**Language**

**What Language says about People**

Look at the following extract in pairs and read it aloud. Note down on the extract any observations you have about the following:

* What clues does the language give of the situation, the issues and the society in which the play is set?
* How can you tell that Danforth is the one with the power in this exchange?
* What are the similarities and differences between the language used here and dialects you are familiar with?

DANFORTH: Come here, woman. *[Elizabeth comes to him, glancing at Proctor' s back].* Look at me only, not at your husband. In my eyes only. ELIZABETH *[faintly]:* Good, sir.

DANFORTH: We are given to understand that.at one time you dismissed your servant, Abigail Williams.

ELIZABETH: That is true, sir.

DANFORTH: For what cause did you dismiss her? *[Slight pause. Then Elizabeth tries to glance at Proctor.]*

You will look in my eyes only and not at your husband. The answer is in your memory and you need no help to give it to me. Why did you dismiss Abigail Williams?

ELIZABETH *[not knowing what to say, sensing a situation, wetting her lips to stall for time]:* She - dissatisfied me. *[Pause.]* And my husband.

DANFORTH: In what way dissatisfied you?

ELIZABETH: She were - *[she glances at Proctor for a cue.]*

DANFORTH: Woman, look at me! *[Elizabeth does.]* Were she slovenly? Lazy? What disturbance did she cause?

ELIZABETH: Your Honour, I - in that time I were sick. And I - my husband is a good and righteous man. He is never drunk as some are, nor wastin' his time at the shovelboard, but always at this work. But in my sickness - you see, sir, I were a long time sick after my last baby, and I thought I saw my husband somewhat turning from me. And this girl - *[she turns to Abigail.]*

DANFORTH: Look at me.

ELIZABETH: Aye, sir. Abigail Williams - *[she break off.]*

DANFORTH: What of Abigail Williams?

ELIZABETH: I came to think he fancied her. And so one night I lost my wits, I think, and put her out on the high-road.

DANFORTH: Your husband - did he indeed turn from you?   
DANFORTH: Then he did not tum from you.

ELIZABETH *[starting to glance at Proctor]:* He -

DANFORTH *[reaches out and holds her face, then]:* Look at me! To your own knowledge, has John Proctor ever committed the crime of lechery? *[In a crisis of indecision she cannot speak.]* Answer my question! Is your husband a lecher?

ELIZABETH *[faintly]:* No, sir.

DANFORTH: Remove her, Marshal.

**Language in Time**

When Arthur Miller visited Salem to look at the court records of the trials it was mainly 'to study the actual words of the interrogations'. He knew that in order to place *The Crucible* historically, he would have to re-capture the people's 'gnarled way of speaking'. He writes

'After a few hours of mouthing the words - often spelled phonetically in improvised shorthand of the court clerks or the ministers who kept the record as the trial proceeded - I felt a bit encouraged that I might be able to handle it, and in more time I came to love the feel of it, like hard burnished wood. Without planning to, I even elaborated a few grammatical forms myself, the double negatives especially, which occurred in the trial record much less frequently than they did in the play.'

He invented a language which reflected the play's time and place:

For example:

* He uses words like 'poppet' instead of doll when there is a visual representation of a doll to make the meaning clear, but rejects the historically accurate word 'dafter' for daughter, because it could lead to confusion.
* He uses non-standard forms of verbs (or syntax) such as 'he have' for he has, and 'she be' for she is. They are still in used in some parts of Britain.
* He uses the title 'Mister' as a form of address which is sometimes used in a formal sense and sometimes meant to be hostile.
* What can you find out about the title 'Goody'?

In pairs look at the language within the play and find your own examples of the following:

* devices used by Arthur Miller to evoke time and place;
* language spoken by characters which reveals aspects of their personalities;
* unusual and striking images and word order;
* sentences and phrases you can compare to other styles and registers;
* aspects of the language which particularly appeal to you.

Write these examples down and pass them round the class so that you can share each other's ideas.

In pairs or small groups select one or two pages of the play where you will find examples of Miller's Salem language in use. Read the extracts aloud a few times and discuss how you think the lines should be said by the characters.

* Discuss how the dialogue differs from Standard English. Look out for unusual or unexpected words and phrases, for example: non-standard forms of verbs; comparisons which stand out; the use of double negatives.
* Look out for examples of the ways in which the language of the Bible is reflected in the speech of the characters.

**Writing** *C*

1. Annotate some of the extracts suggested in this section as part of an assignment that explores language use. Try to draw attention to the ways in which Arthur Miller has created a language which reflects the small seventeenth century Puritan community in which the play is set.
2. Imagine that a government decree has ordered that the text of *The Crucible* must be changed into Standard English so as not to encourage non-standard speech among Britain's school children. Write a letter to the Secretary of State for Education expressing your views on such a move and explaining what would be lost from the play if such changes were made.
3. Re-write your favourite scene from the play in a dialect you know well. Write a commentary to go with it in which you demonstrate the kinds of knowledge about language that you're drawing on in your adaptation.