis for each of these quotations; you should refer to as many of the following aspects as possible:

Characterisation; conflict; poetic technique; theme; motif; tension; historical context; punctuation; tone; symbolism...

10. *I'll plead no more! I see now your spirit twists around the single error of my life, and I will never tear it free! — Proctor*

11. *I like it not that Mr. Parris should lay his hand upon my baby. I see no light of God in that man. I'll not conceal it. — Proctor*

12. *Question Abigail Williams about the gospel, not myself? - Elizabeth*

13. *Elizabeth: I do not judge you. The magistrate sits in your heart that judges you.*

14. *Proctor: Oh, Elizabeth, your justice would freeze beer!*

15. I have seen too many frightful proofs in court—the Devil is alive in Salem, and we dare not quail to follow wherever the accusing finger points! — Hale

16. I'll tell you what's walking Salem—vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law! This warrant's vengeance! I'll not give my wife to vengeance! — Proctor

17. Hell and Heaven grapple on our backs, and all our old pretenses ripped away. God's icy wind will blow. – Proctor

Act Three



TASK THIRTEEN

Read the third act of the play, then answer the following questions:

1. Describe what the audience sees and hears when the scene begins.

2. Why have Giles Corey and Francis Nurse come to intervene in the court proceedings?

3. Why has John Proctor brought Mary Warren in the court?

4. What is Parris's opinion of John Proctor's actions?

5. How does Mary Warren explain her behaviour and that of Abigail and the other girls?

6. What does Proctor say is his reason for coming to the court?

7. What evidence is there that John Proctor does not appear to be a good Christian?

8. How does he react to the news that his wife is pregnant?

9. Why, in spite of the fact that his wife is 'temporarily' saved, does John Proctor persist in trying to give evidence?

10. Why does Danforth say that all the people who signed the testament should come to court?

11. What is Giles' evidence the Mr Putnam is using the court for his own purposes?

12. How does Danforth explain the importance of the victims' testifying in a trial for witchcraft?

13. What is Mary Warren's explanation for having changed her mind now?

14. How does Abigail's story about the poppet in Proctor's house differ from the version we heard earlier?

15. What evidence does John Proctor give to contradict Abigail's version of events?

16. How does Mary's explanation that earlier she had been pretending come to nothing?

17. Why is Mary frightened by the behaviour of Abigail and the other girls?

18. What does Proctor accuse Abigail of in order to silence her?

19. Explain how Danforth uses Elizabeth to test the truth of John's accusation against Abigail.

20. What does Abigail do which wins Mary back to her at the end of the scene?

TASK FOURTEEN

Write a short analysis for each of these quotations; you should refer to as many of the following aspects as possible:

Characterisation; conflict; poetic technique; theme; motif; tension; historical context; punctuation; tone; symbolism...

18. *Do you take it upon yourself to determine what this court shall believe and what it shall set aside? ...This is the highest court of the supreme government of this province, do you know it? — Danforth*

19. *You must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between. This is a sharp time, now, a precise time—we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world. Now, by God's grace, the shining sun is up, and them that fear not light will surely praise it. — Danforth*

20. *Proctor: I have known her sir! I have known her.
Danforth: In what time? What place?
Proctor: In the proper place where my beasts are bedded.*

21. *A man may think God sleeps, but God sees everything, I know it now. I beg you, sir, I beg you- see her what she is . . . She thinks to dance with me on my wife's grave! And well she might, for I thought of her softly. God help me, I lusted, and there is a promise in such sweat. But it is a whore's vengeance. — Proctor*

22. Judge Danforth: *To your knowledge, has John Proctor committed the crime of lechery? Answer my question. Is your husband an adulterer?*

Elizabeth: *No sir.*

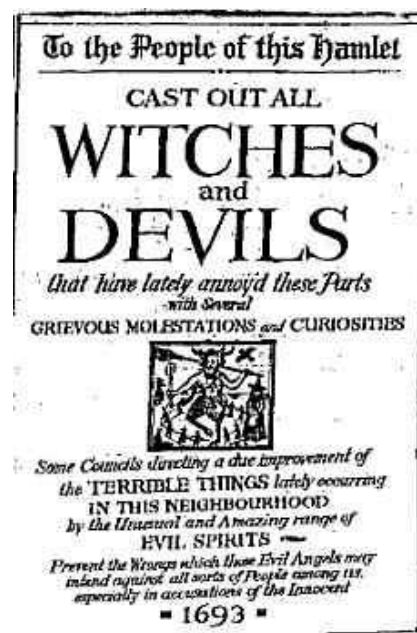
Judge Danforth: *Remove her.*

John Proctor: *Elizabeth, I've confessed it.*

Elizabeth: *Oh, God.*

23. A fire, a fire is burning! I hear the boot of Lucifer, I see his filthy face! And it is my face, and yours, Danforth! For them that quail to bring men out of ignorance, as I have quailed, and as you quail now when you know in all your black hearts that this be fraud—God damns our kind especially, and we will burn, we will burn together! — Proctor

