

# The crucible society affects decisions



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It is appalling how people die for no cause. This happens in the play *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller in which the Salem witch trials were depicted. In Salem, 1692, many people with good reputations are sentenced to death because of supernatural "evidence." The only way to escape death was to admit that they were witches. The intolerance, fear, and reputation of the society affect the choices characters made. This shows how society can be blamed for the decisions people make. Salem society is full of intolerance.

Because of the theocratic nature of the society, moral laws and state laws are one and the same: sin and the status of an individual's soul are matters of public concern. Proctor is a farmer that lives outside of town. During Sundays he does not go to church and he plows his fields, which is considered a sin. This is something that a "Christian" does not do, so society considers Proctor impure because he does not come to church. The society is therefore intolerant of Proctor. Additionally, the witch trials are held in order to make purify society.

People believe that anyone who practices witchcraft believes in the devil. The logic is that if they kill the witches (who supposedly worshiped the devil), then all people that believed in God would remain. This causes "the witches" to blame other people for witchcraft to preserve their own lives. This is just another decision inflicted by society. In addition, the court is intolerant as a whole. As Danforth says in Act III, "a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it" (Miller 94). This illustrates how Salem was either black or white; there was no grey area.

The witch trials are the ultimate expression of intolerance; the trials brand all social deviants with the taint of devil-worship and thus necessitate their excommunication from the community. As a result, society's actions are influenced on the court. The people in Salem were not only intolerant, but the town's hysteria also started because of fear. Abigail Williams and Betty Parris started this because they were scared of the consequences of being caught dancing in the forest, which was considered the Devil's house.

When Betty noticed that her dad Reverend Parris had seen her, she was so scared that she fainted. Other girls in Betty's cohort do similar things out of fear. For example, Abigail threatens the group into lying: " We danced. And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam's dead sister's. And that is all" (Miller 20). She is the reason why people confessed to witchcraft, even when they were not witches, because she had the power of life or death in her hands. In a sense society, in a sense, can be blamed for everyone's decisions to lie or die.

In an environment where reputation plays such an important role, the fear of guilt by association becomes particularly pernicious. In the beginning of the play, John Proctor is known to have a relationship not only with Elizabeth (his wife) but also his house maid Abigail. Proctor has the power to stop the Salem witch trials at the very beginning by telling everyone that he is an adulterer, but is concerned about his reputation being bad in the society. He does not want to be looked down upon.

This shows how society's outlook of people affect the decisions that Proctor makes. Elizabeth knows that her husband was an adulterer but does not tell anyone about this. She thinks that people will look down upon her for not

being as attractive as Abigail; she also does not want to ruin the reputation of her husband because her husband's reputation is her reputation and her family's. Even in court, Elizabeth Proctor does not confess. In addition to that, people had also accused Proctor of being a witch.

Proctor would have to lie and say that he was with the devil and name some people that are still with the devil. The court wanted Proctor to sign his name so they could post it on the church door and in reaction he says, “ 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! ” (Miller 143). This shows how Proctor is willing to die for the reputation of his family.

Evidently, reputation was such major factor in society that the decision of dying for a good reputation was an option. In the Salem witch trials, society caused almost every decision that people made. Society's decisions depended on intolerance, created fear, and affected reputation. These factors may seem alien but today's society behaves in the same manner (albeit less extreme). Miller's text prompts reflection on how society effects our decisions, both good and bad, today and on how we can make sure that the effects of society will improve in the future.