

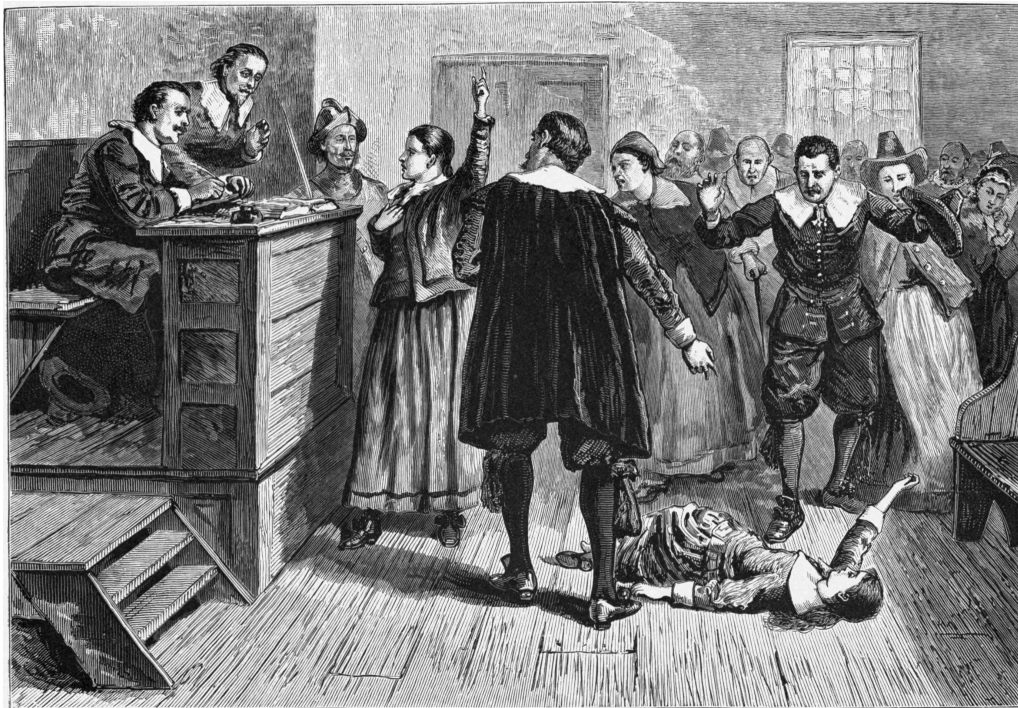
*The Crucible* by Arthur Miller  
ISU Theatre Educational Guide

We are so happy that your school will be attending our performance of *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. This guide contains background information you may find useful in preparation for the performance. Additional learning activities /conversation starters for after the show are also included.

Theater Etiquette

We want your students to have the best experience when they see a performance live so below is a list of reminders of how to behave when they see the show.

- Stay seated during the performance.
- Keep in mind that the actors on stage can hear you if you talk, so always be courteous to the actors and other audience members around you by paying attention during the performance and not talking or texting
- Arrive early. Seeing a show is a special experience, and you don't want to miss any of it.
  - No taking pictures or recording during the performance.
- Be sure to laugh and applaud when appropriate, and remember to have fun!



“Witchcraft at Salem Village”

**SUMMARY:** The Crucible, though fiction, is based on historical facts. The play portrays the events and ensuing paranoia in Salem Village, Massachusetts following the mysterious illnesses of two children.

When witchcraft is suspected, accusations follow. The play is an allegorical response by Arthur Miller to the similar paranoia and accusations during the 1950's McCarthy era and Red Scare in the United States.

**SETTING:** 1692 Puritan settlement of Salem, Massachusetts.

**CHARACTERS:**

*The Villagers*

JOHN PROCTOR: A farmer living on the outskirts of the village. He is respected, and does not tolerate hypocrites.

ELIZABETH PROCTOR: A virtuous woman, Proctor's wife.

GILES COREY: Farmer. Friend of the Proctors. Known for filing lawsuits in the community, he is feisty.

REBECCA NURSE: Elderly, wise, virtuous and highly respected in the community.

FRANCIS NURSE: Husband of Rebecca, also very respected.

TITUBA: From Barbados, she is the slave of Rev. Parris.

SARAH GOOD: A beggar woman, looked down on by the village.

THOMAS PUTNAM: A wealthy landowner

ANN PUTNAM: Wife of Thomas

*The Girls*

ABIGAIL WILLIAMS: Orphan who was taken in by her uncle, the Rev. Parris. Former servant of the Proctors.

