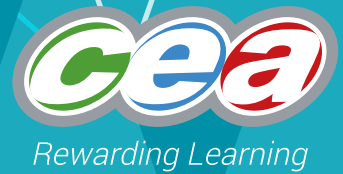


# FACTFILE:

## GCSE DRAMA

### Component 3



## Knowledge and Understanding of Drama, Exploration of the Set Text

### The Crucible

by Arthur Millar

#### Historical

- The Crucible was first performed at the *Martin Beck* Theatre on Broadway on January 22, 1953 and is set in Salem Massachusetts from spring to winter of 1692;
- Arthur Miller was born in 1915 in New York. His parents were immigrants from Poland, searching for the idyllic American dream promising freedom and economic prosperity which would be the background and influence in Millar's writing as he was growing up;
- Between 1950 and 1954 Senator Joseph Mc Carthy presided over the investigations of the Senate Committee on Internal Security which was as ruthlessly determined to hunt out Communists as the Salem judges had been to hunt out witches;
- The Salem Witch trials took place in 1692;
- Many of Miller's artistic friends thought to have the ability to shape public opinion were brought before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Miller himself was brought before this committee in 1956;
- The play is not a history but the characters are based loosely on historical figures and little is known about most of them except what may be surmised by Millar from a few letters, the trial record, certain broadsheets written at the time and references to their conduct in sources of varying reliability.

#### Social Context

- During the 1950s, America went through a period of fear and recrimination caused by the spread of the anti-capitalist economic system which was known as communism. This was as a consequence of the Cold War;
- The government sought to identify communists and ensure that they were removed from positions of authority, resulting in a government led 'witch-hunt';
- America became a place of intolerance and state persecution, much like life in the puritan town of Salem in 1692;
- Miller wrote *The Crucible* after visiting a delapidated Salem in 1951. Whilst he was there, he read some of the court transcripts from the period and was drawn to a man called John Proctor whose wife, Elizabeth, was accused of witchcraft. The parallels between the two societies were striking in terms of the treatment of their citizens;
- Puritan society had different status levels. Tituba is described as Parris's 'Negro slave' and both Abigail and Mary Warren were described as servants;

- America was undergoing massive changes socially. It was only eight years post war, yet America was thriving and booming both in industry, wealth and in the 1950's 'baby boom';
- America was not without its problems with racial segregation causing tension and civil unrest. Such ignorance and intolerance is central to the play.

### Cultural

- American culture was going through great change in the 60's and Miller reflected these changes through the religious, cultural and race divided community in the play;
- After WW2 America started to boom and create a culture of a perfect home with Dad at the head of the family and this image is also reflected in the play through the male authority in the family situations;
- The Mc Carthy trials, the fight against Communism and the armaments race caused mass hysteria in America at this time which is also reflected in the play;
- The growth of the Civil Rights movement in America at this time reflected unrest of the common man and a culture of wanting to be heard which was similar to John Proctor trying to be heard and keep his good name;
- Puritan culture demanded respect and obedience and a strong faith in prayer.

### Form and Style

- The play uses the traditional style of exposition, rising and falling action, climax, resolution and denouement;
- It is considered to be a domestic tragedy set in the puritan small-town of Salem in 1692. There are elements of tragedy and the distinct element of allegory contained within the fabric of the play;
- There are many moments that are inferred or given as off-stage action such as John Proctor's affair with Abigail;
- The play contains a lot of background information about the situation and characters during the early part of Act One;
- Miller's stage directions are detailed and convey the sense of fear and panic and denote the mood as well as being instructional tools for the actor;
- There are various monologues throughout the play. One of the key monologues contains Proctor's confession at the end of the play.
- The dialogue format is generally inter-active conversation with some more formal language from the legal characters.

### Theatrical Conventions

- Although the play is allegorical, it is not an accurate historical allegory. However, there are various authentic references and a huge deal of symbolism contained within the play;
- The play has four acts with four different locations and time periods from spring to winter of 1692. Act one is in an upstairs bedroom, act two in Proctor's living room, act three in a meeting house and act four in Salem prison;
- The action is constant and the play picks up speed, enhancing the sense of hysteria and fear whilst generating intrigue amongst the audience;
- There is constant conflict throughout, both domestic and legal, which creates tension and heightens the atmosphere;
- The play contains an exciting climax, which involves a decision not being revealed until the very end of the play. The question of whether Proctor will confess is left unanswered until the end which extends the element of suspense.

## Genre

- The *Crucible* is considered a modern tragedy. It is modern in the sense that Miller uses ordinary people rather than the wealthy or royalty;
- It is a paradoxical allegory, rather than a factually accurate depiction of events.
- Like most tragedies, Miller has a tragic hero, whose lesson the audience needs to learn. However, like most classical dramas, the tragic hero is flawed and this leads to his demise;
- There are several climactic moments such as John Proctor's confession to adultery with Abigail Williams;
- There are elements of realism within the play despite the play being about witchcraft. There is a love-triangle and each character has individual motive hence making the play believable for an audience, which helps enhance the sense of fear and hysteria and heightens the drama;
- Miller skilfully explores the human psyche, making observations about human motivation and subsequent behaviour.

## Language

- The language in *The Crucible* is archaic; written in the style of old English for the main Puritan characters. The language of Hathorne and Danforth is more natural as they are from Boston;
- The phrasing is specifically sculpted to match the time-period. For example, 'Be you deaf,' as opposed to 'Are you deaf?';
- There is a clear symmetry between the style of writing and the style of writing employed in The Bible;
- There are various historic references taken directly from the transcripts of the Salem witch trials. The language used is often historic, in keeping with the period;
- Language such as 'naught' or 'ails' may be familiar terms, but are not commonly employed in contemporary society;
- The play contains an abundance of religious words and legal jargon, again used to create a sense of authenticity and to show the influence of religion upon laws and practices of the period;
- Various words are repeated for impact or effect. One of the most commonly repeated words is 'bewildered,' which is applied to four different characters in four different situations and circumstances. This word would have been common in the 1600's, coming from the word 'wilder,' which is taken to mean losing one's way;
- Events within the play are told in present tense.

## Structure

- *The Crucible* contains four Acts and is a typical tragedy in structure with an introduction, rising and falling action, a climax and a resolution;
- The play has twenty one characters and lasts two and a half hours with an interval after the second act;
- The initial dramatic action is the accusation of witchcraft but there is another subplot which is grown with the scene between Abigail and Proctor;
- Act two is much calmer with the relationship between John and his wife being explored. This moment and the previous moment are unified in the courtroom scene in Act three;
- In Act Three, the trial takes place without the confines of a courtroom and he purposely holds back the climax;
- Act Four contains isolation in jail, with Proctor reflecting upon his personal crisis and going to the gallows upholding his innocence;
- The play contains an epilogue, in which, everything is neatly resolved and explained. The fate of the characters are revealed in this final epilogue;
- Miller refers to a front stage curtain rising and falling.

