

# The Crucible

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By Arthur Miller

# Essential Question:

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- **How did Arthur Miller use the events of the Salem witch trials to highlight problems in his own world?**
- **Take Cornell Notes (just like summer homework setup)-due 10/13**

# The Crucible is . . .

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Puritanism

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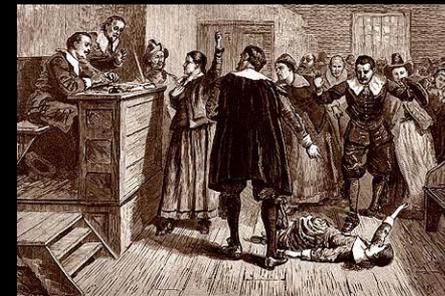
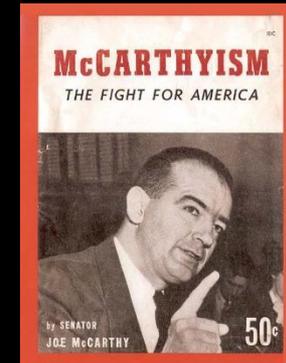
Witchcraft

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McCarthyism

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Arthur Miller



# Puritanism

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- Christian faith that originated in England during the early 1600s
- They split from the Church of England in 1633
- Many emigrated to the American colonies
- Their radical beliefs flourished in the new world

# Predestination

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- Puritans believed in predestination
- This doctrine meant that God had predetermined who would be saved
- You knew you had been chosen because God showed you favor, and you displayed righteousness
- So, the more moral and religious your actions, the more it was believed you were destined for heaven

# Witchcraft in Salem

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- Like all Puritans, the residents of Salem Village believed in witches and in witchcraft.
- They believed that witchcraft was “entering into a compact with the devil in exchange for certain powers to do evil.”
- They considered witchcraft both a sin and a crime; it was a very serious accusation, which was carefully and thoroughly investigated.



# End of the world fever

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- The year 1692 is important
- Many doomsayers claimed the world would end in 1700
- Thus began a fervor to prove their religious/moral worth before the end times came.
- Kept people constantly on edge.

# Witchcraft in Salem

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- The witchcraft hysteria began in Salem, Massachusetts, in early 1692.
- Reverend Samuel Parris's daughter and Abigail Williams started having fits of convulsion, screaming, and hallucination.
- A doctor examined the girls and concluded that the only explanation for these bizarre behaviors was witchcraft.



# Witchcraft in Salem



- A recently published book of the time detailed the symptoms of witchcraft; the girls' fits were much like those described in the book.
- Therefore, the Puritans of Salem were quick to believe the doctor's diagnosis.



# Volatile mix

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- So, a group of people, terrified about the end times, and convinced that their salvation was based on how righteous and holy they acted, were suddenly confronted with the idea that the Devil's minions were acting among them.
- Witch fever swept through the nation

# Witchcraft in Salem

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- The girls pointed fingers at Tituba (the Parris' slave), Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborn, which sparked a witch hunt.



# Witchcraft in Salem

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- During the next eight months of terror, more than 150 people were imprisoned for witchcraft.
- By the time court was dismissed, 27 people had been convicted, 19 hanged, and 1 pressed to death.
- The hysteria that snowballed in Salem reveals how deep the belief in the supernatural ran in colonial America, as well as how easily people could get swept up in nonsense.



# Guilty until proven innocent

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- Accused witches were forced to try to prove their innocence
- They were assumed guilty and threatened with death unless they confessed
- If they admitted they were witches, they were locked in jail
- If they refused, they were hanged

# Why not just confess?

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- You might think, why not just confess and live instead of refuse and die?
- Religious fears. Lying to the court, which was connected to the church, was seen as a damnable offense.
- Better to die innocent and go to Heaven than lie, live, and go to Hell

# Connection to today?

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- The events in Salem went down as one of the darkest chapters in American History
- Author Arthur Miller found scary parallels between what happened there and what was happening to him in the 1950s

# Communism in America

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- At the end of World War II, the United States and the USSR emerged as the world's major powers. They also became involved in the Cold War, a state of hostility (short of direct military conflict) between the two nations.
- Many Americans feared not only Communism around the world but also disloyalty at home. Suspicion about Communist infiltration of the government
- A lot of Americans thought the Soviets got the atomic bomb by using spies. It was charged that secret agents, working under cover, had stolen our secrets and given them to the Enemy. Even worse, these spies supposedly were hardly ever Russians themselves, but often American citizens, the kind of people you see every day on the street and hardly even notice.
- a Communist could be anybody. It sort of makes a Communist sound like the bogey-man, doesn't it? To many people in 1953, a Communist was just as scary as the bogey-man, and a lot more real.

# HUAC

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- Congress began to investigate suspicions of disloyalty. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) sought to expose Communist influence in American life.
- Beginning in the late 1940s, the committee called witnesses and investigated the entertainment industry. Prominent film directors and screenwriters who refused to cooperate were imprisoned on contempt charges.
- As a result of the HUAC investigations, the entertainment industry blacklisted, or refused to hire, artists and writers suspected of being Communists.