MARY WARREN: Current servant of Proctor house.

MERCY LEWIS: Servant of Putnam house.

SUSANNA WALCOTT: One of the teen girls,

BETTY PARRIS: Young daughter of the Reverend Parris, she is ill with an unknown affliction

*The Clergy and The Court*

REVEREND SAMUEL PARRIS: the village's Puritan minister

REVEREND JOHN HALE: Younger Puritan minister, purported expert on witchcraft

JUDGE HATHORNE: Presides over the trials

DEPUTY-GOVERNOR DANFORTH: Presides over the trials

EZEKIEL CHEEVERS Salem resident who acts as the clerk of court during the trials

JOHN WILLARD: Marshall of Salem, responsible for bringing in the accused

**The Playwright: Arthur Miller**

Arthur Miller (1915-2005) was a celebrated American playwright whose works included: *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), and *A View From the Bridge* (1955).

*The Crucible* opened on Broadway in 1953 to mixed reviews and a rather cool reception., but received the Tony Award for Best New Play. The play's popularity continues and it is Miller's most consistently performed play, world-wide.

**The RED SCARE and the McCarthy Era**

In his essay for *The New Yorker* magazine, Miller wrote that: "The *Crucible* was an act of desperation" as a response to the "witch hunts" going on in America during late 1940-early 1950. As the Soviet Union grew in strength and influence and China became a Communist nation, fears arose in the United States. Fear often breeds suspicion, and this suspicion led to the investigations of American citizens suspected of having ties to the Communist Party. As Miller explained in his 1996 essay for *The New Yorker*, just as the Theocracy relied upon "Spectral Evidence" as proof in 1692 Salem, the U.S. government was not so much interested in the actual acts of an accused, but his thoughts and intentions. And in the naming of names. To avoid prosecution, one must name "others." Because of his friendships, ties, and art, Miller came under heavy scrutiny during the "Red Scare" of the McCarthy era and was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. When Miller refused to name names, a judge found him guilty of contempt of Congress in May 1957. As a result, Miller was fined, given a prison sentence, blacklisted, and disallowed a U.S. passport. In August 1958, his appeal succeeded, and the conviction was overturned.

Miller spent a week in Salem researching the witch trials utilizing archives and primary documents including journals and trial transcripts. While a work of fiction, the play is rooted in fact and the characters are based on actual people and real life events. Regarding the reality of his character's lives, Miller wrote the following in his autobiography "Timebends: A Life," while standing on the rock at Gallows Hill:

*Here hung Rebecca, John Proctor; George Jacobs, people more real to me than the living can ever be. The sense of a terrible marvel again that people could have such a belief in themselves and in the rightness of their consciences as to give their lives rather than say what they thought was false. Or, perhaps, they only feared Hell so much? Yet, Rebecca said, and it is written in the record, I cannot believe myself. And she knew it would kill her [...] The rock stands forever in Salem. They knew who they were. Nineteen.*

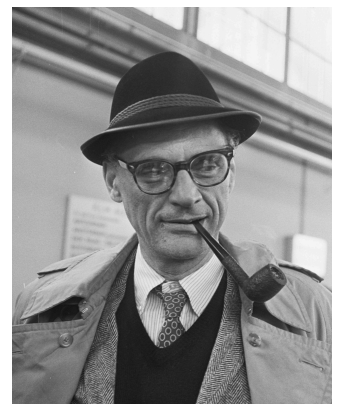
**Sources:**

Miller, Arthur. *Timebends : A Life*. 1st ed., Grove Press, 1987.

Miller, Arthur. *Why I Wrote "The Crucible" an Artist's Answer to Politics*.  
The New Yorker, 21 Oct. 1996.

Link to web edition: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1996/10/21/why-i-wrote-the-crucible>

<https://www.arthurmiller.org/>



## The Puritans

The Puritans were a Protestant group fleeing religious persecution in England. They obtained a charter from King Charles I in 1629 for The Massachusetts Bay Company as a charter colony rather than a royal colony. This particular charter allowed the Puritans to be primarily self-governed, and they established a Theocracy, with the clergy holding authority as the deliverers of God's word and laws to the people.

They emphasized devotion to the bible, the individual conscience, and living a "godly" life that involved daily prayer rituals, hard work, and church services several times a week.

