

# Crucible



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

What exactly is a tragedy? Is it just a story with a sorrowful ending? If someone dies in a sad way does that instantly make them a tragic hero? According to Aristotle and Arthur Miller, a tragedy is an act in which a noble or heroic character goes against what is popular and stands up for what he believes in, ultimately leading to their downfall. In turn, this would mean that *The Crucible* is a tragedy and John Proctor is a tragic hero. For a novel to be a tragedy, it has to have a character that goes against the public opinion, which leads to his fall. According to Aristotle, a tragedy must contain three elements: peripety, recognition, and pathos. Peripety is a change of what is attempted to the opposite (pg. 2115).

John Proctor is accused of being a witch and he falsely takes claim to it just to save his life. He realizes that if he chose to live, his name would lose its integrity, his soul would not be at peace, and he would have eternal guilt. Instead of going with the approved option of admitting he's a witch, Proctor does the complete opposite and chooses death for his beliefs. John Proctor changed his decision because he had finally been exposed to what he was truly giving up. A tragedy must also contain recognition (Aristotle pg. 2115). John Proctor clearly recognized that by lying to save his life, he would be going against his own morals and diminishing his integrity as a person.

The main point he truly recognized was how corrupt the Puritan society was. They viewed their witch hunting as a divine act of God and condemned innocent people to their deaths without a concrete premise to accuse them upon. Also, John recognizes himself as a sinner and that the guilt that has been built up inside of him has ultimately led to his final result. By choosing to hang, John was forgiving himself for his wrongdoings. The

clashing of John's unwillingness to go against what he believes in, the realization of the true side of Puritan society, and the recognition of himself as a sinner would result in his going down in a blaze of glory. The final element for a novel to be a tragedy is pathos, a destructive or painful act, such as death (Aristotle pg. 2116). Proctor's guilt from his adulterous affair slowly gained momentum throughout the novel until it blew up in his face.

The burden John carried would lead to his own tragic downfall. If *The Crucible* is a tragedy, then obviously John Proctor has to be considered the tragic hero. Arthur Miller states that a common man is more subject to tragedy and is a consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly (pg. 2134). John Proctor is as plain and simple as it gets. The problem with John is that he only sees the bad in himself and cannot seem to forgo it. Elizabeth forgave him for his affair with Abigail, but John was not at peace with himself.

He cannot view himself as the same person because of his sin and if he further condemns his name, all his integrity will die along with him and his days of peace will cease to exist. A tragic hero reveals his own tragic flaw (Arthur Miller pg. 2134). Proctor's major flaw was his excessive pride. He would not admit to his affair with Abigail because he did not want his reputation in the town to fall.

At the same time, the burden of guilt he carried would get heavier and heavier and he would soon feel the aftershock of it. Miller states, "The quality in such plays that does shake us, however, derives from the

underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world.??? (pg. 2135).

John Proctor believed that by staying away from the witch hunts and keeping his affair a secret he would bypass all the commotion with a straight face and his legacy would not be tarnished. As his burden got heavier in his heart, he saw that the only way for him to be at peace was to go against who he thought he was. Proctor was recognized as a respected man in the town. If he admitted to his adulterous sin, how would the people think of him now? He had to come to grips with being a sinner, which in turn would result in him sacrificing his life for peace.

In the long run, John Proctor saved more innocent lives by sacrificing his own. People would question why a respected figure like John would hang and the operations of the witch hunt would end. John Proctor is a hero in his own right, but he died because of his own flaws. Tragedy and a tragic hero go hand in hand. You can't have a tragedy without a tragic hero and vice versa.

??? The Crucible??? contained what the characteristics of a tragedy are. It had that one character that tried to find that inner peace within himself and not be subjected to what the popular opinion was. John Proctor showcased the qualities of a tragic hero. He was an ordinary man sucked into an extraordinary situation. As time wore on, John's true colors came out and his flaws were exposed and led to his death. ??? The Crucible??? is already a great tragedy, but the addition of a character like John Proctor is icing on the cake. It only makes it better.