

# The Crucible Project

To encourage interdisciplinary learning, we followed a chronological study of American literature to align English 11 with U.S. History. Thus the first piece of literature studied was Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. During the unit, students used the World Wide Web to access sources and graphics that portray not only the late 1600s but also the 1950s. After reading the play, exploring the Internet, sharing in groups the information found, students wrote a thesis paper that explored a major idea that appears in Miller's play.

For this project, students will be able to

- compare and contrast the Salem Witch Trials to McCarthyism;
- understand the living conditions in Massachusetts in the 17th century;
- examine the dynamics of the Puritan religion in 1692;
- reflect upon the various meanings of the word crucible;
- gather historical perspectives of American colonial times;
- write a literary analysis paper using internal documentation.

## Materials and Resources:

- § *The Crucible*
- § *The Crucible* Project - a web site developed for this lesson  
<<http://www.wshs.fcps.k12.va.us/academic/english/1project/crucible/crucible.htm>>
- § Handout of questions pertaining to Salem in the 1690s and the U.S. in the 1950s
- § Selected scenes from *Three Sovereigns for Sarah*

## Process:

Students will

- read each act;
- complete worksheets for each act;
- view videos that present aspects of the Salem trials;
- discuss the ideas developing in the play;
- participate in a metaphorical thinking exercise by comparing an actual crucible and the Salem Witch Trials;
- explore the World Wide Web to add to their knowledge about two distinctive eras in American history.

After reading the play, students spent two class periods in the computer lab investigating the various web sites that are detailed on *The Crucible* Project (a web site). Students sought answers to questions that appeared on a worksheet designed to elicit information about McCarthyism, HUAC, blacklists, Salem, and Puritanism. Students recorded their findings on this sheet.

After completing this worksheet and upon returning to the classroom, students formed groups of four or fewer to compare and compile their answers. Because *The Crucible* Project has been designed so

that answers to the questions could be found in a variety of sites, students had diverse responses. Once the groups completed this task, they were asked to jigsaw. A member from each group migrated to another group to compare and distill their findings from the worksheet questions. After completing this task, the class gathered as a whole to discuss their findings and make their observations regarding the similarities of these two eras.

Another class period was devoted to metaphorical thinking (synectics). I held an actual crucible in front of the class and asked them how this crucible—I borrowed one from our science department—was like the Salem Witch Trials. Students were invited to share their ideas, and each student was asked to offer at least one response. They were reminded that answers that seem to be the most outlandish at first often have the most significance and that all responses have validity. I used wait time to give all students the opportunity to share their thoughts. Once they got over their initial nervousness, students offered insightful comments that displayed higher level thinking skills. I have found this exercise to be most worthwhile in asking students to focus their thoughts on the meanings of the play.

### **Assessment and Evaluation:**

After completing these discussions, students began to draft their literary essays on *The Crucible*. At this point, students developed thesis statements that incorporated the information that they had researched. Then, they generated method statements that supported the argument of their thesis. I provided a handout that listed sample broad opening sentences, thesis sentences, and method statements. We used these student-generated examples to form our own. Next, students formed groups to edit the introductory paragraph and to suggest possible examples of supporting evidence. Then, students drafted their body paragraphs so that their peers could then edit them in class, revise, and enhance the papers.

Ultimately, students drafted, edited, and revised an expository paper whose thesis statement was an outgrowth of class discussions about *The Crucible* and McCarthyism. We spent a week drafting, peer-editing, and writing these papers.

West Springfield High School's <<http://www.wshs.fcps.k12.va.us/english/rubricex.pdf>>literary analysis rubric</a> was used to evaluate this paper.

### **Alternative Assessments:**

This assignment does not require a thesis paper as its culminating activity. The following are tasks that can elicit the students' understanding of the play and its allusions to the Red Scare.

