

## TEACHERS' NOTES

This study guide is aimed at students of English and Drama at GCSE and A' level. It will also be useful for Media students at these levels. This guide looks at character, setting and themes of the text and includes sections on language work (script to screenplay) and on the specifics of film language. Teachers may find it helpful to look at the first section of this guide before seeing the film. It is intended that this guide be used to complement and extend the close textual analysis which forms the basis of examination work.

## SYNOPSIS

Perched on the edge of a continent is a community dedicated to the service of God. Several teenage girls, stilled by the crushing piety of their elders, dance naked in the woods. One girl, Abigail Williams, her innocence lost in the bed of John Proctor, a married farmer, drinks a charm to kill his wife. And, suddenly, the Devil is loose in Salem. The girls are discovered and, spurred on by their terrified accusations, the entire village is consumed by cries of witchcraft. One by one, the blameless victims of mass hysteria are torn from their homes until, inexorably, Abigail's vengeance is turned on Proctor's wife.

Based on one of the greatest plays of the twentieth century, Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible' is a relentlessly suspenseful drama of collective evil and personal conscience, and at its centre is a vastly moving story of guilt, love and redemption.

Director: Nicholas Hytner

Starring: Daniel Day-Lewis, Winona Ryder

Running time: 118 mins

Certificate: 12

## BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

- What societies can you think of where there is political or religious oppression that we know of? Collect press cuttings illustrating this. Think of historical examples where this has been the case.
- When Mary Warren is faced with being outcast from the other teenage girls if she continues to tell the truth, she bows under their pressure and condemns John Proctor to death. Can you think of a situation in which you have felt similar pressure from your peers to think or act in a particular fashion? Use this as the basis for a piece of writing or drama.
- If the ending had been altered to comply with Hollywood tradition, what effect would this have had on the text?
- Part of the popularity of The Crucible has to be its exploration of witchcraft. Why do you think people are so fascinated with this subject matter? What other texts can you think of that have this as a basis? (They can be films, books, plays, poetry.)
- Arthur Miller comments on the popularity of the story with young people. Why do you think this might be so?
- Miller says the film is 'full of human relations.' The Crucible is a very passionate story. Who in it is passionate, and what about?

“it’s a real page-turner, this story...you don’t have to know a whit about politics or history to really get sucked into the story..!” (Robert A. Miller, Producer of the film). What are the page-turning elements in this story, and how far do you agree with this statement?

## THE OPENING SCENE

The opening scene in any film is particularly important. It establishes the genre, sets the tone, introduces the narrative and major characters, and most importantly, catches the audience’s attention and engages their interest so that they want to see more. In this way it functions exactly like the opening scene of a play or paragraph of a book. If *The Crucible* has proved that it already has an engaging opening sequence in play form, what was the need to change it for the film?

It may help to think of the differences between theatre and film. In film the dominant imagery is visual, whereas in the theatre, much of the dominant imagery is verbal.

- Think about the title graphics for the film. What clues do they give us?
- The first shot we see is of Abigail sitting bolt upright in bed. There is no establishing long shot of place, as is usually the case. How does this catch our attention?
- How are we drawn into the narrative by the movement of the girls from their houses?
- Why include the ‘dancing’ scene in the film? How does it affect our view of the events which follow?
- How is our attention focused on Abigail throughout the opening sequence?
- How do the colours and lighting set the mood of the scene?
- How does the soundtrack (music, silence, dialogue and sound effects) help set the mood of the film and engage our curiosity?
- Explain how the play text starts *in media res* i.e. in the middle of the story. How does this engage our interest?
- What in the opening conversation between Parris and Tituba draws our attention?
- What does Abigail say about the events in the forest? How does it compare with what we see in the film?
- How quickly are we introduced to the idea of witchcraft in the play text? By whom?
- What lines intrigue us in the first scenes? How is the mystery maintained?
- If you were staging a theatrical production of *The Crucible*, how would you ensure visually that Abigail emerges as one of the major characters?

- In your production, what sound effects would you include in the opening scene(s)? (These may be on or off stage.)

## THE SETTING

*“More than anything, I wanted to give the feeling that here was a world that was so incredibly perfect and so tragic to lose.”*

These were the words of Lily Kilvert, the production designer for *The Crucible*. The location that was eventually chosen for the film was Hog Island, an uninhabited wildlife refuge 45 minutes from Boston. A great deal of trouble was taken to re-create the village of Salem ‘circa 1692’, using local carpenters with their understanding of first period architecture, greensmen with knowledge of foliage indigenous to the area and animal handlers who knew where to find the correct period animals. Even the flowers grown in the gardens of the villagers had to be historically correct. All the costumes were made from materials that would have been true to the period and dyed with the type of vegetable dyes that would have been used at the time. All this contributes to the stunning visual ‘look’ of the film.