Unlike the separatist Pilgrims, the Puritans sought to "purify" rather than separate. They believed that evil needed to be rooted out, and it was their job to do just that. The new settlements were surrounded by vast wilderness where potential threats and dark forces might lurk, waiting to infiltrate and test their pious communities. Heaven and Hell were very real and the Devil was ever present, seeking to tempt them. They believed in predestination and while both men and women were seen as equal souls in the eyes of God, they were not equal in the eyes of Satan. Women were considered to be more easily corrupted by the Devil due to their "weaker" faculties. The Puritans held to the early modern European superstitions regarding witchcraft and many afflictions and misfortunes were blamed on it. If witches visited your village, it was not a sign of weakness necessarily, but a sign that yours was a very righteous community. As the influential Puritan minister Cotton Mather wrote, "Where will the devil show the most malice but where he is hated and hateth most?"

The Puritans maintained five essential beliefs based on Calvinism:

**Total Depravity:** all are born evil due to Adam's original sin against God

**Unconditional Election:** God has predetermined, through His mercy, who shall be deemed worthy of salvation, there is nothing one can do to change their lot

**Limited Atonement:** the sacrifice of Jesus only atones for the sins of those predestined by God for salvation, not for all believers

**Irresistible Grace:** one cannot refuse God's grace

**Perseverance of the Saints:** if one has been chosen to be saved by God, they cannot fall from grace, regardless of sin

Puritan life was one of hard work, discipline, modesty, and conformity - all tenets of God's "elect." Sexuality (particularly women's) was repressed and modesty was required. Women, as earthly creatures, were expected to be submissive to their husbands. Young, unmarried women were particularly without power and often viewed

with suspicion of immorality. Dancing was not permitted and public laughing and joking were suspect. Church attendance was a requirement.

Children were expected to obey their parents. Toys and games were limited. Both boys and girls were educated as Puritans were expected to be able to read, write, and interpret their bibles.

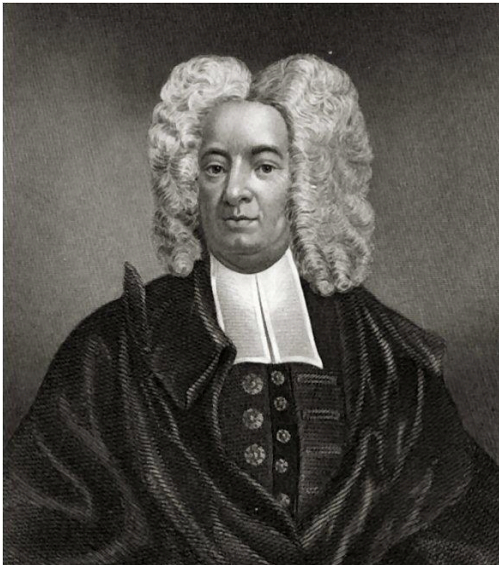
Though at first fairly peaceful, relations with the Native Americans originally living in the area became fraught as more and more Europeans arrived and settlements expanded. Violent conflicts and wars were not uncommon by the late 17th century.

Sources:

Colacurcio, Michael J., and Allison M. Johnson, editors. *Religion and Its Reformation in America, Beginnings to 1730 : An Anthology of Primary Sources*. 1st ed., Baylor University Press, 2020.

Connolly, Brian. "Under Household Government: Sex and Family in Puritan Massachusetts by M. Michelle Jarrett Morris, and: *Regulating Passion: Sexuality and Patriarchal Rule in Massachusetts, 1700–1830* by Kelly A. Ryan (Review)." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2015, pp. 517–22.

Konig, David Thomas. *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts: Essex County, 1629-1692*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1979.



Cotton Mather

By Peter Pelham, artist - <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/law/witt/images/lect3/>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=80525>

**The Original Inhabitants of what was to become Salem:  
The Naumkeag band of the Massachusetts tribe**

The Naumkeag were a nomadic people who moved seasonally. Their villages along the Massachusetts coast would at times appear abandoned and English settlers would take them over as their own, modifying them as they saw fit. The Naumkeag first viewed this as a misunderstanding and continued to keep good relations with the settlers. The settlers brought with them diseases new to the Naumkeag and many became sick and died as a result. Despite their losses of people and their homes, the Naumkeag remained peaceful.

As tensions deepened between the Wampanoag tribe and the English settlers, violence ensued leading to King Philip's War (1675-1678) and many Naumkeag people died as a result of inhumane conditions as prisoners of war.

