



Unit AS 1: Section B

The Study of Drama 1900-Present

Arthur Miller: The Crucible

In this Unit there are 4 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02, A03 and A05.

A01: Textual knowledge and understanding, and communication

In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of a selected play.

This AO involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the play, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.

A01: Textual knowledge and understanding, and communication

The Plot

Overview

First published in 1953, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is a play about the Salem witch-hunt of 1692. The story is about a small community in Massachusetts, New England which is ripped apart by a series of accusations of witchcraft and is stirred into madness by superstition, paranoia and malice. The persecutions which follow lead to the hanging of nineteen people. The story serves as an allegory of the anti-Communist 'witch-hunts' that occurred in the 1950s in America and in which Miller himself became involved.

Summary of Content

Act One (An Overture)

This Act is a clear exposition: the audience is given enough background information to understand what takes place before and during the Act.



The first act is set in an upper-floor bedroom in the home of **Samuel Parris**, where his daughter **Betty** lies stricken in a comatose state. We find out from the dialogue that prior to this a group of girls, of whom Betty was one, had been discovered by Reverend Parris dancing in the forest with a black slave **Tituba**. A crowd has gathered in Parris's home as rumours of witchcraft linked to these girls are spreading around the town. **Reverend Hale**, an expert on witchcraft has been sent for and Parris questions **Abigail Williams**, one of the girls about the events in the forest. Abigail, is Parris's niece and ward and she admits to nothing apart from dancing and warns the rest of the girls to say nothing. At this stage, **John Proctor**, a local farmer, arrives and speaks to Abigail alone. From this we discover Abigail had embarked on an affair with Proctor the previous year when she was his maid. This is not widely known around the town except by Proctor's wife **Elizabeth**, who had sacked Abigail when she found out. Abigail clearly still has feelings for John but he fends her off, aware of the 'sin' he has committed. Betty wakes up screaming and this leads to hysteria in the bedroom, where many of the villagers have now assembled believing Betty has been bewitched. Throughout this Act we are introduced to a range of minor characters: the wealthy **Thomas Putnam**, an elderly farmer **Giles Corey** and their wives who are seen arguing over land deeds and other financial issues. From this we can see that Salem is a divided and parochial town. Reverend Hale arrives shortly after, and examines Betty and interrogates Abigail about the incident in the forest. As his suspicions are aroused he decides to interview Tituba, Reverend Parris's black slave from Barbados. After some time, Tituba confesses to communicating with the devil and in a state of hysteria herself she accuses other townsfolk of being involved too. At this stage Abigail makes similar accusations and admits to seeing the devil and as Betty awakes, she confesses too.

Act Two

This Act takes place in Proctor's farmhouse on the outskirts of town about a week later and opens with John Proctor and his wife Elizabeth discussing the frenzy, the ongoing trials and escalating number of townsfolk who have become involved. Elizabeth tries to persuade John to denounce Abigail as a fraud, but he is nervous due to his earlier relationship with her. This opens up a discussion between the two on whether he still has feelings for Abigail. **Mary Warren**, their servant then appears having returned from Salem and informs Elizabeth that she (Elizabeth) has been cited for witchcraft, but that this has not been pursued by the court at this stage. Reverend Hale then arrives to discuss the cases and he is joined shortly after by Giles Corey and **Francis Nurse** who both announce that their wives have been taken into custody. **Officers of the Court** then arrive at the Proctors' house to arrest Elizabeth. At the end of the scene, once all the characters have left, Proctor tries to persuade Mary to expose Abigail and the other girls to the court, as he fears for his wife's safety.

Act Three

This Act takes place in the vestry of the Salem meeting-house the following day, as Proctor arrives with Mary to inform the court that she will testify against the girls. Before that, arguments in the court between Putnam, Corey and Nurse over the arrests, show how other matters concerning such issues as land are motives for what is happening. **Judge Danforth** is suspicious of Proctor's motives and tells him that the pregnant Elizabeth will be spared for a time, but despite this Proctor goes ahead with his plan and Mary testifies to the court as arranged. When the girls are brought



in to answer these charges they turn the tables on Mary and suggest that she has bewitched them. Infuriated by this, Proctor then admits to the court his affair with Abigail and accuses her of jealousy as her main motivation for her actions. To test this revelation, Elizabeth is summoned to court and asked about Proctor's infidelity; Elizabeth lies to protect Proctor despite her natural honesty. Danforth denounces Proctor as a liar. Mary under the pressure of being accused by the other girls turns on Proctor and accuses him of being a witch. Proctor at this stage is enraged and he loses his temper both with Mary and the court. He is arrested and imprisoned. Reverend Hale having observed the proceedings leaves the court and the proceedings in disgust.

