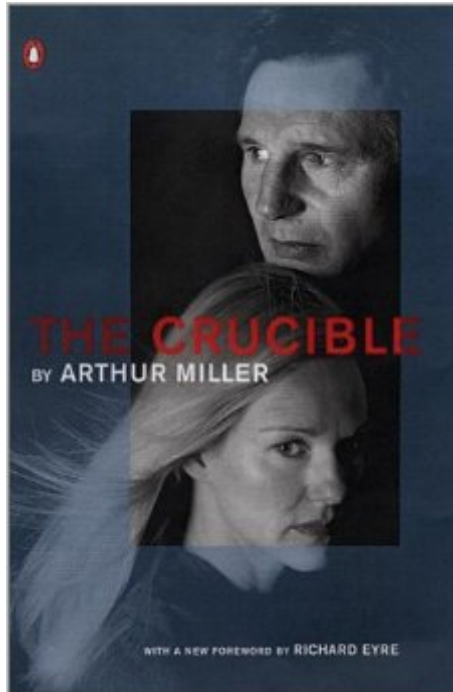


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# The Crucible (Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics)



## Synopsis

The Crucible, Arthur Miller's classic play about the witch-hunts and trials in seventeenth-century Salem, Massachusetts, is returning to Broadway. To mark the occasion, Penguin is pleased to offer this beautiful hardcover edition. "A powerful drama." (Brooks Atkinson, The New York Times)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The play's main narrative line tells the story of the Salem witch hunts which took place in Massachusetts, 1692. At a deeper level, Miller raises several powerful and important questions about human life and morality. But the play's most amazing quality is that it is not "deep" or "philosophical" by traditional standards. Miller has, in a short and easy-to-read manuscript, opened the door (or maybe I should say he presents the reader with a mirror) to modern political life. The play is essentially a critique of McCarthyism and the the communist scare of the 1950s. Miller saw the parallels between the witch hunts and the McCarthy trials, and found the witch trials to be a compelling vehicle for discussing modern events. Key themes include: 1. People gaining absolution from the powers-that-be by confessing the sins of others. 2. The power of community rituals, such as confession. 3. The role of political opposition and the consequences of compliance (passive or active). 4. The consequences of a polarized world views and mass hysteria. These are just a few of the themes. The play is quite clearly a great tragedy, but remains a tragedy for our times. Through characters we can connect with, Miller convincingly shows us that the lessons from the witch hunts

still apply. As a reader, I am convinced that Miller's play remains relevant and powerful in the twenty-first century. Miller has left me with questions, regarding world events in 2002 and 2003, that I did not have before reading the play. I read this play in only a couple hours. It is compelling, engaging, and difficult to put down. Personally, I feel this text stands a great chance of making it onto my "top ten" list of best manuscripts. I highly recommend this play.

As usual, Arthur Miller was in rare form when he wrote "The Crucible." Although on the surface it is about the Salem Witch Trials, Miller's true inspiration came from the Red Scare that plagued Hollywood in the middle of the twentieth century (and included his pal Elia Kazan). The fact that Miller wove factual history with the hysteria of his day makes "The Crucible" all the more chilling. Throughout the course of the play, a collection of teenage girls 'confess' to having seen various women and men of the town of Salem with the devil. This hysteria sweeps over the town as even the authorities fall under the sway of these lying young girls. Caught in the middle of these hysterics is the Proctor family - John and Elizabeth, who have struggled in the past, but are trying to rebuild their marriage. They are rent apart when Elizabeth is suspected of being a witch. John hopes to clear his wife's name, but only manages to make matters worse for both of them. The hysteria experienced in Salem is chilling in the fact that these sorts of witch hunts occur today, in all different areas of society. "The Crucible" shows how easily people can be swayed, with the barest of evidence, to believe something that is false. Miller's play is extremely well-written and informative, and almost too frighteningly real.

I used this recording this year while teaching "The Crucible". My students loved it!! The emotion conveyed by the cast is SO much better than the typical monotone voice that students use while reading out loud. Even though there were some small parts that are skipped when following along with our textbook, it was completely worth it (and the parts skipped were very small - it was very easy to read it aloud if necessary).

Using the historical and controversial subject of the Salem Witch Trials, Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* presents an allegory for events in contemporary America. Miller's play employs these historical events to criticize the moments in humankind's history when reason and fact became clouded by irrational fears and the desire to place blame for society's problems on others. The play deals with the corrupted town of Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. John Proctor, a blunt, out-spoken farmer and the play's central character, gets caught up in a conspiracy not even his own strength

can control when his ex-lover, Abigail, throws false accusations in his wife's direction. As Proctor tries to free his wife and prove all others also accused of witchcraft innocent, he finds himself being accused as well. This play is a story of vengeance; one man stands in a tug-of-war battle between God and Satan, pride and damnation, and good and evil. It all leads up to a climactic ending in which one lost soul finds peace with himself and realizes the importance of one's integrity.

This play is truly and epic for recent times. The language used by Miller for his characters are intelligent and eloquent, but not to such an extent as to make for difficult reading (like Shakespeare for instance). Miller's *Crucible* is largely based on the Salem Witch Trials and contains more than a few actual quotes for his characters that came from transcripts of the real trials. The plot is so very clever with many layers and themes and subplots running throughout. There is the obvious top layer that almost anyone can understand about the horror of the witchhunt, and then there is a more subtle layer about the inner nature of humans... sometimes it can be quite dark (like Abigail, the girl who really leads the accusations) or cowardly (like Parris, whose only real drive seems to be saving his own skin and reputation) and yet there are others that are good (John Proctor, who takes on almost like a Christ figure) and righteous (like Rebecca Nurse who is practical and strong willed through the whole ordeal). The writing is brilliant and it is easy to become thoroughly entrenched in the horror that life in Salem in 1692 came to be. There are many tense moments, and many agonizing situations, and I was quite swept up with the futility and frustration that many of the accusees more than likely felt. This play is brilliant, and was written in response to the McCarthy horror that swept the 1950's, and serves as a disturbing warning that the intolerance and hysteria of the Salem Witch Trials has happened before, and can happen again.

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