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## **Sample essays: Year of Wonders & The Crucible**

### **Sample #1**

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#### **Prompt:**

Compare the ways in which *The Crucible* and *Year of Wonders* explore the conflict between appearance and reality.

**Note: This essay has a slight problem - there is not enough comparison between the two texts in the first body paragraph. The second and third body paragraphs are much better at satisfying this requirement.**

## Essay:

Both Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible' and Geraldine Brooks' 'Year of Wonders' explore the conflict between appearance and reality. In 'The Crucible', the people of Salem are caught up in their superstitious beliefs, and are blind to the lies told by Abigail Williams and her conspirators. In 'Year of Wonders', on the other hand, superstition arises due to fear of the bubonic plague, and this fear alters the townspeople's perception of reality. In both texts, people become too caught up in appearances, and their fear prevents them from being able to see things clearly.

In both texts, certain characters manipulate reality for their own self-gain and self-preservation. Characters such as Aphra Bont and Abigail Williams know that their fellow town members are seduced by appearances, and they prey on this weakness in different ways. In 'Year of Wonders', Aphra sells fake charms to the villagers - she claims that these charms will protect them from the Plague. She is caught 'trying to frighten ... Charity' into buying a charm, capitalising on her belief in the appearance of the Devil. Anna is able to see through this deception, however, and she is 'filled with disgust and anger' when she discovers Aphra has been doing this. At the centre of Brooks' novel lies a struggle between what is real, and what is not, and the people who can see things clearly - such as Anna Frith - are the ones who are able to guide the town through the trials and tribulations of the Plague. Similarly, in 'The Crucible', there are characters who take advantage of others for their own means. Abigail Williams is perhaps the prime example of this - at a court hearing, she pretends that Mary is practising a 'black art' and acts as if she is 'stretching her claws'. Mary's reaction to this act of fraud demonstrates the conflict between appearance and reality - she knows that Abigail is not really seeing these things, and yet she decides to turn on John Proctor in the heat of the moment. Mary, therefore, chooses appearance over reality - and both Miller and Brooks are eager to show us that fear can drive people to these illogical decisions.

However, both texts also feature characters who are able to see reality clearly: these are the people who are not so easily deceived by appearances. In 'Year of Wonders' - even in the early stages of the novel - Anna does not believe that everything in life is either godly or satanic. She recognises that 'how [she] had been taught to view the world' is not necessarily correct, and she thinks in particular of Anys Gowdie, who 'confounded [her] thinking'. Although Anys appears to be a 'sinner' who is chastised for her 'fornication and her blasphemy', Anna is able to understand that she still 'did good' in spite of her

flaws. Anna is not as caught up in the conflict between appearance and reality as the other townspeople - she is able to understand that 'the well-being of [their] village rested ... on [Anys'] works'. In contrast to Anna, who is level-headed and perceptive, Deputy Governor Danforth in 'The Crucible' is the epitome of black-and-white thinking. He refuses to delay the hangings, stating that 'postponement [would speak] a floundering on [his] part', and he also does not listen to the protests of Reverend Hale in the final hour. Hale is much like Anna Frith, in that he is able to acknowledge that people should 'cleave to no faith when faith brings blood'. And although Hale takes much longer than Anna to come to his senses, he ends up coming around nonetheless. In both 'Year of Wonders' and 'The Crucible', there are characters who can see reality clearly, however Danforth in 'The Crucible' is a prime example of someone who is too caught up in appearances.

There are numerous examples in both Eyam and Salem where superstition causes a conflict between appearance and reality. The result of these superstitions is a damaging climate of fear, and such a scenario is highlighted in 'The Crucible' from the beginning of the play. When Betty Parris refuses to wake, the first instinct of the townspeople is to look for 'unnatural causes', and even the discerning Reverend Hale initially believes that 'the Devil is alive in Salem'. Thomas Putnam is convinced that there are 'hurtful, vengeful spirits' attacking the girls, and such a mindset demonstrates how easy it is for those in Salem to be duped by appearances. But a prime embodiment of the conflict between appearance and reality comes in the form of Tituba, the slave, who 'confessed [herself] to witchcraft' in spite of having never truly committed such acts. Tituba is much like Kate Talbot in 'Year of Wonders', who is deceived by Aphra's spell, which reads 'Abracadabra'. Differently from Kate, however, Tituba is aware of the truth - she knows that it is false to declare that 'the Devil got him numerous witches', yet she decides to say those things anyway. Kate Talbot is more gullible than Tituba in that she really believes in her superstitions, and she is an example of a person who is ultimately seduced by appearances. Both texts highlight problems which arise from superstition, and explore how they can exacerbate the conflict between appearance and reality.

'The Crucible' and 'Year of Wonders' both delve into the ways in which appearance and reality can conflict with each other. 'The Crucible' features characters who manipulate this conflict to their advantage (such as Abigail Williams), however there are those such as Reverend Hale who are a little more judicious. The bubonic plague in 'Year of Wonders' results in the spread of fear and suspicion, and at times this causes certain characters to be swayed by appearance. But ultimately, Anna Frith (like Hale) can see

reality clearly: she is able to understand that Eyam is neither a ‘village full of sinners or a host of saints’.