24. You bring down heaven and raise up a whore! – Proctor



THE COURTROOM

The opening of Act 3 of The Crucible is described by Miller in this way:

The vestry room of the Salem meeting house, now serving as the anteroom of the General Court.

As the curtain rises, the room is empty, but for sunlight pouring through two high windows in the back wall. The room is solemn, even forbidding. Heavy beams jut out, boards of random widths make up the walls. At the right are two doors leading into the meeting house proper, where the court is being held. At the left another door leads outside.

There is a plain bench at the left, and another at the right. In the center a rather long meeting table, with stools and a considerable armchair snugged up to it.

Through the partitioning wall at the right we hear a prosecutor's voice, Judge Hathorne's, asking a question; then a woman's voice, Martha Corey's, replying.

HATHORNE'S VOICE: Now, Martha Corey, there is abundant evidence in our hands to show that you have given yourself to the reading of fortunes. Do you deny it?

MARTHA COREY'S VOICE: I am innocent to a witch. I know not what a witch is.

HATHORNE'S VOICE: How do you know, then, that you are not a witch?

MARTHA COREY'S VOICE: If I were, I would know it.

HATHORNE'S VOICE: Why do you hurt these children?

MARTHA COREY'S VOICE: I do not hurt them. I scorn it!

GILES' VOICE, *roaring*: I have evidence for the court!

Voices of townspeople rise in excitement.

DANFORTH'S VOICE: You will keep your seat!

GILES' VOICE: Thomas Putnam is reaching out for land!

DANFORTH'S VOICE: Remove that man, Marshal!

TASK FIFTEEN

1. What atmosphere or mood is suggested here?

2. What might be the symbolic meaning of the sunlight streaming through the two high windows?

3. [Think back to Act 1, and the light streaming in through a window in Parris's house, and Act 2, where the Proctors' house is described as lithe low, dark, and rather long living room of the time.”]

4. What do all these references to light and dark suggest to you about Miller's intentions in staging the play?

Act Four



TASK SIXTEEN

Read the final act of the play, then answer the following questions:

1. What do Sarah Good and Tituba think is going to happen to them?

2. Why does Marshal Herrick need to clear the cell?

3. Why does the Reverend Hale visit the prison?

4. How does Cheever explain Parris's sorrow and 'mad look'?

5. What news does Parris bring about Abigail and Mercy Lewis?

6. What happened recently in the neighbouring village of Andover?

7. What is Danforth's reasoning for refusing to pardon or postpone the execution of the prisoners? 8. Why do they propose bringing Elizabeth to see John?

9. What is the condition of Salem and its farms since so many villagers have been either jailed or executed?

10. How does Hale try to persuade Elizabeth to try to save John's life?

11. How does Danforth try with the same intention?

12. How do Elizabeth and John greet each other?

13. What has happened to Giles Corey? Why did he refuse to answer the charge against him?

14. What is Proctor's reason for confessing now – just before the time of his execution?

15. What is Elizabeth's opinion of her husband?

16. Why is John so reluctant first of all to dictate his confession, and then to sign it?

17. What makes Danforth suspicious of this confession?

18. Why does Danforth refuse after all to accept John's confession?

19. Why do Hale and Parris both urge Elizabeth to plead with John at the last moment?

20. What information is given us in the postscript 'Echoes Down the Corridor'?

TASK SEVENTEEN

Write a short analysis for each of these quotations; you should refer to as many of the following aspects as possible:

Characterisation; conflict; poetic technique; theme; motif; tension; historical context; punctuation; tone; symbolism...

