

# The Crucible

*The Crucible* is a 1950s [play](#) about the [Salem Witch Trials](#) by [Arthur Miller](#).

Miller wrote this play during the time of [McCarthyism](#) in America. Many people were afraid that [communism](#) would stop the American way of life. Some people falsely accused their enemies and even their friends of being communists during this time. Miller writes about the ideas of [fear](#) and false accusation which affected him during this time.

A "**crucible**" is a severe test or trial, which is exactly what happens in the play. Miller intended "The **Crucible**" as an allegory to McCarthyism. The events that took place during the time the play was written were very similar to the Salem [witch hunts](#). This is why Miller named the book "The Crucible" after the Salem Witch Trials.

## Characters

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Many of the characters in the Crucible are based on real people who were at the Salem Witch trials. Some are also based on people in the 1950s Red Scare, such as [Joseph McCarthy](#) and [Julius Rosenberg](#)

- **John Proctor**- Farmer in the town, had an affair with Abigail Williams, has three sons, is accused of being a witch, refuses to say he was wrong, and dies for his dignity.
- **Abigail Williams**- Niece of Samuel Parris, former servant to John and Elizabeth Proctor. Uses the trials to gain status in the town and get revenge on Elizabeth.
- **Reverend Parris**- The local Congregational minister, who starts the witch issue by bringing Rev. Hale. Uncle of Abigail
- **Betty Parris**- His daughter, who becomes sick after dancing in the woods
- **Elizabeth Proctor**- John Proctor's wife, accused of being a witch by Abigail Williams after she fired her for sleeping with her husband
- **Reverend John Hale**-An outsider who knows a lot about witches and the devil. Rev. Parris brings him in. Though he first is trying to find as many witches as possible, he later quits the witch trials because he finds out that there is no devil, but that unspoken revenge is working its way through the trials
- **Giles Corey**-Old man who owns a lot of land and often argues with his neighbors. Accidentally implies that his wife is a witch because she reads books and when she does, he can not pray. Arrested for not naming names, then killed by being crushed by large rocks
- **Deputy Governor Danforth**-One of the judges at the witch trials, who wants to end all bad practices in Salem, is sure there is a devil in Salem at the beginning but at the end has his doubts as well

- **Thomas Putnam**- Owns a lot of land, takes to the witch idea to explain the death of his children and to buy other people's land after they are hung
- **Ann Putnam**-Thomas Putnam's wife
- **Tituba**- Servant to Reverend Parris, from the Barbados Islands. She practices some sort of [voodoo](#).
- **Martha Corey**-Wife of Giles Corey, who is said to be a witch because she reads
- **Rebecca Nurse**- Midwife to Ms. Putnam, was charged with witchcraft because Ms. Putnam suspected her miscarriages were actually murders by Rebecca.
- **Cheever**-the recorder of the trials, he writes down what happens and is told to arrest people

## Plot (theatre version)

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In the beginning of the story, Reverend Parris is looking at his daughter, Betty, while weeping and praying. She is asleep on her bed and cannot wake up. They know that she is not dead, but she does not move or speak. She just lies there. Parris heard that Betty and other girls were dancing in the woods. (This was a very bad thing at the time because that implied they knew the devil.)

Reverend Parris's [slave](#), Tituba, is from [Barbados](#). Abigail says that she put a spell on Betty so she would not wake up. Parris is angry with Tituba. He makes her say that she was a [witch](#), and the devil made her curse Betty. Suddenly, Abigail and Betty both say that they were with the devil too, so they would get out of trouble. They say that other people like Goody Osborne and Goody Good are witches too.

John Proctor's relationship with his wife is quite tense because he cheated on her with Abigail. They try to pretend that nothing is wrong but end up having a tense argument about it. While they are arguing, Mary Warren comes in. Proctor is angry with her for leaving the house when he demanded that she did not. She is arrogant and says she is an official of the court and that her services are needed. Mary informs John and Elizabeth that many more than 39 people will be executed instead of the 19 they heard about. She also claims that she saved Elizabeth's life because Elizabeth was "somewhat mentioned" in court. After Mary goes to bed, Cheever comes to arrest Elizabeth. John does not take it well and rips the arrest warrant. After an emotional exchange, Elizabeth is taken and she gives Mary brief directions for the next day.

In court, John tries to help his wife by accusing the "witches" in court with Mary's deposition. He tells the court how well he knows these people and that they cannot be witches. He confesses that he slept with Abigail and that she wishes to see Elizabeth dead. Abigail is angered and threatens the judge. He tries to get Mary to tell the truth and she initially does, but then reforms to Abigail's act again after being accused of working with the devil. Mary then calls John a witch and says that he has dealings with the devil.

This is a problem because John is very respected in the town, so the judges ask him to admit that he works with the devil. He will be able to live if he lies.

In the end, he signs a letter of confession stating that he works with the devil. Then he destroys the letter instead of lying. He wants to live so he could look after his family, but chose to keep his respect and honor instead. He is tried and the court kills him by hanging. However, the court allows Elizabeth to live because she is pregnant. Abigail runs away to Boston with Mercy Lewis, after stealing her uncle's money because she thinks that people know she told lies.

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