

THE CRUCIBLE ESSAY FOR ACTS 1 - 2)

Argument-style Essay

If you are completing an essay for the SAT test, most likely you will be responding to an argument-style prompt. Responding to this type of prompt requires a writer to make a claim (take a side on the issue presented) and back it up with information from the text as well as supporting evidence from things you have witnessed in your life. You need to be sure to stick with your chosen side of the issue; do not waver between the two sides of the issue. You may bring up the opposing view, but you always want to refute any claims from the opposition.

Assignment: Write an essay in response to one of the topics below. Take time to develop your ideas and thoughts and include specific examples and evidence from both the novel (two quotes at least) and other sources (history, other pieces of literature, personal experiences and observations, society/current events, and movies/tv) to support your essay's position. Aim for 4 – 5 paragraphs in total.

Your intro paragraph should include in background information about the topic of the prompt. End your intro paragraph with a thesis statement that states your claim – your opinion on the prompt. Are you agreeing with the quote or statement, or are you going against it?

Your body paragraphs should include supporting information from both The Crucible and outside information. Failure to include both will not show a fully supported essay.

Other requirements:

- Length: Typed, double-spaced, at least four to five paragraphs (introductory paragraph, two or three body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph)
- 12 font, Times New Roman or Arial
- MLA Format
- Be sure to include the topic number that you have chosen in the title of your paper.
- Be sure to use at least two quotes from The Crucible (cited correctly) to support your claims.
- Your paper needs to be typed and printed out before class on 9/26. No exceptions.

Sample Format

- I) Intro Paragraph (end in a thesis statement which states your opinion on the claim presented)
- II) Body Paragraph #1 (can be two paragraphs): Proof from play
 - A) Example from The Crucible #1 to support (including 1 – 2 quotes)
 - B) Example from The Crucible #2 to support (including 1 – 2 quotes)
- III) Body Paragraph #2 (can be two paragraphs): Proof from two different outside sources
 - A) Example from outside source #1 (such as history) to support the same topic
 - B) Example from outside source #2 (such as a current event) to support the same topic
- IV) Conclusion

Sample prompt #1: Arthur Miller uses his characters in the play to demonstrate how peer pressure can lead individuals into taking part in actions which they know are wrong. You may agree with the statement, disagree with the statement, or present a different point of view on the statement.

Sample Format Example:

- I) Intro Paragraph
Claim/Thesis Statement: Peer pressure can lead individuals into taking part in actions which they know are wrong as seen through the characters Tituba and Mary Warren of The Crucible, through the Red Scare of the 1950s, and through the character Mayella Ewell in To Kill a Mockingbird.
- II) Body Paragraph #1: Proof from The Crucible
 - A) Tituba confesses to witchcraft due to peer pressure (including 1 – 2 quotes)
 - B) Mary Warren blames John Proctor due to peer pressure (including 1 – 2 quotes)
- III) Body Paragraph #2: Proof from two different outside sources
 - A) (History) People turned in others for being Communists during the 1950s Red Scare due to society peer pressure.
 - B) (Novel) Mayella Ewell falsely accuses Tom Robinson of rape due to societal peer pressure in To Kill a Mockingbird.
- IV) Conclusion

Sample prompt #2: One of the main ideas presented in To Kill a Mockingbird is that it is easy to judge others when you do not know them well. You may agree with the statement, disagree with the statement, or present a different point of view on the statement.

Sample Format Example:

- I) Intro Paragraph (Claim: It is easy to judge others when you do not know them well, as seen through the character Scout of To Kill a Mockingbird, through the Jewish Holocaust of WWII, and a current event.
- II) Body Paragraph #1: Proof from the novel
 - A) Scout judges Walter Cunningham without really knowing him (including 1 – 2 quotes)
 - B) Scout judges Boo Radley without really knowing him (including 1 – 2 quotes)
- III) Body Paragraph #2: Proof from two different outside sources
 - A) (History) People unfairly judged the Jewish population in WWII.
 - B) (Current Event) Public unfairly judges victim of a date rape incident at first when finding out that victim was intoxicated.
- IV) Conclusion

Essay topics to choose from:

- 1) Grudges and personal rivalries are often the basis for a mass hysteria. Take a position on this observation. You may agree, disagree, or present a different point of view on the issue.
- 2) Individuals who were previously powerless and become empowered often abuse their new-found power. Take a position on this observation. You may agree, disagree, or present a different point of view on the issue.
- 3) In writing the play, Arthur Miller builds an argument to persuade his audience that humanity has an urge to make one's enemies into an 'absolute evil' and that this urge, when given into, results in injustice. You may agree with the statement, disagree with the statement, or present a different point of view on the statement.
- 4) Reverend Parris is a religious man, but one might say he is abusing his power in the community and is helping to bring destruction upon innocent victims. This is can true of people in society who are in powerful roles. You may agree with the statement, disagree with the statement, or present a different point of view on the statement.
- 5) Is The Crucible an outdated play, or is it relevant today and reflects specific elements of current society? In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question.
- 6) Preserving one's reputation is a prevalent theme in The Crucible and can be seen in life throughout history as well. Is a good name more important than the truth, or should one be honest even if it ruins one's reputation and name? You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question.
- 7) George Bernard Shaw, author of several works, often writes about morality and that wrong-headed actions – such as the Salem witch trials – are often motivated by a lack of personal responsibility rather than based upon deliberate cruelty or malice. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question.
- 8) One of the reasons Arthur Miller wrote this play is to comment on the movement in the 1950's led by senator Joe McCarthy, which was to seek and identify members of the Communist Party that he felt were trying to overthrow the government. Movements such as this (and the Salem Witch trials as seen in the play) ruin many innocent people because of its drive to seek what is thought to be the truth no matter who was hurt in the process. You may agree with the statement, disagree with the statement, or present a different point of view on the statement.
- 9) Arthur Miller demonstrates how humans are often cruel in the name of being righteous. You may agree with the statement, disagree with the statement, or present a different point of view on the statement.
- 10) Is it human nature for people's personal flaws to either contribute or lead to tragedy, or is it just outside forces that lead to tragedy? You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question.

❖ **Outside evidence – Choose two examples from the following the supplement your evidence.**
Types of outside evidence:

- **History**

Examples from history carry great weight because they are events that actually happened, and they are likely to resonate with anyone who has any knowledge of the topic you're writing about. Focus on both historical events and historical figures that are well known and have many different aspects that you might discuss—people and events that brought about revolutionary change in society are always good choices. But remember, the bigger the event, the more information you might have to memorize, so you would have to know an awful lot about an example like “World War II” to put something that broad on your list. Narrowing such a broad topic down to a manageable size, such as the Holocaust, the use of the atomic bomb against Japan, will generally be more effective. Also remember to avoid presenting inaccurate information in your essay or trying to pass something off as a fact that you're actually not sure about.

- **Some suggestions:**

- **wars and related events:** the causes of the American Revolution, the causes of the French Revolution, the Trail of Tears, the causes or the aftermath of the Civil War, the Holocaust, America's use of the atomic bomb against Japan, the Marshall Plan, McCarthyism, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War (which could be divided into many subtopics like the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, the My Lai Massacre, and the Kent State Massacre)
- **major technological developments:** the construction of the transcontinental railroad, the invention of the airplane, the advent of radio or television, space travel, the birth of the Internet
- **major social and economic events:** the stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression, the American civil rights movement, India's independence from Britain, the end of apartheid in South Africa, corporate scandals at the beginning of the 21st century (Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, etc.)
- **important thinkers:** Lao Tzu (Lao Zi), Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx
- **revolutionaries and activists:** Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Martin Luther, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, Helen Keller, Mohandas Gandhi, Clarence Darrow, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela
- **other influential politicians:** Benjamin Franklin, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Delano Roosevelt
- **inventors and scientists:** Gregor Mendel, the Curies, Charles Darwin, Thomas Edison, George Washington Carver, Albert Einstein, Stephen Jay Gould, Stephen Hawking
- **writers, artists, musicians, entertainers:** Ludwig van Beethoven, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Picasso, Louis Armstrong, Django Reinhardt, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Lenny Bruce, The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, John Belushi, Richard Pryor, Chris Farley
- **tyrants:** King Louis XVI, Stalin, Hitler, Mao Zedong

- **Literature**

Although examples from literature usually aren't strictly factual, they reflect universal truths about society and human nature. Therefore, they can be very powerful if you are able to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the works and characters you discuss. Writing about your favorite books or stories (or authors) will allow you to write with great enthusiasm, but be sure to choose a broad range of examples, such as a science fiction novel, a Victorian-era novel, a short story, a work that reflects minorities' experiences in the United States, and a work of "world literature" (a work translated from another language). As with historical examples, choosing well-known books and characters to discuss will make them more likely to resonate with the people scoring your essay—just make sure you get your facts straight. Think about books and novels that you have read so far in high school.

- **Some suggestions:**

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee)
- *Lord of the Flies* (William Golding)
- *Fahrenheit 451* (Ray Bradbury)
- *Night* (Elie Wiesel)
- Shakespeare's plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*
- *The Crucible* (Arthur Miller)
- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Mark Twain)
- Poems and short stories you have read so far

- **Personal experiences and observations**

The advantage of using examples in this category is that you probably know more about your own life than you do about any academic subject, so you can usually write about these examples in great detail and with real feeling. The biggest disadvantage is that they don't give you a chance to show off your knowledge, and they might not have the same weight and richness as examples from literature, history, or current events. As you come up with these examples, focus on experiences that affected you profoundly in some way—people or experiences that inspired you, taught you something important about life, or changed your perspective.* Make sure they're truly significant experiences that you can draw a larger lesson from; a shopping trip to the mall or the great NBA game that you saw last night would probably not be good things to write about.

