

Drama; the crucible and vinegar tom assignment

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Introduction Vinegar Tom was written by Caryl Churchill, a feminist, in 1976 but set in the 17th Century. The play was inspired by the women's rights act of 1970, and the discrimination of women. The title comes from the name of a horrible creature which is supposed to be a witch's familiar. It is about how four naive and innocent women's lives are affected throughout the Salem witch-hunts. Modernised song, dance and rhythm are used to combine the horror of the past and attitudes which have carried on to our world today.

The plot includes lots of witchcraft and demonstrates clear discrimination of women at that time, outlining society's rejection of people who have differences. Vinegar Tom was influenced by Bertolt Brecht, Churchill, like Brecht wanted people to think about what they had saw, instead of just engrossing themselves in an entertaining play, she wanted them to act on their decisions of the play, and not getting too emotionally involved with plot or characters.

She does this by using epic theatre, so the audience thinks about what is happening, not what is going to happen, plus the use of non- realistic songs to break tension and add political comment. The play is relevant to today's audience as it looks at how prejudice against women is still occurring. The Crucible was written by Arthur Miller in 1953 and set in 1692, based on the actual events which led to the Salem Witch Trials, leading to the deaths of over 150 people accused of witchcraft. The play was in response to McCarthyism: where a committee in America grew fearful that the communism would destroy the capitalist American way of life.

They made witnesses come to answer charges that they were a communist and give names of other communists; Miller was made to appear before the committee. This was called McCarthyism; Senator McCarthy making the US government get rid of communists; mirrored in the play where women were accused because of unknown causes to bad events, they were then forced to name other 'witches', Adding to this Miller's failed marriage with Monroe was partly because of his guilt and confusion from his previous marriage.

This is represented in *The Crucible*, by Proctor having an affair with Abigail, behind his wife Elizabeth's back. It all escalates, eventually Proctor is in court arguing his innocence, when he says, 'I have three children ??? how may I teach them to walk like men in the world, and I sold my friends?' I think this is how Miller felt when in front of the committee, now expressing himself through Proctor. These events helped Miller connect with the witchcraft trials two centuries before in Salem, influencing him to write 'The Crucible'.

The story is about young girls who after dancing in the woods get accused of witchcraft, Reverend Parris, both father of one girl and uncle of another, calls an expert who agrees that the girls' strange behaviour is the devil's work.

This leads the girls to accusing others and being scapegoats for the problems in the community. The religious court does not rest until it discovers who the cause of all the evil is. *The Crucible* is relevant to today's audience as it looks at betrayal and how gossip can have devastating effects.

The play is influenced by Konstantin Stanislavski, because Miller wanted the play to be naturalistic to reflect the real story. Stanislavski is primarily known for Realism, where he bases his methods on personal experiences, using

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'emotion memory', getting actors to this of their own experiences to embrace an emotion, making the performance as close to real life as it can get. Also using ' Given circumstances', where actors are aware of the facts about the character, not only in the script but the social, historical and political facts. Plus Stanislavski influenced Miller to use realistic sets, keeping everything as realistic as possible.

Social Cultural Historical Political The Crucible was based on puritan people in Salem 1692. Their society was theocratic, where God was the states civil ruler. The tragedy all began from a combination of economic conditions, jealousies and teenage boredom. Adding to this, not far away there was an Indian war, which guided the community to believe the devil was around. There were lots of possible causes for the witch hunts in Salem, first the religious society strongly believed in Satan and how he had people performing witchcraft for him; believing you can tell which people are witches by certain symptoms.

Plus, because Salem was having so many problems, it appeared likely that the devil was at work; smallpox, Indian war. Secondly, teenagers had little freedom; working on the land and focusing on religion. Adding to this, old feuds and ideas of revenge arose. People saw witch hunting as a possible way of sorting out enemies, and gaining land and arguments over land ownership (most of the accused where financially better off) was a major contributor to who lived and died.

