

## Reading for Information



Use with *The Crucible*, page 132.



FLORIDA

### SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS Literary Analysis

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.8** Explain how ideas, values, and themes of a literary work often reflect the historical period in which it was written.

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.3** Organize information to show understanding or relationships among facts, ideas, and events (e.g., representing key points within text through charting, mapping, paraphrasing, summarizing, comparing, contrasting, outlining).

## The Crucible and McCarthyism

- Online Article, page 213
- Newspaper Article, page 214
- Memoir, page 216

While Arthur Miller was writing *The Crucible*, a young senator named Joseph McCarthy was conducting a campaign to root out communists in American public life. In his memoir, *Timebends*, Miller reveals that he saw a connection between the Salem witch trials and McCarthy's campaign. The following selections will help you understand that connection by providing you with information about McCarthyism and its bearing on *The Crucible*. As you read, bear in mind that you will later be asked to explain how this information affects your sense of the play.

### Skill Focus: Understand Historical Context

As you may recall, the **historical context** of a literary work is the social and political conditions of the times in which the writer lived. To varying degrees, most literature reflects this context, often through its portrayal of values and conflicts.

To better grasp the historical context of *The Crucible*, take notes as you read the selections. In particular, record the significant events, values, and issues that were of primary concern in American society while Miller was writing his play. Use a chart such as the one shown here.

Source	Relevant Historical Information
"McCarthyism"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
"The Demons of Salem, With Us Still"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<i>Timebends</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>



BACK FORWARD STOP REFRESH HOME PRINT



## McCARTHYISM

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s America was overwhelmed with concerns about the threat of communism growing in Eastern Europe and China. Capitalizing on those concerns, a young Senator named Joseph McCarthy made a public accusation that more than two hundred “card-carrying” communists had infiltrated the United States government. Though

10 eventually his accusations were proven to be untrue, and he was censured by the Senate for unbecoming conduct, his zealous campaigning ushered in one of the most repressive times in 20th-century American politics. **A**



Army counsel Joseph N. Welch, left, and Senator Joseph McCarthy

While the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) had been formed in 1938 as an anti-Communist organ, McCarthy's accusations heightened the political tensions of the times. Known as McCarthyism, the paranoid hunt for infiltrators was notoriously difficult on writers and entertainers, many of whom were labeled

20 communist sympathizers and were unable to continue working. Some had their passports taken away, while others were jailed for refusing to give the names of other communists. The trials, which were well publicized, could often destroy a career with a single unsubstantiated accusation. Among those well-known artists accused of communist sympathies or called before the committee were Paul Robeson, Arthur Miller, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Charlie Chaplin and Elia Kazan. In all, three hundred and twenty artists were blacklisted, and for many of them this meant the end of exceptional and promising careers. **B**

30 During this time there were few in the press willing to stand up against McCarthy and the anti-Communist machine. Among those few were comedian Mort Sahl, and journalist Edward R. Murrow, whose strong criticisms of McCarthy are often cited as playing an important role in his eventual removal from power. By 1954, the fervor had died down and many actors and writers were able to return to work. Though relatively short, these proceedings remain one of the most shameful moments in modern U.S. history.

### **A** HISTORICAL CONTEXT

What preoccupied Americans during the 1940s and 1950s? Record your answer on your chart.

### **B** HISTORICAL CONTEXT

What does the term *McCarthyism* refer to? Identify the information in this paragraph that suggests a connection between McCarthyism and Miller's play.



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 1996

B16



Arthur Miller prepares to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, 1956.

## The Demons of Salem, With Us Still

by Victor Navasky

When Arthur Miller's drama *The Crucible* first opened on Broadway in 1953, the country was in a panic about the so-called Red Menace. Senator Joseph McCarthy, with his reckless charges of spies and "comsymps,"<sup>1</sup> occupied the front pages, while behind the scenes J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the F.B.I., presided over and  
 10 manipulated a vast internal security bureaucracy, issuing periodic bulletins intended to fan the flames of the domestic cold war.

In the center ring were the congressional inquisitor-investigators, asking "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?"

At the time, Mr. Miller and  
 20 Tennessee Williams were regarded as the world's two foremost playwrights. But that lofty status was an invitation rather than an obstacle to the red-hunters who wanted to talk to Mr. Miller. In fact, when he was finally

summoned to appear, the committee chairman, Representative Francis Walters, let Mr. Miller know that things might go easier for him if he persuaded his fiancée, Marilyn Monroe,  
 30 to pose for a photograph with the chairman. Mr. Miller let that option lapse and was shortly indicted for contempt of Congress when he refused to answer the committee's questions about Communists he had known.

