

**To what extent can the plays you have studied be seen to have, directly or indirectly, a social or political purpose? Refer to two or three plays, exploring how they achieve their purpose.**

Both Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Athol Fugard's *Master Harold & the Boys* are seen to have direct political purposes and reflect the issues which mark their times. Through targeting the audience as well as mimicking the social consequences of the political regimes, Miller is able to ridicule the irrationality of McCarthyism in a similar manner to which Fugard presents the horrors of Apartheid. Thus, each is able to fulfill their political purposes of indicating the injustices of the regimes thereby attempting to make the audience aware of their ability to eradicate these policies. In addition it is evident that both plays have indirect social policies as they explore the roles of women as well as the oppressive nature of society.

**Comment [K1]:** Establishes immediately which texts will be considered in this essay

**Comment [K2]:** Clear identification of the political purposes of the two playwrights

**Comment [K3]:** Excellent attempt to look beyond the obvious points about McCarthyism and Apartheid

Within *The Crucible* Miller parallels the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 with the Communist Witch Hunt that occurred in America in the 1940s and 1950s. Through refraining from directly addressing the issue of McCarthyism and the House Committee of Un-American Activities, Miller is able to educate his audience without directly implicating or accusing them. In comparison, Fugard sets his play in the midst of Apartheid ridden South Africa indicating the injustices of the regime and the implications of the laws implemented in order to maintain the superiority of the white race within South Africa, thus effectively forcing the audience to re-evaluate their lives in the context of the play. Hence, through emphasizing the savage nature of the political situations, both playwrights are able to incite possible audience action in order to combat the situations.

**Comment [K4]:** The interesting idea that Miller doesn't directly implicate his audience is not really followed throughout the essay

**Comment [K5]:** This phrase is a little vague. It is always better, where possible, to be precise about what the purpose is

Both Miller and Fugard employ naturalistic language in order to directly target the audience and thus aid them in achieving their purposes. Within *Master Harold & the Boys* Fugard utilizes phrases such as *!aq* and *!haaikonaq* in addition to ellipses in order to create a naturalistic tone and thereby enable the audience to associate themselves with the characters within the play. Similarly, Miller employs colloquial abbreviations such as *Goody*, *dancin'* and *ycin* in order to instill a sense of realism in to the play and thus target the audience forcing them to reconsider their initial positions regarding the political situations of the Salem Witch Trials and hence the Communist witch hunt of the 1940s and 1950s.

**Comment [K6]:** It is not clear why simply using colloquial words like *Goody* would make the audience re-evaluate their view of the witch hunts

**Comment [K7]:** This point is better if it is clear how this could have an effect on the audience. However, in addition to pointing out that everyday people in the 1950s are responsible for the current problems in America in the same way that everyday characters were complicit in the witch trials in Salem by not speaking up / going along with it, there are other ways in which this could be effective: do we pity them more because they seem more realistic; are we inspired by them and the fact that they can bring about a change or do we realise that those in control are no more powerful / less fallible than we and so are open to attack?

**Comment [K8]:** Connectives make clear the comparisons that are being drawn between the texts

**Comment [K9]:** Smoothly included quotations

**Comment [K10]:** Again it is not clear why feeling closer to the characters would make us feel responsible: more sympathetic would be more plausible

In addition, Miller and Fugard employ ordinary or everyday characters as tools by which to infuse a sense of responsibility into the audience. Miller insinuates that each individual in society was responsible for the chaos that ensued during the Salem Witch Trials through the use of ordinary characters such as Mrs. Putnam, Ezekiel Cheever, Giles Corey, Judge Danforth and Judge Hawthorne. This therefore serves to cause the audience to feel in part responsible for the undue chaos of the Communist witch hunt. However, Miller is seen to employ John Proctor, a farmer in his middle thirties as his hero thus indicating that an ordinary individual has the power to rebel against society and thus, prevent society from succumbing to total hysteria. This thereby motivates audience members to recognise and take a stand against the insanity of McCarthyism.

Similarly, Fugard bases his play around three everyday individuals. Hally, Willie and Sam. The minimalistic setting with a few stale cakes and a not very impressive display of sweets, cigarettes and cold drinks establishes a closer relationship between the three characters and the audience. This thereby enables the audience to associate themselves with the characters and thus feel a sense of responsibility for the injustices of Apartheid. Moreover, when referring to the men of magnitude the only person upon which Sam and Hally are able to agree is Alexander Fleming as Hally exclaims *For once we are in total agreement.* The significance of Fleming is vital in understanding Fugard's vision of how to overcome Apartheid. Of all the men of magnitude (including Napoleon, Darwin, Lincoln and Jesus Fleming is the only one who could be termed relatively ordinary in that his discovery of penicillin was somewhat accidental. Thus, by presenting Alexander Fleming as the ultimate man of magnitude, Fugard indicates that it is the individual who is able to take steps

and is essential in overcoming Apartheid and hence it is each member of the audience's responsibility to overcome the injustices of Apartheid.

