

Name _____

Period _____

Act Four

Standards Focus: Tragedy and the Tragic Hero

Over 2,300 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote his definition of a **tragedy**. According to Aristotle: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions." In other words, to be a true tragedy, a play must make the audience pity the characters and make them fear the same consequences the character (usually the protagonist) experiences.

Similarly, Aristotle defined the concept of a tragic hero. A **tragic hero** is a protagonist with a fatal (also called tragic) flaw which eventually leads to his downfall. The Aristotelian tragic hero is introduced as happy, powerful, and privileged, and ends up dying or suffering immensely because of his own actions or mistakes. The tragic hero must have four characteristics: goodness (a moral and ethical person), superiority (such as someone with supreme or noble authority or control), a tragic flaw (will eventually lead to his own demise), and the eventual realization that his decisions or actions have caused his downfall (faces death or suffering with honor). Usually, the realization of tragic flaw results in an **epiphany**, or a sudden realization by the character, audience, or both, and a **catharsis**, or a release of emotions, which makes the audience feel more at peace.

Directions: Many scholars feel that John Proctor is the classic tragic hero. Analyze the character of John Proctor and the play as a whole by answering the questions below.

1. In your opinion, what is John Proctor's tragic (fatal) flaw?
2. When John is first introduced, is he "happy"? Why or why not?
3. How might John be considered a superior or privileged person?
4. In your opinion, is John a moral and/or ethical person? Support your response with textual evidence.
5. At what point does John realize he is facing his own demise? What is his reaction? How is/isn't this consistent with the characteristics of the tragic hero?
6. Do you feel John Proctor is the ideal tragic hero? Why or why not? Explain how he fits or does not fit the definition of a tragic hero.
7. According to the definition, is *The Crucible* a tragedy? Why or why not? Support your response with evidence from the play. Do you feel pity for the characters, especially John Proctor? Did you experience a catharsis because you did not suffer the same fate as John and the others who were accused of practicing witchcraft? Why or why not?