The bottom line is that you should use whatever examples you can make the most effective and well-developed argument with—whether they're from personal experience, literature, history, current events, or some other category.

- **Some suggestions:**

- a trip out of the country that exposed you to another culture
- a volunteer experience in which you met people who inspired or influenced you
- a work experience that taught you about the importance of hard work, discipline, teamwork, etc.
- an experience that required you to overcome your fear or to demonstrate resourcefulness or creativity
- a person you have encountered who inspired you with his or her heroism, self-sacrifice, wisdom, etc.
- your parents, siblings, friends, classmates, etc.: the lessons you've learned from interacting with or observing them

- **Society and current events**

Events or trends in society, or people who are influencing the world in a profound way now, can also be great examples. Think about the kinds of things you read about in magazines, newspapers, or Internet news sources. A Google news search (<http://news.google.com>) will provide you with a wealth of information from thousands of sources on recent events.

One thing in particular to keep track of is new technologies and their effect on human society. However, when you're writing about such an abstract subject, be sure to offer concrete, specific examples within that subject. For example, your observations about the effects of your brother's addiction to World of Warcraft or specific examples of television shows that demonstrate the content of contemporary entertainment. Note: If you choose to write about something political, be very careful not to risk offending your audience by being too extreme in your rhetoric.

- **Some suggestions:**

- the widespread use of advanced communications technology (cell phones and the Internet)
- contemporary entertainment (television, movies, video games)
- the war in Iraq (Abu Ghraib, weapons of mass destruction, conflicts between religious and ethnic groups)
- the Israeli/Palestinian conflict
- philanthropists and activists: Bill and Melinda Gates, Warren Buffett, Bono, Aung San Suu Kyi (Burmese democracy activist), Greenpeace
- global warming/global climate change
- alternative energy sources vs. fossil fuels
- genocide in Darfur (a region of Sudan) □ proliferation of nuclear weapons (Iran and North Korea)
- epidemics: drug-resistant strains of various diseases, AIDS, malaria, the threat of bird and swine flu
- the growing economic power of India and China (and the loss of jobs in the U.S.)
- U.S.-China relations
- China-Taiwan relations
- the economic crisis beginning in 2008 and the reform of the banking and finance industry
- the 2008 U.S. presidential election and the Obama presidency
- the debate over health care legislation

- **Movies/TV**

Events in movies and TV shows can also work to help support a claim. However, you want to be careful with the examples you choose. Be sure to show an example from a movie or TV also applies to "real-life," though; otherwise, the reader may think, "but it's only a book..." Therefore, avoid using examples that are too far in the fantasy realm.

❖ **Sample Essay Prompt 1: What motivates people to change?**

If I wanted to argue that guilt makes people change (one of many ways you could respond to the prompt), I might discuss the following examples:

- **example from literature:** The character Pip in *Great Expectations* feels bad about his treatment of and attitude toward a number of people in his life who have shown him kindness, and as a result eventually he learns to become a kinder, more grateful person.
- **example from personal experience:** Like Pip, I have had guilty feelings about how my actions haven't always shown the gratitude toward my parents that I should have shown; with all they have given me and done for me, I should have been a more responsible person earlier in my life. Over time, these feelings have helped me change my life and become a better person.

These examples, discussed in detail, would already constitute a solid basis for a good essay. If you wanted to use an example from history, you could discuss the effect of the Holocaust on German society: guilt over the actions of many German citizens during World War II caused Germany (or at least West Germany) to engage in a profound process of reflection and repudiation of racism.

❖ **Sample Essay Prompt 2: Do changes that make our lives easier not necessarily make them better?**

If I wanted to argue that changes that make our lives easier often don't make them better, I might discuss these examples:

- **example from history:** The use of coal and oil as cheap sources of energy has helped provide electricity and convenient transportation for people all over the world, but it has also had an enormous cost in terms of its environmental effects. Air pollution has affected the health of billions of people in the last two centuries, and global climate change threatens to cause a wide range of devastating problems.
- **example from current events:** Communications and entertainment technology influences us to spend our time in ways that is not desirable; we play video games instead of exercising, and we spend hours "socializing" on our Facebook accounts (and, in many cases, anonymously attacking people on the Internet) instead of interacting with people face to face in a deeper and more dynamic way. I would cite my observations of some of my students and friends (and sometimes myself, too) as evidence of this problem.
- **example from literature:** Neal Stephenson's novel *The Diamond Age* takes the technology-related problems of the present a step further; it imagines a world in which technology has ensured that people have all of their basic needs met but has also created a starkly divided and stratified society in which many people lead alienated and empty lives.

These three examples would work well in conjunction with one another because they are closely related and show a progression through time of the negative consequences of technological advances.