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Using Objects and Artifacts to Understand *The Crucible*

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“I was hanged for living alone / for having blue eyes and a sunburned skin, / tattered skirts, few buttons, / a weedy farm in my own name, / and a surefire cure for warts; / Oh yes, and breasts, / and a sweet pear hidden in my body. / Whenever there’s talk of demons / these come in handy.” –Margaret Atwood, “Half-hanged Mary”

Introduction

At the end of the year, I ask my students to tell me the top three things they enjoyed about my class and three things I can improve upon. Most commonly what is written on these informal surveys is that they love *The Crucible*. This play does have it all -- reading together in class (no solo reading at home), the scandal of an affair, accusations of witchcraft, a girl gang like no other, unfair trials, multiple layers of meaning, and finally, there are the probing questions that get asked by students reading through their modern lens. These questions inevitably turn into heated, healthy discussions of problematic characterization, connections to our current world, patriarchy, racism, and using fear as a means of control. They love this play. It gets them thinking, and for that reason, I will always include it in my curriculum.

When we start the play, the hardest idea that my students wrestle with and the hardest thing for me to teach is this Puritan way of life – what it was like to live during this time, and how the belief in witches came to be seen as a real threat. I often bring in clips from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and show them these funny Puritan valentines I found on Pinterest to help them understand the historical context. After my many years of teaching, I can say for certain that my students are visual creatures. When we read works that place them in a time of history far removed from the world they live in, I find that using artwork, illustrations, photographs, movie clips, and artifacts help students visualize and understand life in earlier times. This is the aim of the unit-- a visual curation of objects and artifacts to help my students truly grasp the historical context of Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. This visual examination will also help my students understand the emotional intensity of Puritan cultural conformity, which generated a type of hysteria represented in the play. Through this study of the Puritan way of life and the images and rhetoric of witchcraft pamphlets circulating in the 16th/17th century, students will be able to clearly see the oppression, within the Puritan world, of those considered to be “others,” such as people of color, women and those who refused to conform to social norms.

Teaching Situation and Rationale

I teach at a magnet school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It has a diverse student body, ranging from those students who help support themselves and their families to those who are extremely wealthy. Specifically speaking, at Booker T. Washington High School, our current student body is 35% African American, 36% Caucasian, 3% Asian, 13% Hispanic, 9% Multi-Race, and 4% American Indian with 38% of our population on free and reduced lunch. My classroom reflects this diversity. Also, the two classes I teach, Pre-AP English II IB-MYP (focus on World Literature) and AP Language and Composition (focus on American Literature) and IBHL Literature I, have students with ranging abilities, so it is important that I differentiate and scaffold my instruction, as well as build in some flexibility for those students who need it. This unit will be written for my AP Language and Composition and my IBHL Literature classes, but I feel like the information and texts will be useful for other upper grade levels as well.

Objects and Artifacts: Teaching Historical Context

Art and artifacts can profoundly enhance teaching in the ELA classroom. Visual and material evidence enhances the understanding and analysis of whatever text you engage with. Yet, students often accept the visual image as simple representations of the world, as true. As educators, we need to challenge uncritical, passive modes of reading and looking. We should guide students to address invisible voices and encoded messages from art, artifacts, and literary works, looking at it from all angles and multiple perspectives. Students should always ask themselves when encountering any literary or visual work: Why is this considered important? Whose voices are being heard and whose are not? What is being left unsaid or ignored?

There is a layering of meaning and perspectives to consider when reading *The Crucible*, which is rooted in American history, its setting based on real events and its characters based on real people in a specific place, albeit fictionalized and exaggerated in many places for dramatic effect and metaphorical life lessons. It is in literary works like this play that we need to teach students to look beyond what is in front of them - to extract information, read between the lines to be able to decipher the message and truly understand and question the author's purpose. We must do the same with objects, art, and artifacts - you need to extract information and see beyond the subject matter to truly get a sense of the artist's intent or an object's significance. Using objects and artifacts to elucidate a particular text will not only heighten student interest because of their visual, tactile natures, it will allow them to approach a topic they may be unfamiliar with an ease and openness that they would not have when encountering a piece of literature. Ulrich et al. writes how "focusing on a single object can generate excitement, prompt historical curiosity, and produce understanding."¹ Objects and art create a sense of wonder that supplements literature. The goal of this unit then is to use objects and artifacts as a lens to understand the historical context and to peel back the layers of meaning of *The Crucible*.

Unit Content

Puritan Way of Life: Interior and Material Culture

At the beginning of the unit and before we start the play *The Crucible*, I want to look at photographs of houses from Puritan New England and the objects that would be inside of these houses. If I can offer my students this vision of setting for the play, it will be instrumental in their understanding of the characters, their motivations, and their understanding of the world. This lesson about historical context would take one to three class periods depending on a teacher's school schedule.

Exterior Home and Physical Environment

Showing students what Puritan houses looked like from the outside will prove beneficial in students' understanding of Salem, a setting that represents seriousness, darkness, and a hidden history, a firm structure of strict religious beliefs and patriarchal obedience, and a fear of the unknown. Using pictures of a Puritan home, like that of Rebecca Nurse's Homestead, John Ward's House in Salem or Buttolph-Williams House in Wethersfield, CT would be ideal for the introduction to a Puritan home. All three of these places have pictures easily found on the Internet. For my presentation to my students, I will use a combination of photographs taken in Wethersfield and photographs of Rebecca Nurse's home. Looking at the exterior of these houses, students should be able to point out several features like small windows made with imperfect glass which would not afford to let much light in. After showing a close-up detail of a window, students can see that this imperfect glass may also distort images while looking out, reinforcing superstitions or fears Puritans may have of their environment. Students should point out that the house is made from wood. I will show them a picture of an interior wood detail. Have students wonder about this wood; get all their senses involved. Where would they get this wood? Who would chop it down and build the house? What does wood smell like, feel like, and sound like inside a dwelling?

