**The Characters:**

**Instigators of the trials:**

The first and perhaps most reprehensible of these characters is the Reverend Samuel Parris, a man who symbolizes the particular quality of moral repression and paranoia that drive the trials. Miller immediately establishes Parris as a man whose main concern is his reputation and status in the community, rather than the well-being of his daughter. It is Tituba who shows more concern for Betty than her father, but she is kept away from the girl's sick bed. When he discusses finding Abigail and Betty dancing in the woods, his concern is not the sin that they committed but rather the possibility that his enemies will use this scandal against him. Parris is distinctly paranoid, defending himself from all enemies even when they may not exist. The particular quality of Parris that renders him dangerous is his strong belief in the presence of evil. Even before the witchcraft paranoia, Proctor indicates that Parris showed an obsession with damnation and hell in order to strike fear into his parishioners. With the seeming presence of witchcraft in Salem, Parris now has a concrete, physical manifestation of the evil he so fears.

Abigail Williams is a less complex character whose motivations are simple; she is a clear villain with straightforward malicious motivation. Miller establishes that Abigail is suspected of adultery with John Proctor, a rumor that is confirmed later in the first act. Abigail demonstrates a great ability for self-preservation: she admits what she must at appropriate times, and places the blame for her actions at the most convenient source, Tituba. She then takes advantage of the situation to accuse [Elizabeth Proctor](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-crucible/study-guide/character-list#elizabeth-proctor), aiming to take her place in John Proctor's life. Abigail's lack of any morality renders her able to charge others with witchery no matter the consequences.

The third character who serves as a proponent of the witchcraft hysteria is Thomas Putnam. While Parris's motivation is selfishness, suspicion, and paranoia and Abigail's is mere villainy, Thomas Putnam demonstrates that his motivation involves his longstanding grudges against others; the witchcraft trials give Putnam an opportunity to exact revenge against others, and, as will later be shown, to profit economically from others' executions.

The final character who sets the witchcraft trials in motion is Reverend John Hale. Hale is perhaps the most complex character in *The Crucible*, a man who approaches religious matters with the conviction of a scientist and a scientific emphasis on proper procedure. Hale holds the contradictory belief that they cannot rely on superstition to solve the girls' problems but that they may find a supernatural explanation for the events. Since he lacks the malicious motivations and obsessions that plague the other instigators of the trials, Reverend Hale has the ability to change his position, yet at this point he finds himself caught up in the hysteria he has helped to create.

**Opponents of the trials:**

In contrast to these four characters stand the three main opponents of the witchcraft accusations. The Nurses are the most straightforward of these; Miller portrays Rebecca Nurse and her husband, Francis Nurse, as near saints who rely on practical wisdom and experience.

In contrast, Giles Corey has none of the noble character of the Nurses, yet he can oppose Parris and Putnam because of his contentious, combative manner. Giles Corey doesn't care about public opinion and has never allowed his actions to be swayed by those around him. He may therefore choose whichever position he finds most suitable, even if it places him in danger.

However, Miller places John Proctor as the main protagonist of the story and its moral center. Proctor, as Miller writes, is a man who can easily discern foolishness and has the will to oppose it. He is a rational man with a brusque manner who, like Giles Corey, has no qualms about expressing his opinion. Miller portrays Proctor as a decidedly modern character, who eschews superstition for rationality and expresses skepticism for the trappings of organized religion, particularly Parris's obsession with hellfire and damnation. The particularly modern quality of John Proctor draws the audience sympathy to him, even if he is a self-professed sinner who had an affair with Abigail Williams. Yet this is the single sin that Proctor manifests and exists more as a plot point than as an organic character trait. The Proctor that Miller portrays throughout *The Crucible* has succumbed to and overcome temptation, like so many of us, making him both flawed and respectable.