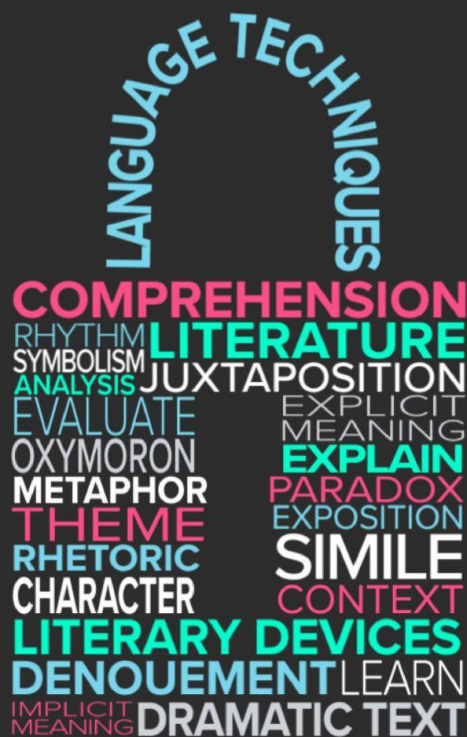


DIGITAL THEATRE+

UNLOCKED STUDY GUIDE:

Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*

Written by Vivienne Sawford



CHARACTERS

There are quite a few characters in *The Crucible*. We're going to look closely at some of the main characters, but we won't spend too long on the minor ones. Feel free to skip ahead to the character you're most interested in (or the one your teacher has told you to look at).

Remember, if you want to build your knowledge, the best place to begin is by watching a production. We've a lot of different versions to spark your interest.

JOHN PROCTOR

The play's protagonist and tragic hero. If you want a great summary, why not watch [Unlocking Character: John Proctor](#).

Key facts:

- ✓ Farmer in his mid-30s
- ✓ Husband to Elizabeth Proctor
- ✓ Has had a secret affair with Abigail Williams
- ✓ Has a good reputation in Salem
- ✓ Admits to his affair to save his wife
- ✓ Hanged because he refuses to sign a public confession admitting witchcraft

Summary:

John Proctor is first introduced to us as a respected member of Salem's community. However, one of his first interactions is with Abigail Williams. We learn that despite his upstanding reputation, he has been unfaithful to his wife Elizabeth Proctor. This affair continues to haunt Proctor and

his relationship with his wife. We know that his marriage has been difficult and that he feels like his wife is still very suspicious of him.

Proctor values his good reputation above everything else. He does not want to go to the court because he knows that he would have to be honest about the affair. However, as the play progresses, Proctor realizes he will have to be honest about his affair with Abigail if he wants to save his wife and bring an end to the witch trials. Unfortunately, his decision to confess comes too late. Elizabeth is charged and Proctor is put in jail.

Look closer:

Proctor is a straightforward and ordinary man who gets caught up in the hysteria of the witch trials. He is calm and rational and seems to represent social decency in the play. However, he still carries his guilt over the affair with Abigail. Proctor is his own worst critic and does not seem to be able to forgive himself for what he has done. As Miller says in the play: “He is a sinner, a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of decent conduct.” In Act 2, Proctor lashes out against his wife, asking if she still doubts him. It’s likely that she does, but it is equally as likely that Proctor feels guilty and so is acting out against his wife.

Proctor’s pride in his reputation can be considered his **hamartia**, the fatal flaw that leads to a tragic hero’s downfall. After all, his decision to keep the affair secret allows Abigail’s accusations to grow out of hand. At the end of the play, Proctor has the opportunity to redeem himself. He tries to protect his wife and finally admits to the affair. However, he is too late and the trials are out of control.

Proctor is a reluctant leader and speaks for those who oppose Parris and the Putnams. At first, he only wants to save his wife. Over time, he realizes how important it is to stand by his moral code and to protect the

other townspeople. He decides to go to the gallows rather than to sign a public confession.