These houses held up to four to ten people and were designed to show patriarchal control.² In his essay "Witchcraft, Bodily Affliction, and Domestic Space in Seventeenth-Century New England," Robert Blair St. George describes how "the exterior order of the house provided architectural proof of patriarchal discipline. With its window/eyes, door/mouth, roof/brain visible from the street, the human house provided a male model of society, but one that could incorporate within its gendered figure elements usually conceived as female."³ There is an illustration of this concept of the house-body included in his essay that would be worth showing to students as well. He also discusses how one way the patriarchal society limited women socially, but gave them a little more authority, was "in the design of the...house itself. It was an architectural strategy that announced the sanctity of the nuclear family and so ordered space that the family's 'head' could maintain an idealized surveillance over the dependent members of his body."⁴ He goes on to say that "the front of the house presented an image of order and control to the public."⁵ The Puritan patriarchal control was literally built into the architecture of the home.

Even more interesting is how Blair St. George connects the exterior of the home to the Salem Witch accusations. He describes how a lot of the stories and accusations about witches in Salem would include an invasion of the house, which he argues is the invasion of the body. This suggests that these stories of witches invading houses are symbolic of the threatened patriarchy -- the accused women trying to conquer or "pierce" the image of control and patriarchy (the house-body).⁶ These witch stories are subconscious fears men of

Salem had about independent women. This would be interesting to walk your students through and see if they can figure out what these witch invasion stories truly represent.

One more idea that might be useful to explore would be the surrounding wilderness – the unknown, the unexplored. Images of forests around Salem could be used here. This will be a critical opportunity to mention colonization, unstable and violent relations with displaced natives (something that Abigail alludes to when describing her parents' death), and the very real fear of witches and the Devil. In her article about the young accusers in Salem, Isabelle Laskaris writes about how “one of the most frightening aspects of Puritan ideology was the belief the Devil could be hiding anywhere, and could descend on any individual at any given time.”⁷ These fears would have affected the psyche of Puritan families and therefore Salem's surrounding wilderness would be a breeding ground for anxieties about invasions, violence, and the supernatural.

Teachers can also show pictures of the body of water that Salem was nearby. Again, using photographs of this body of water (I will be using a picture of a port building still standing in Wethersfield which would be similar to Salem's), a teacher can guide students to question where ships would be going to and from during this time. Students should eventually make the connections that many of the ships went to the Caribbean for importing and exporting capital, including slaves. This would bring a connection to Tituba, Reverend Parris's slave who is the first to be accused.

Interior Home

For the interior of a Puritan home, I would focus on the inside rooms, kitchen hearth, the close quarters, the attic, the cellar, and other objects that would be commonly found in one of the interior rooms. Teachers can choose a variety of images found on museum websites or from simple Google searches. Many of the photos I will use will be from colonial Wethersfield and from Rebecca Nurse's Homestead. As a teacher shows these photographs of the interior and of objects, it is imperative that they have their students use all their senses to wonder about life back in 1692.

Most Puritans lived in one-to-two-bedroom houses, where almost every room was used for sleeping and working.”⁸ This shows their modesty and appreciation of hard work. The main floor rooms were called the parlor and the hall. Inform students that “the ‘parlor’ was always the front room on one side of the entrance; it had the best bed, held the household's most valuable possessions, and was the room where the head of the household slept, occasionally dined, and met with guests.”⁹ What this means is this room was meant for the man of his house and to show off the fruits of his labor, although Puritans should not be too prideful in their material possessions as is exemplified by the character Reverend Parris in *The Crucible*. In her article about American Puritan homes, Diana Strazdes describes how “the front room on the other side of the entrance, the ‘hall’ ...was the center of family life. It was the largest room of the house, the main working and cooking area, and the place where family meals were eaten. When a kitchen was built into the back of the house, a pantry and an additional bedroom of ten adjoined it.”¹⁰ The additional bedroom could be added on at a later date sometimes making the exterior of the house look a bit hodgepodge, but many Puritans were concerned less about aesthetics and more about functionality. The upper floors called the chambers housed spinning wheels and were used for storage like food or textiles.¹¹ What should be emphasized from the interior rooms are the enclosed spaces and low ceilings and how close everyone would be together with very little privacy. What would it be like to be a young person living in this environment? This intimate environment would also mean that slaves and maid servants would be inextricable from everyday life. Students should wonder what types of feelings this would produce from all parties living in this space.

There are a number of items a teacher could focus on within the Puritan home. One item I will have students contemplate are candlesticks. I will show a photograph of a pair of silver candlesticks from 1686 from Edward S. Cooke, Jr. 's *Inventing Boston: Design, Production, and Consumption*. First, I will have students think about silver. Cooke writes how in 1690 paper money became used for monetary exchange and that “leading merchants and officials sought to use silver for personal objects to solidify their new status.”¹² This will directly relate to a part of the play when Reverend Parris says he wants silver candlesticks for his church rather than be satisfied by the pewter ones. This disgusts Parris’s character foil John Proctor, and now students will realize that Parris’s fascination with this object was a sign of capitalism, profiting off the slave trade. This connects directly to Parris’s characterization of someone who only cares about his reputation and his money. The image of candlesticks also raises the question of illumination - darkness and fear of dark which is something students may have noticed when examining the exterior as well. This would again reemphasize a sense of insecurity that people of this time period would feel.

Showing images of the kitchen hearth and spinning wheels with wool and yarn would prove beneficial to have students wonder what it was like to be a woman in this time period. For example, I would show a picture of the kitchen hearth and ask students to look at each object and wonder what it was used for and have them wonder how much time would be spent in that space and who all would be working in the kitchen. What would be the temperature? What would be the concerns while in that space? Next, I will show a picture of the room that has a spinning wheel which suggests another set of responsibilities a woman would have. Another image could be of a crib, prompting students to think about how women of the time period were valued for their reproduction. What would happen if they stopped reproducing? How would that affect their value in this society? One concept students should grasp is that women did not have much free time and that their lives were to be lived in service to their husbands and to God. When thinking about the accusations made by Abigail and the girls, students should realize how hard it would be to “com[e] to a sense of self, in a society that allowed them very few legitimate ways of exploring or finding themselves,”¹³ and why accusing someone of witchcraft might be a way to feel heard and seen in a world where you are made to feel invisible.

