

# INTRO TO THE CRUCIBLE

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## Standards Focus: Author Biography – Arthur Miller (1915-2005)

Known and respected for his intimate and realistic portrayal of the working class, Arthur Miller remains one of the most prolific playwrights of his time. At the peak of his career immediately following World War II, American theater was transformed by his profound ability to capture the heart of the common man and make his audiences empathize with his plight as he attempts to find his way in an often harsh and unsympathetic world.

Arthur Miller was born in 1915 in New York, into a middle-class Jewish immigrant family. His father was a clothing manufacturer and store owner who experienced significant loss after the Stock Market Crash of 1929. Miller attended Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, and was a gifted athlete and an average student. After being rejected the first time, Miller was finally accepted into the University of Michigan in 1934, where his studies focused on drama and journalism. He graduated in 1938 with a Bachelor's degree in English. Two years later, he published his first play, the relatively unsuccessful *The Man Who Had All the Luck* and married his college girlfriend Mary Slattery, with whom he later had two children, Robert and Jane.

Miller's first prominent play was *All My Sons* (1947), a tragedy about a factory owner who knowingly sold faulty aircraft parts during World War II. *All My Sons* won the Drama Critics Circle award and two Tony Awards. His 1949 play *Death of a Salesman* was also an enormous critical success, winning the Drama Critics Circle Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and several Tony Awards, including Best Play, Best Author, and Best director. To this day, *Death of a Salesman* remains his most famous and respected work.

In 1950, Miller's troubles began. After directing a production of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Miller began getting negative attention for his very public political and social commentary. In 1953 *The Crucible* opened on Broadway, depicting a deliberate parallel between the Salem Witch Trials and the Communist Red Scare that America was experiencing at the time. This production brought more suspicion onto Miller at a very unstable time in American history, and in June of 1956, he was called to testify in front of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), for which he was found in contempt of court for his refusal to cooperate and identify names of Communist sympathizers. This ruling was later overturned by the United States Court of Appeals, but damage to his reputation had taken place nonetheless.

That same year, he divorced his wife and married actress and American icon Marilyn Monroe; however, his marriage to Monroe did not last long—they divorced in 1961. His plays *After the Fall* (1964) and *Finishing the Picture* (2004) are said to loosely depict their turbulent and unhappy marriage. After divorcing Monroe, Miller married Inge Morath, with whom he had a son, Daniel, in 1962 and a daughter, Rebecca, in 1963. There have been unconfirmed reports that Miller's son Daniel was diagnosed with Down syndrome shortly after he was born and that Miller institutionalized Daniel and never saw or spoke of him again, even in his poignant autobiography *Timebends: A Life* (1987).

Miller's other plays include *Incident at Vichy* (1965), *The Price* (1968), *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972), *The American Clock* (1980), *The Ride down Mount Morgan* (1991), *Broken Glass* (1994), and *Resurrection Blues* (2002). He also wrote a novel, *Focus* (1945), a book of short stories in 1967, several screenplays and television movies, and *Echoes down the Corridor* (2000), a collection of essays. In addition, he collaborated with Inge (who was a photographer) on several books. He received the Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1999 and the National Book Foundation's medal for his contribution to American literature in 2001.

Arthur Miller died of heart failure in February of 2005 at his Connecticut home. He was 89 years old.

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### Exploring Expository Writing: Notes on *The New England Primer*

In the early settlements of New England, religion was clearly a powerful influence on all aspects of life. In 1642, a law was passed stating that all children should learn to read. It was believed that as students became literate and were able to read the Bible, they became stronger against Satan and his influence.

*The New England Primer* was the first textbook ever used by students throughout New England, including Boston, Massachusetts. It was first printed in Boston in 1690, and was a revision of an earlier version used throughout England. Used by schools into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was a required text from which every child learned the alphabet, spelling, grammar, and reading. However, since religion and morality were so important, the children of New England didn't just learn the alphabet; they learned morality, ethics, and Bible teachings at the same time. Emphasis was placed on God's salvation, and included sayings that helped children learn to fear God, live a morally responsible life, and fear death without salvation.

Here are some examples from the text:

A	In Adam's fall Time cuts down all.	T	Time cuts down all, Both great and small.
B	Thy life to mend This book attend.	W	Whales in the sea, God's voice obey.
D	A dog will bite A thief at night.	X	Xerxes the great did die, And so must you & I.
F	The idle fool Is whipt at school.	Y	Youth forward slips, Death soonest nips.
G	As runs the glass, Man's life doth pass.		

#### A Lesson for Children

Pray to God.	Call no ill names.
Love God.	Use no ill words.
Fear God.	Tell no lies.
Serve God.	Hate lies.
Take not God's name in vain.	Speak the truth.
Spend your time well.	Love your school.
Do not swear.	Mind your Book.
Do not steal.	Strive to learn.
Cheat not in your play.	Be not a dunce.
Play not with bad boys.	