Act Four- Epilogue

The final Act takes place in a cell in Salem jail in the autumn after the earlier events of the summer. Events have moved on: the witchcraft trials have caused unrest in neighbouring towns, Abigail has run away taking all of Parris' money and there is still no outcome to the trials, which is causing Danforth huge concern. Hale has lost faith in the process, and to avoid future hangings he tries to persuade the accused witches to confess falsely so they can be saved, but they refuse. Danforth seeks a solution through Proctor: if he was to confess then the growing crisis could be averted. He uses Elizabeth in this and she persuades Proctor to take this course of action. After some hesitation, he agrees. He desires to live, but he will not incriminate others and he refuses to make a public confession. This is not acceptable to the court and with this stalemate, Proctor once again grows angry and retracts his confession, tearing it up. Despite Hale's pleas Proctor is hanged with the others and the witch trials reach their tragic conclusion.

What is this play about?

Some initial thoughts

'The play is not history in the sense in which the word is used by the academic historian. However I believe that the reader will discover here the essential nature of one of the strangest and most awful chapters in human history.'¹

Miller wrote that 'the central impulse for writing it at all was not the social, but the psychological question.'²

The Themes

Good and Evil

One of the criticisms of *The Crucible* when it first appeared was the predominance of malice and evil in the play. Certainly in terms of the characters on stage, there is an emphasis on evil. This is particularly shown in the prosecutors, with Danforth and to a certain extent with Hathorne. Even if we believe them to be merely misguided and over-zealous, most of the evil arises from their decisions. The elements of evil are also shown in the character of Abigail; her deliberate actions intensify the panic. She can therefore be seen as the most evil character in the play, despite Miller's attempts to

¹ From Arthur Miller- Introduction to the Play- Penguin Edition. 2000.

² From Arthur Miller- 'Collected Plays' 1957.



downplay her role and lay responsibility at the door of the prosecutors, emphasising his interest in the social and political aspects of the play. Other characters are not totally blameless either: Proctor and Corey are hot-tempered and impulsive; Proctor is also an adulterer; Hale sets the hysteria off with his appearance, the Putnams are self-seekers, Parris is only interested in himself at the expense of others and generally all these characters create an atmosphere of mistrust. Is there any goodness in the play? Elizabeth shows signs of goodness, as does Rebecca Nurse, but this is very limited alongside the forces of evil which appear to dominate the play. Is the level of evil realistic and truly representative of the human spirit? Miller has defended this by saying the twentieth century has shown how evil mankind can be³. In the main the play can be seen as a very dark vision of mankind.

Intolerance

The theocracy in which the play is set by definition brings about intolerance of those who do not conform to the norm. Moral laws and state laws are one, and therefore sin and the status of the individual's soul are matters of public concern in this strict puritanical state. There is no room for deviation as the view is held that such deviance endangers the state and the rule of God. Proctor's adultery, Corey's criticism of the court and Tituba's different outlook all challenge the norm and therefore must be punished. According to the state, dissent leads to satanic activity and on this basis the whole witchcraft trials are based.

Hysteria

Hysteria plays a huge role in this play and it is hysteria which tears apart the community in Salem. Hysteria goes beyond logic and for that reason people see things in their neighbours which are patently absurd, such as the killing of babies and communing with the devil. Hysteria also gives some, such as the Putnams and Parris the opportunity to act upon long-held grudges. Abigail thrives on hysteria too. Hysteria only survives because there are those people who can benefit from it; it suspends all logic and common sense.

Sex and Sexual repression

Significantly this theme was deliberately introduced by Miller. By changing the source of the story, by making Abigail an adolescent rather than a twelve-year-old as in the original source and introducing her affair with Proctor, he introduces a sexual element to the play. Some critics have argued that this was a cheap attempt by Miller to include some spurious excitement, but the sexual repression seen in the play is vital to the plot. Abigail's inability to express her sexuality openly is one of the key instigators of the witch hunt; she has no outlet for her feelings in this puritanical society and therefore is forced into her violent scheming. She is followed by several of the other young girls who are equally repressed, unable to show their feelings or emotions apart from when they are together in the wood, where Miller implies their meetings have a sexual component. The guilt of these meetings and the fear of exposure lead the girls into hysteria. Also, Proctor's adultery has a major effect on the way both Proctor and Elizabeth act and ultimately leads to his death, as the shame and horror of the incident damn both of them.

³ From Arthur Miller - *Collected Plays* 1957.



Reputation

Having a good reputation, being blameless and beyond reproach is very important in theocratic Salem where public and private morality are the same. As Parris asks of Abigail in Act One, 'Your name in the town, it is entirely white, is it not?' The fear of 'guilt by association' runs throughout the play and public reputation must be maintained, whether it be Parris's worries over his daughter's condition and what this might mean, Proctor's desire to preserve his reputation after his affair with Abigail or the determination of the Putnams to increase their influence. Significantly Proctor's final words, 'I have given you my soul, leave me my name' indicate the importance of this. Honour and personal integrity dominate the final scenes of the play in the actions of the Proctors in particular.