Another object to concentrate on from the interior of a Puritan home is that of the main book housed there: *The Bible*. *The Bible* would be the book of ultimate truth for all Puritans and was a governing force for Puritan society and beliefs; Salem was a true theocracy. Looking at an image of a Bible on a set of dresser drawers, I will have students notice its size, rather large, and the fact there are no other books nearby. If this was the only source of knowledge for most homes, what does this mean for women and for men? What stories from *The Bible* would reinforce gender roles and patriarchal structure? It might be important to note that there was other printed material “from almanacs, scary stories, and little pamphlets with romantic advice, ... religious instruction manuals, and ...high tracts of philosophy and religion.”¹⁴ These tracts often included “extensive debates on the nature of God, the invisible world, the Devil, and their relationship to the visible happenings of nature and the actions of men and women.”¹⁵ These texts would reaffirm the very real belief of witches and superstitions and the importance of religion to stave off these invisible evils. Again, teachers should prompt students to wonder about who would read these texts and what beliefs would be strengthened by them.

The Image of Witch: Witchcraft Pamphlets

After studying and thinking about the exterior and interior of Puritan houses and the objects that reside there, students should better understand the historical context. The next class period, I will use witchcraft pamphlets from the 16th and 17th century to illustrate the misinformation and stereotypes created to incite fear in their readers and to maintain assurance that the readers will conform to society and to the Christian religion. Using the images from witchcraft pamphlets and excerpts of the stories told on these sensational reads, students

will not only be able to see the real belief and fear in the supernatural, but also to connect to the accusations made in the play. These pamphlets were akin to gossip websites and TikTok for people of the 16th and 17th centuries. The pamphlets were widely disseminated across England, which caused “ideologies about witchcraft and witches [to] spread far beyond their immediate contexts virtually everywhere in England, appearing in several kinds of sources (and, if we include Salem, the geographical coverage is even wider).”¹⁶ This allows us to understand how the image of witch came over with Puritan settlers. Also, the pamphlets tell “about witch trials in which the pamphleteers give descriptions of the witches, physical and mental, their confessions, the complaints made by witnesses, and the arguments that the pamphleteers or the judge use as evidence pointing to the witches’ guilt.”¹⁷ Because of these legal details and descriptions, the pamphlets were seen as truth. These sensationalist reports of witches, their trials, and executions were also used as a means to keep people adhering to God's authority, promoting Christianity and conforming to society's rules. In “Witches and the Devil in Early Modern Visual Culture,” Scott Eaton describes how “the idea of witchcraft made the authorities anxious as witches operated outside of the systems which maintained social order, namely patriarchy, the household, marriage, and the Church.”¹⁸ These pamphlets would not only act as warning to readers, but also advise them how to escape the trickery of the Devil and witches.¹⁹ Later after students get to Act III of *The Crucible*, students can also compare the inflammatory rhetoric used in these print sources with the rhetoric used in the actual court transcripts and the court scenes in the play.

These artifacts were also used to support the patriarchy and to demonize women, keeping them in their subservient position. In Eaton's article, he describes how these pamphlets depicted a witch as “as an old disheveled woman, an evil hag with wrinkled skin, a long nose, a facial protrusion, and a cat for a pet...In early modern print cultures, image and text suggested that the deformed exterior of the witch's body was a mirror for the twisted interior of the mind.”²⁰ The language too plays a role in persuading the reader. In Eaton's article he cites how witches are described in one pamphlet as “‘monstrous and hideous’ in her appearance and, likewise, in 1613, Elizabeth Device was described as an ‘odious witch...her left eye, standing lower than the other...so strangely deformed.’”²¹ Picking apart the visual and textual rhetoric of these pamphlets would be a rich learning experience for my students, and then they can also understand why the accusers went for the old, the disabled, and widowed. These pamphlets will show how women were a threat to the puritanical patriarchal society and thought of as being the weaker sex, subject to the Devil's wiles, according to Puritan beliefs.

Because my students are visual, I will use two images from one pamphlet, highlighting parts of their text and important illustrations. This artifact contains illustrations that reinforce and perpetuate stereotypes of witches that have had lasting effects throughout history and continue to uphold structures of the patriarchy. Teachers can bring any witchcraft pamphlet from this time period but will find a link to the images described in the resources listed below.

A Rehearsall Both Straung and True: Pamphlet from 1579

According to the British Library, this pamphlet focuses on four women: Elizabeth Stiles, Mothers Dutton, Duell, and Margaret.²² The information found on these women was based on Stile's confession in jail. The pamphlet describes how these women all had familiars, pets that were fed on the blood of their owners and did the Devil's bidding, they performed many acts of maleficium, acts of harm on others, and the murders they committed. This salacious pamphlet also describes how these women know of a man named Father Rosimonde who is a shapeshifter.

