

Bristol Old Vic

THE CRUCIBLE

By Arthur Miller

A Bristol Old Vic Production

Directed by Tom Morris

***"The theater is so endlessly fascinating
because it's so accidental. It's so much like life."***

Arthur Miller, *The New York Times* (9 May 1984)

Education Pack

Introduction

As a teacher I have always loved using *The Crucible* as a text with young people. It has a depth and resonance which allows us to challenge ideas and stimulate discussion within our classrooms while allowing a huge range of performance opportunities. The play moves at such a pace and we as an audience are never allowed to lose our focus as scene after scene unravels in front of our eyes. There is an inevitability in the outcome which fascinates and enthalls us all.

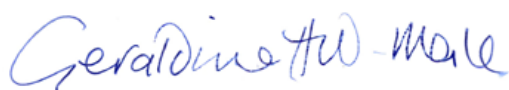
We know John Proctor is doomed from the minute we first meet him and can guess that things will not end well for most people in the play. The moments of great drama, both on and off the stage, are so brilliantly realised within this extraordinary story, which we know actually took place over 300 years ago. Not only this, but it all took place in a new country on the edge of civilisation.

There is something so otherworldly about the crazy collapse of civic and moral order in Salem that we can stand back and look in wonder that anything so ridiculous could be allowed to happen, and with such tragic consequences. We can also look at ourselves and the current state of the world where a growing crisis is unraveling in front of our eyes in Europe, as the fallout from wars in a destabilized Middle East reaches our shores with thousands of dispossessed people living in desperate conditions. Ours is a world where people who are different, socially marginalized and do not fit the conventional ideas of beauty and intelligence are also pilloried and sometimes tortured. Ours is a world where radicalisation is seen as a threat to everything we hold dear.

I am also incredibly excited by *The Crucible* coming back to Bristol after over 60 years and in the anniversary of Arthur Miller's death. For me, and many others, Miller was the greatest playwright of the twentieth century. To have this production directed by Tom Morris playing at the same time as the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Death of Salesman* and following swiftly on from the Old Vic's acclaimed version of *View from a Bridge* is a year of great theatre, centenary or not.

I hope this resource pack is useful. Bristol Old Vic are working incredibly hard to support teachers in the classroom and we are delighted that so many of you are coming to see *The Crucible*.

Best wishes



Geraldine Hill-Male

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Arthur Miller – his life and times



Paul Unwin and Arthur Miller at Bristol Old Vic, 1990

Considered by many to be the greatest dramatist of the twentieth century, Miller was born on November 17th 1915 in New York City. His father, Isodore Miller, was a successful Jewish businessman who was ruined by the Wall Street Crash of 1929, which threw the family into poverty. Miller attended the University of Michigan which is where his love of writing developed and where he wrote his first plays, *Honours at Dawn* and *No Villain*.

Once he graduated, Miller moved back to New York and worked with the Federal Theatre Project which closed in 1939 as its left wing political leanings were considered a threat to the general public. This influenced Miller and the content of his work and he eventually appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1956. This Committee had been set up to investigate anti-American propaganda in the United States following the end of the Second World War and the developing Cold War between East and West. The committee was particularly focused on artists and writers who were seen as being sympathetic towards communism – the term ‘reds under the bed’ came from this – and was seen by many as a witch-hunt against liberal ways of thinking. In 1957 Congress sentenced Miller to a \$500 fine or 30 days in prison. He was also blacklisted and had his passport withdrawn.

Miller wrote many famous plays including *All My Sons* (1947), *View From a Bridge* (1955), *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *The Crucible* (1953). He won numerous awards including a Pulitzer Prize for *Death of a Salesman* and a Tony Award for *The Crucible*. He also received a Tony Award for Lifetime achievement.

“Well, all the plays that I was trying to write were plays that would grab an audience by the throat and not release them, rather than presenting an emotion which you could observe and walk away from.”

Arthur Miller, *The New York Times* (1986)

Timeline

- 1915** Born in New York City
- 1934** Enters University of Michigan to study journalism
- 1936** Writes *No Villain* in six days and receives Hopwood Award in Drama
- 1940** Writes *The Golden Years*
- 1941** Takes extra job working nightshift as a shipfitter’s helper at the Brooklyn Naval Yard
- 1944** *The Man Who Had All The Luck* premieres on Broadway but closes after four performances
- 1947** *All My Sons* premieres and receives the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award
- 1949** *Death of a Salesman* premieres and receives the Pulitzer Prize among many others
- 1950** Adaption of Henrik Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* premieres
- 1952** Visits the Historical Society “Witch Museum” in Salem to research for *The Crucible*
- 1953** *The Crucible* premieres and receives the Antoinette Perry Award, and the Donaldson Award
- 1954** British premiere of *The Crucible* at Bristol Old Vic. Asked to attend the Belgian premier of *The Crucible*, but unable to attend as denied passport by the US
- 1955** *View From the Bridge* premieres
- 1956** Subpoenaed to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)
- 1957** Arthur Miller’s *Collected Plays* published. Convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to name names to HUAC
- 1958** United States Court of Appeals overturns his contempt conviction
- 1959** Receives the Gold Medal for Drama from the National Institute of Arts and Letters
- 1970** Miller’s works are banned in the Soviet Union as a result of his work to free dissident writers
- 1981** The second volume of Arthur Miller’s *Collected Plays* published
- 1983** Directs *Death of a Salesman* at the People’s Art Theater in Beijing
- 1985** Film of *Death of a Salesman* with Dustin Hoffman
- 1996** *The Crucible* film with Daniel Day Lewis opens
- 1999** Wins special Tony Award: Lifetime Achievement
- 2005** Miller dies of heart failure in his Connecticut home on 10th February

The Crucible in context

“I have made more friends for American culture than the State Department. Certainly I have made fewer enemies, but that isn’t very difficult.”

