

The Crucible:

How may Arthur Miller's play, The Crucible be seen as a metaphor of a modern day witch hunt during the McCarthy period?

11th Grade Instructional Unit Plan

By Pat Suiter's

Unit Overview

On February 9, 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy stepped into the spotlight of national attention with a speech given at Wheeling, West Virginia. McCarthy was nearing the end of his first term as senator and needed a big issue to energize his run for a second term. Holding up a piece of paper, he claimed to have in his possession information proving that more than 200 employees in the State Department were card-carrying members of the Communist Party. The charge-- never substantiated--grabbed headlines at a time when friction with the Soviet Union and fear of communist subversion were growing in the country.

In 1953, Arthur Miller wrote and produced his play, The Crucible. Ironically, many of his friends were being persecuted for their pro-communist beliefs. Miller himself was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1956, and like his protagonist in The Crucible, he refused to implicate others involved in activities condemned by society at the time. Much has been written and said about the analogy drawn between McCarthy's activities in connection with his House Committee and the events that took place during the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 as they are portrayed in Miller's play.

If there is any value in studying literature, it is in learning to apply the experiences of others to the practical matters of everyday life. We live in a world shot through with an overload of information. In addition to acquiring this information, it is critical that young people are able to identify and evaluate that which is false. The lesson will be part of a larger developing theme that moves chronologically forward through an American Literature curriculum that challenges students to ask critical questions rather than adhere to accepted convention. Students will examine a combination of primary source documents and classical literature to integrate historical fact with the inner human experience and more accurately understand events.

- I. **Essential Question:** Can a community become dangerous when its members act out of adherence to a common value?
- II. **Learning Objectives**
- A. **Essential Understandings:** Students will
Compare and contrast the Salem Witch Trials to McCarthyism
- B. **Essential Knowledge:** Students will
1. Define and reflect on the various meanings of the words: Crucible, Metaphor, Propaganda
 2. Write an historical/literary critical essay using documentation of primary sources, essays and classical literature
- III. **Standards Addressed**
- A. **Historical Thinking Standards in History for Grades 5-12:**
1. Historical Analysis and Interpretation **(3)**
 2. Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative. **(3A)**
 3. Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities and institutions. **(3B)**
 4. Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations. **(3C)**
 5. Compare competing historical narratives **(3D)**
- B. **South Dakota Grade Level Standards Grade 9-12 Standard 6**
Students will: demonstrate an understanding of domestic history from World War II through the 1900s by examining the civil rights movement and assessing respective federal and state policies; assessing the impact of the cold war on American society, such as McCarthyism; comparing and contrasting conservative to liberal economic and political ideologies and programs such the Fair Deal, Great Society and Reagonomics; examining political turning points, such as the election 1968, Watergate, the Iran hostage crisis and the impeachment of President Clinton; explaining current patterns of Supreme Court nominations and decisions and evaluate their impact , such as the Warren Court and the Thomas/Bork nominations; comparing the positions of the political parties and interest groups on major issues; and analyzing the causes and manifestation of social change, such as feminism, counter culture, and the youth movement.
- C. **Rapid City Area Schools High School Language Arts Standards English 11 Reading Strand:**
1. 11.R.2.1 Analyze and explain how genre shapes the message

2. 11.R.2.2 Analyze and explain literary devices within text
3. 11.R.3.1 Analyze and explain the influence of cultural and historical context on the form, style and point of view of a written work
4. 11.R.4.1 Examine the effects of misleading techniques in expository text

English 11 Writing Strand:

1. 11.W.4.1 Organize and link related information from multiple sources

IV. Learning Activities and Strategies

- A. **Estimated time:** four 2-hour blocks (translating to 4 academic days/or 1 week in a student directed 9 week course of study)
- B. **Necessary materials:**
 1. "The Crucible", from Prentice Hall Literature, Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes, Volume 2.
 2. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA): Primary Source Document Analysis Worksheets available at <http://www.archives.gov/digitalclassroom/lessons/analysisworksheets.html>.
 3. The American Heritage Talking Dictionary CD Rom Windows Program.
 4. "The Crucible" VHS Video Tape.
 5. Handout – "The Crucible".
 6. Handout – "The Persuasive Paper".
- C. **Primary Sources:** Teaching with Documents: Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S Truman from <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/mccarthy-telegram/#documents>
- D. **Resources:**
 1. "Background" from <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/mccarthy-telegram/#documents>
 2. "The Legacy of McCarthyism" article by Ellen Schrecker from <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/schrecker-legacy.html>
 3. "American Masters: Arthur Miller" http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/miller_a.html
- E. **Best Practices Strategies:** Identifying Similarities and Differences (Use both teacher and student directed strategies)
- F. **Need of Diverse Learners:** Interview with Teacher using student generated questions created in a student directed learning situation

