

## *The Crucible*

Author	Arthur Miller
Published by	Penguin Books, London
Published in	1953
Price	€8.05
Genre	Drama
Length	128 pages
Summary	The play is set in 17 <sup>th</sup> -century Salem, Massachusetts, where personal vengeance and moral absolutism combined with the fear of witchcraft spur a witch-hunt that soon affects even the most respected members of the community. The protagonist John Proctor and his wife are also accused of witchcraft by Proctor's former lover Abigail and other girls. They are arrested by a court that is set up to examine the events and forces the suspects to either confess to being in league with the devil or die. After struggling with himself and his moral values, Proctor decides to stay true to his convictions and therefore does not confess. As a consequence, he is hanged.
Structure	4 acts
Characters	Main characters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• John Proctor</li><li>• Abigail Williams</li></ul>
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Puritans</li><li>• The witch-hunt in Salem</li><li>• McCarthyism</li><li>• The power of authorities or peer groups and the need to maintain one's own integrity</li></ul>
Available Media	There are film versions, such as: <i>The Crucible</i> . Dir. Nicholas Hytner. Perf. Daniel Day-Lewis, Winona Ryder. 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1996. Film. (Screenplay by Arthur Miller)
Helpful Secondary Literature	Nünning, Ansgar and Carola Surkamp. <i>Englische Literatur unterrichten: Grundlagen und Methoden</i> . Seelze-Velber: Klett, Kallmeyer, 2006.

Language	The language of the play is modeled on the language of the 17 <sup>th</sup> century, which may cause minor difficulties, but it is well manageable.
Suitable Age	Oberstufe
Activities	<p><b>Character Constellation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The pupils draw a mind map of characters and their relationships.</li><li>• The pupils act out contrasting scenes from the play to see what has changed.</li></ul> <p><b>Techniques of Characterisation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After discussing the techniques in class, the pupils write a dialogue using the techniques themselves.</li></ul> <p><b>Character Conception:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The pupils discuss the changes that the character Hale goes through and then write diary entries using the results of their discussions.</li></ul> <p><b>Metaphors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The pupils look up the word 'crucible' in a monolingual dictionary and discuss its meaning for the play.</li></ul> <p><b>Analysis of the plot:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The pupils compare the structure of <i>The Crucible</i> with Freytag's model and see to what extent they match.</li></ul> <p><b>The Film:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After watching the film, the class can discuss in what way the film differs from the play.</li></ul> <p><b>Pre-reading activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have the pupils gather information about the Puritans and create posters that can be put up on the walls of the classroom.</li><li>• Discuss the quote from the introductory section in act one "They believed, in short, that they held in their steady hands the candle that would light the world." (TC 15). What is the quote about? What dangers does this belief entail? Are there other groups that claim they 'hold the candle that would light the world'?</li><li>• In order to spark interest in the topic of the play, start a discussion about witches. How do the pupils imagine witches? Do they believe they exist? How do they know there are no witches? Can they prove it? This way the teacher can raise the pupils' awareness of the dilemma in the argumentation of the witch hunters.</li></ul>

**While-reading activities:**

- After having read act three, let the pupils suggest possible outcomes of the play. What is going to happen next? How will the characters behave? Later on, the pupils can review and evaluate their predictions. (cf. Nünning 74-75)
- Fill in gaps of the plot, e.g. write a dialogue in which Abigail and Mercy Lewis discuss if they should run away. This will require pupils to think about the characters' motives. To make this task more interesting, one could predetermine that Abigail wants to leave whereas Mercy Lewis would prefer to stay. (cf. Nünning 75)
- At certain stages of the play, write a newspaper article about what has happened so far. Let the pupils decide if their newspaper has a positive or a negative attitude towards the witch hunt.
- Let the pupils conduct an interview with Danforth in which they ask him about his job, the trials and his attitude towards witchcraft. They can either write it down as a dialogue or perform it in front of the class.
- Create a worksheet containing single lines or paragraphs from the play. The pupils have to match each line to the character they think it belongs to. (cf. Nünning 76)
- The pupils write an internal monologue of Mary Warren in act three considering why she changed her mind.

**Post-reading activities:**

- Let the pupils research the historical event that Miller used as a basis. What changes did Miller make and for what purposes?
- The pupils gather information on McCarthyism in the USA in the 1940s and 50s and identify the parallels between this period and the Salem witch trials. Can they think of other "witch hunts" today or in history?
- Discuss the end of the play. Talk about why Proctor does not want to confess even though this means that he has to die. What does that reveal about his personality? How would the pupils' opinion of him change if he had chosen to save his life? How would they decide?
- Let the class write letters to their pen friends and tell them what they liked or did not like about the play or the film.

Teachability Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies of the play are well accessible</li> <li>• Contains topics suitable for cultural studies lessons</li> <li>• Discusses topics that pupils can relate to, e.g. conflicts with authorities, being torn between the need to fit in and to stick to one's own values</li> </ul>
Teachability Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language might be difficult for weaker students</li> </ul>

Overall Evaluation	It is an interesting play, which is very well teachable. There are lots of opportunities for discussion and cultural studies lessons.
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