Arthur Miller, *The New York Herald Tribune* (31 March 1954)

The Salem Witch Trials

The events of the play took place and all the characters are based on real people. Miller played around with the times and also the relationships in the play to develop his dramatic intention. The relationship between Proctor and Abigail cannot have happened – Abigail was only 12 at the time of the trials. All of the many judges involved in the real trials have been symbolized in Danforth and Hathorne.

The events which sparked the trials, in January 1692 were real enough. Accusations continued to build apace and brought to the fore many petty vendettas. The trials continued and in June 1692, the governor of Massachusetts set up a special court which proceeded to convict more and more people. It was not until September that questions began to arise about the validity of the evidence presented. All in all, 43 inhabitants of Salem stood trial and 20 were executed. Most of these were women and two dogs were also tried and hanged for alleged witchcraft.

While we know that there were no witches in Salem, it is important to remember that the inhabitants of the town had a profound belief in the existence of witches. This was an extreme Puritan society which had only been in existence for 30 years or so. Christmas was not celebrated and a holiday meant that the day was to be dedicated to prayer – Proctor is picked up on this and reprimanded for not going frequently to church. The American continent stretched endlessly west and was a place of great mystery and fear.

Activity | Salem In 1692

- **Discuss** the town of Salem and what it was like. Size – people – history – location – housing – lifestyles – occupations – isolation
- **Create** a family tableau. Name the people in the family. Improvise a short everyday scene – maybe a mealtime. Think about the use of language and how you would address each other.
- **Read** the Stage Directions at the beginning of Act 2. Act this out in the style of the previous exercise.

McCarthyism & Cold War USA

At the height of the Cold War in 1950 Miller adapted Ibsen’s play *Enemy of the People*. This suggested to some that Miller was himself an enemy of the American People. Joseph McCarthy was an American senator who spent the early 1950’s trying to purge America of communist sympathisers.

When Miller was summoned before the House Un-American Activities Committee, he was placed in a similar position to Proctor and asked to give the names of writers present at a communist meeting held ten years before. While Miller downplayed the parallel by insisting that he ‘just wanted to stay out of jail’ it is hard to disassociate the contemporary parallel of McCarthy’s witch-hunt against communist sympathisers which was at its zenith in 1953.

Writers in particular were considered to be responsible for using films, plays and books as a vehicle for communist propaganda. It was after a disagreement with his friend Elia Kazan that Miller drove to Salem. Kazan had given the committee the names of people who he knew had communist sympathies because he knew that if he was blacklisted by Hollywood he would never work again. Miller did however say this:

‘The Crucible became by far my most frequently produced play, both abroad and home. It’s meaning is somewhat different in different places and moments. I can almost tell what the political situation in a country is when the play is suddenly a hit there – it is either a warning of tyranny on the way or a reminder of tyranny just past.’

Activity

We can all think of examples where we are faced with the difficulty of balancing the needs of an individual person with the demands of the greater good. Discuss the panic around the current refugee crisis in this context. Can you think of other social and racial examples to discuss?

Mass hysteria

“Mary Warren! Draw back your spirit out of them!”

Danforth

Mass hysteria tends to occur in groups low in the hierarchy of a repressive society, often young women. It can lead to a rapid spread of stories and falsehoods which people believe even though they know they are not true. This is a favourite topic of films and can be seen in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and the more recent film *The Falling* starring Maisie Williams.

In *The Crucible*, the young women are at the bottom of the pecking order. Tituba is a slave owned by Reverend Parris who had no rights at all. Abigail is an unemployed orphan who has slept with a married man and her prospects for the future are bleak. They, along with others are suddenly given the power to hold sway over the whole village and bring powerful men to Salem. They have the whole town in their thrall and even Mary Warren, the Proctor’s servant, shows another side to her character by asserting her authority in the Proctor household: “I’ll not be ordered to be no more, Mr Proctor!” (Act II).

