

The Crucible

Act I

1. What purpose does the Overture serve?
2. What does the “spareness” of the Puritan setting reveal about the lives of the townspeople of Salem?
3. What Puritan primary fear is apparent in the philosophy, “In unity still lay the best promise of safety”?
4. Explain the significance of the forest to the Puritans.
5. Explain the irony in the Puritans’ pilgrimage to Salem to escape persecution.
6. To what twentieth century situation is Miller referring when he declares: “They believed, in short, that they held in their steady hands the candle that would light the world. We have inherited this belief, and it has helped and hurt us.”
7. When Abigail enters, she is described as “a strikingly beautiful girl...with an endless capacity for dissembling.” What does the phrase an “endless capacity for dissembling” suggest?
8. When Susanna exits, Abigail makes a confession to Parris, which she recants near the end of the Act. What is the confession, and why does she change her mind?
9. Based on his words, what seems to be Parris’s motivation for inadvertently causing the hysteria?
10. Explain the relationship between Abigail and Goody (Elizabeth) Proctor.
11. What are Putnam’s motivations for his actions in Salem?
12. Explain the dramatic irony when Parris says, “I know that you—you least of all, Thomas, would ever wish so disastrous a charge laid upon me.”
13. What role did Ann Putnam play in the dancing in the forest? Explain briefly how Putnam coerces Parris to declare witchcraft.
15. What does Betty’s information about dancing in the forest reveal about Abigail’s true motivation?
16. What does the threat of a “pointy reckoning” reveal about Abigail’s true nature?
17. What does Miller mean by: “A Proctor is always marked for calumny”?
18. Describe Mary Warren’s personality.
19. Contrast Proctor’s verbal excuse about why he has come to Parris’s house with what his actions indicate may be his true motivation for coming.
20. Explain Proctor and Abigail’s relationship.
21. What does Abigail say that leads Parris, Putnam, and Mrs. Putnam to believe Betty is bewitched?
22. Describe Rebecca Nurse physically and by reputation.
23. What three grudges could the Putnams have against the Nurses?
24. In Proctor’s argument with Rev. Parris, the theme of authority arises. What are the two points of view?
25. Describe Giles Corey both physically and personally.
26. What is Rebecca’s solution to Betty’s and Ruth’s ailments, and why does this solution anger Ann Putnam?
27. What is Reverend Hale’s motivation?
28. In terms of indirect characterization, why is it significant that Hale recognizes one of the characters by reputation?

29. What question does Giles ask Hale that shows his comical, innocent personality.
30. What effect does Miller create by lowering the curtain for this act during the girls' cries of witchcraft?
31. What motivates Abby and Betty to begin denouncing everyone?
32. Explain how Miller uses the following dramatic conventions to establish character and create a basis for the tragedy in his Overture.
 - Foil Character
 - Direct Characterization
 - Direct Characterization
 - Motivation
 - Character Action

Act II, Scene I

1. What does the reader learn about the Proctors' marriage through the discrepancy between what John Proctor does before he sees his wife and when he talks to her?
2. In what ways is Miller's use of dialogue effective in the first two pages of this scene to show the rift between the couple?
3. When Proctor kisses his wife, what does her reaction show about her feelings?
4. What does Proctor's hesitation to travel to Salem indicate about his inner conflict?
5. Whom does Elizabeth call, "A mouse no more"? What does she mean by this metaphor?
6. Who is the head of the General Court? What significance does this have in the power given to the court?
7. Explain the ironic ultimatum the head of the court has given to those who have been arrested.
8. Explain Proctor's quote: "If the girl's a saint now, I think it is not easy to prove she is a fraud, and the town gone so silly."
9. What lie does Elizabeth notice Proctor told? How does this feed her current suspicions?
10. Explain the metaphor: "The magistrate sits in your heart that judges you."
11. What present does Mary Warren give to Elizabeth? What does her making it and giving it to Elizabeth foreshadow?
12. How does Mary Warren save herself from a whipping? Who does Elizabeth believe accused her of witchcraft and why?
13. What does Hale's motivation for visiting the Proctors tell the audience about his personality?
14. In what ways does Hale question John Proctor's religious strength?
15. Explain how Hale tests Proctor's belief in God, as well as the irony in how Proctor fails Hale's test.
16. Explain Hale's quote: "Man, remember until an hour before the Devil fell, God thought him beautiful in Heaven."
17. List and discuss the validity of the evidence by which Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse are jailed.
18. Explain Francis' metaphor: "My wife is the very brick and mortar of the church."
19. What evidence does Cheever have against Elizabeth?

20. Explain how Abigail might have “set-up” Elizabeth Proctor. List the events chronologically.
21. If Mary contradicts Abigail, how is she “charging cold murder on Abigail”?
22. How is Hale a “broken minister”?
23. Explain Proctor’s quote: “Vengeance is walking Salem.”
24. How have Hale’s opinions of the accused changed by the end of Act II.
25. Explain the demand Proctor makes of Mary Warren at the end of scene one and her significant response to his threat.
26. Who are the two dynamic characters in this scene and show their changes.
27. How are the golden candlesticks symbolic of Parris’s personality?
28. How is the poppet a symbol of Abigail’s control of the society?