1. Research the life of a person who was blacklisted by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the HUAC. Design and create a web site that conveys the information that you have gathered. Your site should reflect a serious approach that is academic in nature regarding the biography information. (Students must have the ability to create web pages.)
2. Research the life of a person who was blacklisted in the 1950s. Pretend that you are a descendant of that person. Write a letter to Senator Joseph McCarthy that explains what happened to your ancestor, what your ancestor's life was like for the last fifty years, and what impact this event had on you as the relative of someone who had been blacklisted. This letter should reflect your research of

the era and of the person who was blacklisted. If possible, interview someone who lived through the Red Scare and who remembers that period, who watched the hearings on television, or who had some personal involvement with it.

3. Research the Salem Tercentenary Memorial dedicated to those who died as a result of the Salem Witch Trials. Design a memorial that captures your understanding of the events. Create a model and present and explain your work to the class. Consider interviewing one of our art teachers regarding restrictions that govern public art.
4. Form a group of students in the class, select a major scene from the play, and present your interpretation of these lines to the class. Use costumes and props to enhance your presentation. Your presentation should reflect your understanding of the motivations of the characters. You may present this scene live, or you may videotape it to show it to the class. Discuss your ideas with our thespians for pointers about your presentation.
5. Design, write, and create a PowerPoint presentation that explores the differences from the actual trials to Miller's version of the events. Present your understanding of why Miller chose to alter aspects of the trial records.
6. Stage a debate between those who persecuted the witches and those whose family members were accused of witchcraft. Observe standard debate rules. Do your research!
7. Design and create a model of Salem village. Include representative buildings of all social levels. Prepare an oral presentation that links the type of architecture to the severity of Puritan life. Research the furnishings of the interiors.

This lesson plan coupled with the thesis writing assignment meets the following:

**Fairfax County's Grade 11 Benchmarks and Indicators:**

**Standard 2** - Know and understand the variety and range of communication forms and strategies in the English Language.

11.2.1.f - Read materials intended to provide information or explain ideas.

**Standard 3** - Know and apply the techniques of effective communication in writing and speaking.

11.3.2.d - Analyze how authors, speakers, and directors create intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic effects on their audience, especially through imagery and figures of speech.

11.3.2.h - Use available technology throughout the writing process.

**Standard 4** - Do effective research.

11.4.1.b - Use available technology to access, organize, and present information.

11.4.1.c - Use and credit primary and secondary sources accurately and ethically.

**Standard 5** - Read and understand major literary types, genres, and traditions of the English Language.

- 11.5.1.a - Plan and implement strategies to organize ideas from a variety of sources.
- 11.5.1.b - Use peer and teacher conferencing to guide research decisions.
- 11.5.2.a - Discuss American literature in terms of historical context and genre.
- 11.5.2.b - Interpret and analyze American literature as an expression of the universal human experience, as well as a reflection of the influences of various cultures.
- 11.5.2.c - Analyze American literature as it reflects traditional and contemporary themes, motifs, and genres.

## **Virginia Standards of Learning**

### **Reading/Literature Strand**

- 11.3 - The student will read and analyze relationships among American literature, history, and culture.
  - 11.3.b - Describe the development of American literature in the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.
  - 11.3.c - Contrast periods in American literature.
  - 11.3.e - Describe the major themes in American literature.
  
- 11.6 - The student will read a variety of dramatic selections.
  - 11.6.b - Describe the dramatic conventions or devices used by playwrights to present selected plays.
  - 11.6.c - Explain the use of monologue and soliloquy.
  - 11.6.d - Explain the use of verbal and dramatic irony.

### **Writing Strand**

- 7.7 - The student will write in a variety of forms with an emphasis on persuasion.
  - 7.7.a - Develop a focus for writing.
  - 7.7.b - Evaluate and cite applicable information.
  
- 11.9 - The student will analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and organize information from a variety of sources into a documented paper dealing with a question, problem, or issue.
  - 11.9.d - Evaluate quality and accuracy of information
  - 11.9.e - Synthesize information in a logical sequence.
  - 11.9.f - Document sources of information using a style sheet format, such as MLA or APA.
  - 11.9.i - Use available technology.