Contemporary examples of mass hysteria

- 1 Tanganyika laughter epidemic (1962).** This began on January 30, 1962, at a mission-run boarding school for girls in Tanzania. The laughter started with three girls and spread throughout the school, affecting 95 of the 159 pupils, aged 12-18. Symptoms lasted from a few hours to 16 days in those affected. The teaching staff were not affected. The school was forced to close down on March 18, 1962.
- 2 Blackburn, England (1965).** In October 1965 at a girls’ school in Blackburn, several girls complained of dizziness. Within a couple of hours, 85 girls from the school were rushed by ambulance to a nearby hospital after fainting. Symptoms included swooning, moaning, and chattering of teeth. The younger girls proved more susceptible, but disturbance was more severe and lasted longer in the older girls.
- 3 West Bank fainting epidemic (1983).** There were a series of incidents in March 1983 in which 943 Palestinian teenage girls, and a small number of IDF women soldiers fainted or complained of feeling nauseous in the West Bank. Israel was accused of using chemical warfare to sterilize West Bank women, but investigators concluded that the wave of complaints was ultimately a product of mass hysteria.
- 4 The Gloucester Pregnancy Pact.** A small fishing town in Massachusetts was shocked when 17 teenage girls at the local high school became pregnant, almost half of them having entered a pact to have babies and raise the children collectively. Officials in Gloucester have discovered that the extraordinarily high number of pregnancies among the school’s 15- and 16-year-olds – four or five times the average annual number – is not a coincidence. The revelation of a pact among up to eight of the girls has prompted heated debate locally.

Activities

- 1** Research any one of these and compare to the girls in *The Crucible*.
- 2** Read through the examples of current mass hysteria. In small groups try and create a short scene, which reflects one of these.
- 3** Create a short improvised scene in groups of four or five. Choose one of the identified manifestations of mass hysteria. One of you is going to be completely hysterical, two are going to get swept up into the hysteria, another is silently panicking, what is the fourth/fifth person going to do? You decide. Can you do this without laughing? How difficult is it to do this and keep a straight face?
- 4** Look at the two scenes in Act 3 where the girls take control of the court. This is where Abigail and the girls start to accuse people and the scene is very fast paced and becomes hysterical.

“Mass hysteria (n) a frenzied emotional state that affects a large number of people at the same time”

Collins Encyclopaedia

Exploring the Story – Act by Act

Act I

“You are no wintry man. I know you John, I know you.”

Abigail Williams

The play opens with Reverend Parris praying at the bed of his daughter Betty who seems unconscious. His slave Tituba enters and is sent away by an angry Parris. Parris’s niece Abigail, a beautiful 17 year old enters. She is living with her uncle having been discharged from the Proctor household for unknown reasons. Abigail, Betty and some local girls led by Tituba were dancing naked in the forest the night before. Rumour is strong that witchcraft is in the village and has caused Betty to go into a coma.

The Putnams come and reveal that their daughter Ruth who was also in the forest has been struck down with a similar condition. Ruth is the Putnam’s only surviving child and they believe that an unknown witch has murdered their dead children.

The Putnams and Parris leave the room and some of the other girls engaged in the ritual come to see Abigail. They wish to tell the truth about the ritual but are threatened by Abigail. John Proctor appears and is left in the room with Abigail and the catatonic Betty. It becomes clear that they have had an affair which she wants to be resumed.

More of the inhabitants of Salem come to see Betty and old tensions are revealed involving disputes over land. Reverend Hale arrives to investigate the witchcraft and Abigail tries to put the blame onto Tituba stating that she has conjured the Devil. Tituba is frightened and makes a false confession. She continues to name other women as witches and is joined in this rising hysteria by Abigail and the reawakened Betty.

Act II

“She wants me dead. I knew all week it would come to this!”

Elizabeth Proctor

The Proctor’s house. Proctor and his wife Elizabeth are alone together and we see the state of distrust in their marriage since the affair. Elizabeth is unhappy to hear that John was alone with Abigail.

Mary Warren, their servant, returns from a day in court and gives Elizabeth a poppet she made during the day at court. Proctor is angry as she has defied his orders not to leave the house. Mary realizes her newfound power and tells them of the goings on in court and that she will no longer be ordered around as she has saved Elizabeth from accusations of witchcraft.

Elizabeth realizes that Abigail is the one trying to blacken her name. She begs her husband to reason with Abigail. Reverend Hale arrives to investigate the suspicions of Elizabeth mentioned in court. During the questioning, we meet more of the local men whose wives have been accused of witchcraft and finally Ezekiel Cheever and Marshall Herrick come to arrest Elizabeth who has formally been accused by Abigail. They question her regarding poppets in the house and when the one Mary gave her is discovered, they arrest her.



Photograph by Mark Douet

Exploring the Story – Act by Act

Act III

***“I denounce these proceedings,
I quit this court”*** Reverend Hale

Salem meeting House. Giles Corey objects to the trial of his wife Martha. Corey and Francis Nurse bring Proctor and Mary Warren in front of the judges Danforth and Hathorne so that Mary can testify against the other girls. Danforth interrogates Proctor when it is revealed that Elizabeth is pregnant and as a consequence her life be spared during her pregnancy if Proctor backs down from his accusations. Proctor will not agree to the terms and produces a signed petition from 91 of the local townspeople in support of Elizabeth, Martha and Rebecca.

Danforth dismisses the petition and demands that all 91 be questioned. Giles Corey claims that Thomas Putnam had a hand in Betty's accusations and is held in contempt of court for refusing to reveal the source of his information. Reverend Hale becomes increasingly aware that the court is condemning innocent people to death and begs Danforth to reconsider Mary's new deposition. Danforth calls for all the girls in an attempt to restore his authority.

