Unit III: Arthur Miller & *The Crucible*

Read the information in this packet, and respond to the questions on page 4.

**Use complete sentences to receive full credit.**

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**"McCarthyism"**

(from http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/arthur-miller/mccarthyism/484/)

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 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.

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 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 Dashiell Hammett, Waldo Salt, Lillian Hellman, Lena Horne, Paul Robeson, Elia Kazan, **Arthur Miller**, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Charlie Chaplin and Group Theatre members Clifford Odets, Elia Kazan, and Stella Adler. In all, three hundred and twenty artists were blacklisted, and for many of them this meant the end of exceptional and promising careers.

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.

Senator McCarthy Republican-Wisconsin 1947-1957

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| **Important Terms** |
| ***communism:*** | social and economic movement that aims towards a classless society with common ownership |
| ***repressive:*** | restraining the freedom of a person or group |
| ***HUAC:*** | investigative committee of the House of Representatives |
| ***Arthur Miller:*** | American playwright who wrote *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman* |
| ***fervor:*** | intense, passionate feelings |

**"Arthur Miller: None Without Sin"**

(from http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/arthur-miller/none-without-sin/56/)

In the period immediately following the end of World War II, American theater was transformed by the work of playwright Arthur Miller. Profoundly influenced by the Depression and the war that immediately followed it, Miller tapped into a sense of dissatisfaction and unrest within the greater American psyche. His probing dramas proved to be both the conscience and **redemption** of the times, allowing people an honest view of the direction the country had taken.

Arthur Miller was born in Manhattan in 1915 to Jewish immigrant parents. By 1928, the family had moved to Brooklyn, after their garment manufacturing business began to fail. Witnessing the societal **decay** of the Depression and his father’s desperation due to business failures had an enormous effect on Miller. After graduating from high school, Miller worked a number of jobs and saved up the money for college. In 1934, he enrolled in the University of Michigan and spent much of the next four years learning to write and working on a number of well-received plays.

After graduating, Miller returned to New York, where he worked as a freelance writer. "The Crucible" was Miller's third published play. Overwhelmed by post-war **paranoia** and intolerance, Miller began work on the third of his major plays. Though it was clearly an indictment of the McCarthyism of the early 1950s, “The Crucible” was set in Salem during the witch-hunts of the late 17th century.

The play, which deals with extraordinary tragedy in ordinary lives, expanded Miller’s voice and his concern for the physical and psychological wellbeing of the working class. Within three years, Miller was called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and convicted of **contempt** of Congress for not cooperating. A difficult time in his life, Miller ended a short and turbulent marriage with actress Marilyn Monroe. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, he wrote very little of note, concentrating at first on issues of guilt over the Holocaust, and later moving into comedies.

More than any other playwright working today, Arthur Miller has dedicated himself to the investigation of the moral plight of the white American working class. With a sense of realism and a strong ear for the American **vernacular**, Miller has created characters whose voices are an important part of the American landscape. His insight into the psychology of desperation and his ability to create stories that express the deepest meanings of struggle, have made him one of the most highly regarded and widely performed American **playwrights**.

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| **Important Terms** |
| ***redemption:*** | forgiveness for past errors and protection from disgrace |
| ***decay:*** | to fall into ruin; decline in strength |
| ***paranoia:*** | irrational thought process influenced by anxiety and fear |
| ***contempt:*** | disrespectful behavior towards the court system |
| ***vernacular:*** | language spoken by a specific population or group of people |
| ***playwright:*** | person who writes dramatic literature |

Arthur Miller

1915-2005

**Arthur Miller, "Are You Now Or Were You Ever?"
from *The Guardian/The Observer* (on line), Saturday, June 17, 2000**

It would probably never have occurred to me to write a play about the Salem witch trials of 1692 had I not seen some astonishing correspondences with that calamity in the America of the late 40s and early 50s. My basic need was to respond to a phenomenon which, with only small exaggeration, one could say paralyzed a whole generation and in a short time dried up the habits of trust and toleration in public **discourse**.

I refer to the anti-communist rage that threatened to reach **hysterical** proportions and sometimes did[....] I suppose we rapidly passed over anything like a discussion or debate, and into something quite different, a hunt not just for subversive people, but for ideas and even a suspect language. The object was to destroy the least credibility of any and all ideas associated with **socialism** and communism[....]

In today's terms, the country had been delivered into the hands of the radical right[....] It is always with us, this anxiety, sometimes directed towards foreigners, Jews, Catholics, fluoridated water, aliens in space, [...] homosexuality, or the Internal Revenue Department. But in the 50s any of these could be validated as real threats by rolling out a map of China. And if this seems crazy now, it seemed just as crazy then, but openly doubting it could cost you.

So in one sense "The Crucible" was an attempt to make life real again[....] Only three or four years earlier an American movie audience, on seeing a newsreel of Stalin saluting the Red Army, would have applauded, for that army had taken the brunt of the Nazi onslaught, as most people were aware. Now they would look on with fear or at least **bewilderment**, for the Russians had become the enemy of mankind, a menace to all that was good. It was the Germans who [...] were turning good[....]

Salem village, that **pious**, devout settlement at the edge of white civilization, had displayed - three centuries before the Russo-American rivalry [...] - what can only be called a built-in pestilence (disease) in the human mind; a fatality forever awaiting the right conditions for its [...] outbreak of distrust, alarm, suspicion and murder. And for people wherever the play is performed on any of the five continents, there is always a certain amazement that the same terror that is happening to them [...] has happened before to others. It is all very strange. But then, the Devil is known to lure people into forgetting what it is **vital** for them to remember - how else could his endless reappearances always come as such a marvelous surprise?



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| **Important Terms** |
| ***discourse:*** | written or spoken communication |
| ***hysterical:*** | having over-the-top, uncontrollable emotions |
| ***socialism:*** | economic system in which goods are state-owned or shared |
| ***bewilderment:*** | state of complete confusion |
| ***pious:*** | extreme loyalty to one's religion; very religious |
| ***vital:*** | Necessary |

**Guided Reading Questions**: Respond to the following in complete sentences to receive full credit.

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"McCarthyism" (page 1)

1. Who was Joseph McCarthy?

2. What happened to many writers and entertainers during the era of McCarthyism?

3. How are the McCarthy investigations similar to the witch hunts of 17th-century Salem?

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"Arthur Miller: None Without Sin" (page 2)

4. What events during Miller's childhood influenced his later plays?

5. Although "The Crucible" was set in the 17th century, what do its events symbolize?

6. Why was Miller convicted of contempt of Congress?

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"Arthur Miller: Are You Now or Were You Ever?" (page 3)

7. What reason does Miller give for writing a play about the Salem witch trials?

8. How does Miller describe the "radical right" of the 1950s?

9. Why were Americans so afraid of socialism and communism during the 1950s?

10. What does Miller believe is the built-in disease of the human mind?

11. What is the "certain amazement" that Miller describes at the bottom of page 3?