As students of the text, the move to film is one of great importance, because almost all productions of the text are in theatre, with the attending problems of space for scenery, props and cast, not to mention the money available to pay for these. In the early 1950s, theatre sets were often fussy and over intricate. When the initial run of ‘*The Crucible*’ began to wane slightly, Arthur Miller himself re-directed and re-cast the production, re-designing the set so that it consisted of simple black drapes and strong white static lighting. General opinion seemed to be that the production was stronger for the changes.

Visual features of the production can affect the way we perceive the text tremendously.

Much has been said about how the dark, claustrophobic settings of the New England buildings of the time contribute to the rising feeling of hysteria as events progress. In most productions of the play the action takes place totally indoors. However, in Hytner’s version we are taken beyond the wooden confines to the world outdoors. How does this move to outside settings affect us?

- We are able to have a wider picture of the environment in which these people live and in particular of the land which is so precious to them. How does this help your understanding of motives and actions in the text?
- We are able to see a larger section of the community than is usual in a stage production of *The Crucible*; you will already have noted that the number of girls affected has risen in accordance with original events in Salem. What effect does this larger perspective have?
- The larger settings allow for much more physical movement from place to place than would be practicable on stage. Think about instances of these, such as, when Elizabeth Proctor is taken from her home chained to the cart or when Mary Warren flees to the river pursued by Abigail and the others, and say how actually seeing the movement adds to the drama.
- What scenes take place at night? How does this add to the drama?
- Where are we first introduced to each of the major characters, and at what time of day or night? How does this add to our

understanding of each of them?

- The visual imagery of this New England world is used by the director on occasion to comment on the action that is taking place. Think about scenes from the film of John Proctor in the water and in a wooden cart on his way to his death. Comment on the symbolism of each. Think back also to the scene where a knife is thrown at the door of the Parris' house (Abigail is looking from an upstairs window at the time).

In what way does it bring a visual reminder of one of Abigail's earlier comments? Can you think of any other examples of language being visually realised on the screen?

- Why is theatre more effective in small spaces than film is?
- How does the alternation between indoor and outdoor scenes add to the pace of the film?
- In the play, the action moves from private houses to public settings. Is this the pattern of the film? Does this affect the structure of the narrative?

## PLAYSCRIPT TO SCREENPLAY

There are still many changes between the original playscript and the screenplay for the film, even though Arthur Miller wrote both of these. The opportunity to study the two versions side by side provides an excellent illustration of the adaptations that must be made for different media.

First read through the section of script in Act One where the Reverend Hale first appears in Salem (Penguin ed. pp. 40-43 "Pray you, someone take these - I could pray again") then the corresponding section of screenplay, printed at the end of this study guide (Scenes 33 -36 inc.).

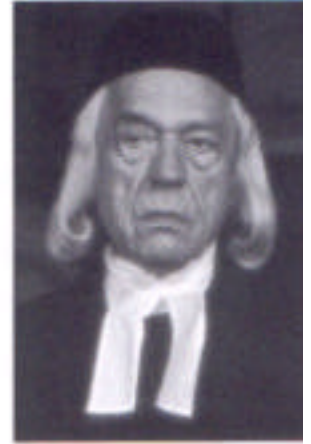
- What difference in the length of the two do you notice? Can you account for this initially by the number of characters?
- Look at the last speech of Rev. Hale in the screenplay, and then find the corresponding piece in the playscript. How has it altered? What does this tell us about the importance and nature of language in film and theatre? Does this apply anywhere else in the two versions?
- In the screenplay, John Proctor offers to take Hale's books as he arrives. What happens in the playscript? Why has this change been made?
- Find examples of lines given to Proctor in the screenplay which were said by someone else in the playscript. (You may have to look a little further backwards and forwards in the play for some of these.) Can you say why they have been changed?
- What is the effect of having the argument between Parris and Corey over firewood taking place as Hale arrives? On screen we see them through an open window as this takes place. How does this further emphasise what is happening in Salem?
- How many different settings do we experience in the course of this section of screenplay? (Look at the set directions next to the scene number.) How does this compare with the play? What would be the effect of changing scenes four times in the theatre? Why does it work on film?

- Arthur Miller says of his work on *The Crucible* that it gave him the chance to “*use a new language .that of seventeenth century New England*” and that “*that plain, craggy English was liberating in a strangely sensuous way, with its swings from an almost legalistic precision to a wonderful metaphoric richness.*” Can you find examples of this in the screenplay extract and throughout the play?

