

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*, The Salem Witch Trials, and McCarthyism

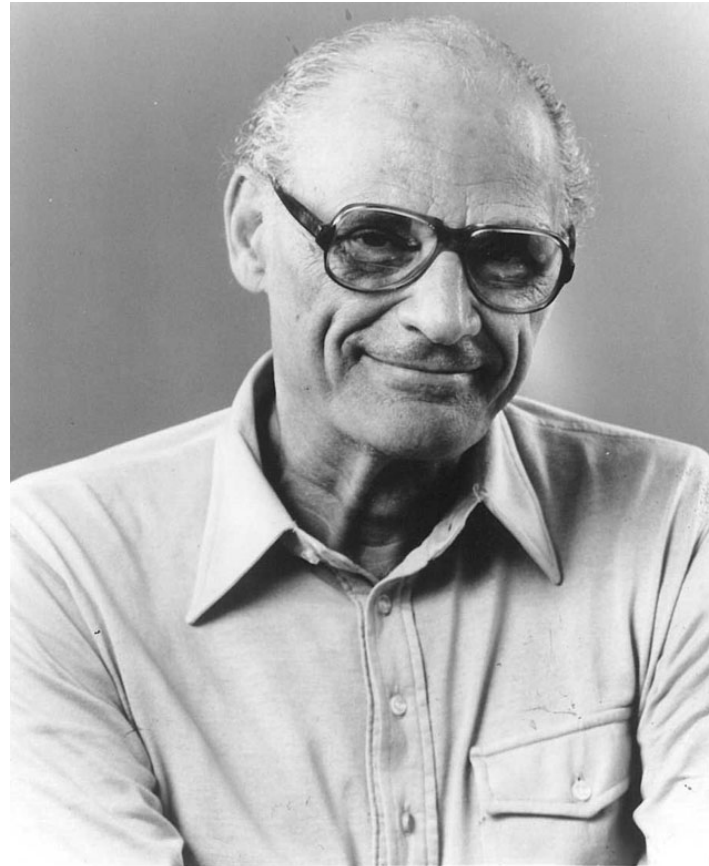
What do they all have in common????



Things to Know about Arthur Miller



- 1915-2005
- Grew up in a working class family; worked as a teenager to earn money to go to college
- Considered one of America's greatest playwrights—wrote *The Crucible*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *All My Sons*
- Confessed to attending Communist meetings in the 1950s and was arrested when he refused to reveal the names of others who were there





McCarthyism and the Salem Witch Trials



McCarthyism

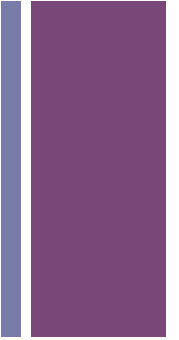
- A period in the 1950s when many public figures, ranging from actors and actresses to politicians, were suspected of holding secret Communist meetings
- Spearheaded by Senator Joseph McCarthy
- People were questioned by a special congressional committee. Expected to confess their own participation as well as that of their friends, or be jailed for contempt of court.
- This cost many of the questioned and accused their careers, savings, and reputations.

Salem Witch Trials

- Began in the late 1600s when several girls and a slave, Tituba, were caught dancing in the forest and were suspected of participating in witchcraft.
- A combination of extreme Puritan views, paranoia, and hysteria led to this outcome:
- 150 accused
- 19 hanged
- 1 crushed

+ What was really going on in Salem???

- ▶ Feuds between families
- ▶ Land grabbing
- ▶ Mass hysteria fueled by fear of Satan (Theocracy)
- ▶ Teenage boredom/rebellion
- ▶ Food poisoning?





Why are we talking about the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism?



- Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is set against the backdrop of the Salem Witch Trials.
- However, he wrote the play to draw a parallel between the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism.

This historical fiction play is clearly an extended metaphor:

- The Salem Witch Trials falsely accused 150 people of practicing witchcraft.
- A Communist witch hunt in which anyone suspected of communism was persecuted.



Parallels between Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism

- Both events showed what can happen when **paranoia** controls people's minds and actions.
- Both events put people in a lose-lose situation

--In the Salem Witch Trials, people had to **confess** to witchcraft and face public condemnation, or be **hanged**.

--In the McCarthy hearings, people had to reveal their Communist involvement or be **arrested** for contempt of court.



WITCHCRAFT AT SALEM VILLAGE



Drama Terms / *The Crucible* Terms



- En medias res: “in the middle of things”; a play begins at a point when something significant has already taken place
- Conjure: to call a spirit
- Sport: to play
- Pretense: pretend
- Crucible: a container that can withstand high heat
 - But , in this case, a crucible is a **severe test, trial, or challenge.**
 - Also, a crucible can be a **situation characterized by conflict.**



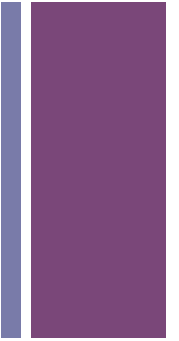
Drama Terms / *The Crucible* Terms



- Afflicted: spiritually harassed
- Spectral evidence: testimony given based on a “supernatural” occurrence
- Base: stupid
- Goody: term for Mrs., addressing a married woman
- Poppet: doll

+ Themes:

- Intolerance of differences
- Deception can lead to tragedy
- Hysteria and its societal effects
- Exercising justice
- The cost of martyrdom
- Appearance vs. Reality
- Reputation vs. Character





Useless facts:



- Arthur Miller was married to Marilyn Monroe for a number of years
- Daniel Day-Lewis (who plays John Proctor in our movie) is married to Arthur Miller's daughter.
- Arthur Miller worked very closely with the screenwriters and director of our movie. So, it is a true reflection of his intended purpose for his play.
- The play turned Salem, Massachusetts into a tourist destination.