#### Duty of Children Toward Their Parents

*The Eye that mocketh his Father, and despiseth the Instruction of his Mother, let the Ravens of the Valley pluck it out, and the young Eagles eat it. Whoso curseth his Father or his Mother, his Lamp shall be put out in obscure Darkness.*  
Proverbs, 20:20

Directions: Answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper.

1. What is your reaction to the excerpts from the Primer? Explain both your positive and negative reactions.
2. Why do you think the Primer was so popular for so many years?
3. How do you think children generally behaved, judging from these teachings?
4. Do you think children today should be taught from a Primer like this? Why or why not? What changes would you make to it so that it would be more appropriate to today's world?
5. Do you think society would be better if children were taught religious morals and ethics in school? Why or why not?

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## Standards Focus: Elements of Drama

### Literary Terms to Know

*Drama* is a form of literature designed to be performed in front of an audience. There are two main types of drama: *comedy* and *tragedy*. Like fiction, dramatic works have a *plot* (action of the story), *characters* (those who take part in the action of the story), *setting* (the time and location of the story), *conflict* (the struggle[s] within a story), and a *theme* (the lesson or moral of the story). It is essential to know the elements of drama when reading a dramatic work.

1. act: a division within a play, much like the chapters of a novel
2. aside: lines that are spoken by a character directly to the audience
3. cast of characters: a listing of the characters who appear on the stage
4. comedy: a humorous work of drama
5. dialogue: conversation between two or more characters
6. drama: a work of literature designed to be performed in front of an audience
7. dramatic irony: when the audience or reader knows something that the characters in the story do not know
8. foil: a character who is much like another character in class, rank, and background, but has opposite traits which provide a contrast and conflict between the two characters
9. monologue: a long speech spoken by a character to himself, another character, or to the audience
10. scene: a division of an act into smaller parts
11. stage directions: italicized comments that identify parts of the setting or the use of props or costumes, give further information about a character, or provide background information
12. tragedy: a serious work of drama in which the hero suffers catastrophe or serious misfortune, usually because of his own actions
13. tragic hero: a protagonist with a fatal flaw which eventually leads to his demise

*Activity: Using the words from the list above, create a 10-question Multiple-Choice quiz. You must use the information/definitions from this page, but you may also add your own knowledge to create your questions. Be sure to create an answer key and keep it on a separate piece of paper. For example:*

1. The two main types of drama are:
  - a. plays and monologues
  - b. comedies and tragedies
  - c. histories and biographies
  - d. monologues and soliloquies

*When you have finished, give the "quiz" to a partner and take his or her quiz. Then, check each other's answers, and turn in your quizzes, your answer key, and your scores to your teacher. Your teacher can even find the best questions and use them on a real quiz.*

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## The Crucible

### Terminology to Know

Although Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* in the 1950s, he wrote in the archaic language of the 1600s, giving a more authentic feel to the play. Some vocabulary may be unfamiliar to you or may be used in a way in which you do not normally see it used, but were commonly understood words of the English language in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. As you come across these words, use the list below to aid your comprehension of the play.

#### Act One

1. hearty – well
2. bid – told
3. aye – yes
4. opened – been honest
5. nay – no
6. sport – a game
7. Goody – Mrs.
8. blink – pay no attention to
9. naught – nothing
10. mark – listen to; remember
11. clapped in the stocks – placed in the stocks (a punishment device in which the offender was secured by the hands and feet or head and hands and was left outside to be publicly humiliated or abused)
12. wintry – unfriendly
13. charge – accusation or reason
14. writ – a court order
15. pray – please
16. incubi and succubi – (plural form for incubus and succubus) male and female demons, respectively, who were believed to have intercourse with people while they were asleep
17. irons – iron restraints

#### Act Two

1. strip – cut into smaller pieces; disassemble
2. would – wish; wish to
3. bewitchin' – putting a curse on; using magic or other supernatural force against
4. fraud – lie or person who lies
5. let you – you should
6. be – were; are
7. weighty – important
8. base – immoral
9. how comes it – why is it
10. quail – show fear or apprehension
11. text – pretext; a made-up reason or excuse

#### Act Three

1. broke charity – broke trust; turned against
2. put-upon – treated badly
3. *ipso facto* – because of that very fact
4. suck a scream – accuse
5. what say you? – what do you have to say?

#### Act Four

1. with child – pregnant
2. marked – scheduled
3. bridegroom – groom or male suitor

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## Historical Context: The Salem Witch-Hunt – Chronology of Events

The following timeline is a chronology of the actual events in Salem during and after the Salem witch trials. Use this timeline to compare and contrast the events in Miller's adaptation of the Salem witch-hunt and trials.