Empowerment

The witch trials empower several characters in the play who were previously marginalised in Salem. This is particularly true of the women, whose main role was to bear children once they had been married off. This is seen in Abigail, and Tituba. One of the recurring motifs in the play is the on-going empowerment of these characters as their words come to be seen as unassailable. Women were largely powerless until they got married; characters such as Abigail, Mary and Mercy were dispensable. For that reason the girls relish the power they acquire during the trials as they realize they have influence.

The Setting

Where

The play is set in Salem, Massachusetts, New England in 1692. By 1692 this community was well established although there were still indications of it being a frontier town under threat from local Indians. It is a typical example of a Puritan settlement in New England.

Government, the Law and the Community of Salem - Puritan New England in the 17th Century.

The government of this town is a theocracy, one ruled by religious officials in the name of God with a legal system based on the Christian Bible. Moral laws and state laws are one; the main concern of the townsfolk is to lead a Christian life and each citizen's private life must conform to the moral laws. Hard work and the Church absorb the time of the townsfolk in this strict Puritan settlement. However within this tightly knit community there are simmering disputes over land boundaries and deeds of ownership which lead to petty disagreements. Other disputes centre on religious offices and sexual behaviour. The citizens of the time considered the idea of having a private life as heretical. For these reasons regulation of the morality of all citizens was paramount and all were under continuous surveillance. For each action there was a potential witness and on this basic principle lies the premise of the play. State officials patrolled the town to ensure appropriate behaviour and morality, free speech was not a right and for those who offended, punishments such as whipping and public



hangings were common. To disagree with the state was to disagree with God. However an emerging issue was that there were few outlets to express jealousy, anger or resentment in this strict religious community. These tensions provide the raw materials for the hysteria of the witch trials.

Timeframe

The play is set over a narrow timeframe in 1692 from spring through to autumn. The first two acts take place over eight days, the third act the following day. The final act is several months later in 'the fall'. The final narrative section included by Miller takes events up to 1712.

Major characters

Characterisation in general

Twenty-one characters appear on stage in this play, representing a 'mosaic of society'. The major characters are outlined below but the characters in the main represent a spectrum of human strength and weakness, a credible community, and have varying degrees of sophistication and experience. Some critics have suggested that *The Crucible* is a morality play due to its concentration on moral issues and conflict between good and evil. In this respect Abigail for example represents Lust, Putnam is Greed, Hale is Good Intentions and Elizabeth is Loyalty. This reduces the characters to symbols rather than people and should be seen as an over-simplification as the characters do have more far-reaching qualities than this. Some critics have suggested though that Miller's characters are 'too one-dimensional'⁴ and this should be considered in an analysis of the characters in the play. Significantly, in *The Crucible* Miller makes a series of observations about the characters in his narrative sections. Other questions worth considering are to what extent each character develops during the play and which characters we may have sympathy with or not.

John Proctor

Honest, upright and blunt, John Proctor is the play's tragic hero. He is its protagonist, a country-man who speaks his mind, one who does not suffer fools and one who is respected by the community. He is a man of principle and is antagonistic towards Parris as he sees him as selfish and interested in self-aggrandisement. His language is simple and direct with occasional moments of humour. He is fundamentally a good man but he has a secret flaw which comes back to haunt him. His lust for Abigail Williams and subsequent affair with her is central to the play and sets off the hysteria, with tragic consequences in the final act. His refusal to make a confession, which leads to his execution, is a moment of great personal sacrifice. His integrity, he believes, will take him to heaven and save his soul. This final stand is based on his religious beliefs, his desire to maintain his self-respect and also to protect those around him who have been falsely charged. Proctor is a proud man who values his reputation and he works hard to defend and protect his wife, Elizabeth. Throughout he shows remorse for his brief affair with Abigail. He does not allow Abigail back again despite her attempts to draw him in. In the revisions to the play that Miller carried out in Act Two and Act

⁴ Ferres- Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'The Crucible' - 1972



Four, he clarifies and extends Proctor's role and makes it clear to the audience what we are to think of him. As Miller said of Proctor, 'He is a character defined by the kind of challenge he cannot walk away from, and by those he has walked away from that cause him remorse'⁵. Critics have commented on Proctor as the classic tragic hero, flawed but fundamentally good in the Shakespearean mould and in this character we have the central themes of the play. It is significant that he appears in every Act and is clearly the dominant force on stage.

Elizabeth Proctor

Less complex than her husband, Elizabeth embodies goodness and she is devoted to her husband and family and is a woman not to be under-estimated. Throughout she is a dignified figure, shown especially when she is put under pressure by Hale and Danforth. Miller has been criticised for emphasising her coldness in Act Two, which she acknowledges, but underneath is a strong-willed, quietly spoken, determined individual who will not be turned. Her only moments of anger come with Abigail whom she understandably despises, and she is clearly hurt by Proctor's adultery. Her final act of love and unselfishness is when she is prepared to lose Proctor at the end of the play. It is with some pleasure that Miller informs us in his epilogue that Elizabeth found happiness after this traumatic event and married four years later.

