

# Characters' conflicts between protagonists, lesser important players and within t...

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## **Conflict Analysis in “ The Crucible”**

In The Crucible, conflict is explored through a variety of means as each scene is presented and it is also portrayed through the different characters. The challenge between two characters in particular, Proctor and Hale, reflects the conflict that is central to the trials in Act III. There are also many private conflicts among the lesser characters, conflicts arise too within characters themselves.

On a primary level the feeling of conflict is felt by the oppressing décor of each of the scenes.

At the beginning of Act I the setting is centered on a small bedroom in reverend Parris's house. The narrow window of leaded panes (allowing little light and a poor means of escape), the burning candle (a flickering ' life'), the clean sparseness (no hint of moral compromise), and the raw wood of the rafters (roughly hewn timber) gives us the impression of conflict. The conflict explored in this setting is of closed-mindedness. In a similar way conflict is explored in Act II '...low ceiling and the darkness of the interior...'

In Acts III and IV, even the safety of being inside your home is no longer there and the issues of the conflict are presented to the public. However there still is the sense of confinement...'the ante-room to the court is like a prison cell'.

The conflict central to the play is that between conformity to the religious practices of the community and individual conscience. The Salem community

enjoys its monotonous lifestyle and frowns upon eccentric behavior. It is not open to change.

In Act III, the conflict reaches its climax, Danforth takes the role of the enforcer of the stability of the state. Everyone must be in church on the Sabbath; all children must be baptized; no one should plough the fields on a Sunday; private reading is suspect. Moreover, people who sign testaments to the good characters of people arrested by the state must themselves be arrested for questioning. Giles is held in contempt for withholding a personal confidence. Proctor had been told by Hale in Act II that it is not for him to judge whether the light of God is in Parris. All of these examples point to the denial of any right to individual conscience among the people of Salem.

In addition, Danforth's handling of trials is overbearing and intolerant. This is highlighted by the increasing conflict between him and John Hale. Hale objects to the assumptions Danforth is making, especially that which seems to say anyone accused of witchcraft must be guilty. His demand that Danforth hear Gile's 'hard evidence' is cut short; when he pleads for 'immaculate proof', Danforth's 'Mr Hale, surely do not 'doubt my justice' confirms our perception that Danforth will not have any part of his procedure questioned. Danforth turns Hale's 'prodigious fear' into 'prodigious guilt', failing to see that fear of the court is producing falsehood. The final break comes when Hale refuses to become involved in Abigail's bird hysteria. Hale's quitting the court sees the irreconcilable nature of the conflict between the two men, a conflict of authoritarianism versus human justice.

Conflict is also explored within the characters themselves. John Proctor is a farmer and a village commoner who is faced with an inner conflict. He has committed adultery with Abigail while his wife was sick. He is fully aware of his immoral actions and the enormity of his failing. When he thought the problem had vanished, it comes back to hit him in the face. Abigail claims that John's wife, Goody, is a witch, this spurs conflict and anger among the townspeople. Proctor then gets involved in these witch trials and claims to be with the devil. His inner struggle is whether or not to tell the truth or fake a confession to save his own life. He is confused as to which way to go and his main obstacle is his pride. John later states "My honesty is broke, Elizabeth; I am no good man." (136) He would rather confess than die as a martyr for honesty. However, as John confesses, he can not allow Danforth to make it an official document. As Danforth asks him why, John answers with a cry "How may I live without my name? Have given you my soul; leave me my name" (143). John feels strongly about having a good name and not dying with a bad one. Proctor weighs both sides of his internal conflict and realizes that he cannot live with another lie. He therefore, sentences himself to be hung and at least passes his "good" name and some pride to his children.

Mary Warren is a young girl evidently stricken with terror and inner conflict. Initially in this play, her character is perceived as a quiet and shy person. She is one who would never speak of her opinions. Proctor finds her where she was not supposed to be and wants her home, Mary immediately replies with "I'm just going home." (21) As the plot thickens, Mary is shown as naïve and easily swayed by Abigail. She ends up getting caught up in all the commotion and pandemonium of the town. She goes along with all the girls

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of the town and lays blame of witchery on innocent people. She amazes herself with the power she can hold when she points a finger towards the accused. Inside, she knows that her actions are wrong and cruel but she is too weak to be her own person. Mary decides to speak out against Abigail and the others for their false accusations and said that “ she tried to kill me numerous times” (57). Yet as she does this heroic act, Abigail pretends that Mary is also a witch using the puppets against her. Mary is now faced with yet another grueling internal conflict: to do what she knows is right and probably die for it, or to return to her old ways. Mary succumbs to Abigail’s “ hypnosis” and accuses John Proctor of forcing her to lie. Clearly the battle which Mary faced from the very beginning is overwhelming.

Conflict is explored throughout the play in many different ways. Conflict is a prime element of *The Crucible* and works at many levels. It is suggested through the settings of each scene or through the characters themselves. The tragedy of the play is that the conflicts are resolved by the inexorable crushing of freedom and conscience by authoritarianism, superstition and lies.