

Contemporary Commentary
Arthur Miller on *The Crucible*

DIRECTIONS: Use the space provided to answer the questions.

1. Briefly identify the “correspondence” Arthur Miller says he perceived in two widely separated periods of American history as he started to write *The Crucible*.

2. How does Miller connect the Salem witch hunt with poetry?

3. What specific similarities does Miller identify between the prosecutions and the confessions of the accused?

4. According to Miller, why has *The Crucible* become his most-produced play?

5. What questions for further research or investigation does this commentary leave you with? Identify at least two issues you would like to pursue as you read the play.

The Crucible, Act I by Arthur Miller
Vocabulary Warm-up Word Lists

Study these words from the selection. Then, complete the activities.

Word List A

autocratic [aw toh KRA tik] *adj.* dictatorial

In an autocratic system of government, the people have little or no power.

faction [FAK shuhn] *n.* party or interest group

A faction on the student council is unhappy with the class president.

homage [HAH mij] *n.* respectful attention

The flag flew at half mast in homage to a local firefighter who died recently.

hypocrisy [hi PAHK ruh see] *n.* pretending to believe something you do not

If you say one thing and do another, you may be guilty of hypocrisy.

paradox [PAR uh dahks] *n.* apparent contradiction

Philosophers think that every paradox is an illusion.

somber [SAHM buhr] *adj.* serious; solemn

Joe's somber expression as he entered was a clue that he had bad news.

villainous [VIL uh nuhs] *adj.* evil

The court punished the criminal's villainous behavior.

vindictive [vin DIK tiv] *adj.* vengeful

Glenda felt vindictive and decided to get revenge on her tattle-tale brother.

Word List B

anarchy [AN ahr kee] *n.* state of chaos

For some years after the revolution, that country was in a state of anarchy.

blatantly [BLAY tuhnt lee] *adv.* very openly; brazenly

Terence blatantly crossed the street against the light.

defamation [def uh MAY shuhn] *n.* slander

The star sued the tabloid publication for defamation when it published a scandalous story.

drastic [DRAS tik] *adj.* severe; harsh; extreme

If a tornado is forecast, we will have to take drastic action.

parochial [puh ROH kee uhl] *adj.* narrow-minded

Some people who have lived all their lives in small towns have a parochial outlook.

propriety [proh PRY uh tee] *n.* conformity with what is proper or fitting

Sandra is never unconventional and always behaves with complete propriety.

rankle [RAN kuh] *v.* irritate; anger

Study hard, because if you get a low grade on the test it will surely rankle.

squabble [SKWAH buhl] *n.* small quarrel

The children became involved in a foolish squabble over some glass marbles.

The Crucible, Act I by Arthur Miller
Vocabulary Warm-up Exercises

Exercise A Fill in the blanks, using each word from Word List A only once.

Throughout history and all across the world, a long series of [1] _____ leaders have tried to seize absolute power. This collection of dictators has included some of the most [2] _____ evildoers known to humanity. There can be few people unaware of the [3] _____, even frightening, details of the dictatorships of Adolf Hitler in Germany and Josef Stalin in Russia. It is a(n) [4] _____ that, even as these rulers thoroughly oppressed their people, they insisted on total [5] _____ and praise from their subjects. When faced by any resistance group or opposing [6] _____, these dictators invariably became [7] _____ and took revenge on their opponents. For many who lived under such dictatorships, the necessity to survive led to a type of [8] _____, in which they said one thing publicly and believed another in private.

Exercise B Revise each sentence so that the underlined vocabulary word is logical. Be sure to keep the vocabulary word in your revision.

Example: Her behavior was consistent, so her actions were hard to predict.
 Her behavior was consistent, so her actions were easy to predict.

1. That nation's government was fair and just, so a state of anarchy prevailed.

2. They defied the law so blatantly that the police didn't even observe them.

3. Inez was delighted when she heard about Joseph's defamation of her.

4. Our decision was drastic, so we changed course only slightly.

5. Because of his parochial mentality, he took note of a wide range of different views.

6. When you act with propriety, most people are surprised and shocked.

7. The team's win rankled John, who had played his heart out as captain.

8. The squabble between the children over toys was a source of pleasure to their mother.

The Crucible, Act I by Arthur Miller
Reading Warm-up A

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

To appreciate Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, it is helpful to understand the historical background of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which included Salem. In the seventeenth century, Massachusetts had a special kind of autocratic, dictatorial government, called a *theocracy*. In this government, there was no separation of church and state. Only church members in good standing could vote. The Puritan authorities demanded citizens' complete loyalty and also their homage. They met any party or faction that opposed or criticized them with vindictive, even ruthless, opposition.

