**CAN YOU TRUST THE JUDGE?**

**Learning about Thinking**

**Bias** is prejudice against some person or issue—a tendency to see only one side of a situation. When people are biased on an issue, they ignore evidence that supports the point of view different from their own. For example, people who are biased against a proposed tax increase may ignore evidence showing that the community really needs to raise extra money.

Bias can be caused by a variety of factors. People’s previous experiences can affect how they feel about a situation. If a person has something to gain or lose from a decision, his or her attitude will be influenced. Also if people have believed something for a long time, they may find it very hard to admit that they were wrong.

**Thinking About the Play**

Several characters in *The Crucible* are biased. Deputy Governor Danforth’s bias has especially unfortunate consequences.

**A.** The first column in the chart below describes several decisions or judgments that Deputy Governor Danforth makes during the course of Act Three. In making each of these decisions, he chooses to ignore evidence or reasons in favor of the opposite point of view. In the second column of the table, list the evidence and reasons that go against Danforth’s judgments.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **JUDGMENT** | **EVIDENCE OR REASONS AGAINST JUDGMENT** |
| 1. He refuses to accept the  Petition presented by  Francis Nurse in behalf  of Rebecca Nurse,  Martha Corey, and  Elizabeth Proctor |  |
| 2. He ignores the claim that  Thomas Putnam told his  Daughter to accuse  George Jacobs of  witchcraft. |  |
| 3. He refuses to let John  Proctor have a lawyer’s  assistance in presenting  Mary Warren’s  testimony. |  |
| 4. He rejects Mary  Warren’s testimony that  the girls were pretending  and instead accepts  Abigail’s account. |  |

**B.** As Act Three progresses, it becomes obvious that Danforth, while convinced that he is being fair, is actually very reluctant to consider the possibility that the witchcraft accusations may be wrong. What makes Danforth biased? Analyze the factors that might account for Danforth’s attitude.

**Writing about the Play**

Danforth’s bias is especially evident in his treatment of Mary Warren. He questions the girl in such a way that it is obvious that he does not want to believe what she is telling him. If he had questioned her differently, she might have held to her account that the girls were faking their symptoms. Write a new dialogue between Danforth and Mary. In it, Danforth should be unbiased and genuinely want to learn the truth. He should question Mary in such a way that she is encouraged to be honest.

Lesson Plan

**Can You Trust the Judge?**

Suggested Answers

A1. The petition was signed by many responsible citizens. It is unlikely that so many people would attest to the good characters of these women if the women were in fact guilty of witchcraft.

2. Thomas Putnam had a clear motive—the acquisition of property—for accusing George Jacobs of witchcraft.

3. John Proctor was a farmer with no knowledge of legal processes. A person should be entitled to legal representation.

4. John Proctor’s confession of adultery with Abigail has shown that Abigail has a motive for wanting to get rid of Elizabeth Proctor. Mary Warren testified that the girls’ afflictions were fraudulent.

B. Danforth is not an evil man, but he assumes that people in authority—like the ministers and himself—cannot be wrong in their judgments. At first, he believes that the accused people are guilty because of the convincing behavior of the young girls. Later, as he participates in the sentencing of more and more people to death, he finds it difficult to reconsider his judgment because it would necessitate admitting to himself that he had unjustly condemned many people.