On the cover, the woodcut illustration has two older women. The wrinkle faced, working class woman on the left is not smiling and her eyes appear to be looking out towards the viewer. One can only imagine that this was used to scare the people who encountered these pamphlets. This woman is definitely bigger in scale and almost seems to have more masculine features, suggesting an intimidation tactic used by the artist. In her right hand, she is gripping a devilish spirit with horns, sharp claws, forked wings, and what looks like a snake's tail, but, at first glance, could be mistaken as a phallus. Here, many evil symbols are at work. Many of the symbols point to Satan, but teachers might want to point out to students that the phallic looking snakes tail serves two purposes. First, it represents the fall of Eve and secondly, the phallic image paired with the face of the horned demon could also represent Pan, the Greek god of the wild who is known for his sexual prowess. Eaton describes how "the sexual element so common in witchcraft iconography is primarily evidenced ... through the witches' nudity and the phallic imagery."²³ Obviously, there is no nudity in this illustration, but the phallic imagery cannot be ignored and most likely represents the lustful nature from descendants of Eve. In this woman's left hand is an unknown object. Having students wonder what it could be will be a useful way to let them make educated guesses and would be low stakes since there is really no right answer. Some students may point out that it looks like a quill and that she is writing something down, as the bottom image looks like a scroll. This could be a decorative element, but also could be insinuating that women who know how to read and write are dangerous, reinforcing the patriarchal notion that women should stay in their subservient, illiterate lane. Others may see an animal of some sort - a bird maybe, alluding to the fact that she may have a familiar.

The woman on the right is older and working class as well, although does not have as many wrinkles as the other. She looks off to the distance and we are unsure if she is a witch as well or an unsuspecting God-fearing woman. She holds a basket that apparently contains fish as she has two fish in both hands. The uncertainty surrounding this figure may have students wonder if she is making a market exchange with someone outside the illustration or is she about to make a deal with the witch. Whatever the case may be, the demon held by the woman on the left looks like it is about to strike. This image not only evokes fear but acts as a warning for its viewers. Students should recognize the visual rhetoric being used for inciting fear.

A teacher could pair this image with the original text that is located before and after this image. Words like "hainous and horrible ac|tes" and "noto|rrious" and "leude, malitious, and hurtfull" are all used to describe the 65 year-old Elizabeth Stiles.²⁴ This would be a good opportunity to talk about the use of connotative adjectives in a persuasive text.

The second image to emphasize from this witchcraft pamphlet contains more stereotypes about witches, including information about their familiars.²⁵ On the left, we see an old, poor woman with a hooked nose and a wart on the side of her face. She has a slight smile and her gaze is towards her animals on the right. These animals are presumably her familiars, referred to as "Spirite(s)" or "Feende(s)" in the text below the image. It would be known by people of this time that "familiars suckled blood from supernumerary teats on the witch's body (resembling a nipple, mole, pimple, wart or keloid) in order to renew the diabolic pact."²⁶ In this illustration, the witch is feeding her familiars using a bowl and spoon. The text that accompanies the image says that the witch is feeding them with "blood whiche she cau|seth to issue from her owne flancke."²⁷ Another compelling feature to note is the size and number of the familiars. They are large in scale in relation to the old woman on the left, signifying their importance to her and the havoc they could potentially create in a pious community. Three animals are held in an open box, the number three being perversion of the Holy Trinity. There are two large toads with rather large claws who are lovingly gazing back at the woman, patiently waiting for their spoonful of blood. The other animal who is being fed with the spoon looks to be a cat, with

sharp demonic features whose eye looks towards the viewer, suggesting that after it has been fed, it might come for the viewer next. The familiars are kept in a box which shows the woman's dominance over them, a feared trait for a woman to have, and the box can represent the fact that she can hide her familiars away so no one can see, again reinforcing the invisible evil witches can perform on unsuspecting communities and individuals.

Another important feature to notice is the window in the background. This is centered in the illustration and draws the viewer's attention away from what is happening in the foreground. The window functions in two different ways. First, this common home feature tells us she is indoors doing nefarious activities with her unsuspecting neighbors nearby. Secondly, the window serves as a symbol for sinister surveillance of her innocent neighbors – what she will do with that information – one can only imagine.

Lastly, it is important to know that this pamphlet illustration is to serve as propaganda for the upright, Christian woman who “was a good wife, mother and manager of her nuclear family within a patriarchy-based household.”²⁸ The artist of this image “styled the witch as an anti-mother”²⁹ as she feed[s] demonic child-like familiars blood, rather than milk.”³⁰ This inverted image of mother was used as a scare tactic to keep women in line and to operate within the structure of religion and the patriarchy. Again, these pamphlets were used as a brainwashing device to persuade “readers [to be] aware of [witches's] possible plots and guile (i.e. how, why, and when witches and Satan operate to harm), so that in the future if everyone joins hands in eradicating witches, the community will be safe.”³¹

Analysis of these pamphlets will show students the real and widespread belief in and fear of witches that came from across the Atlantic to Puritan New England. They will also show how colonial society sincerely believed that “women are morally and intellectually weaker than men.”³² thanks to books that preceded the witchcraft pamphlets like the *Malleus Maleficarum* and *The Bible*. Knowing and understanding these beliefs that Puritans held will then help students think about the motivations behind the young accusers from *The Crucible*.

There are many other witchcraft pamphlets to choose from. I would encourage teachers who want to spend more time on this visual and textual analysis to look at *The Wonderfull Discoverie of the Witch-craftes of Margraet and Phillip Flower*, a pamphlet from 1619 which has another woman who is disfigured and walking with canes, surrounded by her familiars,³³ which generates another stereotype that witches are ugly and disabled. Another pamphlet worth investigating from 1643, closer to the Salem Witch Trials date is called *A Most Certain, Strange, and True Discovery of a Witch*. This has an image of a witch flying over a river, giving us the flying witch image that has carried over to present characterizations of witchcraft.

Not only is it worth looking at the images but pairing it with some of the text from the pamphlet makes for a good study of the synthesis of image and text working together to persuade. When analyzing the text it will be important to point out the use of “us” and “our”³⁴ which reinforce the us vs. them mentality and the use of alliterative adjectives that present binary thinking, highlighting the good of Christians (good, pure, holy) and the evil of witches (sinful, dirty, merciless).³⁵ These linguistic techniques establish the power of persuasion that these pamphlets hold. With the study of these primary source artifacts students should be able to make the connection of how pamphlets can help us understand “one of the most important aspects of growing up as a young New England woman – a profoundly held Puritan belief which integrated a belief in a supernatural world.”³⁶

After using objects that showcase Puritan way of life and dissecting the witchcraft pamphlets from the 16th

and 17th centuries, students will have a greater understanding of the historical context of this play and be equipped with essential knowledge that will help them analyze characters and themes and, more importantly, ask the more crucial, probing questions about issues like gender, race, and social outcasts that Miller, intentionally or unintentionally, features in his iconic play.

