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"The Power of The Mob"

Independent and critical thinking is one of the most challenging skills to learn; unfortunately, it is also one of the most dangerous to lack, especially because it prevents "mob mentalities." In the modern world, where misinformation permeates every aspect of everyday life, "mob mentalities" are especially dangerous and can affect anyone. In Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, the idea of "mob mentality" is heavily present in the events of the Salem witch trials. The concept of "mob mentality" refers to the tendency of individuals to conform to the opinions and beliefs of the group they are a part of, often disregarding their own beliefs and morals in the process. This conformity can lead to irrational and dangerous actions. "Mob mentality" provides the means for the witch trials in *The Crucible*; it causes people to lie, be manipulated, and accept baseless accusations of witchcraft, which allows for the many killings.

One of the key ways "mob mentality" is evident in The Crucible is in the behavior of the young girls who accuse others of witchcraft. When one girl, Betty, falls into a strange illness, the other girls begin to act in strange ways as well. Abigail, who is jealous of Elizabeth Proctor and wants to get rid of her, begins to accuse others of being witches. The other girls quickly follow suit, even though there is no evidence to support their accusations. This behavior is a clear example of "mob mentality" at work. The group's beliefs and desires influence the girls, and they conform to those beliefs to fit in and avoid accusations from said group. After Betty wakes up and begins talking about how Abigail drank blood, Abigail tells Betty and Mary Warren, "Let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word, about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you" (19). The fear and pressure from the group make the girls willing to lie and persecute others to protect themselves. Abigail knows she has power over these girls and weaponizes it for her gain. Abigail's ability to wield the "mob mentality" is seen again later in the courthouse after John Proctor accuses Abigail of being a whore. Abigail changes the topic by pretending to be possessed by Mary Warren, saying, "Oh, Mary, this is a black art to change your shape. No, I cannot, I cannot stop my mouth; it's God's work I do." (107) Abigail starts acting like she is possessed and that Mary Warren has projected her spirit as a bird. Immediately after Abigail starts this act, all the other girls quickly follow and seem to honestly believe they are also possessed. Aside from Abigail, none of these girls are explicitly seeking some malignant goal; the hysteria of the witch trials and Abigail's manipulation have just swept them up.

Another way "mob mentality" is evident in The Crucible is in the townspeople's reactions to the accusations of witchcraft. When the girls first begin to accuse others, the town is skeptical and unwilling to believe them. However, as the allegations continue and the court has more and more people arrested, the townspeople become caught up in the frenzy. They begin to believe in the girls' accusations, and they start to accuse others themselves. The town's reaction is again an example of "mob mentality" at work. The group's beliefs and the fear of being accused influence the townspeople, who then conform to those beliefs to fit in and avoid punishment. As Reverend Hale says while investigating John and Elizabeth, "No man may longer doubt the powers of the dark are gathered in monstrous attack upon this village. There is too much evidence now to deny it" (61). Even Reverend Hale, someone who eventually recognizes the absurdity of the trials, is initially convinced. The hysteria and fear of the status quo being disturbed causes even intelligent and well-meaning people to believe and act on absurdities.

"Mob mentality" plays a significant role in modern society. It is easy to look back on the actions of dead puritans and see how blatantly wrong and baseless their actions were. From a modern perspective, these puritans lacked basic critical thinking skills and failed to demand evidence for accusations. However, the motivations of these people are similar to modern ones. Most people, on a fundamental level, are concerned with their well-being and preserving the status quo when it benefits them. These motivations are precisely what these puritans were acting on; they knew they could either accuse or be accused, kill or be killed, and from that perspective, their actions make more sense. The effect of "mob mentality" also plays directly into this idea. It is much easier to succumb to these motivations when everyone else in the community is as well. It is easier to believe things like witchcraft when everyone else thinks it is accurate. Modern society has plenty of "mob mentality." From political groups, online communities, and social groups, people often find themselves accusing and harassing others over minor differences. It is essential always to be aware of "mob mentalities"; although they are difficult to avoid, knowing they exist and their effect can help prevent their potentially dangerous consequences.