Abigail Williams

Abigail is the villain of the play, the antagonist, and in some ways the least complex character. It is significant that Miller commented that it was Abigail's role in the incidents of 1692 that awakened his interest in the story. In the original script, an additional scene between Proctor and Abigail set in the woods show her in a more complex light as a figure of great religiosity, but Miller's decision to cut this indicates that this was not a route he wanted to take. Significantly too she does not appear in the final act. Throughout she tells lies, manipulates others, has a sense of mischief and is responsible for sending nineteen innocent people to their deaths. She is jealous of Elizabeth and this appears to be her main motivation throughout the play. In terms of the Biblical references in the play, she is the 'Jezebel' figure driven by sexual lust and desire for power. Should we have any sympathy for her? Her background as an orphan, her role as an unwanted lover, the fact that she witnessed her parents' violent deaths and her lowliness as a woman and a servant on the social ladder, act as motivation for her, and when she is empowered she takes her opportunity. However these do not mitigate her behaviour and throughout we should see her as being deluded and a frightening character full of evil, who appears psychologically disturbed.

Reverend John Hale

Of all the characters in the play, it is Hale who appears to change the most. John Hale is the intellectual in the play, a humane figure, eloquent, the witch hunter who is 'eager-eyed' yet naïve in the ways of the world. He is clearly in his element in Act One when summoned to Parris's house; he enjoys his task with his books, his unique knowledge and he is the main force for taking the investigation further. However, as the play progresses he experiences a transformation as he clearly doubts the direction the investigation is taking and finds it easier to believe John Proctor and Mary Warren

⁵ Miller quoted in Daily Telegraph Obituary- February 2005



rather than Abigail. By the third act he has taken on a new role as an appeaser, but the tragedy of the play is that this is too late and he cannot stop the momentum of the trials. As a result he comes to be seen as a broken man, one in despair driven to persuade the accused to lie to save themselves, and by doing so turning against both the law and religion. The audience are sympathetic towards Hale as he admits his failings, 'Let you not mistake your duty, as I mistook my own', but he is unlikely to gain their respect as he lacks the moral strength of other characters and his surrender in the final act is not heroic, unlike that of Proctor, as he has sacrificed his principles.

Reverend Parris

The minister of Salem's church, he is portrayed as a selfish, power-hungry and self-pitying figure. He is widely disliked in the community especially by Proctor for his self-importance and bitterness and his lack of charity. He is humiliated at the end of the play and is voted out of office. Miller's portrayal of Parris is a comment on organised religion in its most grotesque form.

Judge Danforth, Judge Hathorne and Ezekiel Cheever

These three characters have been taken collectively as they represent forms of authority. Hathorne as a judge who presides over the trials is uncompromising, driven on by principle and is a bigot in the clearest sense of the term. Danforth, the deputy governor, is more intelligent and humane but is determined to do his duty. He is driven on by the needs of the theocracy and his actions are determined by this, despite his attempts to reach a compromise. They are supported in this by Cheever who acts as a clerk of the court. These are the human faces of the theocracy, the 'cold representatives of blind justice'⁶ and the comparison between these officials and those of the McCarthy era is clear to see.

Tituba

Tituba is Parris's black slave from Barbados who performs the voodoo in the wood at Abigail's request. Her role is significant as she is a strong believer in the actuality of the Devil. Tituba is a comic figure in the play, with her colourful and free exchanges representative of her early days in Barbados contrasting with the coldness of Salem. However in this unforgiving society she is reduced to a frightened wreck by the final act.

Mary Warren

A member of the Putnam household, she falls in with Abigail and is easily influenced by her. Like Abigail she is aware of her power, and although less intelligent is similarly vengeful and resentful. She is indifferent to the Proctors but her gift of the poppet to Elizabeth condemns Elizabeth. Once discovered, her panic and hysteria are representative of the atmosphere of the court.

⁶ From Arthur Miller - *Collected Plays*-
1957



Francis and Rebecca Nurse

This elderly, influential and respected couple in Salem fall victim to the hysteria when Rebecca is accused. Their innate goodness and experience fail to save them and they represent the depths to which this society has fallen in terms of prejudice and jealousy, especially from the Putnams.

Thomas, Ann and Ruth Putnam

The Putnams are wealthy and influential citizens of Salem, who are embittered and have grudges against many of the other leading families, and who take the opportunity of the trials to further their own religious and financial interests. Ruth is the Putnam's only surviving child; the other seven had all died, according to Ann by supernatural means. Critics have suggested that Ann is 'the true witch of Salem'⁷ and Thomas appears a suitable partner to her.

Giles and Martha Corey

An elderly but feisty farming couple from Salem, Martha suffers the same fate as the other women while her husband, Giles is executed for contempt of court. Although they both have real courage, their unwise words seal their fate.

Others

Several other female characters such as Sarah Good, Susannah Walcott appear, emphasising the female tragedy of the play for those that are outcasts in Salem society and at a far distance from the supposed Puritan utopia.