Key lines:

“Abby, I may think of you softly from time to time. But I will cut off my hand before I’ll ever reach for you again. Wipe it out of mind. We never touched, Abby.” (Act 1)

“You are pulling Heaven down and raising up a whore!” (Act 3)

“Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!” (Act 4)

What other characters say about him:

“[...] this man is mischief.”

(Reverend Parris, Act 3)

“From the beginning this man has struck me true.”

(Reverend Hale, Act 3)

“Whatever you will do, it is a good man does it [...] I never knew such goodness in the world.”

(Elizabeth Proctor, Act 4)

ACTIVITY

Write your answers in the following table. Go through the play act by act.

	ACT 1	ACT 2	ACT 3	ACT 4
What does Proctor want most in this act?				
How does this affect the other characters?				
Does Proctor get what he wants at the end of the act?				

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

John Proctor's wife. If you want to develop your learning, why not watch [On Acting: Anna Madeley?](#) Anna performed as Elizabeth Proctor and can provide some helpful insight into the character.

Key facts:

- ✓ Honest and religious
- ✓ Has been distanced from her husband
- ✓ Became very sick after childbirth
- ✓ Loyal to John and lies to protect his reputation in court
- ✓ Struggles to forgive her husband for his adultery

Summary:

Elizabeth Proctor is first introduced to us by Abigail Williams, who says she is a “cold sniveling woman.” However, this is probably motivated by Abigail's jealousy – after all, Abigail wants to be in a relationship with John Proctor. Elizabeth actually seems to have a good reputation in Salem. When her name is first mentioned in court in connection with witchcraft, the accusation is quickly dismissed. Later, Elizabeth is one of the few wives that Giles Corey gathers support for. He reaches out to the people of Salem and collects 91 signatures to confirm her good name.

Elizabeth appears in person in Act 2. The audience can quickly spot that her marriage is struggling. Elizabeth still loves her husband but seems to find it difficult to move on from her husband's affair. We know that she was ill and recovering from childbirth during the affair. We also know that Elizabeth dismissed Abigail from the house once she found out. It's

very likely that Elizabeth feels betrayed by her husband and insecure in her relationship.

Elizabeth is known in the community for her honesty and John openly states that she “cannot lie.” This makes her decision to lie about Proctor’s affair in front of the court even more powerful. Elizabeth loves her husband and wants to protect his reputation, even if it goes against everything she stands for. Sadly, her decision to lie to spare Proctor’s reputation backfires and he is arrested. This is an example of **dramatic irony**, where the audience is aware of information that the characters do not know. The viewer knows that Elizabeth’s lie will condemn her husband. Elizabeth’s attempt to save him in fact achieves the opposite.

Look closer:

Proctor initially talks about his wife as though she is a cold woman whose sense of right and wrong is simply unachievable. However, by the end of the play, after three months of being alone in jail, Elizabeth decides to place some of the blame for the affair on to herself. She forgives Proctor completely and tells him that she can no longer judge him for his affair. She acknowledges that she became distant and that this would have made things difficult for him. Elizabeth encourages Proctor to forgive himself and make his own decision on whether or not he should hang. Ultimately, she stands by her husband’s final decision and rejects Hale’s requests for her to change his mind.

Key lines:

“I am a covenanted Christian woman.”

(Act 2)

“It is her dearest hope, John, I know it. There be a thousand names; why does she call mine? There be a certain danger in calling such a name – I am no Goody Good that sleeps in ditches, nor Osburn, drunk and half-witted. She’d dare not call out such a farmer’s wife but there be monstrous profit in it. She thinks to take my place, John.” (Act 2)

*“He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him.”
(Act 4)*

What other characters say about her:

*“She is a cold snivelling woman.”
(Abigail, Act 1)*

*“Oh, Elizabeth, your justice would freeze beer!”
(Proctor, Act 2)*

*“That woman will never lie, Mr Danforth!”
(Proctor, Act 3)*

ABIGAIL WILLIAMS

Reverend Parris' 17-year-old niece.