**Comment [K11]:** This is a much better point and clearly linked back to the question in that it makes it clear how Fugard achieves his purpose of encouraging us all to believe that we can make a difference to the world

Furthermore, Miller is seen to fulfill his purpose of emphasizing the irrationality of McCarthyism through undermining the hysteria of the Salem Witch Trials. At the end of Act 1 Miller portrays the accusations led by Abigail and Betty as hysterical and a sham thus undermining their validity. Moreover, Abigail's seemingly infinite list of accusations including Goody Good, Goody Osbourn, and Bridget Bishop renders them hysterical, nonsensical and childish. Through highlighting and exaggerating the hysterical fever of the accusations, Miller undermines McCarthy's Communist witch hunt in the eyes of the audience thus, to a degree, fulfilling his goal. Additionally, Miller contrasts the mad frenzy which is driven by Parris, Putnam and Hale with the calming influences of John Proctor and Rebecca Nurse who refers to Betty's inert state as merely a silly season. This thereby undermines the hysteria and introduces a voice of sanity which serves to contrast with the madness of the Communist witch hunt.

**Comment [K12]:** Linking phrase rather than just a connective introduces a new point

**Comment [K13]:** Again avoid these phrases or it would be better to say something more specific like attacking the credibility of the witch hunt

**Comment [K14]:** This point needs to be taken a little further or exactly what effect does this contrast have?

Furthermore, Miller further undermines the credibility of both witch hunts by maintaining the parallel between Salem and 1940s and 1950s America throughout the play. Despite failing to directly address the issue of McCarthyism, Miller draws the audience's attention to the fact that the insanity is ever-present through the narrators use of the phrases we still live. Moreover, Miller emphasises the fact that one could not know who was a witch and thereby indicates the illogical and irrational nature of the accusations through Danforth's speech. Within Act Two Miller renders the Salem Witch Trials somewhat comical as Danforth states that witchcraft is an invisible crime and thus the court must rely upon her victims in order to prosecute the witch. This irrationality indicates the depths to which society has sunk and draws undeniable parallels to the Communist witch hunt in that Communism was similarly an invisible crime and one could only be convicted by one's victims. Thus, by allowing the Salem Witch Trials to be seen in a comical light, Miller draws the audience's attention to the irrationality of McCarthyism and prompts them to take action.

**Comment [K15]:** The context or precise meaning of this quotation is not clear and needs to be explained a little more.

**Comment [K16]:** This is a much better point than the point introduced at the start of the paragraph which is just about maintaining a parallel between the two events. The use of humour is a far more effective tool used by Miller to achieve his political ends

**Comment [K17]:** A slightly expanded examination of exactly where the irrationality or humour in this lies would be good. It is perhaps something to do with the contrast between the rational and coldly logical tone of voice in which Danforth asserts this claim and the patently ludicrous nature of the power this gives the victims to accuse anyone they wish

In addition, within The Crucible this hysteria is echoed by different characters in different situations, for example, the appearance of Tituba at the beginning of Act Four. It could be argued that this echoing is significant in that it could be perceived as Miller's warning to the audience of the repetition of hysteria during the communist witch hunts. Therefore repetition may be used as a tool by which to convey Miller's political message. Moreover, although Miller utilizes Hale as a comic figure by which to undermine the witch hunt in Salem it could be argued that he is also employed as a model for the audience in that, by the end of Act Three, he denounce[s] the proceedings and thus realises the truth.

**Comment [K18]:** Evidence is needed here or exactly what way is she hysterical

**Comment [K19]:** While true or it is not clear that this point belongs in this paragraph. It would perhaps fit more appropriately with the point about Proctor being a hero at the start of the essay

In contrast, Fugard utilises the contrast between childhood innocence and the present as well as fantasy and reality in order to achieve his purpose of examining the injustices of Apartheid and urging change. Through reminiscence the audience is made aware of the innocence of Hally who sooner or later [would] end up in [the servant's quarters] with Sam and Willie. The equality of their relationship is emphasised and Sam is seen to hold a more dominant role in that he teaches Hally and gives him hope through the kite flying episode. Furthermore, Hally's innocence and childish excitement is seen through the phrases It works, Sam! We've done it! and I was so proud of us! The use of exclamation marks heightens the excitement and thus creates an idyllic atmosphere. However this is undermined by the presence of the Whites only bench. The image of the bench is two fold in that it reflects the innocence of Hally, who through his excitement fails to comprehend reality, as well as the injustices of Apartheid.

**Comment [K20]:** An excellent opening sentence making clear exactly what the point of this paragraph will be

**Comment [K21]:** It needs to be explained a little more exactly how the quotation about the servants quarters indicates equality

Hally's childhood innocence, however, is contrasted directly with his teenage behaviour thus indicating the corrupting influence of society. Hally's superior attitude is evident during his reminiscences when he states, I mean, seriously, what the hell does a black man know about flying a kite? as well as during general conversation when he boasts It's deeply gratifying, Sam, to know that I haven't been wasting my

time in talking to you. Tolstoy may have educated his peasants, but I've educated you. This indicates that, although Hally has been able to look past some of the racism to a degree, he has still been indoctrinated and heavily influenced by society. His reference to black culture as primitive indicates his inability to fully comprehend and accept other cultures. Thus, Fugard directly targets the audience, making them directly responsible for the corruption of youth and emphasizing the extent to which Apartheid is ingrained within Hally's culture. The severe comparison between Hally's youthful innocence and his teenage arrogance forces the audience to reconsider their values concerning Apartheid and this enables Fugard to convey his message.