G. Assessment:

1. Completion of evaluation of a primary source document
2. Worksheet: paraphrasing definitions for crucible, metaphor and propaganda
3. Completion of a persuasive essay

- V. This lesson exploits the notion advanced by Marzano that... “student achievement increases when they engage in historical investigation where they construct a plausible scenario for an event from the past about which there is not general agreement.” The lesson is contained within a contracted student directed curriculum at the Rapid City Academy which precludes general class discussion or cooperative learning techniques. Students will use the American Heritage Dictionary and The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy to work up definitions for the terms: metaphor, propaganda and crucible. They will then locate and evaluate primary source documents related to McCarthyism, read about the “Background” of McCarthyism, read the article, “The Legacy of McCarthyism” and read “American Masters: Arthur Miller”(All resources are found on the aforementioned websites).

Students will read the first act of the play, “The Crucible” and finish surveying the play by watching the video, “The Crucible”. They are encouraged to search the various websites listed and conduct an additional websearch. They will then be required to site no less than three sources, including one primary source and based on MLA research format, incorporate our essential question as the thesis for a persuasive essay consisting of not less than three double spaced typed pages comparing and contrasting the plot of “The Crucible” and McCarthyism. Contained within the work, students will describe the abstract metaphorical relationship between “The Crucible” and McCarthyism. They will prove or disprove that “The Crucible” may be seen as a metaphor of a modern day witch hunt during the McCarthy Period.

Bibliography

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The Crucible:

How may Arthur Miller's play, The Crucible be seen as a metaphor of a modern day witch hunt during the McCarthy period?

On February 9, 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy stepped into the spotlight of national attention with a speech given at Wheeling, West Virginia. McCarthy was nearing the end of his first term as senator and needed a big issue to energize his run for a second term. Holding up a piece of paper, he claimed to have in his possession information proving that more than 200 employees in the State Department were card-carrying members of the Communist Party. The charge-- never substantiated--grabbed headlines at a time when friction with the Soviet Union and fear of communist subversion were growing in the country.

In 1953, Arthur Miller wrote and produced his play, The Crucible. Ironically, many of his friends were being persecuted for their pro-communist beliefs. Miller himself was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1956, and like his protagonist in The Crucible, he refused to implicate others involved in activities condemned by society at the time. Much has been written and said about the analogy drawn between McCarthy's activities in connection with his House Committee and the events that took place during the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 as they are portrayed in Miller's play.

During the course of this lesson, we will be examining the unit question found at the top of this page and investigating contrasts and similarities between McCarthyism and Arthur Miller's apparent political analogy in The Crucible. Another "essential question" to be considered is: **Can a community become dangerous when its members act out of adherence to a common value?** In order to give fair consideration to either of these questions, there is a basic terminology that must be defined. Contained on page two of this handout, please find the American Heritage Dictionary and Dictionary of Cultural Dictionary definitions of four words that are fundamental to our investigation: **McCarthyism, propaganda, crucible, metaphor.**

Assignment: Your task is to prove or disprove the credible application of The Crucible as a metaphor for McCarthyism. Be sure to liberally apply a logical application of our basic terminology. You are required to write a persuasive essay of not less than three double spaced, typed pages, applying the criteria for research

found in the handout entitled “The Persuasive Paper”. The MLA documentation format for your paper can be found beginning on page 263 of your Writer’s Inc student handbook. To help organize your thoughts, locate the chart on page three, entitled “The Ben Franklin Close”, and list ideas you brainstorm during your research.

McCarthyism *American History Since 1865* The extreme opposition to COMMUNISM shown by SENATOR JOSEPH R. MCCARTHY and his supporters in the 1940s and 1950s. *McCarthyism* has become a general term for the hysterical investigation of a government’s opponents, or the publicizing of accusations against these opponents without sufficient evidence to support the charges.