Abigail once again claims that she is being attacked by spirits. Proctor is then forced to admit in court that they had had an affair. Danforth sends for Elizabeth to confirm this as Proctor assures him that she is incapable of lying. She then proceeds to lie to save Proctor and this then triggers another frenzy for the girls who all start screaming that they are being attacked. Mary is then frightened and joins in with them saying that Proctor is the Devil's man. Proctor and Corey are arrested and Hale quits.

Act IV

“What is John Proctor?”

John Proctor

Salem Jail. It is the day of Proctor's execution and Hale begs Rebecca, Martha Corey and others to confess and thus be spared. Parris says that Abigail and another of the girls have fled the town after robbing him. Despite this news and the building lack of confidence in the court, Danforth refuses to postpone the executions.

The town is getting more and more rebellious and in order to try and quiet this, Danforth sends for Elizabeth to try and get a confession out of Proctor. Proctor and Elizabeth talk of Corey's execution and how he continued to protest his innocence. Proctor asks Elizabeth for forgiveness and she says that he must forgive himself. He confesses to Danforth and Hale in an attempt to save his life but cannot make himself sign the written confession as this will damn his name, and instead tears it up in front of them.

Proctor is led off to be hanged. Elizabeth is over wrought and finally accepts that he refuses to lie and that he is a good man.



Photograph by Mark Douet

Characters in *The Crucible*

John Proctor (Dean Lennox Kelly)



"I'll tell you what's walking Salem—vengeance is walking Salem." John Proctor

A farmer, and the husband of Elizabeth. Proctor had an affair with Abigail Williams while she worked as a servant in his house. A powerful man in both build and character, Proctor refuses to follow people he considers hypocrites, including Reverend Parris. Feared and resented by the many people in

Salem he has made feel foolish, Proctor has a powerful sense of personal integrity. For this reason, his affair with Abigail makes him see himself as a hypocrite.

Elizabeth Proctor (Neve McIntosh)



"There be a thousand names; why does she call mine?"

Elizabeth Proctor

The wife of John Proctor. She fires Abigail Williams as her servant when she discovers that the girl is having an affair with Proctor. His affair with Abigail has both shaken the trust she had in her husband and convinced her that she was right in her assumption that she didn't deserve him.

Elizabeth is described by her husband as someone who could never tell a lie, but this becomes the downfall of both herself and Proctor when she lies to the Judges to protect Proctor's reputation after he admits to his affair with Abigail. She and Proctor were found guilty of the charges against them, leading to his execution.

Abigail Williams (Rona Morison)



"I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart!"

Abigail Williams

Abigail is Reverend Parris's niece. Abigail was once the servant for the Proctor household, and had an affair with John Proctor while working for him and was relieved of her duties when it was discovered by Elizabeth. She actively engaged in the ritual

with Tituba in an attempt to destroy the Proctors' marriage and fuels the witchcraft hysteria by naming Tituba, Elizabeth, and many other townsfolk as consorts of the Devil. Abigail develops a detailed plan to acquire Proctor and will stop at nothing to see her plan succeed. Her strategy includes establishing her credibility with the court and then eliminating Elizabeth. At the end of the play, when Abigail realizes that her plan has failed, and that she has condemned Proctor to hang, she displays the same cold indifference that governs her actions throughout the play.

"I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were ... If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy"

Arthur Miller,
New York Times (27 Feb 1949)

Activities | Act by Act

Units of action

A unit of action is like a paragraph in a story. It helps us to make sense of a long scene by breaking it down into bite-sized chunks. Some of the acts in *The Crucible* are complicated.

- Break down Act III into units of action - maybe about six.
- Create a still image which captures each Unit of Action and add a caption.
- Run one after the other to make sense.
- Repeat with other acts if necessary.

The structure of classic tragedy

Classical tragedy often has the following structure:

- The setting of the play is established
- Conflict
- Action rises
- Climax
- Action falls
- Final resolution

Does *The Crucible* fit this model? Where do you think the climax of the play takes place or is the play in a constant state of high dramatic tension?

Activities | Character investigation

Abigail Williams - What we know:

- She is 17 years old
- She is Reverend Parris's niece
- She used to work at the Proctor's house
- She had an affair with John Proctor
- She controls the other girls

Abigail's Reputation in Salem:

This was tarnished when she left the Proctor household. Although no one knows why she left, they suspect something happened. When she begins to accuse people she is seen as being deceptive.

Outline the characteristics and reputation for **John Proctor, Elizabeth, Betty Parris, Mary Warren, Reverend Hale, and Tituba**

Build a character

Physicalise one of these characters. Remember that they are Puritans but think of 2 other attributes that you think your character will have. Try sitting on a chair, moving around the room, greeting one another.

