

## ENGLISH: AREA OF STUDY: BELONGING

**‘The Crucible’ and ‘White Coolies’: Understanding nourishes belonging...a lack of understanding prevents it.**

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**Demonstrate how your prescribed text and ONE other related text represent this interpretation of belonging.**

The principal primal desire of all human beings is to foster a sense of belonging with one’s surroundings in the form of family, peers and the larger community. This desire stems from the sentiments of approval and acceptance that are received when a strong and meaningful relationship is established with others through direct involvement and commitment to a group or greater society. In order for such an innate emotion to be ignited, an individual must seek to understand and embrace themselves completely; as well as empathise with those around them. In doing so, the connection is nourished and supported as each member of the relationship appreciates and recognises the other, thus developing deep rooted feelings of inclusion and acceptance. The dismissal of understanding; a key part of any relationship, forfeits the security of a stable bond, and results in the prevention of genuine feelings of belonging. The prescribed text, The Crucible by Arthur Miller examines the aspects of belonging to self; contrasted against the human emotions of hysteria and revenge which result in the disintegration of cohesion. Betty Jeffrey also focuses upon similar concepts of understanding identity and empathising in a community; as well as demonstrating the raw emotion of dominance in the text White Coolies.

For an individual to possess the sentiments of belonging, they must be at ease with themselves; and appreciate their identity as an individual, and as a member of a greater community group. When a person accepts their individuality, they are able to foster a lasting link with others in their environment, because they have found their place in society. By cultivating this knowledge, one can nourish and preserve the sentiments of belonging that are fundamental to each person’s life.

The play, The Crucible explores the personal struggles that individuals undergo in the confines of a rigid and fundamentalist Christian society. The journey towards gaining integrity and learning to belong to one’s self; undertaken by the protagonist, John Proctor is utilised by Miller as the dramatic purpose of the play. In Proctor’s community of Salem, the foundations of society and the customs that people were governed by; were built upon a strict interpretation of the Bible, which created a theology. Due to this, members of the community who were involved in religious institutions particularly the church; possessed great power and authority, resulting in oppression and the corruption of Salem’s society. The position that religion traditionally plays in people’s lives can be contrasted against the role of the church in The Crucible, where Reverend Samuel Parris was more concerned with his reputation; rather than offering spiritual guidance to the community. Upon recognising the insincerity and hypocrisy of the church, Proctor lost his religious connection to Salem; evident as he had only attended church “...twenty-six time in seventeen month...” and at his refusal to have his youngest child baptised by Parris. As a consequence of the loss of this link, Proctor established his personal belief system, with a foundation on his morality and values, as well as a continued faith in God. This illustrates that John Proctor was an emotionally strong individual who was prepared to take a stand for what he believed was good and right in the world.

However, his affair with his servant Abigail Williams was a violation of his morals, apparent by his crisis of conscience; labelling him as “...a sinner not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of decent conduct.”

Miller expresses this through the use of limited dialogue between John and his wife Elizabeth, creating dramatic tension and a detached atmosphere in the Proctor’s home. In court, Proctor publicly acknowledges his lechery to Salem, as a means of coping with the sins he has committed against himself and his wife. Instead of investigating Proctor’s claim, the court accuses him of

consorting with the devil, and condemns him to death. Proctor struggles between the truth and his conscience when he faces the difficult decision of agreeing to a false deposition. However, he finally resolves to not bend to the influence of the church, and symbolically tears up the confession, "...as though the tearing paper were his life..." which ensured his death. This behaviour was a reflection of Proctor's desire to belong to himself as otherwise, he would be signing away his name and honour; intangible possessions that could not be retrieved once lost. Miller shows this through the use of personal pronouns to depict the isolation that Proctor feels as an individual suppressed by the authoritarian institutions of Salem "...because I cannot have another [name] in my life...I have given you my soul; leave me my name!"

Jeffrey recounts colloquially, through a diary entry style of prose, the three years that she as an individual spent in a Japanese Prisoner of War camp in the text, White Coolies. Throughout this gruelling period, she suffered through much hardship particularly from the stifling weather which she expresses through comparison to being "...as hot as hell and as dry as chips." The roles that she played as a Prisoner of War and as a female allowed her to mature and better understand herself as a person. When she was evacuated from Malaya in 1942, Jeffrey described herself as just a person in a "...long grey line" of uniformed Army nurses; the sole foundation of her identity as an individual. However in the period following this, she was forced to find an emotionally and physically strong side within her that she had never witnessed before; which Jeffrey metaphorically illustrates through allusion "...so I tried to be Tarzan and slid down the rope..." She had to locate this inherent strength despite the vulnerability that she felt not only as a Prisoner of War, but also as a female whose life depended upon the will of barbaric Japanese soldiers, whom she likened to "...an unattractive race, rather like monkeys." Upon reaching the camp, in a tired and exposed state, Jeffrey sensed the community sentiments that had been established, in spite of the cultural and linguistic differences; which were particularly evident when the Dutch people provided the new prisoners with an assortment of necessary objects that were needed to survive. By knowing that "...they had friends outside the barrier..." who were willing to help; restored Jeffrey's faith in humanity as well as her motivation to persevere even though "...everything was being done to break [their] morale and kill [them] off." The resilience of the other women in the camp astounded Jeffrey because they all worked together tirelessly, cementing her beliefs "...there's no doubt about it, women are cats." Her membership to both these groups and the experiences that Jeffrey faced had a great impact upon her identity through the course of WWII. Furthermore, the extent of her knowledge about herself and her endurance through harsh conditions; caused Jeffrey to become a more resilient person, illustrated through allusion to a prominent Australian landmark, "we'll all be able to settle down...in any of those tram shelters along St Kilda Road when we get home," and suggesting the pride and deep rooted connection that she held for her homeland.

