John Proctor as a Tragic Hero?

The Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote his definition of a tragedy more than 2,000 years ago. He wrote: “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.”

According to Aristotle, in order to be a true tragedy, a play must make the audience pity the characters and make them fear the same consequences the protagonist experiences. Doing this creates a catharsis, or a releasing of emotions.

Aristotle also defined the concept of a tragic hero. A **tragic hero** is a protagonist with a fatal (often tragic) flaw which ends up leading to his downfall. The tragic hero is introduced as happy, powerful, and privileged, and ends up dying or suffering because of his own actions. The tragic hero has four major characteristics: goodness (a moral and ethical person), superiority (such as someone with supreme or noble authority or control), a tragic flaw (will eventually lead to his own demise), and the eventual realization that his decisions or actions have caused his downfall (faces death or suffering with honor). Usually, the realization of tragic flaw results in an epiphany, or a sudden realization by the character, audience, or both, and a catharsis, or a release of emotions, which makes the audience feel more at peace.

**Directions:** Analyze the character of John Proctor and the play by answering the questions below.

* 1. What do you think is John Proctor’s tragic (fatal) flaw?

* 1. When Proctor is first introduced, how is he “happy”?

* 1. How might Proctor be considered a superior or privileged person?
  2. How can Proctor be considered a moral/ethical person?

* 1. When in the play does Proctor realize he is facing his own demise? How does he react to this? How does this match the characteristics of the tragic hero?

* 1. According to Aristotle’s definition, what makes *The Crucible* a tragedy?