

The crucible 🗨️ sample essay on playing elizabeth proctor

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



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GCSE Drama Mock Examination - The Crucible - sample essay on playing Elizabeth Proctor I am using the Heinemann edition of the text and I will be discussing how I would play the part of Elizabeth Proctor in the given scene. This scene is taken from Act Four, the final act of the play and the tragic plot is drawing to an end. Both Elizabeth and John Proctor have been imprisoned on false charges of witchcraft. Elizabeth's pregnancy is, at present, sparing her from the possibility of hanging but her husband, John Proctor, in his vain attempts to protect his wife has inadvertently caused his own downfall and he faces the noose if he will not confess to the charges of witchcraft. His only possible life saving choice is to 'confess' to the false charges, have his land and farm confiscated, lose his good name and sense of honour and remain in jail. In this scene the figures of authority, fronted by Danforth, have pleaded with Elizabeth to try to convince John to 'confess' in order to spare his life for reasons that are generated by their own selfish fears with regard to the safety of the convictions. John and Elizabeth's past has been a troubled one as a result of his brief, adulterous affair with his maidservant Abigail Williams. This affair has become public knowledge and the strict religious morality of seventeenth century 'new world' Puritanism means that he will never be regarded with the esteem that he once was: adultery breaking one of the Ten Commandments which had to be strictly adhered to. The Proctors have not seen each other for three months as this scene opens and, although their past difficulties remain somewhere in both their minds, they are insignificant in relation to the tragedy of the situation that they are now faced with. Elizabeth is already on stage as her husband enters. I would stand motionless as he appears at the doorway, my downstage hand gently

rested across my slightly pregnant stomach, a position that I would return to frequently as a means of protection for my unborn child, my maternal instinct clear and unquestionable. As he walks towards me I would swallow hard, as if my throat has become dry and unhelpful in preparation for speaking to him, something that I have been yearning to do for so long. I would want the audience to be able to notice my horror at his appearance by the slight furrowing of my brow and slightly narrowed eyes but I would do my best to hide this from John because I would not want to increase his pain or anxiety. Hence, I would collect myself and as he 'reaches out his hand' just out of my reach, I would move towards him, offer him my hand willingly and without mirroring his hesitation, to encourage his gesture of warmth and affection, I would then, as the text says, cover his hand with mine to maintain the tactile contact. As the 'strange, soft sound comes from his throat' I would look into his eyes and smile a very gentle, closed mouth smile, reassuring him of my joy at seeing him again. As he sits down in his weakened state I would move as if to physically assist him, placing my arm under his elbow as he lowers himself tentatively onto the chair/stool a look of real concern and anxiety on my face. I would retrieve a stool from nearby and place it opposite him, the proxemics close and quite intimate and I would then noiselessly lower myself onto this stool, leaning slightly towards him. When Proctor enquires about the unborn child, I would instinctively move my hand to my stomach and caress it gently, as before, and I would reply to his question quietly yet as positively as I can manage – I want him to pick up on the fact that the child represents hope, that despite all the horrors and trauma of events there remains this miracle of life – it is, literally, the

one thing that keeps her going. Interestingly, it is John who leads all of the questions at the beginning of their conversation. I realise that he is desperate for news of his children first and foremost and my replies would be delivered clearly and calmly, my voice would remain measured and my emotions as firmly intact as I can manage. I am determined not to add to his (or my) agony by becoming overly emotional and hysterical, we may not have time for such displays of emotion. However, when John states, ' You have not seen them?' I can barely cope with the fact spoken by my husband who clearly is so desperately upset for my plight. At this point I would inhale through my nose deeply but silently, clench my teeth slightly and momentarily look away in order to compose myself before I say, ' I have not'. Proctor's line, ' You are a - marvel, Elizabeth.' serves to increase the welling emotions that I am just managing to control - his words are so heartfelt and unselfish that they epitomise the essence of the man I married, as a result, the tears threaten to spill themselves again and I would shift my position in the chair, tuck a piece of stray hair behind my ear, perform any action that distracts the attention away from me and my sense of overwhelming emotion. John would recognise this and would reach his hand out to touch my cheek, or perhaps try to tame a stray strand of hair himself, however the effort makes him wince and my next line, ' You - have been tortured?' is said as an automatic reaction, it is hard to ask - my eyes would widen in incredulity, the pitch of my voice would be raised and the tempo quickened, the momentarily pause in the line would represent me not wanting to know but needing to know, to understand his treatment and situation. I would tentatively reach out my hand and lightly touch his ribs where the pain