Miller uses this to add context to the play, he mirrors the hysteria in Salem to the fear of being accused of communism in the U. S. The Crucible is accurate

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to what went on in Salem 1692, but he changed some details to make it more accessible and relevant to today's audiences; Abigail in truth was 14, but Miller thought this would distract away from the main plot, because it is socially unacceptable today for a man and 14 year old to have a sexual relationship, so he changed her age to 17; making the affair more realistic as Proctors life is supposed to make him look like a tragic hero

A Contemporary audience can relate to the play in the sense that everyone has been betrayed, or felt victimized at some point in their life, which helps the play have meaning and importance to the audience. Scenes which happened years ago, can still be reflected, one way or another, in today's society. Similarly, Vinegar Tom links the ideology of witch hunts and hysteria and power with her feminist theme, about women's sexuality, based around the 17th Century major English witch hunts and social changes. Churchill noticed how the poor have always suffered, and how silly the witches' offences were.

She wanted to write a play about witches with no witches in it, showing the prejudice against women and the humiliation they endured, about poverty humiliation and prejudice, how women accused of being witches saw themselves. The audience can also relate to Vinegar Tom, thinking about prejudices today, and how we can prevent them. Especially because she is a feminist writer, we think about the meaning of some of the prejudices we hold, and how women are treated back then and today, because there are still arguments today about women being equal to men, in religion and general society.

In both plays, Salem warns us to improve how we judge people, and to rethink our prejudices. The crucible is strongly influenced by Stanislavski. Stanislavski was a realist who wanted performances to be as natural as possible. He founded the Moscow Art Theatre. His philosophy was that actors should be true to their given circumstances of the character -conveying internal thoughts and feelings. We did this by thinking about our past experiences, when we have felt jealous, alienated, or scared, this makes performance more authentic when we had to embrace these emotions.

Plus, Stanislavski wanted believable acting, without exaggerating.

Stanislavski also encouraged trial and error, so we kept practicing until we found appropriate emotion memories which stimulated the best response from the actor for the scene. Another way to create realistic acting was to put you in the circumstances as the actor; 'given circumstances'. Using your imagination- you are the character you're playing, as most actors haven't actually experienced what their character has, so Stanislavski technique, the 'magic if' puts yourself in the situation. Circle of Attention', another Stanislavski technique, the area of focus an actor should hold, without getting distracted, because if you become distracted, performance could look artificial. We used these techniques in workshops: 'Given Circumstances', making sure we were aware of the story properly, then thinking about how it must feel for everyone you knew to want you dead, like the accused must have felt. Then putting this emotion into performance.

Proctor Do you look for a whipping? Abigail look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet! In a workshop, we focused on Act 1,

where Abigail and Proctor are discussing their relationship. First, I played Abigail in the above section; I portrayed her to be very frustrated. Then before I tried again, I thought about how Abigail must feel, a young girl who has unrequited love for Proctor, seeing him still stand by his wife, I would feel jealous and angry, frustrated that he can't see how we should be together. My parents were murdered in front of me when I was a young child, and I have never felt love since, so Proctors love I cannot loose!

My heart would be breaking. When I applied this new feeling to my performance, it became for realistic and emotionally powerful showing my devastation and heart ache as well as frustration, making me more vocally aware. This gave me insight to how Abigail feels and helped me to characterize her. Secondly, we imagined Elizabeth being a ' fly-on-the-wall'. What her thoughts would be watching: shocked but almost pleased that Proctor is rejecting Abigail, and then we imagined Abigail's thoughts in Act 4, when Proctor is in the cell talking to Elizabeth.

This gave us real insight to link the characters objective and the motivation for their activities. Additionally, realistic sets would be used in the crucible to add a sense of truth, realistic like Stanislavski idea. Moscow Art Theatres' philosophy was to make theatre a central concern. Vinegar Tom is written with influences from Brecht. Brecht studied Marxism, the political philosophy which analyses capitalism and a theory of social change; which links to how Churchill focused the play around feminism and social change. He wanted theatre to provoke thought, the audience to make decisions on what they saw, instead of apathy.