Key facts:

- ✓ Orphaned and unmarried
- ✓ Ex-servant of the Proctors
- ✓ Leads the other girls
- ✓ Highly manipulative
- ✓ Had an affair with John Proctor and wants to be his wife

Summary:

Miller introduces Abigail Williams as a “strikingly beautiful girl, an orphan, with an endless capacity for dissembling.” When you dissemble, you hide your true feelings towards something. Abigail has no parents to support her and has been working from a young age. She is a fiercely independent character who relies only upon herself.

Abigail is portrayed as being in love with – or at least obsessed with – John Proctor. She is driven by this obsession and hates that Proctor will not continue with the affair. Abigail is young and powerless following her dismissal from the Proctor household. She relies upon her uncle’s kindness to keep a roof above her head and Elizabeth has insulted her to the other townspeople. As an orphan and an unmarried girl, Abigail has very low social status in Puritan society. She would have little opportunity and could not influence the people around her. This begins to change as the witch trials begin. In the courtroom, Abigail has complete control and influence.

Abigail is very manipulative. She controls the people around her through fear. When the girls panic at the beginning of the play, she threatens to

bring a “pointy reckoning” if they speak out against her. This is a reference to a knife. Abigail will do anything to save herself: for example, when Mary Warren testifies against her, Abigail quickly accuses her of witchcraft. Through fear and manipulation, Abigail is able to get the girls to follow her.

By the play’s conclusion, we learn that Abigail has fled from Parris’ home with her friend, Mercy Lewis. She has stolen 31 pounds from her uncle’s strongbox. This would have been his entire fortune and a huge amount of money at the time. Parris believes she is aboard a ship. By this point, she has wreaked chaos across Salem and many of the townspeople have been accused and hanged for charges of witchcraft.

Look closer:

Abigail is presented across the play in several negative ways: she’s shown as a liar, manipulator, and highly dangerous. However, what if we tried to think about her differently?

We know that Abigail is an orphan and – if we believe her – that she witnessed the death of her parents. In Act 1, she says “I saw Indians smash my dear parents’ heads on the pillow next to mine.” If this is true, it’s a horrific thing for somebody to witness. We can tell that Abigail is damaged from her childhood and this shows in her violent and self-motivated behavior. Abigail will do what it takes to survive because as an orphan, she has had to be fiercely independent for a long time.

We should also remember that Abigail is a young girl. She is only 17 years old. We know that she has had a relationship with Proctor in the past. How old was she when this took place? It’s possible to look at the events a different way: Abigail was taken advantage of by Proctor. She clearly still has strong feelings for him and says that he “put knowledge in my heart.” The first scene between the two is flirtatious and Proctor

admits that he still thinks about Abigail, saying, “Abby, I may think of you softly from time to time.” It’s possible to view Abigail’s anger and violent behavior as a childish response to how badly Proctor treats her.

What other characters say about her:

“She wants me dead, John, you know it!”

(Elizabeth, Act 2)

“She thinks to dance with me on my wife’s grave!”