Mc-Car-thy-ism *n.* **1.** The practice of publicizing accusations of political disloyalty or subversion with insufficient regard to evidence. **2.** The use of unfair investigatory or accusatory methods in order to suppress opposition.

prop-a-gan-da *n.* **1.** The systematic propagation of a doctrine or cause or of information reflecting the views and interests of those people advocating such a doctrine or cause. **2.** Material disseminated by the advocates of a doctrine or cause: *the selected truths, exaggerations, and lies of wartime propaganda.*

Propaganda *World Politics* Official government communications to the public that are designed to influence opinion. The information may be true or false, but it is always carefully selected for its political effect.

cru-ci-ble *n.* **1.** A vessel made of a refractory substance such as graphite or porcelain, used for melting and calcining materials at high temperatures. **2.** A severe test, as of patience or belief; a trial. See Synonyms at **trial**. **3.** A place, time, or situation characterized by the confluence of powerful intellectual, social, economic, or political forces: *“Yale is a crucible in American life for the accommodation of intellectual achievement, of wisdom, of refinement, with the democratic ideals of openness, of social justice and of equal opportunity”*

met-a-phor *n.* **1.** *Abbr. met., metaph.* A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in *“a sea of troubles”* or *“All the world’s a stage”* (Shakespeare). **2.** One thing conceived as representing another; a symbol: *“The high-rise garbage repository is a metaphor for both accomplishment and failure”*

metaphor *Conventions of Written English* The comparison of one thing to another without the use of *like* or *as*: “A man is but a weak reed”; “The road was a ribbon of moonlight.” Metaphors are common in literature and expansive speech.

The Ben Franklin Close

An effective technique used by insurance agents to close a sale has been referred to as “The Ben Franklin Close”. According to one story, whenever he had to make an important decision, Benjamin Franklin used to draw a line down the center of a piece of paper and list reasons for taking a specific course of action on one side of the line and reasons against taking that action on the other side. When he was done, he based his final decision on the side of the paper that contained the most reasons. By inference, we can label our two sides of the paper; contrasts and similarities, respectively. Upon concluding your research, you will want to base the thesis for your paper, proving or disproving the credible application of The Crucible as a metaphor for McCarthyism, on the side of your paper that contains the most brainstorming ideas. Remember, as we have often discussed, one of the techniques of persuasion is to list opposing ideas in your argument and then disprove them.

Contrasts

Similarities

The Persuasive Paper

To persuade someone, you must be believable. To be believable, you must persuade with reliable facts. Reliable facts are arrived at through research. The word “research” is defined as ... “careful investigation or study, especially of a scholarly or scientific nature.” What this tells us is that research is formal. It is a set and prescribed method of uncovering **truth** or finding new information. It is indispensable to persuasion.

Generally, research involves new ideas only in so much as they can be supported by old ideas. This conforms to the old notion of knowledge as building blocks where one fact builds on another. To learn something new, you must already know something to which you can attach new meaning. A child learns that heat can be dangerous the first time he touches a hot stove. This fact supports new knowledge, because the first time he encounters fire, his prior experience persuades him that he needn't thrust his hand into the flame to know that it is hot.

This crude example illustrates a fundamental of research done to persuade. Your ideas are a product of **your** experiences and for them to have meaning for others, you must demonstrate a connectedness to already existing information. You must persuade with **evidence**. In the world of research, we call this documentation.

During your life you will often be required to persuade by providing research. It may involve persuading a jury by producing a legal brief, presenting a persuasive argument in a college research paper, persuading a government agency to support your community activities through a grant application or something as simple as writing a complaint letter. In each case you will be required to produce documentation to support your argument. You see, ***the rest of the world cares about your opinions, and interests only in so much as you can support them with something the world already knows, something that can be recognized as fact.*** This is research. Again, it is indispensable to persuasion.

It is now time for you to begin work on a persuasive paper. This is “pure research”. Your ideas will be fully supported (documented) by information from sources listed (and,or) you are able locate on your own. This means that anything you choose to say will consist of either direct or indirect quotes. **You may use no less than three indirect quotes and no less than three direct quotes.**

You will follow the MLA format used in this district and most colleges. You will preface your work with the thesis question: How may Arthur Miller's play, The Crucible be seen as a metaphor for a modern day witch hunt during the McCarthy Period?

The thesis question is actually a statement of purpose or what you intend to prove or disprove.

Sources: You are required to have no less than three sources of information.

Note cards: Take both bibliography cards and note cards as described in your Writer's Inc student handbook.

Outline: Write a rough draft outline; the paper must follow the outline

Documentation: Use parenthetical documentation after each direct or indirect quote. You must use both direct and indirect quotes. Turn to page 263 of your Writer's Inc student handbook. Be sure to pay special attention to the section entitled "MLA documentation style."

Rough Draft: Write or type a rough copy of your final paper to be submitted with the project.

Final Copy: Type a minimum of three double-spaced pages (12 point Geneva).

Bibliography: Type a cover page and bibliography as described in Writer's Inc.