

# The crucible and fear essay sample



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“ I have found it easier to identify with the characters who verge upon hysteria, who were frightened of life, who were desperate to reach out to another person...These seemingly fragile people are the strong people really (Williams: Twenty Years after Glass Menagerie).” Tennessee here captured the very essence of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. *The Crucible* is all about the desperation, hysteria, and fear of Salem’s people. The main theme of *The Crucible* is fear. Hysteria and fear are so closely linked they are practically synonymous. Hysteria is the main reaction to fear. When a person is hysterical, they are paranoid, apprehensive, and their body undergoes “ fight-or-flight response.” According to my online health class (I guess I did learn something...how strange) during fight-or-flight, a person either wants to run away from their fear, or fight it. Arthur Miller was feeling hysteria at the time of *The Crucible*; therefore his characters were as well. They felt the way he was so that he could better identify with them and write a great story. Throughout history, hysteria has proven to be a mass motivator and driving force behind many societies. Arthur Miller was born right after WWI; however he was able to see the affect it had on his family. In 1929, he was able to see closely the affects of mass hysteria when the stock market crashed and caused his family to lose their home. While attending college, Miller switched his major from Journalism to English at the University of Michigan, and eventually wrote *The Crucible* (Arthur Miller Biography, Galvin).

At the time of *The Crucible*, WWII had ended, and America was full into the Red Scare. The Red Scare is far less well known than WWII, yet it had a much greater effect on Arthur Miller and his story. The Red Scare was the search

for Communists in America. This search was brought on by the fear that WWII caused. It brought around mass hysteria that was, oddly enough, centered on the artists at the time. The Red Scare was big in Hollywood because the film makers, writers, painters, etc. were so influential to the public. If they were thought to put pro-communist propaganda in their works, or even to be affiliated in some way with the Communists, they were blacklisted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (or HUAC), and would lose their jobs and reputation (House Committee on Un-American Activities, Wikipedia. org).

Everyone in Hollywood was afraid of being blacklisted. They began reporting each other to the HUAC in order to save themselves, much like what happened in Miller's *The Crucible*. Also like *The Crucible*, there was not a great deal of merit behind these claims. It was found to be rather difficult to find evidence against someone who is only called guilty out of vengeance. As Danforth said, " In an ordinary crime, how does one defend the accused? One calls up the witnesses to prove his innocence. But witchcraft is ipso facto, on its face and by its nature, an invisible crime, is it not? Therefore, who may possibly be witness to it? The witch and the victim. None other. Now we cannot hope the witch will accuse herself; granted? Therefore, we must rely upon her victims- and they do testify, the children certainly do testify (Act III, Scene I)." This line is precisely how the HUAC thought during the Red Scare. The court officials in *The Crucible* are representations of the HUAC.

The Salem Witch Trials were put into action once the girls started accusing people in the village of being witches. They were accusing these people

because they were afraid of Abigail, who was definitely very threatening, saying to Betty and Mary Warren, “ Let either of you breathe a word... 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 (Act I, Scene I).” Abigail said this because she was afraid of word getting out about her wrongdoings (like dancing naked in the woods or drinking blood to kill Goody Proctor). Every character in *The Crucible* was afraid of something. Thomas Putnam is afraid of his reputation being soiled. Danforth is afraid of losing the value and merit of his court; he is also afraid of being wrong. Abigail is afraid of being discovered, and thus ruining her reputation and chances of getting John Proctor to herself.

The characters in *The Crucible* aren't the only ones to feel afraid. Every day, people are afraid around the world. That's why Arthur Miller's style of writing is so accessible to a reader. Arthur Miller uses fear to create relatable, realistic characters that he, as well as any reader, can connect to. He also uses fear to create an allegory, or parallel, for the Red Scare. Fear is the primary theme of *The Crucible*.