seems to come from in a vain hope to alleviate his discomfort. On Proctor's factual ' They come for my life now' I would return his firm eye contact, my reply soft but firm, she is a realistic woman who wants to support her husband and share his pain in any way that she can. I want us now to be brutally honest with each other, even if this means acknowledging terrible eventualities. The ' I know it' would be gently said but very clear and controlled, the worst thing I could do now is to weep and wail, he needs my support but I cannot run the risk of influencing his future decision – even if I wanted to. As John questions me on the news of those who have confessed I would answer calmly, with a clear, matter-of-fact tone to my voice – I would sense the enormity of what must be discussed later with regard to his possible confession and I am anxious not to sway his instinctive decision by my opinions, despite how difficult this is to do. However, when we speak of Rebecca I cannot stop my mouth from forming a half smile of utter respect and love and the tone of my voice is resolute and full of marked admiration as I accentuate the phrase, ' naught may hurt her more.' When the subject of Giles is broached and the horrible realisation for Elizabeth that John has no knowledge of his death, I would look straight at John, focusing intently on his eyes and imploring him with my eyes to do likewise, I would pause, moisten my lips with my tongue, take his hand and cup it between mine in my lap and then deliver the words, ' Giles is dead' with firmness and slightly increased volume, I cannot bear the thought of John not hearing me properly and then having to repeat it – he needs to be informed of the events clearly and rationally and I consider it my duty to do so. Miller's stage directions inform us that she delivers the information pertaining to Giles' death '

quietly, factually' and I think that this is crucial to the audience's understanding and empathy with Elizabeth. I would continue to hold John's hand, providing him with physical reassurance as I deliver the tragic circumstances of Giles' death. The facts are difficult to tell him but he needs to know and I am the one who must impart this news. I would lean in towards him on the line, ' They press him John' I will not spare him the brutal facts but I will be there to comfort and support him if needs be. This conversation gives way to the one that Elizabeth knows is coming and her reply to his suggestion of making a false confession to spare his life immediately results in her line, ' I cannot judge you, John' I would turn away from him slightly as he makes this suggestion, our hands would lose contact and I would shake my head slightly and look down, my eyes momentarily shut as he asks these difficult questions of me. My line here is spoken with a tangible sense of distress with slight emphasise and higher pitch on the words ' I' and ' judge' to try to convey to him the difficulty of what he is expecting of me, I know that he desperately wants me make his decision for him but my fervent religious faith dictates to me that I cannot allow myself to be responsible for another human being's soul, even if he is my husband. I would want the audience to see her silent agony and turmoil as she tries to do the right thing. In the conversation that follows I would want to convey Elizabeth's acute awareness of John's desperation but that she cannot venture an opinion despite his pleadings. Physically I would rise on the line, ' It is not for me to give..' and the anguish in my voice would be matched by me turning away from him in an attempt to forcibly stop him from asking such a difficult thing of me. I would try to put some distance between us, I would clench my

fists hard to show my despair and inner turmoil, I would shut my eyes tightly and tilt my head upwards in an attempt to 'remove' myself from such torture. Despite this John keeps asking, keeps pleading, keeps moving towards me and imploring me to be his judge and in the end I would spontaneously turn, sensing his close presence behind me, letting out 'a heaving sob' and grasping him as firmly as I can manage by the shoulders in a desperate bid to make him understand as I deliver the line, 'John, it comes to naught that I should forgive you, if you'll not forgive yourself'. As he turns away in 'great agony' I would force myself to continue, I can see how much this is hurting him but I must go on. The line 'It is not my soul, John, it is yours' consists of all monosyllabic words and hence these would be emphatic and pronounced whether delivered loudly or quietly. I would deliver them in as measured, quiet and controlled way as I can. I would be physically and vocally battling to tame the torrent of emotion and tears that are present but that I must restrain in order to be able to make him understand my deeply felt words. I would wrap my arms across my abdomen in a self-protective movement but I would hold my head high, trying to establish eye contact with John who has momentarily turned away from me. As I speak aloud my own sense of wrongdoing and 'confess' to him my errors I would search his face with my eyes, willing him to understand that the past is behind us - that we have both been to blame for events in our history. When I say the line, 'It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery.' I would emphasise the word 'cold' making use of the hard 'c' sound and narrowing my eyes and souring my face at my past 'holier than thou' behaviour. As this line is delivered I would reach up to him, place my two hands around his face and lift it until his eyes

are in line with mine so as to show him how important these words are, that I no longer hold him responsible for our sad and desperate situation.