(The Devil)

The devil stands behind all the characters in the play and informs many of the events as the ultimate non-conformist. As the anti-Christ and the underminer of society, he is to be found 'wherever common sense has been lost and darkness has taken over'⁸. This dark spirit appears in many different forms in the play - from Tituba's belief in him as a lover of fun and life, to Hale's more sinister view of him. To many Americans of the 1950's the Devil was communism.

The title of the play and its significance

A crucible is a pot in which metals are melted down to purify them and therefore the title, *The Crucible*, could be seen as a metaphor for man's spiritual improvement and well-being based on the principle of purging by fire. In this respect the actions and sacrifices made by John Proctor in the play show his spiritual development.

Others have suggested that from this 'small pot' in 1692 emerged a purified American democracy based on the principles of justice, welfare and liberty and Miller's final words in the epilogue about the breaking of the theocracy justify this interpretation.

⁷ From James Martine- *Politics, Property and Pretence*- Twayne 1993

⁸ From Arthur Miller- *Collected Plays* 1957



Some commentators have made a link between the cauldron of witchcraft in folklore, the kettle used by the girls in the woods and the title of the play.



A02: Dramatic methods

In this examination, the candidate should analyse the playwright's use of such dramatic methods as characterisation, structure, language and staging.

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in drama. This means identifying dramatic methods and showing how these methods relate to the key terms of the question.

Discussing dramatic methods - advice to teachers and students:

As this section is closed book, examiners will be realistic about the amount of detail which can be provided. It is anticipated that the larger-scale features of characterization, structure, language and staging will be most useful in constructing a relevant response in the time available.

The structure of the play

The *Crucible* is 'a play in four acts' and most critics argue that there is clear structural unity. **Act One** establishes an atmosphere of tension, a mood of uncertainty and the impression of a disturbed community. Thirteen different characters appear at various stages adding to the feeling of excited activity. This is added to by the events in the woods which are gradually revealed in the act. In the original production, the play started with a scene in the woods but this was dropped as it was not seen as essential, and this omission gives the girls' entrance added dramatic effect. The first act ends abruptly, leaving the audience with a sense of mystery and uncertainty. **Act Two** is a much quieter and more thoughtful act in its early stages, revolving around Proctor and his doubts and worries. Dramatic tension mounts as we see the difficulties he is in, particularly in his relationship with Elizabeth. Abigail's unnerving presence is felt throughout although she does not appear. **Act Three** is based on confusion and hysteria and a series of connected incidents which lead the audience to believe that the outcome is likely to be tragic. Opportunities are missed, often by accident, but the outcomes become increasingly significant, especially when Proctor loses his temper. This is an important turning point in the play. Miller's skill in this act is obvious, his interweaving of a series of incidents and happenings concluding with Proctor taking the front of stage. Some critics have argued that the play is over by the end of Act Three and that Miller never really decides in the play whether he wants to concentrate on the tragedy of Proctor or the tragedy of Salem. In **Act Four** the tone is subdued as the play moves towards its inevitable end. The scene with Tituba and Sarah Good provides a distraction from the main focus on Proctor and perhaps suggests Miller was keen to keep his focus on the whole of Salem. However the tragedy is heightened in this final act with Proctor's ultimate decision and this is the main focus of this act. The unexpected turn of events connected with Proctor's decision adds to the dramatic impact of the play. The quietness of the end is totally appropriate as it is a victory for the human spirit and Miller's *Echoes down the Corridor* satisfies the reader who is interested in the long-term historical outcomes.

- **Miller's use of the prose commentary and expanded stage directions**

The extensive use of this feature by Miller particularly in Act One indicates his desire to reach a reading public as well as those in the theatre. The extensive introduction



also serves the same purpose and allows Miller the opportunity to detail his purpose in writing this play. In the summary *Echoes down the Corridor*, Miller takes the opportunity to inform the reader of Parris's loss of position, Abigail's drift into prostitution and Elizabeth's remarriage. Significantly he also refers to the absolution of those hanged. Why does he do this? The clue is in the final sentence where Miller comments that 'to all intents and purposes, the power of the theocracy in Massachusetts was broken'. With the nature of the play and its second meaning, Miller is perhaps commenting on his hopes for a parallel absolution for those involved in the anti-communist witch hunts of the 1950's. The extensive use of the commentary and the extended stage directions in the play have divided critics, some arguing that by putting this in, Miller is taking away from readers their opportunity to make up their own minds or from actors to play their roles as they see fit, whilst others have suggested that such detail supports readers and actors in their interpretations.

The drama of the play

Some critics have argued that the play is too concerned with ideas, is too static and cold, ignores its characters and consequently cannot be a successful theatrical experience. In this respect Miller is seen as allowing his political motives to take control over his role as a dramatist. The audience must make up its own mind here but Miller does attempt to humanise his characters and to include dramatic tension and surprise. We do have examples of the heat of anger and longing in Proctor and Abigail. The language of the play also sees Miller using a series of devices to raise our interest. The use of apocalyptic imagery seen in the expression of Proctor's fury when Elizabeth is taken away, Hale's use of vivid imagery in his description of Rebecca Nurse, the rhetoric about duty in Act Three, and Proctor's speeches where he raises the emotional tone would all suggest that Miller has infused dramatic language with the archaic flavour which is consistent with the historical period (see below). This is a play about ordinary people whose lives are touched by high drama.