Suggested links to learn more about the Massachusetts tribe, the Wampanoag and Naumkeag people:

<https://massachusettstribe.org/>

<https://www.mcnaa.org/mission-history-work>

<https://www.salem.org/about-salem/native-history-and-indigenous-acknowledgement/>

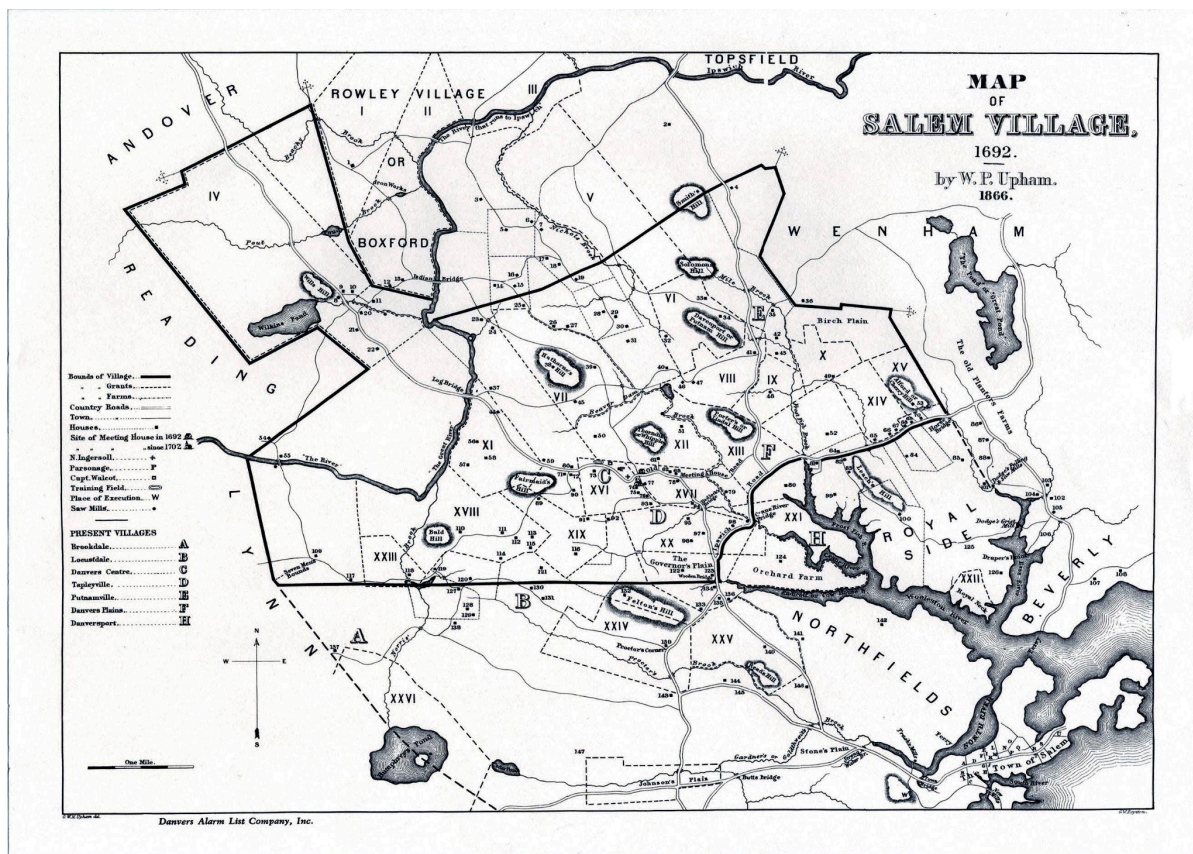
<https://www.pioneervillagesalem.org/the-naumkeag>

## The Salem Witch Trials

Between early 1692 and mid 1693, more than 200 people in colonial Massachusetts had been accused of practicing witchcraft, 20 of them were executed. The Salem witch trials were starting just as the "witch craze" in Europe that lasted from the 1300's through the 1600's with tens of thousands of "witches" being executed, was winding down. During the medieval and early modern eras, it was widely believed that the devil could, in exchange for a loyalty pact, grant special powers to people to harm others. The Puritan settlers brought this belief with them to Massachusetts.

Scholars tend to point to several factors leading up to the trials. It is important to understand a bit about the history of the area.

In 1689 England (monarchs William and Mary) started a war with France, referred to as King William's War. The conflict sent a wave of refugees from upstate New York, Nova Scotia, and Quebec into Essex County including Salem Village in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Tensions rose between the villagers as resources were strained, old family rivalries became more pronounced. There was a growing distrust of the "merchant" class of Salem Town by those in Salem Village who depended on agriculture. Salem Village petitioned to have its own minister, and the Reverend Samuel Parris was elected to become the first ordained minister of Salem Village in 1689 (not without controversy). Some villagers found Parris to be overly rigid and greedy. Amidst the tension and arguing, the Puritans believed the devil was at work in their community.