### 1688

Thirteen year-old Martha Goodwin begins to exhibit strange behavior after an alleged argument between her and her Irish housekeeper, Ann Glover. After her younger siblings begin to exhibit the same "symptoms," the children together accuse Glover of bewitching them. Glover is put on trial and after refusing to speak anything other than her native Irish in the courtroom, Glover is found guilty and hanged for practicing witchcraft against the Goodwin children. Cotton Mather publishes *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*. Mather is a great influence upon the concept and acceptance of spectral evidence (evidence of dreams and visions) in trial.

### 1692

#### January

Elizabeth Parris (9) and Abigail Williams (11) exhibit unusual behavior, including screaming, convulsing, cursing, and falling into trances. Since there is no medical explanation for their behavior, it is concluded that the girls are under the Devil's spell.

#### February

The girls are forced to place blame for their strange behavior: they accuse Sarah Good, Sarah Osburn, and Tituba, the Reverend Parris's slave from Barbados. On February 29, arrest warrants are issued for the three women.

#### March

On March 1, the first three accused are put in jail. The women are later examined for the Devil's marks. Under extreme threats and pressure, Tituba confesses to practicing witchcraft and of seeing the devil, which she claims appeared to her in various forms. She confirms Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn are practicing witchcraft. More accusations are made, and the witch-hunt escalates. Martha Corey, Rebecca Nurse, and Elizabeth Proctor are also accused.

#### April

Attempting to defend her sister Rebecca Nurse, Sarah Cloyce is also accused. Similarly, defending his wife's name, John Proctor becomes the first man accused of witchcraft. In early April, Mary Warren, the Proctors' accuser, retracts her accusation; later, under pressure, she overturns her retraction. By the end of April, between twenty-two and twenty-five people are accused of practicing witchcraft, including former Salem minister George Burroughs.

#### May

Due to a lack of official governance, the accused are imprisoned until May, when newly appointed Governor Sir William Phips arrives and institutes a trial system; the trials begin. George Burroughs is arrested in Maine and returned to a Salem jail. Sarah Good's newborn and Sarah Osburn die in jail while Osburn and Good are awaiting trial. Mary Easty is released, but re-arrested after the public protests.

#### June

Bridget Bishop is convicted and sentenced to die by hanging. Cotton Mather writes a letter urging a speedy trial for the accused.

#### July-September

Rebecca Nurse, George Burroughs, Sarah Good, John Proctor, and others are found guilty, sentenced, and hung. Only those who plead guilty to witchcraft and supply the names of others to the court are spared execution. Elizabeth Proctor and at least one other woman are spared because they are pregnant. Giles Corey is pressed to death after he refuses to enter a plea to the charges against him.

#### October

The Reverend Increase Mather, father of Cotton Mather, declares that spectral evidence (the idea of dreams and visions as evidence) should no longer be allowed in court. Governor Phips orders that spectral evidence is no longer admitted as evidence. Phips also prohibits further arrests and releases many of the accused.

### 1693

#### January

Forty-nine of the 52 people accused based on spectral evidence are released. By this time, 24 people have died; 19 by hanging, 1 by pressing, and others from old age or poor living conditions while in prison.

#### May

Phips pardons those still imprisoned on charges of witchcraft.

### 1702

The General Court declares the 1692 Salem Trials unlawful.

### 1711

The Massachusetts Colony clears the names of the accused and gives monetary retribution to the families of the accused.

### 1957

Massachusetts formally apologizes for the events of 1692.

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## Act One

### Comprehension Check

*As you read *The Crucible*, use the Note-Taking techniques described on page 19. To give you a complete and comprehensive method of reading and understanding all aspects of the play, answer the following questions for Act One. Write your answers in complete sentences.*

1. What is wrong with Betty Parris?
2. How does Tituba react to Betty's condition?
3. What news does Susanna bring from the doctor?
4. What rumor is circulating about Betty?
5. How does Abigail initially defend the girls' behavior in the woods?
6. Why is Reverend Parris so worried about his reputation?
7. What did Parris see in the woods?
8. What does Abigail claim is the reason she was discharged from the Proctor household?
9. In what condition is Ruth Putnam?
10. Briefly describe Thomas Putnam.
11. Why did Mrs. Putnam enlist Tituba's help?
12. Why did Abigail drink blood?
13. How does Abigail threaten the other girls?
14. Briefly describe John Proctor.
15. What happens when John and Abigail are left alone?
16. What does Rebecca Nurse say about Betty and Ruth's sickness?
17. Why is Reverend Parris dissatisfied with his job in Salem?
18. About what are Proctor and Putnam fighting?
19. Describe Reverend Hale. For what reason has he been called to Salem?
20. What is Giles Corey's complaint about his wife?
21. Why does Tituba finally "confess"? What do you think of her actions? What do you think will happen as a result?
22. Why do you think the girls begin their accusations when they could have just let Tituba take the blame for everything?
23. What does the girls' behavior tell you about the youth of Salem?