The language of the play

The vocabulary and language in the play is archaic and simple as these are simple townfolk. Miller allows occasional peculiarities of expression to emphasise their rural origins and as an attempt to give an archaic flavour to the play. Tituba as a black West Indian slave speaks English less accurately, as we would expect. The most common form of change is the substitution of one form of a verb for another, 'it were' instead of 'it was', or the omission of the word 'do' for example, 'I like not'. The language is not authentic seventeenth-century New England dialogue but Miller keeps us aware of the differences from twentieth-century language. Miller is not interested in overdoing the use of authentic language, as one of his main purposes in this play is to put across his message clearly. Biblical language is common as appropriate to the language of a theocracy; 'Pray you' is used extensively, often replacing the word 'please'.



A03: Contexts

In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which a play is written and received by drawing on appropriate information from outside the play.

No particular type of context will be stipulated in the question. However, contextual information which is made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.

This information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text and context in a response.

Arthur Miller's own life and career

(There is a danger of including too much biographical detail in an examination response, so candidates should use this section with care and as background information for a relevant argument.)

- Miller was born in 1915 in New York to a family of Jewish shop-keepers. He left school in 1932 during the Depression, which had a ruinous effect on Miller's family and on Miller himself, and worked in a factory. The Depression is reflected in many of Miller's works and characters and it gave him an insight into the insecurity of man and the need for social responsibility.
- In 1934 he attended Michigan University studying history and economics, graduating in 1938. At college he wrote his first plays and also worked as a part-time journalist. He was able to take advantage of the Federal Theatre Project set up in the Depression period to learn the craft of the theatre.
- Miller's first play, *The Man who Had All the Luck* opened in 1944 but failed. His next two plays fared better, *All My Sons* in 1947, followed by perhaps his most famous play, *Death of a Salesman* in 1949 (which won the Pulitzer Prize). Both dealt with the strains of American life, business and society.
- *The Crucible* appeared in 1953 and on the surface appeared to be totally different from anything Miller had written before, historical in nature, dealing with events almost three hundred years earlier and with a religion which was alien to him. However the allegorical nature of the play in its linking of the fears of Communism to the witch trials of 1692 gave Miller his motive (see below). He was one of three dramatists of the time who used the Salem witch trials as a way of commenting obliquely on the McCarthy era.
- In 1956, Miller was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee to explain his supposedly pro-Communist views and he was found guilty of contempt of Congress in 1957 for not naming those who were working alongside him. This



action must have confirmed for Miller the need for such a play as *The Crucible*.

- His later plays returned him to the traditional contemporary themes of his earlier work. *A View from the Bridge*, *The Price* and *After the Fall* were all successful, the last describing his marriage to Marilyn Monroe in 1956. Miller never again attempted a historical drama after *The Crucible*.
- His later career saw him publishing short stories, writing cinema and television scripts and writing a series of critical essays, many on his own works.
- Miller died in 2005 and he is considered alongside Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams as one of the three great American playwrights of the twentieth century. Amongst these Miller has the reputation as the 'cold intellectual' of the trio. Perhaps significantly his works have been performed more extensively in Britain than the USA.

A note on the text

Two versions of the text were produced by Miller. The original version of 1953 was amended by Miller nine months later but he returned to the original version soon after. This original version is now the one used in most publications. What is significant are the changes Miller considered, mainly to do with the increased role of Abigail and her relationship with Proctor discussed in an earlier section. Miller spoke of his justification for this change in his critical analysis of his works.⁹

The Witch Trials and McCarthyism

There is not a great deal of symbolism in *The Crucible* (apart from the typical symbols of witchcraft such as rats, dolls etc.), but it is clear that the play in its entirety is an allegory of the paranoia about communism that occurred in America in the 1950s during the Cold War. Interest in the Salem witch trials was prominent at this time in America after the release in 1949 of Marion Starkey's work. Starkey considered her work to be 'an allegory of our times' and referred to 'ideological intensities which rent their age no less than they do ours'¹⁰. Miller used her work as the main source for *The Crucible*. This play was written at a time when Senator Joseph McCarthy was dominant in American politics. McCarthy's anti-communism knew no bounds and the committee he led took it upon themselves to root out communist sympathisers. Miller himself was questioned by the committee but refused to co-operate; others however co-operated and paid the price for their 'confessions'. The bitterness from this period of American history lasted decades. There are clear parallels between the 'Un-American Activities Committee' at that time and the work of the theocratic court of 1692 in Salem. Both worked with great zeal, with a disregard for personal liberty and with narrow-mindedness to root out what were seen as potential evils in society. There are clear similarities with the importance of confessions in the process, the need to name others and the bringing of people to these courts. However it should be noted that although there were no witches (as far as we know) in 1692, there were Communists in the 1950s in America. Miller's purpose was however to bring to notice the lack of trust and the prejudice in both sets of courts which offended many Americans of the time, and in 1957 he spoke candidly about the links between the play and McCarthyism, while pointing out that the play deals with much wider themes¹¹. As Miller also pointed out, 'When you have an ideology which itself feels so pure, it implies an extreme view of the world'¹²