# McCarthyism

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- McCarthyism is the term used to describe a period of intense suspicion in the United States during the early 1950s.
- It began when Senator Joseph McCarthy, a U.S. senator from Wisconsin, claimed that communists had infiltrated the Department of State.
- During this period, people from all walks of life became the subjects of aggressive “witch hunts” often based on inconclusive, questionable evidence.

# McCarthyism

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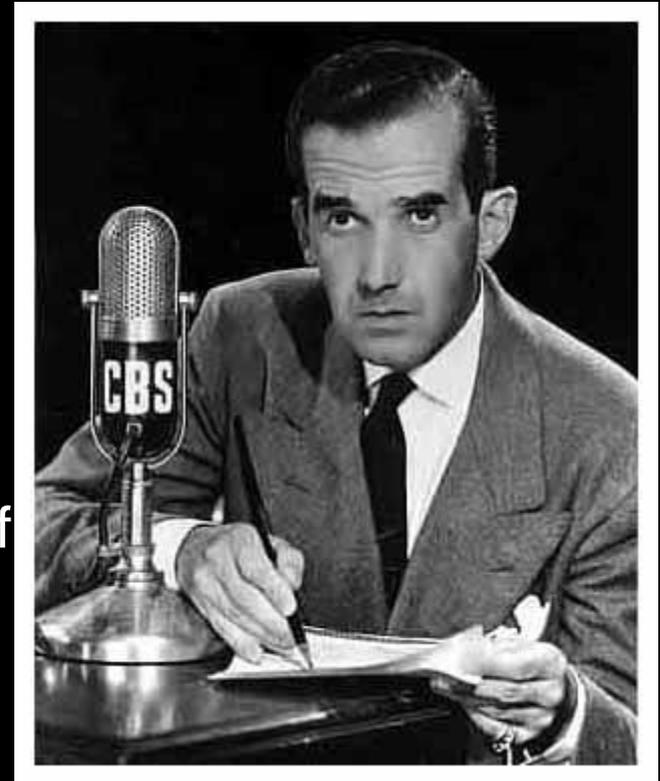


- Persons accused of being communists were often denied employment in both the public and private sector.
- In the film industry alone, over 300 actors, writers, and directors were denied work in the U.S.
- American writer, Arthur Miller, was one of those alleged to have been “blacklisted.”

# McCarthyism

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- McCarthy's influence finally faltered in 1954 when a famous CBS newsman, Edward R. Murrow, aired an investigative news report which revealed McCarthy as dishonest in his speeches and abusive in his interrogation of witnesses.
- The public was finally made aware of how McCarthy was ruining the reputations of many individuals through false accusations of communism.

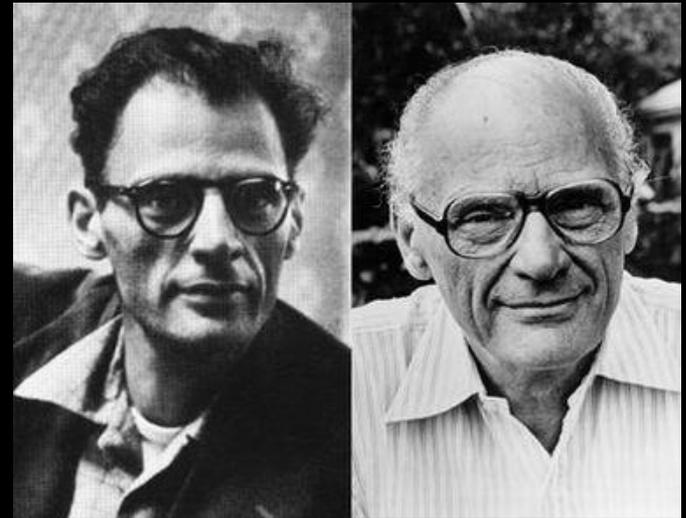


Edward R. Murrow

# Arthur Miller

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- 1915-2005
- American Playwright and Writer
- In 1953 he wrote *The Crucible*, which uses the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 to attack the anti-communist “witch hunts” of the 1950s.
- He believed the hysteria surrounding the witch craft trials in Puritan New England paralleled the climate of McCarthyism – Senator Joseph McCarthy’s obsessive quest to uncover communist party infiltration of American institutions.
- After the publication of the *The Crucible*, Miller himself was investigated for possible associations with the communist party.
- He refused to give information regarding his colleagues and was found guilty of contempt of court. His sentence was later overturned.



# *The Crucible*: Good drama, bad history

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- Miller wrote *The Crucible* not simply as a straight historical play detailing the Salem witch trials.
- a good deal of the information in the play misrepresents the literal events of the trial: at the time of the trial, John Proctor was sixty years old and Abigail Williams only eleven.
- The play is a parable for the McCarthy era, in which similar “witch hunts” occurred targeting citizens as communists rather than disciples of the devil.