Characters from *The Crucible*: The Exploration of the Other

After using objects that showcase Puritan way of life and dissecting the witchcraft pamphlets from the 16th and 17th centuries, students will have a greater understanding of historical context to begin this play. Students will now be able to draw parallels between Puritan New England and that of Miller's world of 1950s McCarthyism which teachers should and usually do bring in before reading as well. This unit is not focused on that content, but there are many sources available to teachers to help with delivering that knowledge.

Although I am constantly telling my students to look for the author's purpose, it is just as good to have them question that purpose as well. The understanding of Puritan life and beliefs will be the key to questioning Miller's interpretation of The Salem Witch Trials. Who is he blaming for the hysteria that ensues? Why is Tituba characterized the way she is? Why does he make John Proctor the hero? Why does he vilify Abigail? What 1950s social and cultural beliefs are hidden in the creation of these characters and dramatization of these events? By reading against the grain, looking at a few key characters can guide students to challenge the traditional reading of this play. This will not include all the characters you could do this with but does use characters that will reveal critical ideas about race and gender. This delinking/ deprogramming of conventional thought about the play will lead students to create a final product that will put resistant reading, "students analyze the dominant reading of a text and "resist" it by engaging in alternative readings,"³⁷ into practice.

Tituba

Tituba is a character that captures students' interest right away. She is the only character of color, enslaved, and the first to be accused. She is the character that sparks questions about Miller's intent due to her characterization. When we first meet Tituba, students automatically point out how she is like a black caricature. They are taken aback by this dated, racist characterization. My students ask questions about whether or not Miller is perpetuating a racist narrative through this character, or is Miller critically commenting on the tendency to blame "the other" first? Jungyum Hwang's article about Tituba argues that Miller is perpetuating a racist narrative by pointing out how "Miller draws Tituba's characterization from the stereotype of the African American 'mammy,' and out of the accompanying attributes such as one-dimensionality and bestial instinctiveness."³⁸ The author continues to argue that "the play ultimately points the finger at Tituba's foreignness as the root cause of America's collective fear and fanaticism."³⁹ I'm not one hundred percent convinced of this as the author's intent - to blame Tituba for the whole event, but it is worth having students explore and to think about as it seems to be a persistent image in our American culture. Miller does characterize and implicate Tituba as an orchestrator of events of folk magic in the forest. So again the question arises: is he presenting us with a racist perception of his time or critically commenting on looking to those considered outsiders by a community as a scapegoat? I would have students discuss these questions after Act I when we see Tituba get accused as this will generate critical analysis of race and author's intention. The play's characters spark meaningful conversation about important topics that exist today.

One piece of interesting information to bring to students as they discuss Miller's characterization of Tituba would be the true account of Tituba's life as written in Elaine Breslaw's *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem*:

Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies. Breslaw points out that it was Betty and Abigail who decide to play with an egg to do some folk magic, akin to girls today playing with a magic 8 ball, common in this time period and not connected with the devil.⁴⁰ After the girls started to act strange (presumably from the guilt and fear of their little folk magic experiment), Tituba was enlisted by a neighbor to make what is called a witch cake to help heal the girls with more white magic/ folk magic.⁴¹ She was a slave and not in a position to say no to a white woman and she was worried about her charge Betty. It was then after Parris found out about the witch cake that Tituba was blamed and which she promptly denied being involved with the devil.⁴² Navigating the world of slave and master, she realized it would be in her best interest in saving her life to tell Parris what he wanted to hear. Miller does portray this idea in his dialogue. Using the original transcripts of Tituba's confessions and accusations at the end of Breslaw's book would prove useful for students to read. As an extension to the unit, teachers could use these transcripts as a way to compare primary source documents with the fiction that was inspired by them. This will be another way teachers can bring artifact analysis in the classroom. Mentioned earlier, some have argued that Tituba is a racist caricature created by Miller. To compare the original confession to Miller's fictional dialogue would be useful to delve into this idea and to get a better understanding of Tituba and Miller's characterization of her.

Abigail and the Girls

Using their modern lens, another set of challenging questions students ask is about the young female accusers turning on everyone, especially other women, and vilification of Abigail. One question students often ask is: why? Why are these girls hopping on the accusation bandwagon? Other questions on their motivations to accuse others arise as well. First, it will be important for students to think about how women were treated during this time period. They can bring in information that they learned through the Puritan way of life objects and witchcraft pamphlets here. In the dissertation "The Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692: Constructing the Female as Irrational Other," Helen Hughes writes, "Ultimately, accused or condemned women's most accessible means of appropriating a voice came in confessions. If one would not confess, one's voice was in distinct danger of going unheard."⁴³ This "'no-win position of women' seems crucial to a discursive analysis of Salem petitions and transcripts since 'they [women] were inferior and yet dangerous, disgusting and yet powerful, and it was their bodies that chiefly made them so.'"⁴⁴ Not having a voice, being constantly looked at as less than by society, and experiencing the contradictions because of gender would make women feel isolated and devalued. Laskaris mentions how these young girls for the first time in their lives were not being controlled by men and were taking on an important, active role in the courtroom. She writes, "These instances simply do not fit neatly into the typically prescribed narrative of female actors working as tools for the patriarchal elite. In fact, they stand as examples of female agency driving the action in the courtroom by emphasizing their own perspective."⁴⁵ As mentioned before when exploring the Puritan way of life, these young girls did not have a sense of agency. They finally had a voice and were being listened to by men in power. Attention was turned to them as they were the experts in the room- something Puritan women never experienced, especially young girls. This coupled with the very real belief of witches is the cause for the accusation outbreak.⁴⁶