- **Find** a section of text where two of the characters are together **and perform** it.
- **Perform:** Pupils show their sections of the text and evaluate. Is it believable? Concentrate on the subtext of the piece.
- **Plenary:** What does the performed scene tell you about the two people? Pick out a sentence that you think defines them as characters.
- **Still image:** In groups of two or four create two contrasting still images. One will be of Abigail and Proctor and the other of Proctor and Elizabeth. Really show the difference in their relationships.
- **Select some text:** Chose a scene which best describes Abigail to you.

An exploration of the themes

Fear

“The Devil is alive in Salem, and we dare not quail to follow wherever the accusing finger points!”

Reverend Hale, Act II

America is a new and unknown country. There were no maps of America in 1692 and small populations from European countries had only been arriving for a few decades. It is also a new country bound by a seemingly endless forest.

The town of Salem - in reality a small village - had only been established for 40 years. The pioneers were often extreme religious groups and this religious fundamentalism is present in Salem. There is an emerging judicial system and Deputy Gov. Danforth is uncompromising in his implementation of this. It is the sign of an emerging civilization and its needs to stamp its authority on its people. Once Danforth had committed to the death of the so-called witches, he cannot afford to change direction.

There are parallels to this in the war on terrorism. After 9/11, the president of the USA, George W Bush, stated in an address to Congress and the nation, ‘you are either with us or with the terrorists’.

Torture is much feared in *The Crucible*. Today Guantanamo Bay is still a prison where people have been held for over 14 years without trial. Evidence of torture following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is still coming to light.

Guilt and innocence

“actions are as irrelevant during cultural and religious wars as they are in nightmares.”

Arthur Miller, *The New Yorker* (21 Oct 1996)

Guilt and innocence have no place in *The Crucible*. The idea of girls dancing naked was both salacious and deeply scandalous. However, the resulting trials were then used by rival families to build their power base and extend their land holding.

For such a moralistic society, gossip and rumour were rife. Proctor makes his last tragic stand because he is uncompromising and will not forfeit his name and reputation. The whole trial is based around rumours and misinterpretations - the poppet found at the Proctors’ house is enough to send Elizabeth to trial. Abigail is unscrupulous in her manipulation of this and uses rumour and muttering to stir up a scandal so she can both wreak her revenge on Proctor and commit Elizabeth to death so she can ultimately take her place.



An exploration of the themes

Intolerance

***“we burn a hot fire here;
it melts down all concealment.”***

Deputy Governor Danforth, Act III

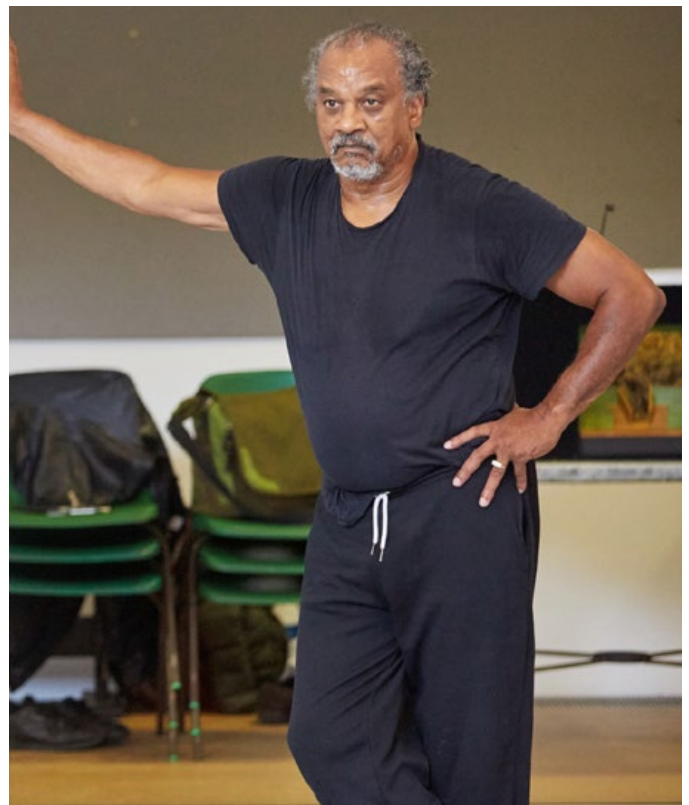
Salem is a theocracy, a society where the state and the church are part of the same system. There is no room for deviation from social norms as anyone who does not confirm to the established laws is seen as a threat, not only to the public good but also to the rule of God. To go against this is to be associated with the devil. Religion permeates every aspect of life and both Abigail and Proctor are aware of the hypocrisy underneath this. It is place where hierarchies are being established and people are fighting over land and the strongest are successful. The land dispute between Thomas Putnam and Francis Nurse adds the implication that the trials are as much to do with personal issues as the devil's influence.



Reputation

***“I have given you my soul;
leave me my name!”*** John Proctor, Act IV

Reputation is very important in Salem where public and private behaviour is one and the same. The need to build a public reputation means that actions are made to try and maintain this reputation at all costs. Reverend Parris is concerned that the witchcraft induced coma which we find Betty in at the start of the play will force him from his job. Proctor also seeks to keep his good name from being tarnished and will not speak out against Abigail early in the play, as he fears the public fallout from their affair. At the end however, he makes the heroic choice to keep his good name - he will not relinquish his name and so regains his integrity.