He goes on to say “*The problem was not to imitate the archaic speech but to try to create a new echo of it which would flow freely off American actors’ tongues.*” Are you aware when you are watching the film that this was set in a time 400 years ago? Does the language sound natural? Try to read a text that was written in the language patterns of the late 1700’s and compare it with the language of both the play and the film.

## CHARACTER WORK

- Look at the stills from the film of John Proctor, Abigail and Danforth. Consider how the visual image of each one we are given here contributes to our understanding of character. You should take into account: clothing, hairstyles, make-up (yes, they will be wearing it), facial expression and body language. You may like to then compare your comments on John Proctor with the description of him in the play text. (p. 27)



- Think back to the film and what we learn of the character of John Proctor. Look at the list of words below in turn and say which of these could be used to describe him. Consider each word carefully. For each one, think in terms of
  - a) his own inner picture of himself
  - b) how he is perceived by his family and society
  - c) how we as an audience see him.

You must back up your opinions by using references from the film for each word.

POWERFUL    HYPOCRITICAL    CALM    FRIGHTENED    AUTHORITY    CHRISTIAN  
 FORTHRIGHT    REPRESSED    UNFAIR    HEADSTRONG    PASSIONATE    VIOLENT  
 A RISK-TAKER    RELAXED    OPINIONATED    HUMAN    DIFFERENT    STUPID    CARING  
 CONTROLLING    GOOD    CONFIDENT    JUST    EVIL    IMAGINATIVE    CARING

- Now take this one step further and consider your impression of him from the play. Again, you must use references from the text to justify your opinions. Is your perception of John Proctor the same from both texts? If there are differences, what are they and do they affect our sympathies for him?
- Repeat this exercise with the characters of Abigail and Danforth, using the same list of words.

## ABIGAIL

In adapting *The Crucible* for film, Arthur Miller re-instituted the scene in the forest where John Proctor meets Abigail and once more rejects her advances. This scene had been added in some early versions of the play (although not in the original version) but then discarded by Miller and consequently it does not appear as part of the printed play text. He also added two extra scenes; those of Abigail going to Danforth to complain that she has been tormented by the spirit of Reverend Hale's wife, and of Abigail visiting John Proctor in jail to try to persuade him to run away with her as she leaves to board ship.

- The scene in the forest precedes the scene where Abigail is found to have a two-inch needle in her stomach, which she attributes to Elizabeth's spirit.
- The scene between Abigail and Danforth takes place after Hale has observed Abigail at the empty Proctor house (following the scene in the courtroom/river where John Proctor is denounced by Mary Warren and Hale cries out in support of him).
- The scene in the jail takes place after the villagers have turned away from Abigail in the street and someone has left a knife in the Parris household's door.

How does the inclusion of these three scenes affect our perception of Abigail and her motives? How does this compare with the Abigail of the play?

- Improvise a conversation between Abigail and Mary Warren following the scene mentioned above in which Mary denounces John Proctor. What might both girls be feeling and saying at this time? They may or may not be truthful with each other.
- Look at this image from the film (again it follows the traumatic exit from the courtroom). Create the tableau in a group. Take it in turns to 'hot seat' several of the characters; ask them to come to life, step outside the scene and tell you their thoughts at this time, explaining their actions. Include one of the onlookers at the back, asking for their thoughts and opinions on the proceedings.



## ELIZABETH PROCTOR

- Imagine you are Elizabeth Proctor. Picture yourself in the scene where you stand in front of Danforth in the courtroom to answer his questions about the relationship between your husband and Abigail. What might you be thinking at this point? It is likely that you will be thinking back over your relationship with your husband and ahead to what may happen in the future, dependent on your answer. You may be calm inside, or feeling panicky. Present your thoughts to the rest of the group in the form of a monologue.
- You are directing a production of 'The Crucible' in which you wish to convey Elizabeth's thoughts at this time to the audience. Explain how you would do this a) in a film and b) in the theatre.

You may wish to extend this exercise to consider Elizabeth's thoughts as she sits with John over their supper persuading him to go to Salem, and perhaps at the end of the narrative as she sees him refuse to co-operate with the authorities, thus condemning himself to death. In this way you can explore how Elizabeth's feelings about herself and towards her husband may change in the course of events.

## REVEREND HALE

Hale is a man who arrives in Salem ready to do combat with the forces of evil but whose attitude and opinions change during the course of events. What impression of him do we gain from the film? How does this compare with your impression of him in the play script?

- Imagine that you are Reverend Hale and have just returned to your lodgings on the night that you have visited the Proctors in their house and witnessed Elizabeth being taken off in chains. Write a report to your superiors in Boston, detailing what you have seen and heard in Salem since your arrival, what your actions have been and what your opinions are on the people and events that have happened. You can either write this in modern English or in the language of 17th century Salem.
- "There are no out and out villains in The Crucible - everyone has their own reasons for behaving as they do."  
"Characters in The Crucible are all black or white - in this respect it is reminiscent of a medieval morality play."  
Which of these two statements do you agree with? Why?

