

# Critical essay

The Crucible by Arthur Miller

# Read the questions carefully!

- ❖ Seems obvious, but make sure you look at the second part of the question.
- ❖ The first part is really just an indicator: “Choose a play in which...”
- ❖ It is the second part which tells you what to do:  
“Explain the nature of the conflict and then show how it helps our understanding of the play as a whole.”
- ❖ Lots of people don't do well as they forget to answer the second part.

# Make a plan

- ❖ When you have decided on your question, spend a few minutes making a plan.
- ❖ Write down what your main points should be (try to write at least 4). You will write a paragraph about each.
- ❖ Try to also write down your key quotes now. This will help when you come to writing the essay.
- ❖ The most logical (and the easiest) order, is the order of the play. But it depends on your question. For example if the question asks about the final scene.
- ❖ There is no one correct way to structure your essay. Just try to be logical about it. And try to link your points/ paragraphs

# Referring to the question N5

Choose a play which explores **a theme** which you think is important.

By referring to **appropriate techniques**, show how effectively the playwright establishes and explores the theme.

# Introduction

## N5

The Crucible is a play by Arthur Miller. In this essay, I will show how theme is important throughout the play.

Compare this  with 

“The Crucible” is a play by Arthur Miller, which explores the theme of love in difficult circumstances. In this essay I will explore the love between the central character, Proctor, and his wife, Elizabeth.

# Referring to the question Higher

Choose a play in which a central character is in conflict or rejects another character.

Briefly explain the circumstances of the conflict or rejection and go on to **discuss the consequences** of this conflict or rejection **for the play as a whole**.

# Introduction

## Higher

The Crucible by Arthur Miller is a play in which the central character is in conflict with another character. In this play, John Proctor is in conflict with his wife, Elizabeth.

Compare this  with 

In this drama, “The Crucible” by Arthur Miller, there is conflict between the central character, John Proctor, and Abigail, the girl he had an affair with. I will speak about this conflict and its consequences to the play as a whole.

# Referring to the question

Use the summary:

This play follows the witchcraft trials that took place in a small town, called Salem, in the 1600s. Throughout the play a number of dramatic events take place, largely caused by Abigail, who led the group of girls in their accusations of witchcraft. This led to the truth about Proctor and Abigail's affair coming out, which creates conflict between them, and ultimately led to his death.

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# Referring to the question

## Main paragraph:

In the opening act we learn about Proctor's affair with Abigail...He feels very guilty about his sin, whereas Abigail believes if it were not for his wife, they could be together and she continues to confess that she looks for "John Proctor who took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart." This shows that she is determined that her and Proctor should be together. However, **Proctor rejects her**, saying, "I may think of you softly from time to time but I will cut off my hand before I reach for you again." **This rejection upsets and angers Abigail but she still believes her and John have a chance.**

# Remember the second part of the question

*In the opening act we learn about Proctor's affair with Abigail... This rejection upsets and angers Abigail but she still believes her and John have a chance.*

How can we answer the second part of the question? **“discuss the consequences of this conflict or rejection for the play as a whole”**

Try adding something like:

Soon after this scene, accusations of witchcraft begin and Abigail sees an opportunity to get rid of Proctor's wife. We find out in Act 2 that Elizabeth has been accused of witchcraft and it is as a direct result of Proctor's rejection of Abigail.

# Analysis

Many of you are still doing too much retelling of the story:

In the first act we find out about the affair between Proctor and Abigail. They are at the bedside of Betty, who cannot seem to wake. They then begin to talk about their relationship, thinking no-one can hear. Betty, distressed at what she hears, wakes up screaming, but everyone downstairs, who was singing a psalm, thought she “couldn’t bear to hear the lords name”. This really started the belief that Betty was “bewitched”.

# Analysis

A good example of analysis:

In Act 1 we learn that Proctor had an affair with Abigail, the Reverend Parris' niece. While Parris' daughter lies unconscious on the bed, we hear John and Abigail discuss the affair. Abigail states her ever-present love for John and he replies with: "Abby, I may think of you softly from time to time but I will cut off my hand before I reach for you again." **His use of a bloody image emphasises disgust in himself for cheating in his wife**...John sharply rejects her by saying: "No, no, Abby, that's done with." **The repetition emphasises the affair shall not happen again.**

# Evaluation

This paragraph is link to the question and contains analysis:

At the end of Act 2, we see how much Proctor cares about Elizabeth. Elizabeth is taken to court because Abigail has accused her of witchcraft and Proctor does everything he can to try and save her. His words: “my wife will never die for me” shows his strength of feeling. As Elizabeth is being led away, stage directions tell us that Proctor “cannot bear to look at her”, which expresses his guilt. Proctor feels bad because if it wasn't for the affair the Abigail's jealousy wouldn't have led to Elizabeth going to court.

But how can we include evaluation?

# Evaluation

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# Critical terminology

The question also asks you to identify/ discuss the writer's techniques. Some of you write about the play as if it was real. But it has been created by a playwright. To get a really good mark, you must show an awareness of the writer's skills.

Look at the top of the paper. There is a box that asks you to:

**Answers to questions on Drama, should refer to the text and to such relevant features such as characterisation, key scene(s), structure, climax, theme, plot, conflict, setting...**

# Critical terminology

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# Questions on key scenes

- ❖ These are tricky, but there is a way to structure them.
- ❖ If you are answering a question about a dramatic scene, you must still show how it **impacts the rest of the play**
- ❖ Say what happens to **lead up to this point**
- ❖ And how the events in this scene **impact the rest of the play.**
- ❖ But...

# Questions on key scenes

- ❖ You must make sure you get on to the key scene quickly!
- ❖ If you are dealing with the conclusion to the play, you do not spend \_ or even \_ your essay dealing with what happened up to this point.
- ❖ Deal with this scene early on
- ❖ And then you can always go back and deal with what lead up to this point.

## **Final scene** - an example structure could be this:

❖ Introduction (say what scene)

❖ Brief summary (keep relevant to question)

❖ Point 1: what lead up to the imprisonment of P and E (Acts 1-3)

- P's affair with A; her jealousy and accusation of E; P's attempt to save E which resulted in his own accusation of witchcraft

- It is perfectly reasonable to word it like this:

“In order to fully understand the significance of the final scene, it is important to first explain what lead to this point.”

❖ Point 2: The final scene as a resolution of their relationship (start of the scene)

- significance of this scene - P and E see each other for first time in months/  
link to how they ended up there

❖ Point 3: Mutual forgiveness (middle of the scene)

- highly emotional scene/ link to strained relationship in past

❖ Point 4 – P forgives himself (end of the scene)

- he chooses to sacrifice his life to stand by his moral code/ link to his guilt about the affair/ link to hypocrisy of the whole trial

❖ Conclusion