Brecht wanted the audience to be entertained without getting too emotionally involved. He did this by keeping things minimal- sets and costumes, using narrators to tell the audience what is going to happen, multi-character, montage scenes, epic theatre, songs to break tension and letting the audience remember they are watching actor's not actual characters. Plus Churchill includes songs, which is a music influence from Brecht, entertaining songs to break tension, but with serious ideas behind them. In a workshop we explored scene fourteen:

We decided to use epic theatre to exaggerate the alternation between characters and to make more amusing. In my pair, we decided to start off at the back of the stage and move forward at each line, acting what we said. Margery: ' struck me in the head' - jack literally strikes her in the head. Adding comedy and exaggeration, distancing the audience but keeping them connected to the themes. Plus we used minimal props to symbolize set. This kept the audience entertained still, but reminded them they were watching actors in a play. Characterization/ Interpretation: We each chose a character from The Crucible and selected some speech for them.

Then we had to create a freeze frame stance and say their lines, the rest of the class then debated who we were: Parris'the devil lives on such confidences, without confidences there could be no conspiracy, your honor! ' I stood in this position, non verbally portraying myself to be Parris ->> Leaning forward, as Parris leans towards destruction, with hand gestures, palms up almost in prayer, to show Parris's religious side, showing my eagerness to persuade/ make a point about Proctors life and that devils don't

exist. Plus making eye contact with the person whom he's talking too.

Facially, I looked concerned but angry/frustrated.

Vocally I sounded confident, sure of myself, Parris's power, he feels guilty that he helped to create the appearance of witch craft so the first clause I said calmly and quiet, but then gained pace and volume. This had a powerful impact, showing Parris's confidence and regret. Vinegar Tom we characterized Ellen in Scene Nine by trying her with different personalities, then deciding which one fit best. The three ideas we came up with were: ??? Old lady ??? fragile, soft voice, quiet but firm, glasses, squinty eyes. ??? 'Hippy' ??? Stood tall, confident, happy young voice, feminine, talked faster. 'Witch' ??? Hunched back, croaky voice, stutter, open-aware eyes, slow creepy voice. We decided the old lady worked best, as it made her look wise and knowledgeable but without making her look evil. The hippy looked to young and felt to naive for the character. Next we thought of the circumstances for Alice, she is young, single, her mother is an alcoholic-Joan, who Alice cares for. She wants to go and see the witch trials in London, ironically, as she gets hung in the end. Susan thinks Alice always talks about men. She doesn't say she is lonely, but I think she wants a man to love her, for companionship.

I like the use of language in Scene twenty-two Vinegar Tom, the alternation between Sprenger and Kramer, Brecht's Epic Theatre to reduce tension, making it comical but at the same time keeping us involved with the story and facts about what is going on. Both characters say approximate equal amounts. Scene Twenty-One Sprenger: He's Kramer. Kramer: He's Sprenger. Kramer/ Sprenger: Professors of Theology Kramer: Delegated by letters
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apostolic Sprenger: (here's a toast, non-alcoholic) Kramer: Inquisitors of heretical pravitities Sprenger: we must fill those moral cavities Kramer: so we've written a book Sprenger: Malleus Maleficarum

Kramer: The Hammer of Witches Sprenger: It works like a charm Kramer: to discover witches Sprenger: and torture no hitches. Kramer: Why is a greater number of witches found in the fragile feminine sex to men? Sprenger: Why is a greater number of witches found in the fragile feminine sex to men?

Kramer: ' All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. '

Ecclesiastes. Non verbal Communication/ Interpretation: gesture, facial expression, movement, mime, freeze frames, physical theatre We watched the beginning of The Crucible, a film, the director elected to show the children going to the woods to dance.

We thought this gave too much away too soon, so began thinking of other ways to begin the play and develop the appropriate atmosphere. We decided to experiment by doing a selection of still images about the ideas in the play; this is a Brecht idea, letting the audience know more before they have watched the play, but we wanted to set the scene with an original impact. We needed to communicate non-verbally, considering facial expression, gesture and levels. The tableau we did was the cross on the floor (physical theatre to create cross) with characters on blocks looking down at it; symbolizing the corruption of religion on the Salem society.