Miller does suggest some other motivations for why some girls became accusers: Ruth Putnam was accusing people whose land her father wanted, Abigail wanted to marry John Proctor and take Elizabeth's place, Mary Warren was bullied by the other girls. All of these seem likely possible causes for the bandwagon accusations, however, Laskaris suggests that "through these narratives, young women expressed a sense of self by highlighting and mediating their own strength and agency."⁴⁷ In other words, the narratives created through these accusations, not only gave these girls a voice, they got to show off their strength of fighting off

temptation from the Devil and they “positioned themselves in believable antithesis to their tormentors.”⁴⁸ The girls’ accusations seem to be a power move, moving them up the chain of command, and a means of confirming their strength and goodness, casting off the belief that women are the weaker sex. Thinking about the *The Crucible* “girl gang” in this way will allow for unique illuminations of characters and a non-traditional way to analyze the girls’ accusations and motivations.

Next, Abigail is a character that my students love to hate; she is the other woman. John Proctor, a man in his 30s, and Abigail, 17 years-old, have an affair which is slowly revealed in the first Act of *The Crucible*. Once students figure this out, they are, at first, scandalized by this fact and typically, blame her for being the other woman. However, over time, students start questioning if Abigail is really to blame. They start wondering if she was the true aggressor of this situation; she could be the victim – John preying on young Abigail and of community gossip that casts a shadow on her reputation. At the beginning of the play, students see John Proctor inappropriately flirt with Abigail and we know women are talking about her in the village through the conversation Abigail has with Reverend Parris. Students ask why this is; Why is John Proctor not blamed for this? Why is he seen as the village hero and Abigail is seen as the village whore? Students should recognize that Abigail clings to this new role of lead accuser because again this brings her voice, power, and respect – something she never had in Salem. She also does this to rise above “the woman as temptress” stereotype that this Puritan society believes in so ardently.

This is where reading against the grain will work in the classroom and where teachers can bring in those ideas from witchcraft pamphlets: women are always the ones who get demonized and blamed for the ills of the world. Again, students should consider the author's purpose. Is Miller trying to point out the tendency to blame women or is he inadvertently perpetuating the female as witch and temptress stereotype that was prominent in Miller's time of the 1950s. Hwang asserts that “Miller blames Abigail and Elizabeth, representing the two androcentric female stereotypes of femme fatales and cold wives, for manipulating and stunting his supposedly ‘natural’ male sexuality, leading to ‘the Fall of a good man.’”⁴⁹ This is an interesting read of these characters and again is where students typically go with their thoughts about Abigail and Elizabeth. Hwang continues to point out “Abigail is depicted as the core evil, whom both Proctor and Elizabeth unanimously condemn as a ‘whore’ set to destroy their marriage; and Elizabeth, although portrayed as honest and virtuous, is a frigid wife, who readily blames herself for her husband’s sexual misadventure.”⁵⁰ Proctor is lifted up as the hero of the play as Miller “grant[s] him the voice to speak up against the collective madness around him”-- his voice rising above Abigail's, “displac[ing] Proctor’s guilt onto [her].”⁵¹ It is women who are to blame for this hysteria in society, not the logical, rational world of men. This reinforces women being used as scapegoats in a puritanical, patriarchal world, which is not unlike ours today.

By questioning these creations of characters and dramatizing of personalities that actually existed during The Salem Witch Trials, students will be able to question whether or not Miller was subconsciously or consciously perpetuating stereotypes on race and gender – ideas that were carried over from the colonization of America, ideas that worked their way through Miller's time of the 1950s, and ideas that continue to exist today. Reading against the grain and analyzing and questioning characterization as a means of discussing critical issues, like race and gender, is something students should always do when encountering a literary or visual work. They can appreciate the work from a traditional read but why not use literature or works of art to explore, question, think critically about issues that seem to permeate and thread through time. *The Crucible* is a timeless play – it deals with issues of scapegoating and fear and demonization of an enemy, typically due to race, religion, gender – something that is seen time after time in our history. This play can be used as a vehicle to understand historical context through objects and artifacts and to try and understand why the

Puritan world, the world of McCarthyism, and the world of today still rely on these same techniques to maintain the status quo.

Teaching Strategies

Object Investigation and Mapping

Object investigation and mapping will be essential in uncovering historical context for a text. As Ulrich et al. notes, “just about any tangible thing can be pressed into service as primary historical evidence.”⁵² While showing off either actual objects or photographs of objects and artifacts, students will write down the object name and create a quick, rough sketch of the object. On to one side teachers can have them write down two to three emotions that the objects make them feel. They will draw a circle around these words. Then, teachers can start off with “a basic set of questions: What is it? Who made it? How did it get here? What is it worth?”⁵³ You can continue with asking about the material the object is made from, where it came from, and who would value the object and why. These questions will allow students to wonder which is something they need to do in the classroom- to feel free to be curious, no right or wrong, pure exploration. Students should bullet point in a list of quick answers to the questions you provide off to the other side of the rough sketch, drawing a box around their answers. Next, have students look at an object from many angles and then close their eyes and picture it or the environment with all their senses, imagining how the object would feel and smell like, and employ the sensations of taste and sound if applicable to the object on display. On the top of the rough sketch and inside a triangle, students should write down sensory ideas and words. Down below the image, students quickly write narrative surrounding the object, unlocking possibilities and new ways of looking at things. Encourage them to have as much fun with this; they can be humorous or dark or a matter of fact with their approach. This should be four to five sentences. Then have them draw a scalloped circle around this. This strategy will be a visual brainstorming and mapping exercise that can be done informally in small groups or individually, depending on your students’ needs. Because of its exploratory nature, object investigation and mapping is just that: an easy, visual way for students to open their minds to what these objects can represent about a time and place.