On the left, the hunt for subversives was routinely labeled a witch hunt, after the infamous Salem witch trials  
 40 of the late 17th century. And so when *The Crucible*, set in Salem in 1692 but written in the overheated atmosphere of the domestic cold war, appeared, two questions were quickly asked: Was Mr. Miller's depiction of the inhabitants and events of 1692 Salem faithful to the original? And was the original an appropriate metaphor for McCarthyism? **C**

### **C** HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reread lines 1–48. When *The Crucible* hit the stage, why were people so quick to ask about the connection between the play and McCarthy's campaign?

1. "comsymps": Communist sympathizers.



50 On the historical front it was generally conceded when the play was written that Mr. Miller's research was accurate. His principal changes involved fusing some characters and raising the age of John Proctor's accuser, Abigail Williams, from 11 to 17 (to accommodate Mr. Miller's story of how a liaison between Abigail and John was intertwined with the accusations of witchcraft against Proctor's wife).

60 But even before the play was written, Mr. Miller was denounced for his metaphor. He had stopped off at the home of his friend and colleague Elia Kazan, who had directed Mr. Miller's two previous prize-winning hits, "All My Sons" and "Death of a Salesman," and who had been subpoenaed to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (where he ultimately named names).

They went for a walk in the Connecticut woods and discussed Mr. Kazan's dilemma. On the one hand to be an informer was unpalatable, but on the other, as Mr. Kazan put it at the time, "Secrecy serves the Communists." **D**

80 In his memoir *Timebends*, Mr. Miller wrote that he was half inside his car when Molly, Kazan's wife, "came out and asked if I was staying at my house, half an hour away, and I said that I was on my way to Salem. She instantly understood what my destination meant, and her eyes widened in sudden apprehension and possible anger. 'You're not going to equate witches with this!'

Later, Mr. Kazan reported his wife's views in his own memoir, *A Life*.

90 "What's going on here and now is not to be compared with the witch trials of that time," she said. "Those witches did not exist. Communists do. Here and everywhere in the world. It's a false parallel. Witch hunt! The phrase would indicate that there are no Communists

in government, none in the arts, none sending money from Hollywood to 100 12th Street." **E**

For me, the parallel worked. The term "Communist" had been so demonized that like the word "witch" it signified something that didn't really exist in its popular meaning. Certainly the entertainment community Communists like Mr. Kazan (and for a brief period, Mr. Miller himself, although he never fully joined the party) were not conscious agents of an international monolithic conspiracy to overthrow the Government by force and violence; they were, for the most part, do-gooders, who thought—misguidedly, most of them later concluded—that the Communist Party was the best agency to do something about the depression and racism at home and fascism abroad.

120 As it turned out, despite mixed notices for *The Crucible*, over the years it was to become Arthur Miller's most performed play, with productions in China, Poland, Britain, high schools and repertory theaters throughout the world. Now *The Crucible* is a \$25 million motion picture, under the aegis of 20th Century Fox.

130 Although the playwright in Mr. Miller was originally drawn to think about the political and moral pressures of the domestic cold war years, when I asked him about the applicability of the play to the here and now he said:

140 "I have had immense confidence in the applicability of the play to almost any time, the reason being it's dealing with a paranoid situation. But that situation doesn't depend on any particular political or sociological development. I wrote it blind to the world. The enemy is within, and within stays within, and we can't get out of within. It's always on the edge of our minds that behind what we see is a nefarious plot." **F**

#### **D** HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reread lines 11–77. In light of his comment, would you say that Elia Kazan took McCarthy's mission seriously? Explain.

#### **E** HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Given her husband's role in the McCarthy hearings, why do you think Molly Kazan might have objected to Miller's comparison between HUAC and Salem?

#### **F** HISTORICAL CONTEXT

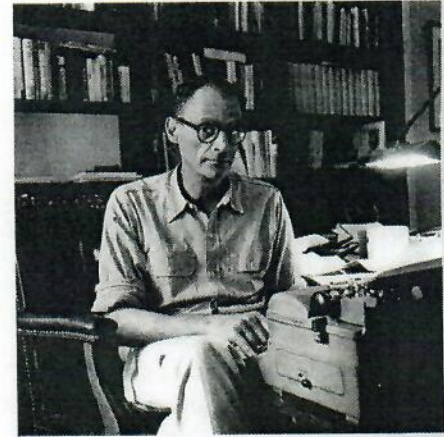
Reread Miller's final comments in lines 133–144. In the end, how would you describe his feelings about the comparison between the Salem trials and the McCarthy hearings?