Activity

In many ways Salem reflects a contemporary school with individuals with different hopes, dreams and beliefs.

Ask students to put themselves on a line from 0 to 10 indicating where they would position their school on **Tolerance, Equality, Celebrating Differences** and **Individual Freedom** (0=very negative, 10=very positive). Discuss their decisions.

Create a short scene around each of the four themes. Start with a still image, bring it to life using dialogue and non-verbal communication, then end with a still image which symbolizes the approach you have chosen.



Interpreting the text & language

Language

Miller's starting point for the play was to read all the transcripts he could from the historic Salem witch trials which are recorded in great detail. Miller says he was struck by the "gnarled way of speaking, to my ear of the dialects or idioms of the interrogations"

The vocabulary, the rhythms, and patterns of speech in *The Crucible* are highly influenced by the King James Bible and is used to reflect the symbolic and historic nature of religion in the characters and the community.

As in all of Miller's plays, the language characters speak in *The Crucible* is specific and deliberately chosen. The language and sentence structure is archaic and unfamiliar to a modern audience: Tituba opens the play with 'My Betty be hearty soon?' (Act I).

Tone

Each character has a particular way of speaking which helps to identify them. The distinctive language of the court uses heightened legalistic terms while Proctor uses simple language often referring to the land and nature. The language is old fashioned and this gives a distance to the play and helps create an atmosphere of profound seriousness. Its formality creates a tension and a sense of high drama and tragedy.

Imagery

Many of the images are heightened and important as fits the subject matter in the play. Danforth states that he would continue to 'hang ten thousand' if necessary and that 'an ocean of salt tears could not melt the resolution of the statutes'. Proctor refers to his farm as 'a continent.'

Context

The words and sentence structure set the action in a distant past. Words like "Goody" and syntax like "I know not" rather than the present day "I don't know" create the impression of remoteness. It is the language of the King James Version of the Bible which all the characters would be very familiar with.

"I was also drawn into writing *The Crucible* by the chance it gave me to use a new language - that of 17th Century New England. That plain, craggy English was liberating in a strangely sensuous way, with its swings from an almost legalistic precision to a wonderful metaphoric richness ... The problem was not to imitate the archaic speech but to try to create a new echo of it which would flow freely off American actors' tongues"

Arthur Miller,
The New Yorker (21 Oct 1996)

Activities | Depiction of Character by their language

Most of the characters can be distinguished by their language. Look at the language of Proctor. He is plain-speaking, simple, direct, frank, blunt, earthy and uses physical and concrete images of farming and animals.

Compare the language used by either Danforth or Hale. Consider words like: Bureaucratic, legalistic, jargon, authoritarian.

An interview with the Director

Tom Morris

Why have you chosen to direct *The Crucible* rather than another play by Arthur Miller?

We're very fortunate to be able to put this play on in what is Miller's centenary year. For many people it's his most powerful play, a play that when people attend a production, whether it's well-received or not, they talk about getting completely lost in the story despite it often being quite a long play and a long evening. It's written at an incredibly high dramatic temperature. In other words, from the first scene you're in crisis, people are dealing with a disaster. There's a priest who's trying to secure his job in a community that's rebelling against him, whose daughter has fallen into a coma, and people are talking about witchcraft, and he's absolutely clear in his own mind that if any rumours of witchcraft get out it will be the end of his career, and in some ways the intensity and the tension in the story never relaxes. So yes, it's very powerful. It's a play that people talk about having seen.

This is a play first performed in England at Bristol Old Vic in 1954 and recreates events which took place in Salem in 1692. How is the play able to be relevant to these times, as well as to a contemporary audience?

The Crucible is a story which, as sometimes happens with great pieces of writing for theatre, seems able to reflect whichever time, country or culture it's performed in. It was written in the 1950s when Arthur Miller was caught up in the paranoid, anti-communist investigations set up by the American Government. Lots of his friends were being interviewed, being asked to give names of other people who'd been members of the Communist party, and he very clearly wrote the play with this situation in mind.

Sometimes when people write a play that is historically specific, (another example being Fielding's *Tom Thumb* which was written about the government in the 1730s), you take away the historical context and the play no longer makes sense. However *The Crucible* is so extraordinarily structured internally, all of its conflicts so balanced, that when you take away the context, it survives. It has its own purity of structure, its own balance of conflict, and what that means is that it can then find echoes in any society that it's played in, which means that it's a great play to revive.

At the moment there's a panic about immigration. Now, the play isn't about immigration, but it is about panic. The play is so brilliantly structured to be about panic that maybe when our audiences see it, they will be reminded about the intolerances and hypocrisies that characterise our society in relation to immigration. I don't need to make the production about immigration for that to happen. Also, there are all sorts of other kinds of intolerance, racial intolerance, social intolerance, which we might find the production resonates with now. It's a play in which there are children in court, it's a play in which a society doesn't know how to deal with its children, which is dangerously topical to us now. It's also a society in which religious rules are so strict that kinds of fundamentalism can apply, and that's something that we can find resonances with in our world.

