

THE CRUCIBLE

THE CRUCIBLE
BY ARTHUR MILLER
DIRECTED BY JONATHAN GOAD

GRADE RECOMMENDATION

Suitable for Grade 9 and up.

CONTENT ADVISORY FOR STUDENTS

Contains some mature themes and strong language.

STUDENT MATINÉE DATES

September 18, 25; October 4, 9, 15, 23.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Written in 1953, the play tells a fictionalized story of the Salem, Massachusetts, witch trials that took place in the seventeenth century. Miller wrote it as an allegory for the 1950s McCarthy era, when the House of Un-American Activities Committee in the United States, at the height of the Cold War and anti-Communist hysteria, was accusing people of subversion or treason without sufficient evidence. Artistic Director Antoni Cimolino says it is a play we need to also examine through the lens of today: “Not only is it about women not being believed, but at its core is a man in a position of power who has an affair with a younger woman in his employ and refuses to admit it.”

SYNOPSIS

Reverend Parris is nursing his sick daughter, Betty, after having discovered her, his seventeen-year-old niece, Abigail Williams, and other teenage girls dancing naked in the forest with Tituba, an African-Caribbean slave. The girls seem to be possessed with hallucinations and seizures and claim that the spirits of some of the members of the Salem community used witchcraft on them. Rumours spread, and the town is gripped in a frenzy of hysteria and wrongful accusations.

John Proctor, a farmer and respected pillar of the community, suspects that Abigail and the girls are lying and confronts her. It is an uncomfortable meeting, as she and John had an affair while she was a servant in his employ. Abigail reveals to John that the accusations of witchcraft are indeed false and that she still cares for him. Guilt-ridden, John refuses her advances. The vengeful Abigail accuses John’s wife, Elizabeth, of witchcraft and has her imprisoned. Elizabeth is spared hanging only because she is found to be pregnant.



A desperate John brings Mary Warren, one of the instigators, to court to expose the girls’ lies. Abigail and the other girls deny the accusation. John suddenly reveals his affair with Abigail to prove her dishonesty as a witness. However, when Elizabeth – unaware of what has transpired thus far in court – is brought out to verify the affair, she denies it in an effort to protect John’s reputation. Suddenly, under pressure from the other girls, Mary accuses John of being in league with the devil, and he is sentenced to hang.

On the day of the hanging, attempts are made to get John to confess to witchcraft and implicate others in order to save his life. Not wanting to leave his wife and children destitute, he signs his confession; however, he immediately regrets his decision and tears up the document. As he goes to his death, he knows all he has left is his name, and he won’t use it to condemn other innocent lives. Elizabeth looks on as a redeemed John walks to the gallows.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

GLOBAL COMPETENCIES:

- Creativity
- Learning to Learn/Self-Awareness
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Critical Thinking

GRADES 9–12:

- Language/English (listening to understand, speaking to communicate, reading for meaning)
- Drama, Music, Visual Art

GRADES 9–12:

- Health and PE (interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, harassment, bullying, leadership, decision-making, mental health, healthy relationships)

GRADE 11:

- Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology (explaining human mental processes and behaviour, socialization)
- Gender Studies (power relations, sex and gender)
- Equity, Diversity and Social Justice (the social construction of identity, power and relations)
- World Religions and Belief (functions of human belief traditions, tenets, practices, and teachings, social contexts)

GRADE 12:

- Equity and Social Justice: From Theory to Practice (power relations, historical and contemporary issues, leadership)
- World History Since the Fifteenth Century (social, economic and political context)
- Adventures in World History (politics and conflict)
- World Cultures (power relations)

THEMES

- Social Order and Individuality: Empowerment and Manipulation; Expectations of Gender and Marriage; Community; Groupthink, Reason and Hysteria
- Integrity: Reputation; Revenge; Compassion and Forgiveness
- Justice: Innocence, Persecution, Guilt and Confession, Good and Evil

CLASSROOM WARM-UP

Look at the beginning of Act 2, starting from Elizabeth's "What keeps you so late?..." to her response sometime later: "Aye it is." Finish with the stage notes that follows this scene: "There is a pause.... A sense of their separation rises."

Divide the class into groups of four. Each group will read the scene several times together for clarity and understanding. They will then examine and determine the particular tensions inherent in the scene. What is not being said? What can they infer about the characters and their relationship?

In each group, two students to play John and Elizabeth Proctor. They will say their lines as written. The other two students will act as their inner voices, one for John and one for Elizabeth. After each of the spoken lines of John or Mary, the inner-voice counterpart will speak the character's thought (or subtext) aloud. All of the group members can help to shape and offer suggestions on each response as the student assigned that part writes down their inner-voiced lines.

Below are some prompting questions to support the students in creating the subtext:

What do you know about the characters?

What is their relationship?

When is this happening? Does the fact that it's set in the 17th century affect the status of the man and the woman?

Where is this happening? Would a public or private setting affect the characters differently? In what ways?

What is happening? Are there any clues that suggest there is more going on than what is being said?

What has happened prior to this scene or in their relationship?

What might happen next?

What emotions do the characters experience in this scene?

Once the inner-voiced lines are written, get the scene up on its feet and have each group rehearse their new scene a few times. Students may wish to play a certain section of the scene with the "real" John and Elizabeth and then have the actors playing the inner-voiced John and Elizabeth repeat the same section of the script, speaking their inner thoughts. Students may also choose to speak the inner thoughts immediately after the "real" characters have spoken, saying their lines in turn.

Then invite each group to present their scene to the entire class. After the presentations, discuss what discoveries the students made about this scene and about John and Elizabeth.

ENRICHMENT

Study Guide available at stratfordfestival.ca/studyguides

Prologues (interactive presentations on stage) at 11 a.m. before every student matinée except September 18, 25.

Workshops and post-show chats may be arranged by calling the Education Department at 519.271.4040, ext. 2354.

Festival Theatre and Costume Warehouse tours may be arranged by calling the Box Office at 1.800.567.1600.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Online: www.stratfordfestival.ca/schools

Email: groups@stratfordfestival.ca

Phone: 1.800.567.1600 or 519.273.1600

Mail:

Stratford Festival
Attn: Groups and Schools
P.O. Box 520
Stratford, ON N5A 6V2

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