# TIME BENDS

by Arthur Miller

I had known about the Salem witchcraft phenomenon since my American history class at Michigan, but it had remained in mind as one of those inexplicable mystifications of the long-dead past when people commonly believed that the spirit could leave the body, palpably and visibly. My mother might believe it still, if only in one corner of her mind, and I  
10 suspected that there were a lot of other people who, like me, were secretly open to suggestion. As though it had been ordained, a copy of Marion Starkey's book *The Devil in Massachusetts* fell into my hands, and the bizarre story came back as I had recalled it, but this time in remarkably well-organized detail. **G**



Miller at his typewriter in 1959

At first I rejected the idea of a play on the subject. My own rationality was too strong, I thought, to really allow me to capture this wildly irrational outbreak. A  
20 drama cannot merely describe an emotion, it has to become that emotion. But gradually, over weeks, a living connection between myself and Salem, and between Salem and Washington, was made in my mind—for whatever else they might be, I saw that the hearings in Washington were profoundly and even avowedly ritualistic. After all, in almost every case the Committee knew in advance what they wanted the witness to give them; the names of his comrades in the Party. The FBI had long since infiltrated the Party, and informers had long ago identified the participants in various meetings. The main point of the hearings, precisely as in seventeenth-century Salem, was that the accused make public confession, damn his confederates as well as his  
30 vows—whereupon he was let loose to rejoin the society of extremely decent people. In other words, the same spiritual nugget lay folded within both procedures—an act of contrition done not in solemn privacy but out in the public air. The Salem prosecution was actually on more solid legal ground since the defendant, if guilty of familiarity with the Unclean One, had broken a law against the practice of witchcraft, a civil as well as a religious offense; whereas the offender against HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) could not be accused of any such violation but only of a spiritual crime, subservience to a political enemy's desires and ideology. He was summoned before the Committee to be called a bad name, but one that could destroy his career. **H**

## **G** HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reread lines 1–17. What details indicate the significance for him of finding Starkey's book?

## **H** HISTORICAL CONTEXT

What parallels does Miller identify between the hearings in Washington and the Salem witch trials?



## Comprehension

1. **Recall** What was Senator McCarthy's mission?
2. **Recall** What kinds of professionals were targeted by McCarthy's accusations?
3. **Recall** What was the catalyst for Miller's interest in the Salem witch trials?

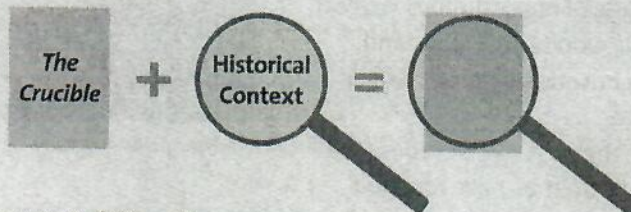
## Critical Analysis

4. **Evaluate Statements** Considering the historical context of *The Crucible* and Arthur Miller's own comments in *Timebends*, do you think Miller was really "blind to the world" when he wrote *The Crucible*? Support your opinion.
5. **Evaluate the Role of Historical Context** In your opinion, is knowing *The Crucible*'s historical context necessary to understand the playwright's message? Explain.

## Read for Information: Synthesize

### WRITING PROMPT

Think about the social and political conditions of the time during which Arthur Miller was writing *The Crucible*. In what ways has looking through this historical lens colored your understanding of the play? In developing your new analysis, support your thesis with information from the articles you have just read and details from the play.



To answer this prompt, follow these steps:

1. In a sentence or two, summarize how this historical information has added to or changed your understanding of the play. Consider using this summary as your thesis statement.
2. In your notes, identify elements of the play that you now view differently. How has your sense of these elements changed? For example, are there things you now see more clearly? Does the play seem more or less interesting? Note the historical details that caused you to think differently.
3. Using your thesis statement and notes, write a brief essay in which you explain how learning about the historical context of *The Crucible* affected your appreciation and understanding of the play.



### SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS Literary Analysis

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.8** Explain how ideas, values, and themes of a literary work often reflect the historical period in which it was written.

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.3** Organize information to show understanding or relationships among facts, ideas, and events (e.g., representing key points within text through charting, mapping, paraphrasing, summarizing, comparing, contrasting, outlining).



*sublime official, dutiful. Mary Warren sobs once.*

560 John Proctor touches her head reassuringly. Presently Danforth lifts his eyes, stands up, takes out a kerchief and blows his nose. The others stand aside as he moves in thought toward the window.)