24. *I have three children – how may I teach them to walk like men in the world, and I sold my friends? – Proctor*

25. *It is mistaken law that leads you to sacrifice. Life, woman, life is God's most precious gift; no principle, however glorious, may justify the taking of it . . . it may well be God damns a liar less than he that throws his life away for pride. — Hale*

26. *It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery. - Elizabeth*

27. *I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs. Give them no tear! Tears pleasure them! Show honor now, show a stony heart and sink them with it! — Proctor*

28. *Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name! — Proctor*

TASK EIGHTEEN

Now you have finished reading the play, answer the following questions in the boxes below:

Which characters did you feel sympathy for?

Which characters did you find unsympathetic?

Which scene did you find most dramatic, and why?

Which theme do you feel is the most important to the play, and why?

Which quotation do you feel is the most memorable in the play?

CRITICISM

In *Miller, The Playwright*, Dennis Welland has this to say about the setting and lighting of *The Crucible*:

"The stage directions are particularly explicit about the source of light in each scene. In Act I, the sun streams through the leaded panes of a high window; in Act III" sunlight pours through the bars of another high window. It shows how Miller sees the mood of the play - darkness and gloom penetrated by the single shaft of light cast by conscientiously dogged goodness.

The revised version of the play in July 1953, staged under Miller's own direction, "did away with all scenery, and had the action take place against drapes and a light-flooded cyclorama (Backcloth)". The starkness of such a production would well suit the starkness of the play's theme, hovering on the brink of nihilism in a nightmare of lost innocence."

Welland also discusses Miller's intentions when writing *The Crucible*:

Ibsen's play *The Enemy of the People* had attracted Miller because the play dealt with

"... the central theme of our social life today. Simply, it is the question of whether the democratic guarantees protecting political minorities ought to be set aside in times of crisis. More personally, it is the question of whether one's vision of the truth ought to be a source of guilt at a time when the mass of men condemn it as a dangerous and devilish lie. It is an enduring theme ... because there never was, nor will there ever be, an organised society able to countenance calmly the individual who insists that he is right while the vast majority is absolutely wrong." (Theater Essays, pp17-18)

He expanded that thinking to:

"I saw accepted the notion that conscience was no longer a private matter but one of state administration. I saw men handing conscience to other men and thanking other men for the opportunity of doing so."

Clearly, Miller was seeing-the McCarthy trials as a perfect example of men and women ignoring their consciences, and accepting the court's authority without standing up for what they believed was right.

Act Three of *The Crucible* presents the audience with the injustices of the trials, and Act Four shows us the "single shaft of light" - John Proctor - who will not compromise his conscience, even to save his life.

TRAGEDY

In literary terms, the word “tragedy” has a specific meaning.

It is a play about a man - the hero - who begins by being successful, powerful, and having some authority. (In Shakespeare's tragedies, the heroes are all men of high rank.)

However, the hero has a fatal or tragic flaw (hamartia) in his character which leads to him falling from his high position and ultimately to his death.

The hero regains much of his stature, but dies by the end of the play, as a direct result of the flaw in his character: his death is not brought about by chance or accident.

TASK NINETEEN

1. Which elements of the play make The Crucible a tragedy?

2. As a tragic hero, what is John Proctor's fatal flaw?



TASK TWENTY

In the Higher Examination you must answer a question on literature.

As practice for that part of the examination, and as a way of reviewing *The Crucible* as a whole, choose one of the following questions and write at least two sides of A4 on it.

1. Choose a play in which the main character cannot escape the past because it shapes his/her present life.

Discuss the present predicament of the main character, showing how past events have brought about the difficulties s/he faces.

2. What, for you, were the memorable moments in a play you have studied?

Consider at least two such moments, indicate briefly what happened in them, and discuss what it was about the situation and/or character interaction and/or dialogue which made such an impression on you.

3. A good performance of a play, whether on the stage, on film, on television or radio, invariably reveals to us aspects of the play we had not fully understood or appreciated before.

Choose one scene or episode from a play which you have read and experienced as a performance, and show in detail how the techniques used in the performance gave you fresh insights into aspects of the text.

4. From a play of any period, choose a scene in which the hero makes a choice which we know is likely to bring about his own destruction.

Give an account of the scene, showing how the choice is forced on him and bringing out the full agony of his decision.

5. Demonstrate how a playwright you have studied creates a character. (You should consider such means as e.g. the speeches he gives to that character, the way that other characters react to him, what they say about him, etc.)

6. Many modern plays, whether made for the stage or television, clearly stem from a desire to expose social or political injustices.

Choose one such play and discuss the means by which one or more of the flaws in twentieth century society are revealed.