In England, the Puritans had been victims of persecution. This sad, even somber, part of their history was an important reason for their decision to emigrate. They first traveled to Holland and then to America in search of religious freedom. Once in America, however, the Puritans' unwillingness to tolerate dissent presents us with a paradox, or apparent contradiction.

Consider the case of Anne Hutchinson, who was hounded out of Massachusetts in 1637 as a villainous threat to society. Hutchinson was a religious liberal. She founded a woman's group in Boston to discuss religious views and recent sermons by ministers. She criticized the Puritan clergy, saying they were guilty of hypocrisy. The clergy, Hutchinson said, emphasized narrowly legalistic concepts of morality but ignored the individual's ability to choose ethical behavior.

Hutchinson's opposition to the Puritan establishment soon led to the powerful opposition of John Winthrop, the most influential clergyman in Massachusetts. She was tried on the charge of "betraying the ministers" and then sentenced to banishment. With some of her followers, she then established a settlement in what is now Rhode Island.

1. Underline the word that gives a clue to the meaning of autocratic. Use a word meaning the opposite of *autocratic* in a sentence of your own.
2. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of homage. What is a synonym for *homage*?
3. Underline the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of faction. Use the word *faction* in an original sentence.
4. What is a synonym for vindictive? What is an antonym for *vindictive*?
5. Circle the words in this and the previous sentence that offer a clue to the meaning of somber. Write a sentence about something or someone that you feel is *somber*.
6. Underline the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of paradox. In your own words, restate the *paradox* identified in this and the preceding sentences.
7. What is a synonym for villainous? What is an antonym for the word *villainous*?
8. Underline the words in the next sentence that give a clue to the meaning of hypocrisy. What is a synonym for *hypocrisy*?

The Crucible, Act I by Arthur Miller
Reading Warm-up B

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

An important character in Act I of Arthur Miller's play is the slave Tituba, who was brought to Massachusetts from the Caribbean island of Barbados. The English first established a colony on Barbados in 1627. The colonists' early years there were marked by disorder, even anarchy, because of their troubles in obtaining supplies. Another problem was the frequent quarrels or squabbles between colonial leaders, who often disagreed about land claims. In addition, many of the leaders had narrow-minded, parochial views on what exact relationship should exist between the colony, the British Parliament, and the King.

Other problems in early Barbados stemmed from the search for a profitable export crop. In the 1640s, however, the colonists agreed on a drastic, thoroughgoing shift from tobacco to sugar. This decision had important consequences. Sugar needed a large labor force, so landowners turned openly and blatantly to the importation of African slaves. Small farms were combined into much larger plantations. This is a trend that must surely have rankled the less prosperous colonists. Large landowners, however, reaped huge profits, because sugar was in high demand in European markets. Such landowners settled comfortably into political power as a planter aristocracy, leading life with elegant propriety and enjoying the privileges of an elite class. Other colonists, as well as slaves, understood for the most part that criticism of the planter slaveholders would be interpreted as defamation, and would be severely punished as a slander on the island's leadership.

In 1834, slavery was abolished; the Barbados sugar trade, however, continued on. Even today, most farmland is planted with sugarcane, although the island's chief source of revenue is tourism. In 1966, Barbados won independence from Great Britain.

1. Underline the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of anarchy. What are two antonyms for *anarchy*?
2. Circle the words that hint at the meaning of squabbles. Are *squabbles* usually about important issues, or about small ones?
3. Underline the word in this sentence that hints at the meaning of parochial. Use a word meaning the opposite of *parochial* in a sentence.
4. Underline the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of drastic. What are two synonyms for *drastic*?
5. Circle the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of blatantly. Use a word meaning the opposite of *blatantly* in a sentence of your own.
6. Circle the words in this and the previous sentence that give a good clue to the meaning of rankled. What is an antonym for *rankled*?
7. Underline the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of propriety. What is a synonym for *propriety*?
8. Underline the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of defamation. Use the word *defamation* in an original sentence.