**Parris** (*hardly able to contain his anger and fear*). I should like to question—

**Danforth** (*his first real outburst, in which his contempt for Parris is clear*). Mr. Parris, I bid you be silent! (*He stands in silence, looking out the window. Now, having established that he will set the gait.*) Mr. Cheever, will

570 you go into the court and bring the children here? (*Cheever gets up and goes out upstage. Danforth now turns to Mary.*) Mary Warren, how came you to this turnabout? Has Mr. Proctor threatened you for this deposition?

**Mary Warren**. No, sir.

**Danforth**. Has he ever threatened you?

**Mary Warren** (*weaker*). No, sir.

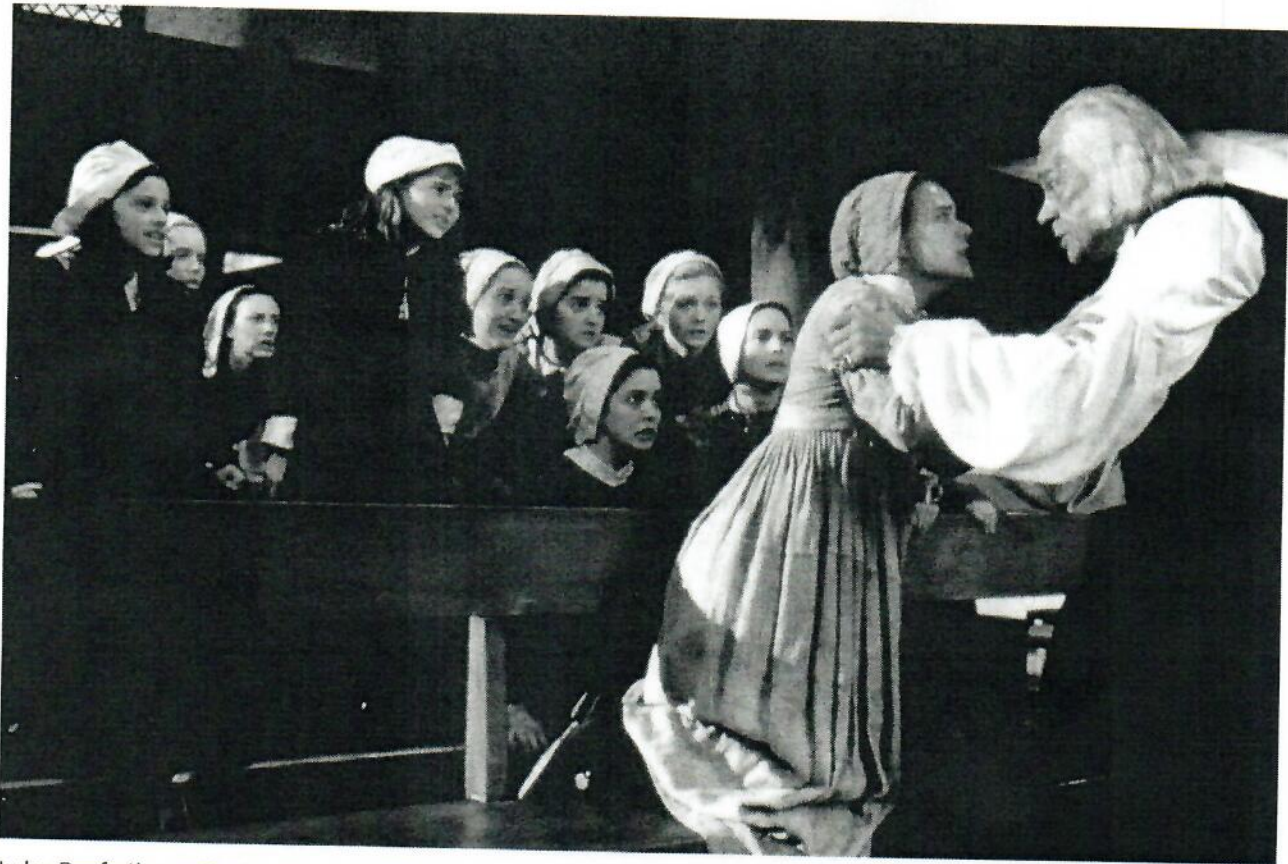
**Danforth** (*sensing a weakening*). Has he threatened you?

580 **Mary Warren**. No, sir.

**Danforth**. Then you tell me that you sat in my court, callously lying, when you knew that people would hang by your evidence? (*She does not answer.*) Answer me!

**Mary Warren** (*almost inaudibly*). I did, sir.

**Danforth**. How were you instructed in your life? Do you not know that God damns all liars? (*She cannot speak.*) Or is it now that you lie?



Judge Danforth questioning Mary Warren