Visual Thinking Strategies: Three Simple Questions

For images and illustrations from the witchcraft pamphlets, I will use the strategy “Three Simple Questions.” Ask the following questions about an image: What’s going on in this picture? What makes you say that? What else can we find?⁵⁴ These questions are low stakes and can be easily answered by anyone – even a student who may not be paying attention at the moment. It will allow them to focus on the narrative being created in the image and the stereotypes that are being reinforced in these illustrations. Three Simple Questions is a common technique used when dissecting a visual work, but, as said before, this strategy is not intimidating for students, allowing for maximum participation. Students will answer these three questions in their notes in small groups. For example, when showing an image from a witchcraft pamphlet, before walking them through a full analysis, students in their groups will already come up with their ideas of what the story is behind the image and what details make them think so. They should come up with one additional interesting element and their interpretation for it. Each group will share their findings, and then we can start analyzing as a whole class, teachers pointing out any information that was missed.

Fictional Museum Curation

With any piece of literature, you can ask students to curate a fictional museum. Have students focus on a particular character and find objects mentioned in the text to use for their curation. They can write a label for each object and a rationale for why that object was chosen to represent their character and what it reveals about them. Authors use objects in a text to aid in understanding what a character is doing, essentially a prop encased in a text's imagery. These objects can be tied to a character's identity, they can be symbolic, or they can show us their status in society— the possibilities are endless. Since this unit focuses on objects and artifacts to understand historical context and characterization and resistant reading, a fiction museum curation will tie all this together and will allow for a true character study and exploration of the author's purpose. Teachers can use this opportunity to have students pull quotes from the text to pair with the chosen objects to help further understanding of characterization. Students should also think about where their exhibition will be displayed in the museum and what would be displayed next to it with a reason why. This strategy will be exemplified in the Classroom Activities section.

Classroom Activities

Let the Objects Speak: Understanding Historical Context

Before diving into *The Crucible*, it is important to introduce students to the historical context, especially the Puritan way of life because this will be something that isn't that familiar to them. By focusing on physical objects such as the exterior and interior of their homes, this will have them explore familiar ideas in an unfamiliar time and place. These objects will encourage wonder in this examination of historical context. Ulrich et al. describes how "asking students to study an object— any object— almost always leads them in unexpected directions."⁵⁵ By showing students pictures of objects and using the object investigation and mapping strategy, teachers can have students think about life during colonial times, tapping into their visual and tactile natures. Teachers will walk through the exterior and interior of Puritan homes as students take visual object mapping notes on each object as described in the object investigation and mapping teaching strategy. I plan to have a Google Slides presentation with these images with bare minimum descriptions. Students will be paired in groups of two to three. For example, when showing the exterior of a Puritan home, students will be asked to first label the object and do a quick sketch of the house. Let students know this does not have to be perfect. Off to the left, have students write down their first impressions or emotions about the exterior of the home and draw a circle around it. Then off to the right, students will answer the questions in bullet point style from Ulrich et al.: "What is it? Who made it? How did it get here? What is it worth?"⁵⁶ Depending on the object shown, you could add other questions as to who would use this? Who would live here? How would you feel living here or using this object? Where did the material of the object come from? Then have them draw a box around those answers. For part three, on the top of their sketch, have them use as many of five senses to think about and describe the object - again, this will create a connection to the object and its purpose in the Puritan world. They should draw a triangle around these sensory descriptions, about four to five ideas. After they have done this and below their sketch, they can jointly create a short narrative about this object, who would use it and what its purpose is. Encourage students to be as creative as they can be. Then draw a scalloped circle around this, like the shape of a cloud. This object investigation and mapping technique will provide a visual aid to what each object tells us about the Puritan way of life. Everything they write down in their groups can then be used for a whole class discussion where teachers can

help guide students' thinking about these objects even further, and students can write down any added information they deem interesting in the white spaces around their original map. This will be a unique way to infuse the visual and tactile into a lesson that is essentially about historical context, making it more engaging for students and heightening the understanding of a world and time period far from theirs.

She's a Witch!: Social Media Pamphlet

After studying the witchcraft propaganda and after Act II of the play, students will create a pamphlet cover for a character in *The Crucible*. Teachers will want to wait until after Act II because that will be after the many accusations will be made. They can choose any character who was accused in the play that they want, and teachers can have students do this activity in a variety of ways. For example, they can choose Sarah Good, Sarah Osburne, Tituba, Elizabeth Proctor, John Proctor, Rebecca Nurse, Giles Corey, or Martha Corey – all characters who were accused of witchcraft from the play. After students choose their character, they can either draw or find a picture off the internet– maybe of the characters from the 1997 movie *The Crucible*. They will then need to manipulate the image in a way that would showcase the stereotypes that the witchcraft pamphlets from the 16th and 17th centuries created and emphasized like warts and long noses – maybe a familiar. Students can print a picture out and draw over it or they can create their own image using pencils, pens, or even the computer if they have those skills. Stylizing their image to look like the pamphlets would be ideal. They will also have to produce a creative headline, mimicking the headlines and stories used in these primary source documents studied, utilizing literary techniques such as alliteration and sensationalist adjectives to draw the reader's attention. This activity is designed to show students the power of words and images and how they can be used to provoke fear and manipulate their readers. Teachers can take this activity further by having a contest on who creates the most disparaging image and enticing headline. Having students write a rationale for the words and image they used and why they chose that character, and then connect that rationale to the text will be another way to extend this activity to include more writing in the classroom.

The Crucible Museum Curation

At the end of the play and for our final project, I want students to create a fictional museum for *The Crucible*. This will marry our study of objects and artifacts to our reading against the grain and critical analysis of characterization. Before introducing this project, it will be beneficial to have students think about museum curation. This can be done as a 15-minute beginning of class activity. A teacher could walk them through a virtual exhibition from a local museum or use the Peabody Museum which houses the Salem Witch Trials exhibition.

