Comprehension Check Questions for

The Crucible

71 Questions
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Comprehension Check Questions
for Entire Play

THE
CRUCIBLE

by Arthur Miller

From The Crucible Literature Guide Developed by Kristen Bowers
for Secondary Solutions®

Item No. 29529CCK

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The Crucible
Comprehension Check Questions

Act One

1. What is wrong with Betty Parris?
2. How does Tituba react to Betty's condition?
3. What news does Susanna bring from the doctor?
4. What rumor is circulating about Betty?
5. How does Abigail initially defend the girls' behavior in the woods?
6. Why is Reverend Parris so worried about his reputation?
7. What did Parris see in the woods?
8. What does Abigail claim is the reason she was discharged from the Proctor household?
9. In what condition is Ruth Putnam?
11. Why did Mrs. Putnam enlist Tituba's help?
12. Why did Abigail drink blood?
13. How does Abigail threaten the other girls?
15. What happens when John and Abigail are left alone?
16. What does Rebecca Nurse say about Betty and Ruth's sickness?
17. Why is Reverend Parris dissatisfied with his job in Salem?
18. About what are Proctor and Putnam fighting?
19. Describe Reverend Hale. For what reason has he been called to Salem?
20. What is Giles Corey's complaint about his wife?
21. Why does Tituba finally "confess"? What do you think of her actions? What do you think will happen as a result?
22. Why do you think the girls begin their accusations when they could have just let Tituba take the blame for everything?
23. What does the girls' behavior tell you about the youth of Salem?
Act Two

1. What is the mood at the beginning of Act Two? Why?
2. What do we learn about John and Elizabeth’s relationship at the beginning of the act?
3. What does Mary give Elizabeth?
4. What news does Mary Warren bring from court?
5. What does Elizabeth mean when she says: “Oh, the noose, the noose is up!”
6. What does Elizabeth want John to do in town? What will everyone find out if he does this?
7. Why has Reverend Hale come to the Proctor house?
8. To what is John referring when he says: “…it tells me that a minister may pray to God without he have golden candlesticks upon the altar.”
9. What does Hale ask John to do? What happens?
10. What is ironic about this omission?
11. What news do Giles Corey and Frances Nurse tell John Proctor?
12. On what basis are they accused?
13. What is the significance of the poppet? How does this serve as “proof” for Elizabeth’s accusation?
14. What does John mean when he says “I’ll tell you what’s walking in Salem—vengeance is walking in Salem”?

Act Three

1. When the act begins, who is on the stand, and of what is she accused?
2. Who bursts into court, and why?
3. What does Mary Warren tell the court?
4. What does Cheever say that Proctor did when they came to arrest Elizabeth Proctor?
5. What do we learn about Elizabeth Proctor?
6. How many people signed the deposition? Who are the people who signed, and to what are they testifying?
7. Why is Giles Corey arrested?
8. How many death warrants has Hale signed?
9. What do the men of the court want Mary Warren to do on command?
10. What does Proctor confess?
11. What does Proctor say about his wife that eventually works against him?
12. What do the girls pretend to see in the courtroom?
13. What does Mary claim Proctor made her do?
14. What does Hale do at the end of the act? Why?
15. In our court system today, the accused is innocent until proven guilty. In what ways does the court of Salem ignore the “innocent until proven guilty” clause?
16. If you were a lawyer defending one of the accused today, what arguments would you make to defend your client? Compose a one-page speech which defends the innocence of John Proctor. Be sure to use examples from the text to make your case.

Act Four
1. What is Reverend Hale doing at the jailhouse?
2. What is happening to the farms and animals in the town of Salem? Why do you think this is happening?
3. What has happened to Abigail and Mercy Lewis?
4. What happened in the town of Andover? Why is Parris afraid of this news?
5. What does Parris suggest to Danforth? Why does he make this suggestion?
6. What other indications does Hale give that the town is falling apart?
7. What does Hale mean when he says, “There is blood on my head! Can you not see the blood on my head”?
8. Why does Danforth refuse to postpone the executions?
9. How long has passed since the trials first began?
10. What do Hale and Danforth beg Elizabeth to do? Why?
11. What does Elizabeth say happened to Giles Corey?
12. What has Proctor been contemplating doing? What is Elizabeth’s response to this?
13. What do Danforth and Parris plan to do with Proctor’s confession?
14. Why does Proctor refuse to sign the confession?
15. What does he do with the confession, and what happens to him as a result?
16. What does Elizabeth mean by: “He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him”?
17. What lessons do you think Arthur Miller wanted readers and audiences to learn from his play? What do you think are the most important themes of the play?
18. Do you think the story would have been as effective as a novel rather than a play? Why or why not? Why do you think Miller decided to tell the story of the Salem Witch Trials as a play rather than a novel?
Answer Key

