

# The crucible



It is true, for human beings, it is natural to want to belong.

It may be something that is born within many of us. As human beings, we want to be accepted and liked and feel that we ??? fit in???. That said it is also natural for human beings to want to express their individuality as we are all unique individuals. Belonging, though, can come at the price of rigid conformity, especially in societies where rules and authority are strictly enforced, for example, in religious communities. And sometimes a society might try to enforce belonging in a way that makes it difficult for individuals to live their lives. Rigid conformity is clearly evident in the text by Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*.

Through Miller's representations of people, relationships and events characterised throughout the play, we see the concept of belonging.

Scattered throughout *The Crucible* is the importance of religion which binds the community and provides a sense of belonging, or not belonging, as the case may be. *The Crucible* is set in Salem, Massachusetts in the spring of 1692.

It looks at the need to belong within a particular society that is strict and authoritarian. It looks at the consequences of making decisions that ultimately lead to a sense of not, or no longer, belonging. Suspicion grows amongst the community and it would seem the only way to avoid punishment is to admit to being in association with the devil. ??? Vengeance is walking Salem??? found in Act 2 describes the fear and revenge as the witchcraft scandal spreads through the community.

In Act 2, the use of the phrase "You know yourself I must do as I am told", indicates an understanding between two of the play's characters that it is known they must do what is expected of them in order to belong. It suggests there is little choice but to do what others would expect is the right thing, rather than what the character may want to do to gain acceptance from those in society and belong. On the outside, the members of the Salem community must conform. But when in private, their words and thoughts can be in conflict with their public conformity. For example, Abigail, in Act 1, refers to Salem as "pretense".

"I never knew what pretence Salem was... Pretence, or in other words, make believe or a charade tells us all was not what it seemed in the Salem community. The character, Reverend Parris, is concerned his daughter and a group of girls may have been dabbling in witchcraft.

Outwardly he appears worried about his daughter Betty's health and concerned that the Devil has come to Salem. But his public concern is very different to his private concern. In private Reverend Parris is more concerned for his own reputation and how it will affect his employment prospects. In Act One Parris says to the character, Abigail "If you trafficked with spirits in the forest I must know now for surely my enemies will and they will ruin me with it". Parris is fearing that he too will be alienated from the society of Salem and not belong. Above all else, it is very important for Parris to keep his sense of belonging and to do this; Reverend Parris even tells lies when in Act 3 he says, "I can only say, sir, that I never found any of them naked".

Parris is a weak and cowardly man and is suspicious of everyone. Parris feels that everyone is his enemy and this is portrayed when he says in Act 1: "There is a faction that is sworn to drive me from my pulpit." Another of Miller's characters, who also happens to be a Reverend, is John Hale.

Reverend Hale arrives in Salem as the expert in witchcraft and devil worship. The Salem community has faith in Reverend Hale. He is a confident man and finds himself in a position of power in the investigations. He walks into the community as a saviour and is embraced. He instantly belongs. Parris greets him with enthusiasm in Act 1: "Mr. Hale! Oh! It's good to see you again!" Reverend John Hale is entirely confident in his knowledge and ability to find and defeat the devil.

His confidence is shaken and from this position of confidence he falls heavily. Hale is shaken by the arrests of Elizabeth and Rebecca, as he believed them to be innocent. At the beginning of the play Hale belongs and has his place in society. He is held in high regard by the people of Salem. He belongs. As the play goes on Hale's feelings of belonging are diminished.

By Act 4 Reverend Hale is a broken man. "I came into this village like a bridegroom to his beloved, bearing gifts of high religion! I beg you woman, prevail upon your husband to confess." Reverend Hale encourages Elizabeth Proctor to have her husband lie.

Reverend Hale once belonged, but his behavior sees him completely alienated from the court and the community. He now does not belong. Abigail Williams is the seventeen year old niece of Reverend Parris. Abigail is a powerful figure throughout the play and her character is intimidating and

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dishonest. In Salem society Abigail is still regarded as a child and has no status. To give her a sense of belonging, she leads a group of her peers and like the other girls in the town, Abigail has no way of belonging in the adult society in Salem, due to her age.

Abigail was removed from her job at the home of John and Elizabeth Proctor as it was discovered she had been involved in a sexual relationship with John Proctor. In Act 1 Abigail says to John Proctor ??? how do you call me a child???! This shows Abigail??™s resentment at her being given the status of being a child. Elizabeth Proctor can see Abigail??™s real motives which are to replace Elizabeth as John Proctor??™s wife.

This is shown in Elizabeth??™s words in Act 2, ??? She wants me dead; I knew all week it would come to this???. Abigail tries to bring John Proctor back to her in the only scene where they are alone. It is here that Abigail refers to how her relationship with John Proctor made her realize what ??? pretense??? Salem is. John Proctor rejects Abigail and this rejection returns Abigail to her status of childhood. This attempt at adult belonging fails for Abigail, so she returns to the peer group where she can belong and have power over others.

Abigail belongs with the girls. John Proctor is a Salem farmer. He is a proud man with his own opinions.

He is an individual and that can cause problems in a society, like Salem, that expects everyone to be the same. John Proctor chooses not to belong in the Salem society. His sin, even when only Elizabeth knows about it, makes him uncomfortable in terms of belonging in the Salem society

Proctor's sense of belonging has been shattered by the affair with Abigail. Proctor says to Elizabeth, "Spare me! You forget nothin' and forgive nothin'." John Proctor believes he is unworthy of belonging because of his affair with Abigail. This shows the idea of not belonging to society. For Abigail, it is a failed attempt at belonging and for John Proctor; it is an act of social suicide.

This event shows the concept of not belonging to the Salem society. Act 1, "In the Woods" is the key event in this text. This event is integral to the story of The Crucible. Those involved in this event show they don't belong. The group who gathered in the woods was young women, considered to be children and therefore outsiders in Salem society. They were alienated from society due to their age and did not belong.

Tituba is also considered to be an outcast and not belonging in Salem society. She is only a servant and her race, religion, culture and language add to her sense of not belonging. She is used as a scapegoat and a victim of Abigail's lies. This prevents her from belonging as well.

Throughout this text we can see, that through Miller's representations of people like Abigail and Reverend Hale, the relationship between Elizabeth and John Proctor and the event that takes place in the opening act where the girls are found in the woods, the concept of belonging and not belonging in the Salem society.