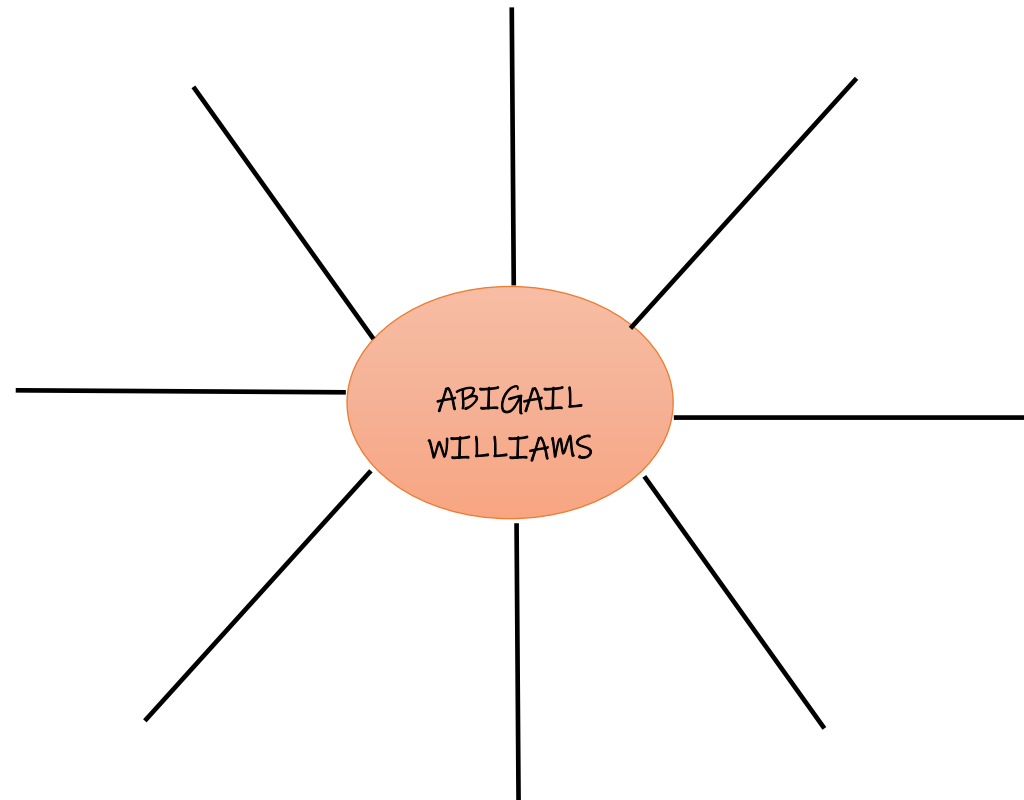
(Proctor, Act 3)

“This girl has always struck me false!”

(Hale, Act 3)

ACTIVITY

Using the spider diagram below, pick eight adjectives that describe Abigail. Explain your reasoning and use direct quotations from the play to justify your choices.



REVEREND PARIS

The Puritan minister of Salem.

Key facts:

- ✓ Betty Parris' father and uncle to Abigail Williams
- ✓ Unpopular in the town
- ✓ Overly concerned about his reputation and position in the community

Summary:

Reverend Parris is very worried about his position in the town. He is portrayed as a greedy, ambitious man who does not want his position to be taken from him. After witnessing his daughter's coma-like state and learning that the girls were dancing and conjuring spirits, Parris contacts Reverend Hale. It is this action which sets the events of the play into motion and begins the witch trials.

Parris is very unpopular across Salem. Many in the town think that he is greedy and that he is not behaving in a religious way. Parris has tried to increase his own salary. He also went against tradition by demanding the deeds for the house he was gifted when he became a reverend. Finally, we learn that he replaced the simple pewter candlesticks in church with golden ones. These little examples provide us with the image of a man who is greedy and ambitious. He wants all of the benefits of being a reverend but does not like the responsibility that comes with the job.

Look closer:

Parris supports the work of the court during the witch trials. However, he is not as powerful as Hale or Danforth. As time progresses, he becomes increasingly worried about where the hysteria might lead. This isn't to say that he's concerned about anybody's wellbeing. In fact, Parris is not bothered about this at all! Instead, he is very worried about his own wealth and power. By the end of the play, he begs Danforth to spare Proctor and Rebecca Nurse. This is because he fears that the death of such well-respected townspeople would lead to rioting and his position, home, and life would be at risk.

By the play's conclusion, Parris admits that Abigail has fled and stolen all of his money. This is the ultimate punishment for a character who is so obsessed with his wealth and power. He is left penniless with the strong possibility of an uprising in the town.

