

EXCERPT FROM ACT ONE OF *THE CRUCIBLE*

This document provides an example of text dependent questions for a passage from *The Crucible*. Questions should always be driven by key understandings or themes in the document and the Common Core State Standards. Years of research in reading continues to support the observation that vocabulary and syntax are two of the primary obstacles to comprehension. Document study in any classroom should always include these two areas.

PARRIS: If she starts for the window, cry for me at once.
(Crossing to door.)

ABIGAIL: Yes, Uncle. (He goes out with Putnam.) How is Ruth sick?

MERCY: It's weirdish, I know not—she seems to walk like a dead one since last night.

ABIGAIL: Now look you, if they be questioning us tell them we danced—I told him as much already.

MERCY: And what more?

ABIGAIL: He saw you naked.

MERCY: Oh, Jesus! (Falls back on bed. Enter Mary Warren, breathless. She is seventeen, a subservient, naïve girl.)

MARY: I just come from the farm, the whole country's talking witchcraft! They'll be callin' us witches, Abby! Abby, we've got to tell. Witchery's a hangin' error, a hangin' like they done in Boston two years ago! We must tell the truth, Abby!—you'll only be whipped for dancin', and the other things!

What do the characters' colloquial language reveal about the time period and their lives?

How does Abigail set herself up as the authoritative voice in this scene?

What effect does the syntax in Mary Warren's speech have on the text? How does the syntax inform the actor how to perform this speech?

ABIGAIL: (Betty whimpers.) Betty? Now, Betty, dear, wake up now. It's Abigail. (She sits Betty up, furiously shakes her.) I'll beat you, Betty! (Betty whimpers.) My, you seem improving. I talked to your papa and I told him everything. So there's nothing to...

BETTY: (Betty suddenly springs off bed, rushes across room to window where Abigail catches her.) You drank blood, Abby, you drank blood!

ABIGAIL: (Dragging Betty back to bed and forcing her into it.) Betty, you never say that again! You will never...

BETTY: You did, you did! You drank a charm to kill John Proctor's wife! You drank a charm to kill Goody Proctor!

ABIGAIL: (Slaps her face.) Shut it! Now shut it! (Betty dissolves into sobs.) Now look you. All of you. We danced. And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam's dead sisters. And that is all. And mark this—let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it. I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down! (Betty cries louder. She goes to Betty, sits L. side of bed D.S. of Mercy, and roughly sits her up.) Now you... sit up and stop this! (Betty collapses in her hands.) (Enter John Proctor.)

PROCTOR: Be you foolish, Mary Warren? Be you deaf? I forbid you leave the house, did I not? Now get you home; (Mary crosses up and out.) my wife is waitin' with your work!

What does the action Abigail takes toward Betty say about her character?

Why might Abigail want to drink a charm to kill John Proctor's wife? Why did the author use the term "John Proctor's wife" first instead of saying Elizabeth Proctor?

What does this speech reveal about both Abigail's character and about her intentions?

MERCY: (Rising, crossing to entrance. Titillated. Being aware of their relationship.) I'd best be off. I have my Ruth to watch... Good morning, Mister Proctor. (Mercy sidles out. Since Proctor's entrance, Abigail has stood absorbing his presence, wide-eyed.)

ABIGAIL: She's only gone silly, somehow. She'll come out of it.

PROCTOR: So she flies, eh? Where are her wings?

ABIGAIL: (With a nervous laugh.) Oh, John, sure you're not believin' she flies!

PROCTOR: The road past my house is a pilgrimage to Salem all morning. The town's mumbling witchcraft.

ABIGAIL: Oh, posh!—We were dancin' in the woods last night, and my uncle leaped in on us. She took fright, is all.

PROCTOR: (His smile widens. Crossing to door.) Dancin' by moonlight! (Abigail springs into his path.) You'll be clapped in the stocks before you're twenty.

ABIGAIL: (Barring his way at door.) Give me a word, John. A soft word.

PROCTOR: I come to see what mischief your uncle's brewin' now. Put it out of mind, Abby.

ABIGAIL: John—I am waitin' for you every night.

Why does John Proctor's presence have such an effect on Abigail? What does this reveal about the nature of their relationship?

What does this coy behavior from John reveal about his true feelings toward Abigail?

What revelation does the shift in tone signify about their relationship?

PROCTOR: Abby, you'll put it out of mind. I'll not be comin' for you more. You know me better.

What does the word choice of "not... more" say about the history of their relationship?

ABIGAIL: I know how you clutched my back behind your house and sweated like a stallion whenever I come near! I saw your face when she put me out and you loved me then and you do now!

PROCTOR: (Taking her hands.) Child...

ABIGAIL: (With a flash of anger. Throwing his hands off.) How do you call me child!

What are the implications of him calling her "child"? Why might this make Abigail angry?

PROCTOR: (As 3 or 4 persons off-stage begin a quiet chant—a psalm or hymn.) Abby, I may think of you softly from time to time. But I will cut off my hand before I'll ever reach for you again. Wipe it out of mind—(Takes her arms.) we never touched, Abby.

How is this speech similar to the one Abigail gave to the other girls earlier?

ABIGAIL: (With a bitter anger.) Oh, I marvel how such a (Beating her fists against his chest) strong man may let such a sickly wife be...

PROCTOR: (Coldly. Grabbing her wrists.) You'll speak nothin' of Elizabeth!

ABIGAIL: She is blackening my name in the village! She is telling lies about me! She is a cold sniveling woman and you bend to her! Let her turn you like a...?

What impact does Abigail's words have on John Proctor? What does she imply?

PROCTOR: (Shakes her.) Do you look for whippin'!

ABIGAIL: (Shakes free.) You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is you love me yet! (He turns abruptly to go out. She rushes to door, blocks it.) John, pity me, pity me! (The words —Jehovah□ are heard in the psalm—the song outside— Betty claps her ear suddenly, and whines loudly Parris ENTERS.)

How has Abigail's tone now shifted? Why did the author choose to have this shift happen?