**A timeline of events during 1692:**

\*Jan. 1692: Elizabeth (Betty) the 9-year-old daughter of the Rev. Parris, and her 11-year-old cousin, Abigail begin having unexplainable "fits." Upon examination of their strange behavior, a local doctor determined the supernatural was to blame. 12-year-old Ann Putnam Jr. begins displaying similar behavior - throwing things, contorting, screaming.

\*Feb. 29, 1692: the girls are questioned by magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne and under pressure, blame Tituba (Caribbean slave of the Rev. Parris family), Sarah Osborne (elderly and impoverished), and Sarah Good (homeless beggar).

\*March 1, 1692: the women are brought in for interrogation, lasting several days. Tituba is the only one who confessed, stating: *The devil came to me and bid me serve him*. She went on to describe the encounter in elaborate detail, claiming there were more witches.

\*Wild accusations follow, but the seeds of paranoia were already planted.

\*April, 1692: Deputy-Governor Thomas Danforth and his assistants begin attending the hearings as dozens of accused witches are brought in.

\*May 27, 1692: Governor William Phips orders a Special Court with Bridget Bishop, an older woman known for promiscuity and gossip, is ordered to testify. She refuses to confess, stating: I am as innocent as the unborn child. She is found guilty of witchcraft.

\*June 10, 1692: Bridget Bishop is the first to hang on what would become known as "Gallows Hill."

\*Cotton Mather, an influential Puritan minister, implores the court to stop using "spectral evidence." He is ignored.

\*July, 1692: 5 more people are hung for witchcraft

\*August, 1692: 5 more people are hung for witchcraft

\*September, 1692: 8 more people are hung for witchcraft

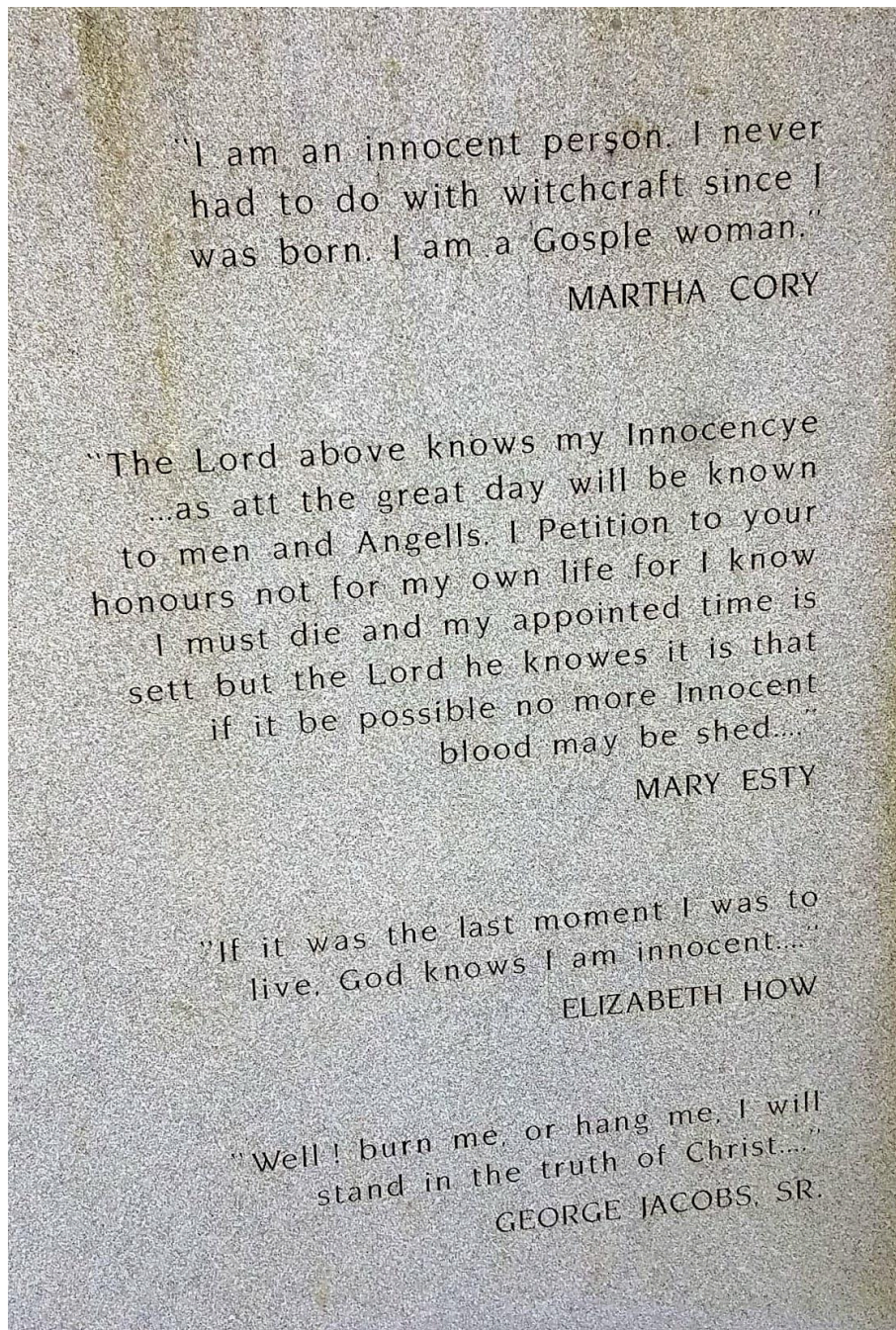
\*Phips own wife is questioned for witchcraft

