

# Hysteria in "the crucible" essay sample

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The state of hysteria in a society can spread faster than a brush fire, and be more dangerous than a San Francisco earthquake. There is a process of four combined steps that will ultimately lead to this disaster; a fearful event, promotion of the event, attacks due to pretense, and total panic and chaos. Webster's dictionary defines hysteria as a state of unmanageable fear or excess.

The process of hysteria is initiated by an event which brings fear, and will eventually cause social unrest, chaos, and distrust. This event usually involves a group of people and an issue that concerns the whole community. In the Crucible this can be seen when Abi and the other girls of Salem are found dancing in the woods. The dancing strikes fear of witchcraft, and the process of hysteria begins. The American Communist scare in the 1950's was initiated by the increased popularity of the socialist system of government. Because this system challenged the basic civil rights of Americans, this event involved the entire nation.

In order for hysteria to occur a significant number of people must learn of the event. This happens by the promotion and spread of fear throughout a community. Promotion is important because without public knowledge of the fear social unrest will not take place. As seen in the Crucible, promotion is shown when Reverend Parris holds a meeting of the largest town gossips to tell them of Betty and Ruth's ailment, and that witchcraft may be involved. This knowledge starts a chain reaction through Salem, which spreads the news to everyone in the town. During the Red scare media exploitation had already plagued America, so promotion was almost instant.

At this point the community is starting to fall apart. The first signs of unrest are noticeable, and control has become a mute point. Members of the community begin lashing out at others making accusations based on pretense, and driven by fear. This is so destructive to a community because no one is safe from false accusations or slander. When this happens "mob mentality" takes effect. A person is calm, responsible, and reasonable; but people are out of control and easily panicked. At this time in *The Crucible*, the town of Salem is in complete disarray. No one can take control, and the "mob" in effect has all the power. During the communist scare however, the American population is not the mob. Instead a small group of high-powered individuals seem to have the power which makes it hard to believe that these events even took place.

Finally there is no hope. Hysteria has plagued the community. Everyone is panicked, and individuals have lost any sense of reality. The consequences were dire in both examples of the Communist scare and *The Crucible*. In the *Crucible* countless innocent citizens of Salem lost their lives as a result. During the red scare many talented writers and actors lost their jobs and any chance of ever working in the entertainment industry again.

The steps to hysteria may be hard to recognize, or may even seem to be unimportant; however the result of letting this process take place can be eternally destructive to a society.