## FILM LANGUAGE

### LOOK AT STUDY CLIP 1

(Abigail threatens the girls in Betty's bedroom.)

- Where is the camera placed when Abigail is initially talking to Betty and the girls? What effect does this have?
- What is the lighting like in these early frames? How does this style of lighting add to the mood of the scene?

- How is Betty's clothing different to the other girls'? What is the effect of this?
- When Abigail is delivering her speech about "a pointy reckoning", whose point of view do we see this from? How does the movement of the camera during this speech enhance the threatening nature of it?
- What other point-of-view shots do we see in this clip?
- How does the editing reflect the mood of the action?

#### NOW LOOK AT STUDY CLIP 2

(John and his wife talk about him going to Salem over their meal.)

- Where are John and his wife placed in the frame at the beginning of the scene? How does this reflect what is happening in the story?
- What effect does the slow, steady movement of the camera towards the mid-shot of John and Elizabeth have?
- Elizabeth walks out of the frame during the early stages of their conversation. Comment on the effect of this.
- After this point we do not see the two of them in the same frame. Where are they looking, where is the space in each frame and what is the overall effect?
- Look at this still image from the film. The camera was placed at a low angle, looking upwards into the shot. What effect does this give of the three judges? How does the positioning of the three men within the shot and the clothes they are wearing contribute to this impression?





THE CRUCIBLE SCREEN PLAY BY ARTHUR MILLER, SCENES 33-36.

33 EXT. DAY. PARRIS HOUSE.

HALE's horse and gig coming to a halt before the PARRIS HOUSE; the CROWD is hushed, agog. PROCTOR goes to HALE, who is unloading four enormous tomes.

PROCTOR        *Can / help you?*

HALE            *Why thank you.*  
(Hands him two books)

PROCTOR        *Heavy books!*

HALE            *They must be, they are weighted with authority.*

PROCTOR        *I am John Proctor, Mr Hale.*

HALE            *You have afflicted children?*

PROCTOR        *My children are healthy as bull calves, sir - like all the other children in this village. There are wheels, within wheels here, Mr. Hale, I hope you'll not forget that...*

As they approach the house, they see the following enormous argument through the windows (which overlaps their dialogue).

34 INT./EXT DAY. PARRIS PARLOUR.

PARRIS                    *Where is my wood! My contract provides I be supplied with all my firewood...*

CO REY                    *You are allowed six pounds a year to buy your wood...*

PARRIS                    *That six pound is part of my salary, Mr. Corey.*

COREY                    *Salary sixty pounds, plus six for firewood!*

PARRIS                    *I am not some preaching farmer with a book under my arm, I am a graduate of Harvard College!*

COREY                    *Aye, and well-instructed in arithmetic!*

PROCTOR and HALE move inside.

35 INT. DAY PARRIS PARLOLR.

PARRIS                    *I cannot fathom you people - I can never offer one proposition but I face a howling riot of argument! - I tell you I have often wondered if the Devil might be in it somewhere!*

PROCTOR                (To HALE, aside)  
*We/come to Salem.*

PARRIS suddenly sees HALE.

PARRIS                    *Mr. Hale! How good to see you again!*

PUTNAM                    (Rushing to take books from Hale; PROCTOR sets his two down)

*Oh, allow, me, sir! -- I am Thomas Putnam, and here is my wife, Goody Ann.*

ANN PUTNAM            *Will you come to our Ruth?*

HALE                    *Aye, directly.*

(turns to REBECCA and FRANCIS)

*You must be Rebecca Nurse. And Mr. Nurse.*

REBECCA                *Do you know me?*

HALE                    *No, but you look as such a good soul should -- we have all heard of your great charities in Beverly.*

REBECCA *There is prodigious danger in seeking loose spirits; I fear it. I go to God for you, sir.*

PARRIS *I hope you do not mean we go to Satan here!*

REBECCA *I wish I knew.*

The NURSES leave.

PROCTOR *I've heard you be a sensible man, Mr. Hale -- I hope you'll leave some of it in Salem.*

PARRIS and the PUTNAMs register this rebuke, as PROCTOR leaves.

HALE *Where is your daughter, Mr. Parris?*

36. INT. DAY. BETTY'S BEDROOM.

They are gathered around the bed.

ANN PUTNAM *Our child cannot wake, sir; she lies as though dead.*

PUTNAM *And this one cannot bear the Lord's name - that's a sure sign of witchcraft afloat.*

HALE *No, Mr. Putnam, we cannot look to superstition in this. The marks of the Devil are definite as stone.*