What other characters say about him:

*"I have enough without I come five mile to hear him preach
only hellfire and bloody damnation."*

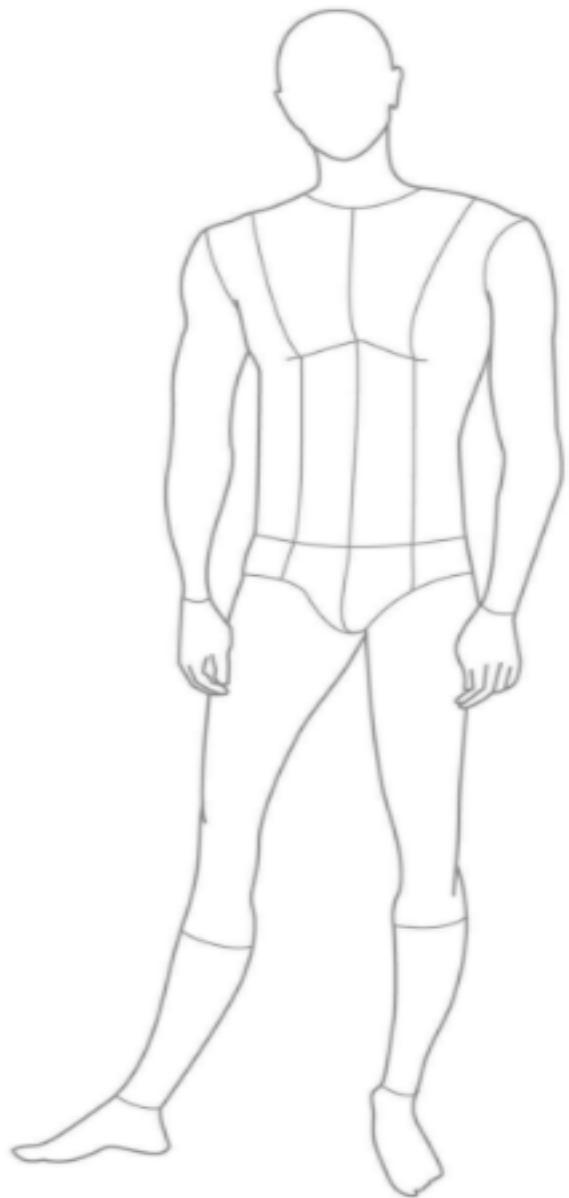
(Proctor, Act 1)

"My Parris, you are a brainless man!"

(Danforth, Act 4)

ACTIVITY

Using the sketch below, design a costume for Reverend Parris. Remember that he is a higher status character and would wear clothing that reflects this – a hat, collars, cuffs, and a coat. Don't forget that he is worried about what people think about him and that he is greedy. These traits would definitely show in what he wears! If you need more ideas, why not watch Act 1 of *The Crucible* for more inspiration?



REVEREND HALE

A young minister from Beverly and a known witch hunter. If you want to develop your learning, why not watch [On Acting: Adrian Schiller](#). Adrian performed as Hale and can provide some helpful insight into the character.

Key facts:

- ✓ Is considered an expert on witchcraft and the demonic arts
- ✓ Invited to examine Betty Parris
- ✓ Begins to lose confidence in the trials
- ✓ At the end of the play, tries to save as many lives as possible

Summary:

Reverend Hale is first introduced to us as a man of absolute self-certainty. He is confident in his beliefs and feels he is an expert in identifying witches. Miller portrays him as a self-confident reverend who is proud to be doing God's work by hunting out witches. He claims he has 'discovered' one in Beverly and is summoned to Salem as an expert. Hale speaks confidently on the topic of witchcraft and interrogates many of the townspeople. He looks for evidence of poppets, questions characters on their knowledge of the Bible, and even prays over Betty in Latin. Of course, his confidence in his abilities does not last and by the end of the play, everything he knows is thrown into doubt.

Look closer:

Hale's character transforms as the play progresses. In Act 2, he visits the Proctor household and interrogates Proctor and Elizabeth about his

Christian values. He assures them that people like Rebecca Nurse, who have outstanding reputations, will be safe from arrest. He advises the Proctors on how to avoid any further suspicion. In this way, we learn that though Hale accuses people of witchcraft, he genuinely believes this is a threat. He is not lying for personal gain or trying to manipulate the court. He honestly believes in the role of God in the proceedings and feels that innocent people will not be charged.