Act II, Scene II

1. Given the Puritans’ view of the forest, what atmosphere does Miller create by setting this scene in the woods?
2. What evidence is there that Abigail’s saintly reputation mentioned in Act II, Scene I is changing?
3. In what way has Abigail become the poppet?
4. Discuss the verbal irony in her line: “Oh John, the world’s so full of hypocrites.”
5. What motivation does Abigail give for making the world “white again”?
6. Discuss Proctor’s implied motivation for warning Abigail of his intentions in court the next day.
7. Discuss the verbal irony in Abigail’s line: “Fear naught. I will save you tomorrow.”

Act III

1. Who is on trial when Giles Corey interrupts the court? How have the charges against this person changed since Act II?
 2. Explain the charge Giles makes against Putnam?
 3. How has Giles “broke charity with the woman”?
 4. Explain how Francis offends Deputy Governor Danforth.
 5. Why do you think Dansforth is concerned whether Proctor has told anyone else about the girls’ lies?
- Explain Dansforth’s statement: “We burn a hot fire here; it melts down all concealment.”
7. What words demonstrate Parris’s reaction to having John Proctor in the court?
 8. What two things does Cheever reveal to the court as evidence against Proctor’s good character? What could this evidence prove in court?
 9. When Proctor hears that his wife claims to be pregnant, what reason does he give for believing her?
 10. Discuss the evidence Proctor gives Danforth proving Elizabeth, Rebecca, and Martha’s innocence, in terms of credibility and outcome.
 11. How does this episode help to establish Miller’s connection of the Salem witch trials with the McCarthy hearings?
 12. What is the charge that Giles Corey makes against Putnam?
 13. What is Giles Corey’s proof for his charge, and why will he not supply the proof to the court? What parallel does this have in the HUAC hearings?
 14. What does Hale ask Parris about those who attack the court? What is Parris’ ironic response?

15. What evidence does Giles give the court?
16. Why does Giles not reveal his witness?
17. Why do you think Hale wants Proctor to have a lawyer?
18. Explain Mary Warren's predicament. What consequences does she face from Abigail and the other girls, Danforth, and Proctor if she goes against each of them?
19. According to Mary, what circumstances allowed her to pretend in court, but not in the vestry?
20. What threat does Abigail give Danforth when he accuses her of lying?
21. How do Abigail and the other girls turn the accusation against Mary Warren?
22. Why is Danforth temporarily persuaded by Proctor's accusation of Abigail?
23. Cite Abigail's answer when Danforth questions her about being a harlot. What is strange about her denial?
24. Why does Danforth put so much faith in Elizabeth's testimony?
25. What sacrifice does Elizabeth make for her husband? How is the result of this sacrifice ironic?
26. When Hale verbally attacks Abigail, how does she defend herself?
27. How does Mary, in turn, defend herself from the girls?
28. On what charges are Proctor and Corey arrested?
29. In what way has Hale completed his transformation as a dynamic character by end of Act III?
30. Upon finishing this act, explain how Proctor's earlier advice to Mary Warren is ironic to both of their situations. "Do that which is good, and no harm shall come to thee."

Act IV

1. What is Miller's purpose setting this scene in a jail cell?
2. Explain Miller's use of comic relief at the beginning of this act. How is this scene ambiguous?
3. Danforth, Hathorne, and Cheever's conversation tells the audience about what changes in Salem in the months that passed between Act III and IV?
4. Explain Parris's comment: "Hale has returned to bring Rebecca Nurse to God."
5. What is the relationship between the rebellion in Andover and the flight of Abigail and Mercy Lewis?
6. Why is Parris upset?
7. Why is it important for the court to get one of the accused "respectable citizens," such as John Proctor or Rebecca Nurse to confess?
8. Parris brings what news that further disturbs Danforth?
9. Explain Parris's comment that Rebecca will "wake a vengeance" on Danforth.
10. Name the recent event that has made Parris afraid for his life and explain its social significance.
11. Why has John Proctor become the court's last hope to save its credibility?
12. In what way is Reverend Hale doing the Devil's work?
13. Explain Miller's purpose in writing Hale's warning in general terms: "Cleave to no faith when faith brings blood. It is mistaken law that leads you to sacrifice."
14. When Proctor questions whether anyone has confessed, what does this reveal about his inner conflict?
15. Explain Giles' fate.
16. Explain the metaphor, "a thread to weave into his agony: 'More weight.'"

17. When John asks his wife for forgiveness, what revelation does the audience receive about Elizabeth's character?
18. Explain the paradox of John's statement that it would be a fraud for him to die for the truth.
19. What responsibility does Elizabeth accept for Proctor's lechery? What does she advise him to do?
20. What event makes Proctor recant his confession? What is the significance of this event?
21. How is this recantation a climax for John Proctor?
22. How is this recantation also a climax for the court in Salem?
23. What purpose would Miller have in giving this play a tragic ending?