**Comment [K22]:** Although the point about the corruption of youth is excellent and developed in detail, it is not clear why the audience should feel responsible. Isn't it more simply making us aware of the horrific effects of Apartheid on the white youth as well as the black man

Furthermore, Hally's later actions emphasise the pressure of society and the consequentially confused nature of his relationships. Hally's internal struggles regarding his relationships with his parents as well as with Sam and Willie indicate the influence of society and the pressure placed on the individual to conform. After telephone calls from his mother, representing intrusions from society, the pressure of society is evident as a distinct change in Hally's behaviour is noted as he attempts to conform to the social norm of Apartheid ridden South Africa. Hally immediately assumes power and authority and is described as a little despot during a tirade. Moreover, his insistence that Sam call him Master Harold as well as his story about the racist joke emphasises the depths to which society has sunk and the effective loss of humanity, thus forcing the audience to want to incite change. Additionally, before Hally spits in Sam's face, he calls after him quietly thereby indicating his intent to hurt Sam as well as the fact that society has been effectively rendered inhuman and animalistic due to Apartheid and the superior mentality of the white race. These blatant acts of racism reflect reality and thus appeal to the audience evoking pathos and perhaps fulfilling Fugard's goal of evoking a desire to change.

**Comment [K23]:** This is a better point of it's not that we feel responsible for having caused this situation per se it's more that we appreciate the corrupting nature of the regime and thus should, hopefully, be moved to do something about it

**Comment [K24]:** It is unclear why Hally's actions should suddenly represent the whole of society

**Comment [K25]:** However, this again is an excellent point which clearly explains the effect on the audience

Moreover the contrast between reality and fantasy is also employed by Fugard to achieve his political purpose of initiating a true awareness of the injustices of Apartheid. The world of dancing is seen to be Utopian in nature in that there's no collisions - nobody trips or stumbles or bumps into anybody else and it is described as the way we want life to be. Therefore, dancing provides the audience with a goal. However, in addition, it is seen to be a metaphor for change in that it takes effort yet it is achievable for the ordinary individual. Hence, dancing effectively encapsulates Fugard's message for the audience: we have to work hard at taking the first steps towards a better world even if that world seems like nothing more than just a distant dream or unattainable reality when we begin.

**Comment [K26]:** Lovely point of well explained and clear

In addition, both plays are seen to have indirect social purposes or messages. Both plays, possibly unknowingly, reinforce the stereotypical roles of women. This is apparent in The Crucible in that most of the female characters such as Rebecca Nurse and Elizabeth Proctor fulfill the roles of motherly women. The only character who is seen to break this stereotype is Abigail who is a strong female character. However she is undermined as she is rendered evil and is utilized as a tool by which to rescue John Proctor. Similarly, within Master Harold - and the boys sexism is also evident given the obvious absence of women and the submissive nature of the women that we do hear about, in particular Hally's mother. Fugard may intentionally be paralleling the submissive nature of women and blacks in the contemporary white male dominated society of South Africa to indicate that prejudice exists in many different forms. Alternatively this stereotypical portrayal of weak, passive and illogical women may indicate Fugard's implicit acceptance of gender roles something we may find particularly surprising given his obvious challenge to racial stereotyping.

**Comment [K27]:** Clear linking phrase to indicate a new point. However, it is a shame that this possibly quite original and innovative point is left so late that it could not be fully developed

**Comment [K28]:** Not the -only because surely this applies to all of the girls within Salem - although Abigail is surely the most salient example of this

**Comment [K29]:** Although, in terms of feminist criticism she falls plainly into the equally stereotypical role of wicked temptress

**Comment [K30]:** Exactly what rescuing means and how it is achieved need to be made more clear.

**Comment [K31]:** Evidence is needed for this point

**Comment [K32]:** Nice clear point about the similarities between the two texts which is clearly linked back to the question

Ultimately, both Fugard and Miller achieve their respective political purposes within their plays. Both directly target the audiences and emphasise the power of the individual to rebel against the oppressive and restrictive nature of society. However, Miller fails to give a direct solution and merely points out the problems which he felt plagued 1950s America whereas, in contrast, Fugard indicates a degree of hope as they can hope for better weather tomorrow and the play ends with a return to dancing which is, as we have seen, a metaphor for a better life. Hence, both are seen to achieve their political purposes and, to an extent, reveal an underlying social message.

**Comment [K33]:** Seems a needless repetition of the opening sentence. The previous sentence would have made a more powerful ending