⁹ Introduction to the *Collected Plays* - Miller 1957

¹⁰ Marion Starkey - *The Devil in Massachusetts* 1949

¹¹ From Arthur Miller - *Collected Plays*-1957

¹² Miller - Interview given to Theatre Arts in 1953.



Historical Background

Fact and fiction

Prefixed to *The Crucible* is a note from Miller, 'This play is not history.' However the play is clearly based on historical events and Miller goes to great lengths to ensure it was dramatised as faithfully as possible. His original source, *The Devil in Massachusetts* by Marion Starkey was used extensively and it gave Miller the 'essential nature'¹³ of this period of history. By saying this Miller wants to assure us that he has not falsified or distorted these events but has focused on the parts he considers to be essential, though he may have taken dramatic licence. In the original sources, Proctor was rougher but the main change was Abigail who was transformed from a young girl of 12 to an adolescent.

Seventeenth-century witchcraft in New England

A belief in witchcraft had been held for centuries throughout the world prior to 1692 and a belief in its existence in New England at this time was driven on by three factors: the proximity of native Indians who were considered to be agents of the Devil, the insular nature of these newly founded, often persecuted Puritan communities who looked upon anyone who criticised them as agents of the Devil, and the fact that there was evidence that witchcraft was being practised at the time. Witchcraft came in several forms: 'white magic' with the use of charms to protect one from evil spirits, 'black magic' using charms to harm others such as the use of the poppets, and thirdly the entering directly into a pact with the Devil. We are not asked to believe in these forms of witchcraft, but what is important was that people living in Salem in 1692 did believe in them, leading to fear and hysteria. This could be seen at the highest level of society in the reaction of Judge Hathorne and the role of Reverend Hale. For that reason we must look at the events of the play such as Betty's illness or the actions of Tituba from the viewpoint of people at that time, who believed in witchcraft and its dangers, rather than dismiss the citizens of Salem as foolish, superstitious rustics.

¹³ From Arthur Miller - *Collected Plays*- 1957



A05: Argument and interpretation

In this examination, the candidate should offer opinion or judgment in response to the given reading of the text, taking account of the key terms as the basis of the argument. This AO is the driver of Unit AS 1: Section B and is of primary importance.

A05 can be satisfied in full by the candidate developing his/her own reading in response to the given reading. If, however, critics are used, they must be:

- *used with understanding*
- *incorporated into the argument to reinforce or be seen as an alternative to the student's opinion*
- *not used as a substitute for the development of the student's own opinion*
- *properly acknowledged.*

Coherence and relevance of argument will be rewarded. Students should be aware of the importance of planning in the sequencing, development and illustration of the reading they wish to put forward. They should also beware of the danger of replacing the key terms of the question with others of their own choosing which they assume mean much the same thing.

The following information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a starting point for teachers and students. It reflects some of the stylistic and contextual issues which may be explored and developed further both in the classroom and through teachers' and students' own independent research.

Two questions are set and candidates answer either (a) or (b). In the specimen assessment materials the two questions were:

- (a) *The Crucible* is about little more than religious intolerance.

With reference to the dramatic methods used in the play, and relevant contextual information, **show to what extent** you agree with this statement.

- (b) *The Crucible* tells us little about seventeenth-century witchcraft.

With reference to the dramatic methods used in the play, and relevant contextual information, **show to what extent** you agree with this statement.

In order to construct a meaningful and cogent argument (and to move beyond making simple assertions and offering unsupported opinions) students should use A02 and A03 elements to support and enhance their point of view. Convincing arguments will be based on a secure understanding of *how* Miller has used dramatic methods (A02) to convey his message. Students will also encounter difficulties in presenting an argument which is focused on the stimulus statement without knowledge of the context(s) in which the play is set (A03).

It is not necessary for a candidate to fully agree or disagree with the stimulus statement. Indeed, it is likely that a sophisticated argument will negotiate a response to the key terms of the question in a more considered and tempered fashion than is suggested by the stimulus statement.



