

## THE CRUCIBLE

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**OVERALL OBJECTIVE:** To provide teachers with instructional materials that will enhance their students' understanding of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* through development of skills in the areas of vocabulary, literary analysis, writing, reading comprehension, and appreciation of the novel through a multi-level instructional approach.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THIS PACKET:

#### To help students

1. build vocabulary based on the words used in the play.
2. develop reading comprehension skills of determining main idea, inference, and critical reading.
3. improve the literary analytical skills of recognizing and understanding theme and characterization and of identifying irony and symbolism.
4. practice writing skills.

### APPROACHES TO THE CRUCIBLE

Few plays are as frequently performed before school audiences as is *The Crucible*. The reasons for the play's popularity are not hard to find. Its dramatic craftsmanship is stunning: every act builds to a fever pitch of tension, every character projects individuality, and the play's issues stand clear and compelling. Added to this craftsmanship is the historical analogy of the play's subject matter to the political issues of the early 1950's. The result is a work of importance to every American English and history classroom.

*The Crucible* is a perfect vehicle for any teacher wishing to demonstrate the fascination of history. Miller portrays the citizens of Salem to be fully as human as our contemporaries and makes clear and believable the complex motivations that drive them to their own and others' destruction. The teacher may assign parts to students—the cast is large—for both reading aloud and analyzing in prose. Exploring the behavior of each character by writing about him or her, either objectively or in a role-playing fashion, will both interest students and deepen their analytical skills. There are also endless possibilities for constructing new scenes based on the events leading up to, or after, the trials.

The issues raised by *The Crucible* are as important as their presentation is compelling. The right of the state to control the thoughts and behavior of the individual, the difficulty of standing firm against the hysteria of a mass movement, and the obligation to defend one's own principles are all central themes in the play. These subjects are likely to provoke heated discussion and to suggest much material for persuasive essay writing. More subtle questions are raised by the mixtures of good and evil, wisdom and folly, to be found in such characters as John and Elizabeth Proctor, Giles Corey, and Reverend Hale. Students may wish to hold class debate on the behavior of each of these characters.

The play's courtroom setting and legal disputation make it a valuable text for the study of logic and reasoning. The arguments of Reverend Hale and Judge Danforth raise questions about the nature of

evidence and inferential reasoning. Each of their arguments about the nature of witchcraft and the justice of their proceedings can be isolated, and students can be required to analyze and criticize their points and to explain the flaws in their thinking. Such analyses can lead to examinations of arguments in current newspapers and other media, particularly in contemporary political debate.

The teacher may also wish to explore the historical background of the play. Mary McCarthy's essay "A Goat for Azazel," history textbooks, or audio-visual materials can help students compare Miller's interpretation of events in Salem to those of others. Students in the Northeast may visit Salem or other locations restored to resemble the world inhabited by Miller's characters. Those interested in the circumstances that moved Miller to write *The Crucible* may study other writers' accounts of the "witch hunts" of the 1950's, particularly Lillian Hellman's *Scoundrel Time*.

On a larger scale, *The Crucible* may be compared with other works depicting individuals caught up in a wave of unreasoning hysteria; for example, the literature of the holocaust.

Finally, *The Crucible* may also be read in conjunction with numerous other plays, including such related courtroom dramas as *The Caine Mutiny*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Twelve Angry Men*, or the dramatic version of *Billy Budd*. It may also be dissected as an example of the "literature of ideas," works in which moral concerns predominate. Much science fiction, including such classics as *Brave New World* or *Fahrenheit 451*, deals with an individual's efforts to resist or convert a society gone mad. Such political works as George Orwell's *1984* or *Animal Farm* can also be used to explore further the phenomena of propaganda and mind control as found in the modern world, and the violent confrontation between rational and irrational minds as depicted in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, offers significant parallels. And the impact of *The Crucible* can be placed against that of other historical dramas of conscience, such as *A Man For All Seasons*, *Luther*, or *Galileo*. *The Crucible* is a play that can affect students on many levels, for it will both move them emotionally and cause them to stretch intellectually.

### WHAT IS THE CRUCIBLE ABOUT?

The year is 1692, the place Salem, Massachusetts. The Reverend Samuel Parris' daughter Betty lies prostrate of a mysterious illness, the apparent consequence of a wild ritual held in the woods by girls from the village. The fearful Reverend Parris questions his niece, Abigail Williams, about the possibility of witchcraft and about the reason for Abby's dismissal from the service of John and Elizabeth Proctor.

The Putnams, who are bitter over the deaths of their seven infants, also suspect witchcraft and ask Parris to seek the aid of his West Indian slave, Tituba, who has a reputation for conjuring. Abby, meanwhile, dominates the other girls, who are terrified at the prospect of discovery, and begins planning a course of action. She also meets John Proctor and begs him to

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### SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CHART

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SKILL AREA	ACTIVITY SHEET	TIME OF USE	LEVEL	SKILL
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