

# The crucible



After so much discussion of the summer reading novels from 2009, I felt that it was time to return to books that I have read and enjoyed in the past. Arthur Miller, the author of *The Crucible*, utilizes his literary work as a statement about the nature of humankind and the faithfully unyielding manner in which it reasserts itself throughout history. This statement made about the unchanging nature of humankind is exemplified in Miller's comparison of the hysterics during the Salem Witch Trials to the suspicion-riddled climate of 1950s America. Miller's story is rich with rhetorical devices which not only add to a compelling reading experience but contribute heavily to his expression of theme.

Arthur Miller in *The Crucible* employs the devices of metaphor, kenning, dramatic irony, and personification to suggest that people will always seek to fulfill their selfish desires through manipulation of the people and atmosphere surrounding them. As a means to set the tone of the story and establish the far reaches of corruption in Salem, Miller uses metaphors that appeal to the reader's pathos and fully immerse him or her in the story's action. As no doubt several of the villagers are aware and none will admit, the motive behind much of the corruption and accusation is greed for land or power. When expressing what she believes are the layers of corruption in the village, Mrs. Ann Putnam insists, "There are wheels within wheels in this village, and fires within fires!" Here, she is alluding to wrongdoing, witchcraft; while supporting herself as an innocent. Both wheels and fire can be interpreted as being connected to the sinister practice of witchcraft, as wheels and other circular figures are powerful symbols in pagan lifestyles and fire is more stereotypically associated with evil. Mrs.

Putnam uses these images to imply that witches inhabit the village of Salem. The wheels ??? within wheels??? and fires ??? within fires,??? as layers, symbolize the layers of complication of this issue such as the internal struggles for power among the villagers. Mrs. Putnam??™s metaphoric declaration reveals her bitterly deep-seated desire to expose as a ??? witch??? the woman she blames for the loss of her unborn children and her capability as an imperfect human to incite paranoia. Arthur Miller also uses the device of kenning to arouse feelings of fear and illustrate Abigail??™s determination to bring her revenge upon Elizabeth Proctor. Abigail craftily manipulates her friends into serving her purposes.

Her power over them is first revealed in examining her harried whisper, ??? Let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word, about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it; I saw Indians smash my dear parents heads on the pillow next to mine, and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down!??? Colors in this quote serve as kennings; black represents the dark of night and reddish work is a kenning for violence. The crudity of these kennings compared to the words which they represent creates a more violent and terrifying tone when spoken by Abigail. The girl??™s exploitive nature is manifested and one can easily draw comparisons between her self-serving behavior and that of other women in the village (Ann Putnam for example) or of politicians from the 1950s.