

in the opening of the  
play, how does miller  
seek to create an  
atmosphere of hyst...

[Literature](#), [Drama](#)



Premiering in 1953, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* was a scathing attack on the Communist scare of the era in the guise of a dramatization of the witch hunts that took place in Salem in the 1690's. Throughout the beginning the play follows how fear of death, The Devil and the unknown causes people to submit to madness and how the sense of guilt could cause them to lose all forms of their common sense and allow for insanity to overcome a whole community. During the play there are many areas in which Arthur Miller creates an atmosphere of tension and hysteria through many different techniques including rising arguments, fast pace dialogue, negative language and interruptions; all which add to the pressure that builds up throughout the play. Tension begins from the title of the play, crucible can be defined as a heatproof container in which substance may be melted or subjected to very high temperatures, which may cause any impurities to rise to the surface.

However, a Crucible could also be defined in two other ways: metaphorically it is a severe test or trial and a place, time or situation characterised by the confluence of power, intellectual, economical and political forces. The significance of these definitions illustrates how appropriate this title is to the play. Some of the characters are tested to their limits and crumpled under the pressure. Another interpretation of the word is how a crucible purifies metal, which connotes the people of Salem trying to purify the accused who confess, the accused are tested to their limits to see whether or not they will fold and tell everyone they are witches to save their own lives or if they will keep honest with themselves and risk their life.

At the beginning of the play, Miller introduces the scene and only one character; it entails phrases that leave the audience to assume that this is leading to a specific event happening, such as ‘ The Salem tragedy, which is about to begin in these pages, developed from a paradox. ‘ Instantly, the audience begin to vividly imagine the happenings of the play and what these consequences can be, yet still not knowing for certain. By this, miller builds up tension gradually and gradually, giving the audience only one suspicion that the book will contain frightful scenes with only misery and tragedy. Moreover the abrupt opening of the play, with Betty Parris laid “ inertly on a bed” and Reverend Parris knelt weeping and praying, instantly creates a sudden suspense for the audience who are unaware of the situations, which have led to this strange occurrence now portrayed before them on the Stage. Parris’s concern and fear of what is happening to his daughter alerts the audience to the seriousness of Betty’s condition and so causes for a sense of drama and anxiety to further grow in the audience’s minds. Miller does this to relate to the serious air that is carried through the entire play and begins the opening scene in this manner in order to portray a certain expectation for what may follow throughout the first act.

Additionally throughout Act one, the pace of the play seems to overpower the act. The use of the hyphen in “ No good Putnam. It is-“ shows an interruption in conversations between characters, Miller gives the idea that the characters are stressed and heavily under pressure as they cannot awaken a young girl. Also, we know that this is all taking place within a bedroom, and in this strict Puritanical society the bedroom would have been

reasonably small. By the use of this small room and imagery of I being overcrowded with adults, Miller gives the feeling of the characters being suffocated and lack of privacy in the village- this continuing to gradually make the audience feel awkward and apprehensive about what is to happen soon. The theme of hysteria is presented during the play holding a large role throughout. Hysteria can play a critical part in the destroying a healthy community. It enables people to believe and accuse their neighbours, whom normally they would get on with, of witch-craft, devil-worship, murder, infant killing and so on. Some people may accuse others for revenge.

In 'The Crucible', the inhabitants accept hysteria and also go on to become active in a hysterical climate. This is not just of genuine piety, but also because it gives them the opportunity to repress sentiments and also to act on long-held grudges. This is seen when the girls begin to accuse the people involved with witchcraft. Causing tension to build for example when Abigail states 'I saw Goody Sibley with the Devil! (it is raising with a great glee)' this causes the other girls to begin accusing citizens of Salem for being associated with the devil. This reiterates the theme of hysteria as a panic breaks out throughout and the viewers are able to see frenzy that is created in act one.

Overall the opening is effective to create an atmosphere of hysteria and tension. Miller is able to allow the audience to witness the anxiety and panic that is present in act one through his use of negative dialogue, constant questioning and semantic field of evil through language and fast pace throughout the act. This sets the mood of the play and causes the audience to

gain suspense towards the end of act one of what will occur throughout the play between the characters. In all the opening of the play sets the mood and is an effective presentation of tension and hysteria atmosphere.