

## **The Crucible - what happens in each act**

### **Act 1**

The action takes place in the upper rooms of Revd Parris's house. His daughter, Betty, lies ill in bed and Parris prays at her side. Shortly after, Abigail Williams, the minister's niece, arrives, and in the conversation which follows it is revealed that a group of girls together with Tituba, the minister's slave, have been in the forest. They were dabbling with magic, dancing, and one of the girls was naked.

Later still, Mr and Mrs Putnam arrive. Mrs Putnam is a bitter woman, with a history of having children who die immediately after birth. The allegation of witchcraft in the forest has spread, and they counsel Parris to face the people who are gathered in the downstairs room.

On their departure, leaving Abigail in the room with Betty, another 2 girls, Mercy Lewis and Mary Warren arrive. Their conversation reveals further details of what happened in the forest and discloses much about the character of each girl.

John Proctor, a local farmer, arrives and Mary and Mercy leave. A relationship between Abigail and John is disclosed, but he has now rejected her advances. She criticises his wife as being cold and snivelling. Betty 'wakes' from her illness and cries out, bringing the Putnams and Parris back into the room. Rebecca Nurse and Giles Corey are 2 other characters who appear at this time, both well-respected in the community, though both disliked by the Putnams.

Revd Hale, sent for by Parris arrives. He is an expert on witchcraft. He examines Betty, and following Abigail's accusations against Tituba, interrogates her.

The scene ends with Abigail leading a chorus of hysterical accusations against various local people, some suggested by the Putnams, accusing them of witchcraft.

### **Act 2**

It is 8 days later and the scene has now moved to the farmhouse of John Proctor and his wife Elizabeth. From their conversation and actions it soon becomes apparent that Elizabeth has still not forgiven John for his relationship with Abigail, who used to be their servant girl.

Mary Warren, their new servant arrives. She discloses that witch hunting in Salem is rife and says she is a member of the court along with Abigail and several other girls who are accusing people of being witches. She brings a doll for Elizabeth which will later be used in evidence against her. Elizabeth urges John to go to town and disclose the truth of the matter concerning Abigail and himself as Abigail had told him the business in the forest was only 'sport'.

Hale arrives to check for himself on the Proctors' character. He is dismayed that John cannot remember one of the 10 commandments. Giles Corey and Francis Nurse arrive distraught because their wives have been arrested. Shortly after, court officials arrive to arrest Elizabeth.

### **Act 3**

A week later in the courtroom at Salem, Giles Corey is protesting about the arrest of his wife. Francis Nurse is also there pleading his cause. They produce testimony in the form of a signed declaration from their neighbours as to the good character of their wives. Danforth, the Deputy Governor, orders these people to be detained for interrogation. Giles Corey states he has a witness to Mr Putnam's manipulation of the girls, but refuses to name him.

John Proctor produces Mary Warren to testify against the girls. In the course of the arguments, he is forced to confront Abigail, and admits his adultery with her.

Elizabeth is brought in and asked why she dismissed Abigail and whether she knew her husband had committed adultery with her. Afraid to ruin her husband's reputation, she lies and denies any knowledge of adultery. The girls go into a frenzied hysteria and Mary Warren joins them. John Proctor is arrested for witchcraft and Giles Corey for refusing to name his witness. Hale denounces the court.

### **Act 4**

Some months later in the autumn, in a cell in Salem jail, an attempt is made to persuade John to confess he is a witch. Elizabeth is asked to plead with him to that end to save his life but she does not attempt to do so. In the conversation that follows, they recognise their love for each other. John decides to confess and live despite hearing that Giles has refused to speak at all so his sons can inherit his farm. He dies under a weight of rocks.

It is revealed that Abigail has fled after stealing her uncle's money along with Mercy Lewis. Parris calls for the hangings to be postponed as he is afraid for his life once they start hanging well-respected townsfolk on the word of his daughter and niece. Danforth refuses as he will look incompetent if he now admits he has made a mistake.

On the return of Danforth and the others John eventually signs a confession but on realising it will be published, he tears it up. He discovers that his conscience will not allow him to lie in order to save his life and with Rebecca Nurse, who also refused to confess, he is led away to be hanged.