The Crucible Essay Prompts

Choose one prompt and write a 2-4 page, academically cited essay. Cite from the primary text and at least one article (you may use any articles from our course website if you like – or not).

1. Who gets the blame for this entire horrific event? Does the majority of the blame rest on just one character, or is the blame spread equally to multiple characters? Take a defined stand on one or two villains and defend it.

2. Besides letting the trials get out of control, what other weaknesses characterize Reverend Parris as a community leader? What are his overriding concerns, and how does he manage them? To what degree is he responsible for the trials and the final setting of the play?

3. Does Salem seem a typical Puritan town in 1692 New England? Why does Salem suffer the witch trials while other Puritan communities avoided them? Or did other communities have witch issues? Are hanging and being pressed to death standard penalties for breaking Puritan laws? What penalties are typical for Puritan crimes, major and minor?

4. I enjoy looking closely at character development, especially by analyzing characters that are foils. Pick one set of foils in the play and describe the importance of these characters to each other and the plot of the play. For example, you could discuss Elizabeth and Abigail, and describe how their relationship doomed John to certain disaster, etc.

5. Who is ultimately more central to this story: John Proctor or Abigail Williams? What did John mean by his anguished cries of “Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!” Is John a “real” Puritan? Is Abigail?

6. Match the events in the play to the real life events for which is was supposedly written. Does McCarthyism get a bad rap because of this play? Do some events clearly match? Does this play impact the hearts and minds of the American public in relation to the McCarthy Hearings or Red Scare overall? Does this comparison even work?

7. I purposely matched a brief look at Feminism with this play. How does Miller treat the women in the play?

8. Reverend Hale is a dynamic character, in that he evolves during the play. To what does he evolve, and why? What pressures directly influence his “research” of the citizens of Salem, and what does he learn from them that facilitates his change?

9. What does the title mean? Is it the best title for this play? What parts of the play support the literal and figurative definitions of “crucible”?