\*October 29, 1692: Phips dissolves the Special Court of Oyer and Terminer, replacing it with a Special Court of Judicature which does not allow for spectral evidence. This court only condemned 3 of its 56 defendants.

\*May, 1693: Phips pardons those imprisoned on witchcraft charges.



By the end of the Salem Witch Trials, 19 men and women had been hung on Gallows Hill. At least five accused died in jail and Giles Corey, age 71, was pressed to death for refusing to go to trial. At least two dogs with suspected ties to the devil were killed.



Statements of Innocence. Part of the memorial for the victims of the 1692 witch trials. Danvers, Mass. Francis Helminski

**Recommended links and sources:**

<https://www.salem.org/salem-witch-trials/>

<https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/home.html>

<https://www.neh.gov/article/records-salem-witch-trials>

**Conversation Starters:**

1. Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? How did you respond?
2. What does the phrase "witch hunt" mean to you?
3. Do you think our government wrongly accuses people today? If so, who are the wrongly accused?
4. One of the themes of *The Crucible* is "power" and the abuse of power as well as the desire to gain or hold onto power. At the beginning of the play, which characters have power and which ones do not? How does this change throughout the play? Does it change for all of the characters? Why or why not?
5. According to the dictionary, the word "crucible" can be defined in the following ways:
  1. *a ceramic or metal container in which metals or other substances may be melted or subjected to very high temperatures*
  2. *a situation of severe trial, a test*
  3. *a place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development*Which of these definitions do you think best fits the play's themes and why? Or, do they all? If so, why?
6. Tituba is the first to confess to witchcraft. Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne do not. Why do you think that is?
7. Do you see a villain or multiple villains in this play? If so, who are they and why? Do you think there are any heroes? If so, who are they, and why?
8. Why do you think the choice was made to use chalk in our staging? What might it symbolize?
9. What is a Theocracy?

**ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:**

- Write a review of this performance! What did you like? What didn't you like? What artistic choices were most effective for you and why?
- Write a character analysis.
- Choose one (or more) of the characters and compare/contrast Miller's description with research you find on the actual person.
- Discuss how YOU would stage *The Crucible*. What artistic choices would you make and why?
- Write an essay discussing why (or why not) you find this play relevant today.

### **About Iowa State University Department of Music and Theatre**

The Department of Music and Theatre offers a strong undergraduate music and theatre program, where students study with full-time faculty professionals in a supportive environment that encourages students to become their best.

#### **Our faculty**

Faculty in the Department of Music and Theatre represent a distinguished combination of professional and academic excellence.

#### **Mission and vision**

The Mission of ISU Theatre and Performing Arts is to empower citizen artistry by engaging students and the community in transformative theatre and performing arts experiences which examine the human condition, encourage lifelong learning, teach artistic skills, prepare professionals, inspire empathy, explore creativity, build relationships, and embrace diversity.

*We love to hear from our audience members! Send letters, drawings or reviews to:*

ISU Theatre

0310 Carver Hall

411 Morrill Road

Ames, IA 50011

Email: [isutheatre@iastate.edu](mailto:isutheatre@iastate.edu)

Website: [www.theatre.iastate.edu](http://www.theatre.iastate.edu)

This educational guide was created by senior performing arts student, Nicole Friess-Schilling.