

The Crucible

Act I

VOCABULARY

abomination – a thing that is detested or despised
abrogation – an abolishment; an annulment
abyss – nothingness; a point of no return
anarchy – a state of lawlessness
antagonistic – hostile
arbitrate – to decide
ascertain – to determine
atomization – the reduction to small particles
autocratic – absolute
blanched – paled
blatantly – in an offensively obvious manner
calumny – false charges calculated to damage another's reputation
canny – clever; shrewd
congerie – a collection
contempt – disdain
contention – a point advanced in a debate; a rivalry
contiguous – next to; adjacent
corroborating – agreeing with and supporting
cosmology – the theory of the natural order of the universe
covenanted – pledged
dallied – lingered; dawdled
darkling – dark
defamation – the act of damaging another's reputation
deference – the respect due an elder or superior
defiled – dirtied; fouled
diametrically – extremely; oppositely
Dionysiac – frenzied; festive and wild
dissembling – putting on a false appearance; concealing something
ecclesiasts – clergymen
fetishes – objects believed to have magical power
formidable – massive; considerable
ideology – a system of beliefs
incubi – evil masculine spirits that come to women while women sleep
inculcation – an implanting of ideas; a brainwashing
inert – still; not moving
iniquity – a wickedness; a sin
innate – natural; present from birth
intimations – suggestions; hints

junta – a group controlling a government after seizing power
ken – the range of perception or understanding
klatches – gatherings, usually characterized by casual conversation
lascivious – lustful
licentious – lewd
magistrates – local officials
malevolence – ill will; hatred
malign – completely evil
manifestation – an embodiment
marauded – raided
mores – moral attitudes, manners, and customs
naïve – not worldly
naught – nothing
paradox – something with seemingly contradictory elements
parochial – narrow-minded
perverse – corrupt
predilection – a preference
pretense – pretending; an act
prodigious – strange; extraordinary
propitiation – an appeasement; an atonement
providence – a divine guidance
quail – to hesitate; to recoil in fear
rankle – to irritate
scourge – a cause of widespread affliction
smirched – dirtied; stained
sniveling – whining and sniffing
speculation – a wondering
subservient – cringingly submissive
succubi – evil female spirits that come to men while men sleep
theocracy – a government by divine guidance
titillated – excited and intrigued
trepidation – apprehension
vindictive – vengeful
writ – a formal written document
yeomanry – middle class land-owners; farmers

1. In the opening exposition, what are some good and bad points that Miller observes about the Puritans?

2. How is the Puritans' treatment of other religious sects ironic or hypocritical?

3. Who is Betty, and what is wrong with her?

4. When Abigail enters, she is described as "a strikingly beautiful girl...with an endless capacity for dissembling." What does the phrase "an endless capacity for dissembling" suggest?

5. Why does Rev. Parris become upset at the thought that Betty's illness is a result of unnatural causes?

6. What negative aspect of his character does Rev. Parris's concern reveal?

7. What innuendo does Rev. Parris make about Abigail's character?

8. How does Abigail respond when Rev. Parris questions her reputation?

9. "Goody" is a title much like "Mrs." It is short for "Goodwife." What effect does Miller create by using this address?

10. How does Goody Putnam move the plot along?

11. In a digression, what motivation does Miller attribute to Thomas Putnam's actions?

12. What do you learn about what Mercy, Abigail, and Mary Warren did while alone?

13. How do the characters' actions demonstrate that Abigail is the acknowledged leader of this group of girls?

14. Miller states that despite, or perhaps due to, his upright appearance, John Proctor feels he is a fraud because he knows he is a sinner. What does his conversation with Abigail indicate about the nature of his sin?

15. What seems to be the attitude of Giles Corey and the others gathered in the house?

16. What does Miller foreshadow will happen to Rebecca Nurse?

17. To what does Rebecca Nurse attribute Betty's condition? What does Rebecca's assessment indicate about her own character?

18. Who is Rev. Hale, and why was he sent for? Why does Rebecca Nurse tell Parris that Hale should be sent home rather than allowed to see Betty?

19. Why are the Putnams unwilling to accept Rebecca Nurse's argument?

20. Identify the significance of Mrs. Putnam’s statement “There are wheels within wheels in this village, and fires within fires!”

21. Why do Putnam and Proctor get into an argument?

22. How does Proctor’s comment on Parris’s fiery sermons cause an outburst from Rev. Parris?

23. In the argument between Parris and Proctor, the motif of authority explicitly arises. What are the two points of view?

24. Who is Giles Corey, and how does Proctor treat him?

25. How does the argument between Putnam and Proctor reveal Putnam’s materialistic ambitions?

26. The Rev. Hale enters. From his comments, where may the reader infer that he believes that authority resides, and what does this say of his personality?

27. Who is Tituba, and of what does Abigail accuse her?

28. How does Abigail's accusation against Tituba contradict earlier conversations?

29. What does Putnam say that terrifies Tituba and causes her to say that she told the devil she did not want to work for him?

30. Why does Tituba name Goody Good and Goody Osburn as the two women she saw consorting with the devil?

31. Based on Tituba's outburst about the devil's telling her to kill Rev. Parris, what can the reader infer about Tituba's feelings toward him?

32. What motivates Abby and Betty to begin denouncing everyone?

33. What is the dramatic effect of the curtain's falling as Betty and Abigail continue to cry out names?

34. A foil is a character who emphasizes the qualities or actions of another character by providing a contrast. Which characters are established as foils in Act I, and how are they different?
