

ENGLISH: *THE CRUCIBLE*

'Belonging is in many ways synonymous with identity.'

How do the texts you have studied demonstrate the connection between personal identity and identity with others?

A study of belonging reveals the eternal struggle between the desire for acceptance from one's community and oneself. Arthur Miller's 1952 play 'The Crucible' and W.H. Auden's 1939 poetry 'Refugee Blues' demonstrate the complexities of belonging to a community that does not accept one's identity. In *The Crucible*, it is evident that choosing whether to belong superficially to a group, or truthfully to oneself, can create inner and external conflict. However, in 'Refugee Blues', the narrator laments his lack of identity, which stems from his isolation from society and most importantly, his culture and heritage. Ultimately, both texts urge us to see that the most beneficial belonging is not acceptance by the larger society but instead inner harmony with one's own identity and convictions.

Arthur Miller explores the human desire of belonging to the broader community, which inevitably comes into conflict with one's identity. Many of the accusers are young, unmarried women with no recognized skill other than housework. Abigail, Mary Warren and Mercy Lewis are all restricted by the harsh Puritanical moral codes that scorn 'vain enjoyment'. This is reinforced by the staging in all the acts, and especially Act I, which is cast in Betty's cramped upper chamber to convey notions of claustrophobia and reinforce the narrow views of this community. The young women who are confined by these rules seek the freedom and expression of youth and thus dance in the forest, symbolizing secrecy, wild desire and freedom. The accusers do not accept the identity that their society places on them like a straitjacket, demanding subjection, silence and propriety. Thus, they seek to create their own identity through dance and by inflaming and directing the craze of mass-hysteria that has seized the Massachusetts Bay's Puritan community. In this manner, Miller stresses the complications of belonging when one's true identity is not consistent with community values.

In W.H. Auden's 'Refugee Blues', the narrator's identity is also in conflict with the accepted norms of his society. The narrator is a German Jew fleeing Nazi policies and is seeking refuge in various Allied, democratic nations. However, he finds that his new society views him suspiciously because he comes from 'enemy' territory. Thus, the poet seeks to strengthen his identity by reaching out to his heritage and culture as a Jew in the stanza:

"We once had a country and we thought it fair;
look in the atlas and you'll find it there.
But we can't go there, my dear, we can't go there"

The first two lines offer hope and opportunity, the poet referring to the ancient Jewish homeland of Jerusalem and noting its close proximity when viewing a map. However, the last line fractures this hope and distances the narrator from the Jewish homeland on a physical and spiritual level. Auden uses the 'unschooled' music of another ostracised minority, African Americans, in order to convey the narrator's existential crisis. The ancient African call and response pattern is the foundation of blues music, and is utilized in this stanza as the last line responds to the hope that is planted in the first two lines. Furthermore, the statement issued in the last line: "but we can't go there" brackets the words "my dear". "My dear" is typical of a blues note, which breaks the rhythm of the last line, and makes the audience pause and consider the emotional intensity of the initial statement. The blue note is also musically represented as a descending note in the diatonic scale, and here Auden uses it to enforce the emotional descent of the last line, which is brought home by the final repetition of "we can't go there". The use of blues conventions is effectively employed to express the narrator's dislocation in society as a "German Jew", an outcast among the xenophobic society he currently resides in. The narrator desires to belong by forming relationships and being accepted, however he cannot identify with those around him. Auden explores the intrinsic human desire to belong, but asserts that belonging is only nourishing if one's identity may be respected.

Furthermore, in 'The Crucible', Miller suggests that belonging to one's self and identity is ultimately better than conforming to the majority. The title is an extended metaphor, referring to a receptacle in which substances are exposed to high temperatures for analysis. The court represents the psychological battleground as character struggle between their personal convictions and the attractions and protections of the group.

Miller develops John Proctor as a sincere and independent character who is confident with his own opinions, which are generally frank and sometimes outspoken, and is also comfortable alone with nature, as exemplified by his use of natural imagery and warm metaphors (e.g. "I will break like an ocean on that court" or "The ground is warm underfoot"). He also has his own individual perspective on the theocracy, not being judged by Parris or Danforth, but it is the "magistrate" which "sits in his heart" that judges him. Thus, the audience is positioned to honour and respect Proctor's values when he makes the decision to hang rather than allowing his freedom to further falsely indict others. This is highlighted by the lighting, which, having been barred from the stage for the entire play finally pours in upon Elizabeth Proctor. Thus, Proctor's death reconciles him with his identity, and Miller uses this to demonstrate the need for loyalty to one's beliefs and identity. Thus, while humans desire to belong, there are complexities with belonging to a community that does not accept one's identity.

The Crucible also warns that resentment, self-advancement and monomania cuts away at belonging, while healthy belonging is formed through respect. For the Puritans that settled in Massachusetts Bay in the 17th Century, the land had to be made arable, and the constant danger of attacks from native Indians constituted a very real physical danger. Thus, they formed a tight-knit, disciplined group with a strict absolute theocracy in order to achieve the dedication and unity essential to surviving the New World. However, as the Puritans came to feel more secure, false motives betrayed the trust within the community. For example, Ruth Putnam's motive for revenge, stemming from her several natural, miscarriages and Thomas Putnam's greed for land, revealed in Miller's play notes, are a warning that one must stick to their own convictions, as society's dictates can often be directed by those with dishonest intentions who seek to create discord.

Both Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible' and W.H. Auden's 'Refugee Blues' explore historical situations where society has become xenophobic and non-inclusive. These situations are used to highlight the complications of preserving one's unique identity when the majority of society does not practice acceptance and understanding. While both texts present conformity and subjection to community values as beneficial in the short term, they ultimately conclude that belonging to one's identity, comprised of personal convictions or cultural heritage, is the most fulfilling form of belonging.

If two texts are required, add this paragraph to the end of the body paragraphs (and shorten the paragraph on Refugee Blues):

Similarly, in 'The New War Against Terror' Noam Chomsky engages directly with the issue of xenophobia through the more persuasive and direct medium of a speech to highlight the difficulties in maintaining individual thought while belonging to the values and ideals of retribution of post 9/11 America. Chomsky comments sarcastically on those drawing assumptions regarding terrorists saying, "if you want to live with your head buried in the sand... yeah, that's comforting, and it's a great way to make sure that violence escalates". His crude warning and exasperated and ironic tone positions the audience to see that they cannot allow a desire for acceptance or fear of backlash bar them from developing their own, informed opinion towards significant issues. He further condemn "elitist" American culture based on the founding ideals that their role in the great pages of history was to be a light unto the world and, in Chomsky's context, the light of democracy and freedom. Chomsky his disparagement is expressed through the line "you all remember it, massive self adulation about how for the first time in human history we are so magnificent... in the new era of this and that". He addresses the audience conversationally, and makes a sweeping, big-picture assertion, ending it with an apathetic "this and that". Chomsky acknowledges the temptation to conform in order to gain acceptance, however he asserts that we all have a duty to assert our personal convictions and thus discover a sense of personal belonging.