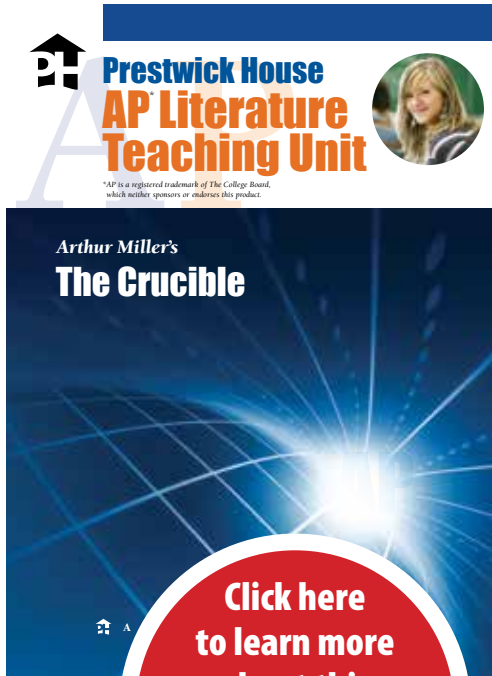




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Teaching Unit

# The Crucible

by Arthur Miller

Written by Anthony Varrato



# Prestwick House

Item No. 203628

# The Crucible

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:*

1. analyze the purpose of the play by relating it to Miller's contemporary society of the 1950s.
2. analyze the characters of Proctor, Abigail, Elizabeth, Hale, and Danforth and their relationships to each other.
3. trace the development of John Proctor from his first mention in the play until his last, noting how and why he changes.
4. trace the development of Reverend Hale from his first mention in the play until his last, noting how and why he changes.
5. discuss the dramatic development of the play in terms of exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution.
6. analyze the importance of literary elements like foreshadowing and authorial intrusion on the development of the play.
7. analyze the structure of the play in relation to Miller's theme.
8. identify and analyze Miller's frequent use of allusions and metonymy to create a universal application of his theme.
9. identify and interpret the correlation between the social climate and events of the late 1600s and those of the mid-1900s.
10. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
11. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
12. offer a close reading of *The Crucible* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.

## Cast of Characters

**Reverend Parris** – the minister of Salem, Massachusetts. The witch scare began with his daughter's mysterious illness.

**Betty Parris** – Reverend Parris' daughter, one of the initial accusers.

**Tituba** – the Parris family's Caribbean slave.

**Abigail Williams** – Parris' niece and chief among the accusers. Formerly a servant in the Proctor household.

**Susanna Walcott** – accused of witchcraft.

**Mrs. Ann Putnam** – a bitter woman who sides with the accusers.

**Thomas Putnam** – her husband for whom the witch trials are a means of increasing his already-considerable land holdings. An enemy of Reverend Parris.

**Mercy Lewis** – the Putnams' servant. One of the accusers.

**Mary Warren** – the Proctors' servant. One of the accusers.

**John Proctor** – a prominent landholder and farmer in the Salem community.

**Rebecca Nurse** – a prominent citizen of Salem, famous throughout Massachusetts for her virtue and charity.

**Giles Corey** – a prominent landholder in Salem.

**Reverend John Hale** – another minister—from Beverly, Massachusetts—famous for his study of witchcraft and witches.

**Elizabeth Proctor** – John's wife.

**Francis Nurse** – Rebecca's husband.

**Ezekiel Cheever** – town constable.

**Marshal Herrick** – town jailer.

**Judge Hathorne** – the inflexible judge in the witch trials. A distant ancestor of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

**Deputy Governor Danforth** – the Deputy Governor of Massachusetts and presiding officer of the court.

**Sarah Good** – one of the condemned.

**Hopkins** – a guard in the jail.

## Lecture Notes

### ARTHUR MILLER (1915 – 2005)

Arthur Miller was called the greatest living American playwright. Known best for writing *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*, Miller's plays share the theme of morality vs. pressures from society and family. *The Crucible* won the Antoinette Perry award in 1953, but soon closed because the comparison between the Salem witch trials and McCarthy hearings made many viewers uncomfortable. In 1956, Miller was himself summoned before the very trials he criticized in his play. Like John Proctor, he refused to implicate his friends and was tried for and convicted of contempt of Congress. In 1958, his conviction was overturned.