Other questions worth considering apart from those above:

- What part do grudges and personal rivalries play in *The Crucible*?
- What sort of community is Salem in 1692?
- How do the witch trials empower certain individuals?
- Which of the characters should we have sympathy with?
- Do any of the characters change over the course of the play?
- How does John Proctor's great dilemma change over the course of the play?
- Is the play about Salem or the Proctors?
- What role does sex and sexual repression play in *The Crucible*?
- Is *The Crucible* a morality play?
- How convincing is Miller's manipulation of characters and incidents in the play?
- 'The play is a tragedy, which ends in unrelieved gloom.'¹⁴
- *The Crucible* is 'an intellectually dishonest play'.¹⁵
- What does *The Crucible* tell us about the relationship between the individual and society?
- 'The play is a study of the dangers of religious fundamentalism and therefore very relevant to a modern audience.'¹⁶

Critics' reception to *The Crucible*

When Miller's work first appeared in 1953 reception was mixed. Although it only lasted for 197 performances on its first run it subsequently became the most frequently performed of Miller's plays, selling over seven million copies, with its own film version. Miller himself contributed a great deal to discussions of the play notably in his Introduction to *Collected Plays* and in a Theatre Arts interview in 1953. When it first appeared in New York in 1953 both the critics and the cast perceived it as a direct attack on McCarthyism and the government, and the shortness of its first run was explained by this.

Critical comments to note

Robert Warshaw wrote, 'The play reveals at every turn a contemptuous lack in the particularities, which is to say the reality of the Salem Trials.'¹⁷

Rhoda Koenig – 'Arthur Miller writes clumsy lines and lousy charactersand seems never to have heard the idea that there are no frigid women.'¹⁸

'Miller wrote not merely to entertain, but also to reform and radicalise his audience.'¹⁹

Nicholas Hytner: 'I was privileged to make the film of *The Crucible* and worked with Miller on it. I felt as if I were watching Shakespeare rewrite *King Lear*.'²⁰

¹⁴ Dennis Welland - *Arthur Miller*- 1961

¹⁵ Charles Spencer review of *The Crucible* – 2004

¹⁶ Charles Spencer review of *The Crucible* -2004

¹⁷ From Daily Telegraph Obituary to Arthur Miller- February 2005

¹⁸ Rhoda Koenig in The Sunday Times -1996

¹⁹ As 17

²⁰ Nicholas Hytner, Director of the National Theatre in Daily Telegraph interview- February 2005.



A checklist of literary and contextual terms

Here are 10 terms which are central to the study of the play. More detailed analysis of these terms can be found above:

1. **Allegory** - A literary piece that is written in such a way as to suggest two coherent meanings. In the context of *The Crucible*, the figures in Salem represent contemporary Americans of the 1950s caught up in the McCarthy Trials.
2. **Antagonist/ Protagonist** - The antagonist is the character who frustrates or is in opposition to the goals of the protagonist, the leading character in a piece of literature. In this case the antagonist is Abigail, the protagonist is John Proctor.
3. **Bigot** - Someone who is obstinate and intolerant of others and has a strong personal creed from which they will not change. Several characters in *The Crucible* such as Hathorne and Thomas Putnam could be seen as bigots.
4. **McCarthyism** - The doctrine followed by Senator McCarthy and his followers in the 1950's in America; it was anti-communist and led America into hysteria during the time of the Cold War with the aim of rooting out Communist sympathisers as a danger to the state.
5. **Morality Play** - A play based on moral issues and the conflict between good and evil with strong Christian connotations. Morality Plays were popular in the Middle Ages. The characters personify abstract qualities. *The Crucible* has elements of this.
6. **Parable** - A narrative piece devised so as to give a clear demonstration of a moral or lesson. Several critics have commented on *The Crucible* as a parable.
7. **Puritans** - A group of religious reformers originating in the sixteenth century in England, whose aim was to purify the Church from previous excesses. Many set up settlements in North America in the seventeenth century.
8. **Theocracy** - A form of government in which God is recognised as being the supreme civil ruler, the laws of this state being interpreted by church authorities. Salem in 1692 was a theocracy run by the church in strict accordance with God's laws.
9. **Tragedy** - This form of literature traces the career and downfall of a character and within this downfall, his or her capacities and human limitations are shown. *The Crucible* is seen by some critics as being a tragedy but there is disagreement over this interpretation.
10. **Utopia** - A description of an imaginary and perfect society. Salem was considered by some to be a utopian settlement.



Links to other resources and suggestions for further reading

The following **resources and works** could be useful for further study.

- Marion Starkey - *The Devil in Massachusetts* - Knopf- 1949
- *The Crucible* and McCarthyism can be looked at in an Encarta Schoolhouse lesson plan on: <http://encarta.msn.com/alexandria/templates/lesson>
- John Ferres - *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Crucible* – Prentice-Hall - 1979
- Dennis Wellend - *Miller: A study of his play* - Methuen -1979
- Neil Carson - *Arthur Miller* - Grove Press-1982

By Miller:

- Interview to *Theatre Arts* - October 1953
- Miller - *Introduction to the Collected Plays* - Viking Press- 1957
- General teaching resources on Arthur Miller can be found at: www.webenglishteacher.com/miller.html
- The **film version** of *The Crucible* starring Daniel Day- Lewis is available- Twentieth Century Fox- 1996.

Alongside this there is a teaching resource to be found at:
<http://www.teachwithmovies.org/guides/crucible.html>