Teachers should point out some of the problematic issues with current exhibitions and classifications seen in museums today, as museum exhibitions can be seen as problematic and inherently imperialistic. For example, the labeling of Native American exhibits as “primitive” and heroization of problematic characters from history like Christopher Columbus are some issues that can be pointed out. Teachers should highlight the power museums have over storytelling and history and explore other controversial topics surrounding museums, such as returning of indigenous works housed in these institutions to their rightful owners.

Teachers can give examples of current museums that use juxtaposition of exhibitions to have their patrons think critically about issues like racism and colonization. By providing students a brief overview of why museums can be problematic, students will understand the importance of telling a well-rounded, multi-sided story about their character through objects and artifacts, hopefully realizing that they should not ignore the critical issues each character brings up in the play and how complex they are. Students will focus again on any

character from the play. This can be Abigail, Judge Danforth, Reverend Parris, Elizabeth Proctor – whoever they want to focus on and that they feel has a story to tell and an issue about life and society to reveal.

Students will choose three to five objects mentioned in the play to represent that character. For example, if they choose Reverend Parris, they may think about using the silver candlesticks, his Bible, his lock box which held his valuables, and his whip he used on Tituba. These items can show off his concern for his reputation, his hypocrisy, his focus on materialism, and the fact that he was a slave owner. Have students sketch these objects out or find pictures from the internet of objects from this time period. Then students will create museum labels for each object (teachers may want to show examples of what these look like) and write rationales for each object – what does each object reveal about the character, the time period, and any critical issue it exposes. They should also write about what the viewer of the object should consider. This will bring in the skills we used at the beginning of the unit where we used the object investigation and mapping technique and allow them to work through and write about each object as we modeled earlier in the unit.

Teachers may want students to write down where in the play they found the object mentioned to connect their rationale to the text. One extension that can be used is to have students find two quotes from or about that character to display on the museum wall, again writing about why those quotes were chosen and what they reveal about character or society. Finally, students will have to choose one character’s exhibition to place theirs next to. For example, maybe Reverend Parris’s objects are placed next to Tituba’s to juxtapose slave owner and slave, the respected and the outcast, and white and black. Students will write about why they placed them next to the character they chose and what critical analysis their viewers should think about and question. This activity will allow students to highlight their critical reading and understanding of *The Crucible* while thinking about how objects, artifacts, and literature can help us understand our complex world, navigate our tough history, and combat serious issues like the use of fear to control, scapegoating, and demonization of others.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Standards -- Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts -- 11th grade. These standards can be easily cross-referenced to other standards.

11.1.R.3 Students will engage in collaborative discussions about appropriate topics and texts, expressing their own ideas by contributing to, building on, and questioning the ideas of others in pairs, diverse groups, and whole class settings.

Students will participate in small group and whole class settings when discussing the Puritan way of life, witchcraft pamphlets, and characterization while reading the play.

11.3.R.1 Students will evaluate the extent to which historical, cultural, and/or global perspectives affect authors’ stylistic and organizational choices in grade-level literary and informational genres.

Investigating the objects and homes from colonial times will provide much needed historical context for understanding the play, as well as studying the witchcraft pamphlets which will allow students to understand the real fear of the Devil and witchcraft during this time period.

11.3.R.2 Students will evaluate points of view and perspectives in more than one grade-level literary and/or informational text and explain how multiple points of view contribute to the meaning of a work.

By reading against the grain, students will ask themselves about Miller’s characterizations of the historical figures from the Salem Witch Trials and think about the different perspectives and ways to think about these characters and what Miller was trying to say about race and gender.

11.3.W.3 Students will elaborate on ideas by using logical reasoning and illustrative examples to connect evidence to claim(s).

When writing their rationales in the Fiction Museum Curation activity, students will have to present solid logic for their choices, connecting objects to characterization and what they want their reader/ viewer to think about while looking at their fictional exhibition.

11.7.R.1 Students will analyze and evaluate the various techniques used to construct arguments in written, oral, visual, digital, non-verbal, and interactive texts, to generate and answer applied questions, and to create new understandings.

Students will analyze the word choice and images found within witchcraft pamphlets from the 16th and 17th centuries to see how the makers of these pamphlets were trying to sway their audience.

11.7.W.2 Students will construct engaging visual and/or multimedia presentations using a variety of media forms to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence for diverse audiences.

Students are designing two different multimodal presentations for this unit. First, students are creating a sensationalist headline and image for their chosen character to mimic the witchcraft pamphlets, showing their understanding of how words and images have power to sway an audience. At the end of the unit, students are creating a fictional museum curation to have their audience consider the deep, complicated characters from the play and the critical issues that those characters make us think about.

Resources

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<https://go.exlibris.link/FVZPrbLQ>. This dissertation really homes in on the words and syntax used in witchcraft pamphlets and focuses on alliteration, exaggeration, and binaries used to persuade their readers.

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Hwang, Junghyun. "Tituba, "Dark Eve" in the Origins of the American Myth: The Subject of History and Writing about Salem." *CLCWeb : Comparative Literature and Culture* 23 no. 4, (2021), <https://go.exlibris.link/OBTIKy0M>. This article critically comments on Miller's creation of Tituba and criticizes Miller's heroization of John Proctor. It provides context and ideas for those students who question why Tituba is created the way she is and why Abigail is vilified.

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useful information about the Puritan house.

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher, et al. *Tangible Things: Making History Through Objects*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, (2015), ProQuest *Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.yale.idm.oclc.org/lib/yale-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1836106>. This source talks about the importance of using objects in the classroom and for investigation.

“Visual Thinking Strategies,” *Embracing Our Differences*, 2023, <https://www.embracingourdifferences.org/VTS>. This website walks teachers through using these three simple questions technique. Images and Useful Websites for Teachers

“Early English Books Online,” University of Michigan, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebogroup/>. This website has transcriptions of witchcraft pamphlets which will help teachers and students decipher the script used on the actual primary source.

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