

What does an individual's response to adversity reveal about their character?

Hysteria took over the town of Salem, Massachusetts in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Fear, religious devotion, and greed overtook reasoning and factual evidence. Nobody was safe from the possibility of being accused and killed due to false accusations. In a time like the Salem Witch trials, when faced with adversity, it may be easy for an individual's response to be to focus on protecting themselves, and act only in their own benefit. It takes an individual with strong moral values, and the ability to act and fight for those values, to put others and the greater good above themselves. While this may be difficult in times of adversity, selflessness and sacrifice reveal the personal integrity an individual may need to overcome their own personal, internal problems. Through the actions of John Proctor in *The Crucible*, by Arthur Miller, the author suggests that when an individual is willing to make sacrifices when faced with adversity, they reveal their personal integrity, which can enable them to overcome their internal struggles.

In *The Crucible*, John Proctor, a proud man, is able sacrifice his honor and good name when faced with the adversity of his wife, Elizabeth Proctor, being falsely accused of witchcraft due to the hysteria in his town. It is evident throughout the play that John Proctor is a proud man. Like most people in the town of Salem, he values his reputation of being an honorable person. He refuses to be judged and doubted, as his pride will not allow it. This is shown by his response to when his wife brings up his affair. In Act I of the play, when discussing Abigail, he yells at his wife "in anger" (54): "Spare me! You forgive and forget nothing... I am doubted every moment, judged for lies," (54). This anger, refusal to be judged, and defensive stance when it comes to attacks on his honor changes when he is faced with the adversity of his wife's false accusation. He stands to lose his wife, the woman he loves, to the hysteria brought by the witch trials, which were indirectly caused by his affair with Abigail. In Act II, after his wife is taken, John tells Mary Warren that she must testify that Abigail and the rest of the girls are lying. Mary cries that he shouldn't do that, as Abigail will "put lechery" (80) on him. In response, John says "Good... we

will slide together into our pit" (80). This quote provides insight into how John Proctor, despite knowing that there is a possibility of his good name being tarnished by the revelation of his affair with Abigail, is willing to sacrifice his pride for the wellbeing of his wife. Additionally, he is willing to sacrifice his respect by challenging the court, and the town's Reverend, to bring Abigail William's lies to light and save the town from the mass hysteria that plagues them. Perhaps the clearest evidence of John Proctor's willingness to sacrifice in response to adversity is when he tells the court of his affair with Abigail. After failing to convince the court of Abigail's lies with Mary Warren's testimony, he reveals his adultery. By doing so, he tarnishes his reputation. He says that he "made a bell of [his honor]!" and "rung the doom of [his] good name." (111). He tells the court that a "man will not cast away his good name..." (110) if he wasn't telling the truth, confirming that he ruined his good name and honor. John Proctor is willing and able to sacrifice his pride, reputation, and honor in a response to the adversity he faces when his wife is falsely accused witchcraft, and is able to put his wife and the town's wellbeing, over himself when he reveals his affair to the court in order to bring Abigail's lies to light.

John Proctor's ability to make sacrifices for his wife and the town of Salem reveal his personal integrity, not only to him, but to other characters. Personal integrity, the trait of having strong morals and intentionally acting according to them, is shown when John Proctor stands up for what he believes, and is willing to tarnish his good name to save his wife and his town. His actions show that he does not believe it is right to accuse based on fear and personal gain, and then use religion to justify it. Instead, he believes in the truth. By telling Mary Warren that "God damns all liars," in court, in an effort to convince her to remain honest in the adversity she is facing, he displays his strong values and morals. He wants the truth to prevail. Another action that illustrates John Proctor's personal integrity is how he reacts to being falsely accused. He is willing to go to prison and have the potential of being hung to stay true to his moral values. A way to see that John Proctor's personal integrity is revealed with sacrifice is by

observing how his personal integrity affects other characters. One character who is changed by John Proctor's display of strong morals is Reverend Hale. At the beginning of the play, Hale believed in the court and church of Salem. He believed that the witch trials were necessary to purge the Devil in Salem. However, after witnessing John's sacrifice, Hale has a change of heart. He says to the court "From the beginning, this man has struck me true... By my oath to heaven, I believe him now..." (114). The revelation of John's personal integrity through his sacrifice, as shown by this quote, cause Hale to defend him, and believe in his words. Elizabeth has always believed in John Proctor's personal integrity. However, this seems to be exemplified after his sacrifice, and after he stays true to his value of honesty and truth, and refuses to confess to a lie of being a witch. Elizabeth says that the fact John is able to stand up for his values, and make sacrifices to do so, "speaks goodness in [him]." (136). John Proctor's sacrifice reveals his personal integrity. He stays true to his morals even after things do not go the way he intended. He continuously fights for the truth even after sacrificing his honor, and continues to make sacrifices in the name of his moral values. By being willing to make sacrifices when responding to adversity, John Proctor displays his personal integrity through his actions, and the way his morals affect the people around him.

John Proctor's personal integrity, revealed in response to adversity, allows him to overcome his own personal conflicts. John, while being presented as a morally righteous individual, who is respected, makes a crucial mistake before the beginning of the play: he has an affair with Abigail Williams. This antecedent action causes Abigail to accuse Elizabeth in an effort to get her out of the picture. Even before the witch trials, John is shown to harbor an immense amount of guilt because of his actions. In a line description, Proctor is said to have "a deep hatred of himself," (80), which provides insight into the guilt and hatred John harbors towards himself because of his mistake. He tells Elizabeth that he "[is] no good man!" (130), and the he is a "fraud." (136). John is said to be the biggest judge of himself by

Elizabeth. The overwhelming guilt he shows could only be overcome because of his personal integrity, and his ability to stand up for what he believes. At the end of the play, John Proctor makes another sacrifice due to his strong morals. He chooses to hang over confessing to a lie. It is because of this action that John Proctor finally forgives himself. The personal integrity that he revealed to himself in court, and in his refusal to confess, enables him to take the action he needs to prove to himself that he is, indeed, a good man. His ability to stay true to his moral values, and continuously fight for them, allows him to make the right decision for himself, and realize that "Now, [he does] see some goodness in John Proctor." (144). By proving to himself that he is a good person because of the actions he takes due to his personal integrity, John Proctor is able to forgive himself, and overcome the overwhelming guilt he harbored.

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* suggests that an individual can only reveal the personal integrity they need to overcome their internal struggles when they are able to respond to adversity with sacrifice. In the case of John Proctor, the personal integrity he needed to forgive himself for his mistake is displayed only after he chooses to make sacrifices. He is willing and able to sacrifice his honour to save his wife, and later, he is willing to sacrifice his life to stay true to his moral values. When an individual is faced with an adversity, not unlike John Proctor and the hysteria that plagued his town, and the false accusation of his wife, it is important not to be set on personal gain. An individual who is able to make sacrifices in response to adversity, and display a sense of selflessness, may be able to reveal their personal integrity, a quality that can be used to help that individual with their own struggles, and positively affect those around him. John Proctor's response to adversity with sacrifice revealed his strong morals, and his ability to fight for what he believes. It was only after this that he was able to forgive himself for the guilt that plagued him. The case of John Proctor in *The Crucible* shows that with sacrifice, comes success.