When people live in the same area and share common experiences or values, they generally adopt links and ties with each other, constructing a close community based group. For such a group to thrive and continue to develop successfully, a degree of empathy and consideration is essential from all members of the community. However, if the morality of the people suggests a greater desire for self-interest, and a hatred for one's neighbours, then the basis on which society is built is quite likely to break down, resulting in a loss of unity and belonging.

The concept of belonging to an accepting community can be observed in White Coolies, where the common adversities that the women of the camp face, acts as the catalyst which brings together "...people from all ends of the earth." The harsh experiences that they encounter collectively crafts a binding connection based upon friendship and camaraderie. The compassionate nature of the women in the camp is apparent as they all unite to assist those who are ill regardless of differences in nationality, race and language, such as on the occasion where a surgery became "an international event [with] an Australian nurse, [being] instructed by a Dutch nun, giving treatment to a German woman [all] in the presence of a Jap soldier." The ability of some of the prisoners to exist in such a confined space shown by Jeffrey through the utilisation of a simile, in which they were "...sixty to one hut and [had to] lie alongside each other like sardines;" whilst still continuing to survive with hope, encouraged sentiments of belonging to evolve in their small community. Although

the women lived in an “awful mess and in slum conditions...” they were still quite willing to celebrate birthdays and Christmases, just as when they “...had [their] party in the Dutch kitchen, [with] girls from England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Holland”; depicting their continuing strength. The creation of a vocal orchestra served as a symbol of the unified spirit of the prisoners, as it brought everyone together, particularly at Christmas time when “...the camp choral society...were joined by almost everybody else in camp.” In White Coolies, music had the power to surpass any language barrier and act as a channel of communication between “...people of all colours and creeds...” who “...hummed or ‘oohed’... French, English, Scottish, Irish and Dutch songs;” paving the way for understanding, respect, and support amongst all the female prisoners.

On the other hand, in stark contrast to the community of the Prisoners of War in White Coolies, Salem in The Crucible illustrates the ill effects that hysteria and self-interest may have upon people. The communal society of Salem was first established in response to “Massachusetts [trying] to kill off the Puritans,” thus developing a community that was vulnerable and particularly sensitive to the unknown. For this reason, the cries of witchery quickly enveloped the anxious population who urged on the hysteria in a bid to act upon family feuds, emphasised by Miller through contrast and juxtaposition; “...old scores could be settled on a plane of heavenly combat between Lucifer and the Lord.” The allegations initiated by the young group of girls, ignited an all encompassing war which was aimed at discovering the truth and defining the morality of society. Proctor utilises personification when he expresses that “vengeance is walking Salem;” resulting in the large scale persecution of the most vulnerable members of the community. As personal battles, particularly those in relation to “land lusts [were]...elevated to the arena of morality;” the cohesion and sense of unity that ought to be evident in the small settlement broke down under the pretence of witchcraft. Thus, the hysteria surrounding the accusations fuelled by the human emotions of self-interest and greed; coupled with Salem’s belief in the existence of malevolent forces such as witchcraft, led to the destruction of reality, justice and all communal morals.

Human emotions are strong, untamed and raw feelings within each person, usually evoked as a result of the situation that people are in. Sentiments of dominance are built upon the absence of knowledge or empathy for fellow human beings; and when acted upon, can cause others to experience discomfort, isolation, and powerlessness.

As White Coolies was set in WWII, a time when the world was in turmoil because harmony had broken down between most sovereign states; the text deals with the important human emotion of domination. The powerful authoritarian Japanese soldiers in the Prisoner of War camp embody the world’s largest empires, who were at that time, displaying their supremacy in a bid for more territory and power. This belief in their superiority was developed by the Japanese due to a lack of knowledge and understanding about their own race in regards to others, thus ostracising other nations and harbouring emotions of isolation.

In conclusion, both of the texts, The Crucible and White Coolies represent the aspects of belonging and not belonging evident in the world. Sentiments of belonging are provoked when a person thoroughly understands and accepts themselves; and can identify with others in their environment. However, a shortfall in this knowledge and empathy can result in the loss of inclusive feelings which are harboured by the human emotions of self-interest and displays of dominance.