Secondly we had all the characters on stage pointing at each other, at different levels, on chairs, floor etc; representing blame and rumours. Finally, there was a abstract image of a dance, with Elizabeth looking at Abigail and

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Proctor dancing, showing the juxtaposition of the innocent dancing girls on the final impact of the affair. I would include these images before the play to give the audience a taster of what is to come, to grab their interest and make them think about what they could mean. We used physical theatre in an exercise for Vinegar Tom, using our bodies as the set and props.

For example, for scene 1, on the roadside, a few of us stood back to back with arms out; we were a sign post, and others used levels to create plants as it was a rural area. Visual/ Spatial We considered a few types of staging for Vinegar Tom and the crucible; in-the-round, Proscenium Arch and thrust. In-the-round staging wouldn't fit with Brecht's ideas as it is too realistic and the audience would feel really involved for Vinegar Tom. Plus, it would be difficult for the action to engage everyone in the audience, as there would always be a section which couldn't see.

I don't think this would be best suited as it involves the audience too much. Alternatively, it would be good for The Crucible as it involves audience and creates an interesting, realistic atmosphere. But I think it would get too complicated when lots of characters are on stage; too busy to see clearly. Thrust staging like in-the-round, is intimate, and can still have blind spots. Although it can have more props and is easier to perform without blocking views too badly. Again, I don't think this would suit Vinegar Tom as it would include the audience too much, but it would suit my interpretation of The Crucible as it IS intimate with the audience and includes realistic, props and staging. Throughout The Crucible there is a variety of locations, so it is difficult to choose a stage, particularly Act 3, The ' Bird' Scene because all characters are important to see, this is why I chose Thrust Staging, personal <https://assignbuster.com/drama-the-crucible-and-vinegar-tom-assignment/>

and realistic, and more room to see more action. If I were to direct this scene, I would have it diagonally, so action can be scene by all 3 sides.

First, I would have Hale higher up then the other characters, this gives him authority. Abigail and Proctor are spaced so Abigail can be seen looking over at Proctor, as well as Elizabeth. The relationship between all three characters on stage is a triangle, like the love triangle they used to be in. ADD CELL SCENE LAYOUT? SOUNDS Proscenium Arch distances the audience from the drama, this links with how Brecht wanted the audience to remember they are watching a play. Plus the actors can address the audience directly, another idea of Brecht. Plus the simple set can be moved around easily.

This is the stage I would choose for Vinegar Tom. Scene Nineteen JOAN and Ellen are hanged while MARGERY prays. MARGERY: Dear God, thank you for saving us. Let us live safe now. I have scrubbed the dairy out. You have shown your power in destroying the wicked, and you show it in blessing the good. You have helped me in my struggle against the witches, help me in my daily struggle. Help me work harder and our good harvests will be to your glory. Bless Miss Betty's marriage and let her live happy. Bless Jack and keep him safe from evil and let him love me nd give us the land, ahem. [pic] AUDIENCE If I was to do this scene, on a proscenium arch, I would have Margery in the foreground and the girls in the background. This keeps attention on Margery, but the audience can relate her monologue to the hangings, putting it in context. After ' glory', I would have a pause, then the hanging. As the girls step down from the block (as they ' hang') I would have Margery go down on to her knees for prayer, ' Bless...' This simultaneous

change of levels would draw the audience in, thinking about how Margery's prayer and the hangings are related.

Ellen and Joan's backs would be to the audience so that their hangings are more symbolic than emotional. I think Vinegar Tom could be modernized, and the actors could wear modern everyday clothes, this is a Brecht technique, reminding the audience they are actors. I think The Crucible can't be modernized, it is the history of 1692, so characters would be wearing clothing (picture) from that period of time, using the slang and dialect from that period. ————— The book title is violent. ' Hammer' is a destructive word, like the destruction of witches.

Non-alcoholic makes them sound innocent and good, which is the contrast to their ideas and book on witches. Academic lexis, implying they are knowledgeable; so their book will be truthful and correct. The repetition emphasizes the fact that most witches are female. Informal introduction, comical stand up style, introducing each other. Scene twenty-one is like an Aside, a speech to the audience, but in the style of a comical stand up or advert. They alternate lines to add interest and capture people's attention. Rhyme for comic effect, combining Kramer and Sprenger as one person. Reference to philosopher suggests wisdom. [pic] [pic] [pic]