Of course, this belief is challenged as more and more people are arrested. Hale begins to doubt the court and becomes increasingly worried that innocent people are being killed. This frustration builds until the events of Act 3. As Proctor is arrested, Hale condemns the court and storms out.

In the final act, Hale is shown as a broken man. He desperately tries to convince those awaiting the gallows to confess. This isn't because he thinks they are guilty, but rather is because a confession will save their lives. He feels personally responsible for every towns person who hangs.

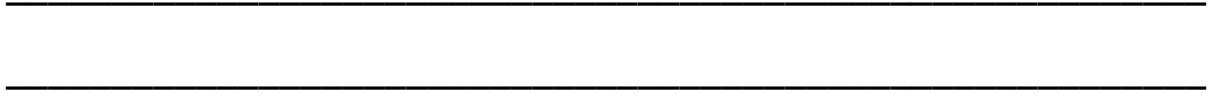
What other characters say about him:

"You are a coward! Though you be ordained in God's own tears, you are a coward now!"

(Proctor, Act 3)

"Mr Hale, believe me; for a man of such terrible learning you are most bewildered."

(Danforth, Act 3)



OTHER CHARACTERS

In this section, we'll look briefly at some of the key facts of the other characters in Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*.

Tituba:

- ✓ From Barbados
- ✓ Reverend Parris' slave
- ✓ Tries to raise the spirits of Ann Putnam's dead children
- ✓ Creates a potion for the girls to attract men
- ✓ This sparks the hysteria in the town
- ✓ Accused of witchcraft by the girls and forced to confess

Mary Warren:

- ✓ Servant of the Proctors
- ✓ Friends with Abigail and the other girls
- ✓ Swept into the hysteria
- ✓ Forced by Proctor to explain she was lying in court
- ✓ Switches side when the girls turn against her

Deputy Governor-Danforth:

- ✓ Deputy-Governor of Massachusetts
- ✓ Oversees the witch trials and presides over the court
- ✓ Deeply religious and sees himself as doing the work of God
- ✓ Powerful and enjoys this power

Betty Parris:

- ✓ 10 years old
- ✓ Daughter of Reverend Parris
- ✓ Abigail's cousin
- ✓ Her illness sparks the rumors of witchcraft

Thomas and Ann Putnam:

- ✓ Thomas is a wealthy farmer
- ✓ Involved in many disputes about land ownership
- ✓ Ann has lost seven children in childbirth
- ✓ Daughter Ruth asks Tituba to raise the spirits of Ann's children

Francis and Rebecca Nurse:

- ✓ Both in their 70s
- ✓ Rebecca is very well respected in the town
- ✓ Both are true Christians and very devoutly religious
- ✓ Rebecca is accused of witchcraft by Ann Putnam
- ✓ Rebecca refuses to plead guilty to witchcraft and is sent to the gallows

Giles Corey:

- ✓ A likeable but argumentative old man
- ✓ Friends with Proctor
- ✓ Accidentally accuses his wife of witchcraft after mentioning her reading
- ✓ Tries to reverse the conviction but ends up being in contempt of court
- ✓ After refusing to plead guilty, he is crushed to death with heavy stones

Mercy Lewis and Susanna Walcott:

- ✓ Friends of Abigail
- ✓ Mercy flees with Abigail at the end of the play
- ✓ Susanna is one of the youngest in the group

Judge Hathorne:

- ✓ Assists Danforth in the court proceedings
- ✓ Quick to jump to accusations of contempt of court
- ✓ Does not tolerate protests or challenges made to the authority of the court

Marshal Herrick:

- ✓ An officer of the court
- ✓ Exhibits more kindness than the others in authority

Ezekiel Cheever:

- ✓ Acts as clerk of the court
- ✓ Helps to arrest the women accused of witchcraft