Overall, my sense is that one of the reasons the play has endured so well is that it does ask questions of any context that it's put in, and that makes it very exciting to stage.

What do you consider to be the key themes of the play?

Miller writes about conscience in relation to the play, and he writes about tragedy and heroism, and the things you shouldn't compromise on no matter how difficult the circumstances you're in. As the drama of the play reaches its climax, John Proctor is asked to make a confession to witchcraft, which he knows to be false, and he's offered that chance in order to save his life. He's got three children, and he clearly wants to be with his children, and Miller structures it very clearly to show that if Proctor refuses to sign that document, he won't only be making a sacrifice himself, he'll be making a sacrifice on behalf of his children who will have no father. Proctor talks about giving



An interview with the Director

away his name at that point, and Miller writing about it uses the word conscience to describe what Proctor's battle is. Whether you call it your name, or your good faith, at what price do you allow yourself to support a story that you know to be false. So for Miller, conscience is a really profound theme in the play.

The other thing I've been thinking about is what the community of the play means, and here the history of the play is useful. The play is set in 1692, at a point when America isn't even a country, where many of the people who live in Salem were born in Britain. For whatever reason, the people who were settling in that part of what we now call North America had abandoned lives in Britain in order to create a new life for themselves in which they had religious freedom, in which they were able to invent themselves as a kind of community on the edge of what they perceived to be a terrifying wilderness. Many people had died on the journey and more than half of the first two generations after settlement, so it was a community doing something incredibly difficult, dangerous and frightening, and a community which to my mind could only survive if it was sustained by hope. The kinds of narratives that puritanism offered the religion of that community would have lived in two areas, one would have been about making the group coherent at all costs, which is one of the reasons why you can understand religious intolerance in Salem. In Salem they got rid of all the Quakers, because in this community they needed to be of one belief in order to survive. The other area is hope. Those kind of religious beliefs enable you to hope, to hope that your project is achievable on earth, and in heaven after you're dead however difficult it may have been on earth.

All this means you have a small community bound together by hope, which messes up its entire life. It's a tragedy of a community that gets it entirely wrong, and starts to tear itself apart because it misunderstands its own unity. That seems to be really powerful, and is one of the things that interests me at this point.

I think the music is going to be very important. I think that the way that the community prays and sings together will be in some way part of the production. If the production works you will have a sense of the heroic ambition of a community to support itself, and the appalling tragedy that happens when it forgets that, and goes mad.

Activity | Director task

- 1 Should we blame anyone in particular for the terrible events in the play or are the characters' victims of their society and its ambition? Where should the blame lie? How much to blame is John Proctor for the terrible events of the play? As director, how do you want the audience to feel about Proctor at each significant point in the play? For example:
 - How should the audience view him in Act I, when we first meet him with Abigail? Does our view of him change when we see him interact with the other characters?
 - How might the audience's view of Proctor shift when we see him with Elizabeth in Act II?
 - What do we learn about Proctor in Acts III and IV? How convincingly do you think he "overturns his paralysing personal guilt"? Is he a tragic hero who is flawed but magnificent in the end and eventually wins our admiration? He is prepared to lie but not lose his reputation. Does this have anything to do with the fact he has three children?
- 2 Discuss what happened the night before the play opens. How might you stage this? Consider a non-naturalistic approach which sets the atmosphere for the rest of the play. How might you direct the scene changes between each of the acts to tell the story of how the action has progressed outside the scripted dialogue?

An interview with the Designer

Robert Innes Hopkins

What was your initial response when asked to design *The Crucible*?

I've seen half a dozen productions of *The Crucible*, all of which worked tremendously well, from West End to student productions. It's such a robust and rigorous piece of writing that it always delivers an impact for the audience, so it's always been a play I've wanted to work on. I've worked on a vast spectrum of productions, including opera as well as theatre, but *The Crucible* has always been on my wish-list.

Can you explain the process you went through when designing the set for *The Crucible*?

Tom Morris made contact with me six months ago and asked if I was available and willing to work on *The Crucible*. I was happy to work with him again after working on *Swallows and Amazons* three years ago. So, I met with Tom and he talked about why he wanted to do *The Crucible* and his initial thoughts about how he wanted to present it.

After our first meeting, I went away and read the text. Then I read it again - there are so many notes from Arthur Miller about the scenes that it is integral to the whole production to use them as a starting point. I then did a few sketches based on what we'd discussed and I met with Tom again to talk further about his vision for the show, and we refined our ideas. The process of designing always involves refining the early ideas discussed between the director and designer, and then in later stages bringing in lighting designers, movement directors and other members of the team.

Next, I created a model box of the set, making first the white-card model, which is the first time the designs are realized in 3D and shared with the production team. At this point we have to consider production budgets and how much it will cost to build the set, so producers and technical managers are brought in who look at the viability of the design. Once this is approved by everyone, a final model is made (see over), incorporating both artistic and technical input. This final model is then shared with all departments involved with the production, including marketing, press and box office and is the first opportunity they have to get a good idea of the artistic vision of the show.

Can you explain your design for *The Crucible*?

