

## 'The Crucible' Key Information Sheets

### 1. Context

- The play was written in 1953 by Arthur Miller.
- It is an **allegory**, criticising the political crisis in America over **McCarthyism** (Senator Joseph McCarthy whipped America into a frenzy over a Communist threat).
- The play is set in 1692, in Salem, Massachusetts, America.
- It is based on true events.
- The play follows the witch trials after some of the girls in the town fall ill and devil worshipping is blamed.
- The key message of the play is about how intolerance, hysteria and peer pressure can tear a community apart.

### 2. Themes

<u>Key Themes:</u>	<u>Examples:</u>
Reputation	Reputation is one of the major themes in the play, The Crucible. Most of the characters of the story strive hard to maintain their reputations.
Intolerance	During the play, various characters face false judgment and intolerance.
Judgment	Another major theme in the play is judgment. It is seen through the characters of Danforth and Hale.
Jealousy	Another important theme seen through the character of Abigail is jealousy. She plots the whole blame to rekindle the affair with John Proctor. Ann Putnam's jealousy of Rebecca Nurse also results in false accusations.
Morality	Goodness also serves as a major theme of The Crucible despite the deception. People in Salem intend to look genuine in the eyes of society.
Deception	Deception and lies present another important theme that runs throughout the play. It does not include myths related to black magic or witchcraft. It includes lies that people tell to save their false reputations in society.
Guilt	The theme of guilt is related to the progress in John Proctor's character in the play. He is ashamed of the infidelity committed in the past and wants to bury it deep in the heart as if it never existed. The theme of guilt plays an important role in shaping and reshaping the characters in the play.
Power and authority	The desire to attain power serves as blood for the people of Salem. The pillars of traditional power, the church, and the court worked in unison. The judges exercise their absolute power by rejecting Proctor's rational explanation and punishing him and acquitting the girls, who are guilty.
Hysteria	Hysteria also upholds thematic significance in the play because the society in Salem is engulfed in the accusations of witchcraft. The rapid growth of hysteria in Salem destroys the impact of rational thinking. Often mass hysteria numbs people's mind and makes them vulnerable.

### 3. Key events

#### Act 1

- The opening of the play shows us some of the younger girls of the town – they are unconscious and appear to be critically ill. We find out that they have been dancing in the woods with Tituba, a servant – they have been “casting spells” and drinking blood. Abigail Williams discusses the reason for the curses – she has had an affair with John Proctor and his wife has dismissed her.

- There is some argument over land ownership and also over Reverend Parris' salary. In addition, Mrs Putnam is jealous that she has had only one surviving child and is suspicious of Rebecca Nurse.
- Reverend Hale arrives from another town to investigate the strange events in Salem. Tituba and Abigail confess to witchcraft. Betty wakes up, and she and Abigail name individuals that they say they have seen with the Devil.

## Act 2

- Elizabeth and Proctor argue over the affair. Their servant, Mary Warren comes home from Salem where she is serving as an official of the court, and gives Elizabeth a poppet (doll) that she made for her while sitting in the courtroom.
- Hale arrives at the Proctor house and questions Proctor about his poor church attendance. He asks Proctor to name the Ten Commandments. Proctor names nine successfully, but he forgets the commandment forbidding adultery. Proctor reveals that Abigail admitted to him that the witchcraft charges were false.
- Marshal Herrick then arrives and arrests Elizabeth. Abigail accuses Elizabeth of attempted murder. The authorities of Salem search the Proctor house and discover the poppet, along with a needle.

## Act 3

- The court convicts Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse of witchcraft. Giles Corey tells the court he has proof that Putnam is accusing his neighbours of witchcraft in order to gain their land. Judge Danforth informs Proctor that Elizabeth is pregnant.
- Mary Warren tells the court that she pretended to see spirits and falsely accused others of witchcraft. She reveals that Abigail and the other girls are also lying. Abigail denies Mary Warren's charge, however, and she and the others claim that Mary Warren is sending out her spirit against them in the court.
- Proctor denounces Abigail's charge against Mary Warren, stating that Abigail is lying. Proctor informs the court of his affair with Abigail and states that she is lying in order to have Elizabeth executed. After Proctor agrees that Elizabeth would never lie, the court summons Elizabeth and questions her about the affair. Not knowing that her husband has confessed it, Elizabeth lies about the affair. Abigail resumes her claim that Mary Warren is attacking her until Mary Warren recants her confession that she lied about the witchcraft and charges John Proctor as the Devil's man.

## Act 4

- Several months pass. Proctor is in prison, scheduled to hang, along with Rebecca Nurse. Elizabeth is also in prison, although the court has delayed her execution until after she gives birth. Hale attempts to convince the prisoners to confess rather than hang, but all refuse. Proctor confesses and signs a written document, but he destroys it rather than have it posted on the church door. Proctor is taken to the gallows.