### SENATOR JOSEPH RAYMOND MCCARTHY AND THE COMMUNIST TRIALS OF THE 1950S

Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908 – 1957), arguably the greatest demagogue in American history, gained national attention in 1950 when he claimed that the State Department had been infiltrated by Communists. In a speech in West Virginia, the Senator proclaimed, "I have in my hand a list of 205 cases of individuals who appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party." For the next four years, he searched for Communist subversion through televised and highly publicized hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He subpoenaed some of the most prominent entertainers of the era (e.g., Orson Welles, Lucille Ball, Dashielle Hammett, and Lillian Hellman) before HUAC, demanding "the naming of names." Careers and lives were ruined by McCarthy's accusations, which were based on unidentified sources, and weak evidence. In April 1954, McCarthy accused the Secretary of the Army of concealing foreign espionage activities. The Secretary countered that members of McCarthy's subcommittee staff had threatened army officials in order to obtain preferential treatment for an associate of the subcommittee who had been recently drafted. The Senator and his committee were cleared of these charges, but McCarthy was censured by the Senate, and his power slowly declined.

### SALEM 1680

Shortly following the first English settlement of Plymouth in 1620, the Puritans founded New Jerusalem or Salem in 1626. They sought, among other things, freedom from religious persecution and considered themselves God's chosen people, as exemplified in the naming of their town. For the first few decades, the Puritans fought the cold, the strange land, and the savage natives. By 1680, the town was much more settled; however, the strict theocracy which helped them survive the tough settlement period did not adjust to the growing, evolving society.

Calling their settlement the "New Jerusalem" was more than merely choosing a name for a place. From the time that Old Testament King David established it as his capital, Jerusalem was a holy city to both Jews and Christians. As the center of Judaism and early Christianity, it was destroyed twice, first in 586 B.C.E. by the Babylonians and again in 70 C.E. by the Romans. It

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Based on Act I, why do you think Miller and the characters refer to Ann Putnam as Mrs. Putnam, but they refer to Rebecca Nurse as Rebecca?
2. Considering the number of characters he does comment on in the Overture, explain why Miller chose *not* to comment on Abigail?
3. Do you think Mary Warren truly believes that Sarah Good bewitched her? Cite evidence from the story to support your opinion.
4. Elizabeth's accusation is the reason Hale comes to the Proctor household in Act II. Why do you think Hale changes the focus of his interview to John Proctor?
5. Do you believe Mary is helping Abigail frame Elizabeth in Act II, or is she just an unwitting part of the scheme? Support your answer with proof from the story.
6. Critics disagree whether John Proctor or Abigail is the protagonist of this play. Adhering to the definition of the term, argue and support your choice of John Proctor or Abigail as the true protagonist.
7. Do a detailed character analysis for each of the following characters. Indicate both their actions and their motives. Also, point out their state of mind and what significant actions of their own, or others, affected them.
  - Abigail
  - Parris
  - John Proctor
  - Hale
  - Giles
  - Danforth
8. Critique Miller's use of the Overture to not only introduce his characters, but also to convey his theme. Consider and discuss the effectiveness of the parallel he has drawn between the Puritan society and the 1950s.

Act I

1. What purpose does the Overture serve?

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2. What does the “spareness” of the Puritan setting reveal about the lives of the townspeople of Salem?

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3. What Puritan primary fear is apparent in the philosophy, “In unity still lay the best promise of safety”?

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4. Explain the significance of the forest to the Puritans.

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5. Explain the irony in the Puritans’ pilgrimage to Salem to escape persecution.

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6. To what twentieth century situation is Miller referring when he declares:

“They believed, in short, that they held in their steady hands the candle that would light the world. We have inherited this belief, and it has helped and hurt us.”

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**Act II, Scene I**

1. What does the reader learn about the Proctors' marriage through the discrepancy between what John Proctor does before he sees his wife and when he talks to her?

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2. In what ways is Miller's use of dialogue effective in the first two pages of this scene to show the rift between the couple?

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3. When Proctor kisses his wife, what does her reaction show about her feelings?

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4. What does Proctor's hesitation to travel to Salem indicate about his inner conflict?

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5. Whom does Elizabeth call, "A mouse no more"? What does she mean by this metaphor?

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**Act III**

1. Who is on trial when Giles Corey interrupts the court? How have the charges against this person changed since Act II?

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2. Explain the charge Giles makes against Putnam?

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3. How has Giles “broke charity with the woman”?

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4. Explain how Francis offends Deputy Governor Danforth.

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5. Why do you think Danforth is concerned whether Proctor has told anyone else about the girls’ lies?

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**Act IV**

1. What is Miller’s purpose setting this scene in a jail cell?

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2. Explain Miller’s use of comic relief at the beginning of this act. How is this scene ambiguous?

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3. Danforth, Hathorne, and Cheever’s conversation tells the audience about what changes in Salem in the months that passed between Act III and IV?

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4. Explain Parris’s comment: “Hale has returned to bring Rebecca Nurse to God.”

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

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6. Why is Parris upset?

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