As a Puritan community in Massachusetts in the 1600s, the characters in *The Crucible* would have built their own homes and would not have had many possessions. Therefore, everything on-stage is very simple, with a handmade feel that uses natural materials such as wood.

For the first half, Tom gave me the challenge of housing all the actors on-stage, even when they are not in the scene. To achieve this, I have made a playing space on a circular disc in the middle of the stage, with benches alongside where the actors will sit and enter and exit the performance space without the use of doorways - eliminating that level of naturalism. It is not designed to be a naturalistic actual space, but we represent the three main settings with unique pieces of set, for example a window or a door to demonstrate a change in environment.

The final major element of the design is on-stage seating, which was something Tom envisioned from the beginning. It is very exciting thing to pursue as a designer, because it is very much outside of the normal approach to designing a show. It also works very well for *The Crucible* because it puts the audience in the heart of the action as observers, startlingly close as the action unfolds. During some scenes they might feel a bit more like a jury than an audience as a result of the design.

To design the on-stage seating, we looked at some of the early lecture halls and old operating theatres where they had curved rows of seats looking down on a central area. In *The Crucible*, the first scene takes place in the house of Reverend Samuel Parris and simply has a bed on stage. This set up, in some ways, suggests that we're doing a forensic examination of the play and the main characters in it which aligns with the themes of a community anatomising itself.



An interview with the Designer

How does your design change to reflect the four scenes in *The Crucible*?

The first Act is set in the house of Reverend Samuel Parris in the centre of the community, whose daughter, Betty, lies unconscious in a bed. To aid the transformation of the circular performance space, there is a simple but elegant window and a bed on which Betty lies.

The second act begins in the house of John Proctor which is on the edge of the community near the wilderness. Here, a different, more rustic window and a door onto the wilderness are in place, through which the different parties in this scene will enter.

The third act is situated in the Salem meeting house and this is where the on-stage audience will really feel like they are the jury, as the seating bank forms part of the architecture of the courtroom. The wilderness outside is obscured by the safety of the courthouse wall with windows, which aids the sense of state and of civic (see below).

The final act is set in the Salem prison, the claustrophobia of which will be represented by lighting and darkness. Paradoxically, this will be the biggest, emptiest space created in the show. As John Proctor is lead to the gallows at the end of the scene, the space will change. We open up the seating banks to reveal the forest, and we become aware of hanging bodies in the trees, a haunting image that embraces the openness and emptiness of the Theatre.

Activity | Design task

- The play takes place in a number of locations. Identify where these are.
- Create a stage design which incorporates all of these.
- Look at the photographs from 1954 version at Bristol Old Vic (see Appendix C). Compare with the model box of the contemporary stage set.



Final model box, designed by Robert Innes Hopkins

How to write a review

Now write your own review after you have seen the play. Before you start, go online and find some reviews of *The Crucible*, either the current production or some of the more recent ones. These will help you get a sense of how to approach your review.

Then on to your own individual review. You will have many opinions about the production and you must remember to justify any statements you make. Always give examples to support the point you are making, use details from the performance such as acting, set, sound, lighting.

1 Introduction

Start with the essential information. Make sure you mention:

- The full title of the play and the name of the playwright
- The date, time and location of the place you saw this production
- The name of the director
- Names of the main characters and the actors

2 Plot

- Give a brief summary of the plot
- Which were your favourite sections?
- Was there a clear message for the audience in the play? What was it?
- Did the production hold the audience's interest?

3 The Design

- Describe the set and the position of the audience.
- How appropriate was this to the production and to the space it was being performed in? What did you think of it?
- How did it work for the performers and the audience? Exits and entrances?
- Describe how lighting was used to create atmosphere. Did it add anything to the production?
- How did the designer use music, singing and sound? Did it add to the atmosphere?
- Did the music choices add to the play?
- What were the costumes like? Did they help to express the characters or themes of the play?
- Don't forget to add labeled illustrations and diagrams to support your statements.

4 The Acting

- Describe some of the performances. Choose a couple of characters and analyse the acting: voice/body/facial expression/gesture/proxemics
- Voice and movement choices. How did the actors use their bodies differently to show the characters they played and how they felt?
- How did they relate to other characters?
- Give some examples of some actors do that particularly impressed you and justify your choices with examples from the play.

5 Summary

Was it a successful production? Were you interested and involved all the way through? Would you recommend the play to other people? If so who? You need to pull together all your opinions make a nice punchy final paragraph.

“On opening night, January 22 1953, I knew the atmosphere would be pretty hostile. The coldness of the crowd was not a surprise; Broadway audiences were not famous for loving history lessons, which is what they made of the play ... Meanwhile the remoteness of the production was guaranteed by the director, Jed Harris, who insisted that this was a classic requiring the actors to face front, never to each other.”

Arthur Miller,
The New Yorker (21 Oct 1996)

Reviews of the original
production on Broadway

“The play is good, strong, rugged stuff with a lot more kick in it than *Death of a Salesman*”

Christopher Small, *Spectator*, No. 193

“As a historical melodrama, *The Crucible* is profoundly affecting and a play in which suspense can choke.”

J.C Trewin, *The Illustrated London News*