Act One Comprehension Check
1. She is sick of unknown causes; lies in a coma-like state.
2. She is very worried about her—almost panicked.
3. There is no “natural” cause for her condition.
4. That she has been touched by witchcraft; that she has been trying to fly.
5. They were only dancing; it was “sport.”
6. He knows he is not well-liked; there is a group that wants him fired.
7. A girl running and dancing naked.
8. She would not be Elizabeth Proctor’s slave; that Elizabeth is evil and “sniveling.”
9. She is in the same condition as Betty; in a coma-like trance.
10. He is a self-centered man who is always getting into fights with others in the community; thinks there are witches at work; quick to place blame on others; thinks everyone is cheating him or out to get something from him.
11. She asked Tituba to find out why her children have always died at birth; she knew Tituba new black magic.
12. It was a “charm” to kill Elizabeth Proctor so that Abigail could be with John.
13. She says she will kill them if they talk, just like her parents were killed.
14. A farmer; had an affair with Abigail that he swears is over, yet never says he doesn’t love her; he is strong, but wrought with guilt.
15. Abigail comes on to John—tries to seduce him.
16. That they are fine and will get over it; there is no witchcraft at work.
17. He doesn’t get paid enough; he feels he is being taken advantage of.
18. Land ownership; Putnam believes part of Proctor’s land is rightfully his.
19. He is a Reverend; an “expert” at detecting witchcraft; to find out what has been happening to the girls.
20. That she reads “strange” books and he is unable to pray when she is reading.
21. She is threatened; they say they will whip and beat her until she confesses.
22. Answers will vary; accept all reasonably supported responses
23. Answers will vary; accept all reasonably supported responses

Act Two Comprehension Check
1. somber; tension between John and Elizabeth
2. it has been under stress; there is no trust
3. a poppet
4. There have been more arrests; Elizabeth has been accused.
5. She is going to die.
6. tell about the affair; he will lose all credibility and be excommunicated and outcast
7. to question John and the Proctor family’s faith
8. Parris’s greed
9. recite the Ten Commandments; he can’t remember “Thou shalt not commit adultery”
10. He has committed adultery.
11. Their wives have been arrested.
12. Goody Corey for reading strange books; Goody Nurse for killing Ann Putnam’s babies.
13. Abigail was stabbed in the stomach; a needle was found in the poppet’s stomach.
14. It is not witchcraft at work—it is only people looking for revenge against those who they feel have wronged them somehow.

Act Three Comprehension Check
1. Martha Corey; reading “fortunes”
2. Giles Corey; he says he has brought evidence to free his wife and Rebecca Nurse
3. That the girls were only pretending that they had been touched by spirits
4. tore up the warrant
5. she is pregnant
6. 91; the people of the community (landowners, members of the church); to the good nature of Martha, Rebecca, and Elizabeth
7. he refuses to give the name of the person that heard Putnam go after Jacobs for his land
8. 72
9. pretend to faint
10. that he and Abigail had an affair
11. that she never lies
12. a yellow bird
13. She claims he made her sign the Devil’s book and overthrow the court.
14. he quits the court
15. Answers will vary; accept all reasonably supported responses.
16. Answers will vary; accept all reasonably supported responses

Act Four Comprehension Check
1. praying with them and trying to get the convicted to confess
2. Cows are wandering the streets because they have no owners to take care of them.
3. They stole Parris’s money and ran away.
4. The rioted against the executions; he is afraid the people of Salem will riot.
5. that they postpone the executions; he fears his own life and retaliation against him
6. Children are orphaned and wandering from house to house looking for food.
7. He feels he is responsible for the executions because he was the supposed expert and did not stop all the executions.
8. He doesn’t want to appear weak.
9. 3 months
10. to get John to confess; they can’t get him to, so they are hoping Elizabeth will make him change his mind
11. He was pressed to death.
12. confessing; that it is not her place to judge his decisions
13. post the written confession on the church doors
14. He thinks his verbal confession is enough; he doesn’t want his name to be 
    shamed in the town.
15. He tears it up, and is then taken to be executed.
16. that John did the right thing; he didn’t confess to something he didn’t do, so he 
    has his pride and good name still, and no one can take that away from him 
17. *Answers will vary; accept all reasonably supported responses.*
18. *Answers will vary; accept all reasonably supported responses.*