#### 4. Key characters

John Proctor	A local farmer who lives just outside town; Elizabeth Proctor's husband. A stern, harsh-tongued man, John hates hypocrisy.
Abigail Williams	Reverend Parris's niece. Abigail was once the servant for the Proctor household. Abigail is smart, wily, a good liar, and vindictive when crossed.
Reverend John Hale	A young minister reputed to be an expert on witchcraft. His arrival sets the hysteria in motion, although he later regrets his actions and attempts to save the lives of those accused.
Elizabeth Proctor	John Proctor's wife. Elizabeth fired Abigail when she discovered that her husband was having an affair with Abigail. Elizabeth is supremely virtuous, but often cold.
Reverend Parris	The minister of Salem's church. Reverend Parris is a paranoid, power-hungry, yet oddly self-pitying figure. Many of the townsfolk, especially John Proctor, dislike him.
Rebecca Nurse	Francis Nurse's wife. Rebecca is a wise, sensible, and upright woman, held in tremendous regard by most of the Salem community.
Francis Nurse	A wealthy, influential man in Salem. Nurse is well respected by most people in Salem, but he is an enemy of Thomas Putnam and his wife.
Judge Danforth	The deputy governor of Massachusetts and the presiding judge at the witch trials. Honest and scrupulous, at least in his own mind, Danforth is convinced that he is doing right in rooting out witchcraft.
Giles Corey	An elderly but feisty farmer in Salem, famous for his tendency to file lawsuits. He is eventually held in contempt of court and pressed to death with large stones.
Thomas Putnam	A wealthy, influential citizen of Salem, Putnam holds a grudge against Francis Nurse for preventing Putnam's brother-in-law from being elected to the office of minister.
Ann Putnam	Thomas Putnam's wife. Ann Putnam has given birth to eight children, but only Ruth Putnam survived. Ann is convinced that they were murdered by supernatural means.
Ruth Putnam	The Putnams' lone surviving child out of eight. Like Betty Parris, Ruth falls into a strange stupor after Reverend Parris catches her and the other girls dancing in the woods at night.
Tituba	Reverend Parris's slave from Barbados. Tituba agrees to perform voodoo at Abigail's request.
Mary Warren	The servant in the Proctor household and a member of Abigail's group of girls.
Betty Parris	Reverend Parris's ten-year-old daughter. Betty falls into a strange stupor after Parris catches her and the other girls dancing in the forest with Tituba.
Martha Corey	Giles Corey's third wife. Martha's reading habits lead to her arrest and conviction for witchcraft.
Ezekiel Cheever	A man from Salem who acts as clerk of the court during the witch trials. He is upright and determined to do his duty for justice.
Judge Hathorne	A judge who presides, along with Danforth, over the witch trials.
Herrick	The marshal of Salem.
Mercy Lewis	One of the girls in Abigail's group.

## 5. Literary features (AO2)

- Monologue – a character speaking alone on stage.
- Allusion – a reference to something (usually cultural)
- Dramatic irony – when the audience knows something the characters don't
- Foreshadowing – hints for events later in the play
- Allegory – a story with an underlying meaning, usually moral or political
- Structure:
  - Exposition
  - Rising action
  - Climax
  - Falling action
  - Resolution

## 6. Prepared Introduction

Miller presents [key focus] to reveal the **hypocrisy** and **social injustice** of a society based on religious judgement and jealousy. As someone who advocated **political freedoms**, he was concerned by the ways that power and injustices could impact on others' happiness and lifestyles, as seen by the **American Colonial society** in the setting of the play and the form of the play as an **allegory**. The townspeople's and judges indifference to **social justice** is presented in the **tragedy** of the play, from the opening where fear and criticism rule to the ending where several innocent victims are killed. Miller's message is that of **social responsibility** and the warning of the negative impact of **hysteria** on society.

## 7. Key Quotations

"I have given you my soul; leave me my name!" (John Proctor)	"He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!" (Elizabeth Proctor)
"She thought only to save my name!" (John Proctor about Elizabeth)	
"Until an hour before the Devil fell, God thought him beautiful in Heaven." (Reverend Hale)	Life, woman, life is God's most precious gift; no principle, however glorious, may justify the taking of it. (Reverend Hale)
"vengeance is walking Salem" (John Proctor)	"We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law!" (John Proctor)
"This is a sharp time, now, a precise time—we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world." (Danforth)	"There is prodigious fear in seeking loose spirits" (Rebecca Nurse)
"I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down! (Abigail Williams)	"I never knew it before. I never knew anything before...and all at once I remembered everything she done to me!" (Mary Warren).
"Pontius Pilate! God will not let you clean your hands of this!" (John Proctor to Hale)	"I speak my own sins; I cannot judge another" (John Proctor)
"We burn a hot fire here; it melts down all concealment" (Danforth)	"All innocent and Christian people are happy for the courts in Salem! These people are gloomy for it" (Parris to Danforth)

"God damns our kind especially, and we will burn, we will burn together!" (John Proctor to Danforth)	
--	--

## 8. Key Vocabulary

Word	Definition
Pious	being devoutly (or deeply) religious.
Hypocrite	A person who behaves in a way that is the opposite of what you have said or believed in.
Envy	A feeling of jealousy.
Morality	Ideas about what is right and wrong.
Hysteria	exaggerated or uncontrollable emotion or excitement.
Dissemble	To trick someone and show or hide beneath a false appearance.
Duplicitous	A word to describe someone who is dishonest, hides who they truly are, and tricks others.
Prejudice	Unfair ideas about someone or a group of people that is not based on fact.
Judicious	Showing good judgement and sensible decision making.
Vanity	Having too much pride or interest in your appearance.