**LANGUAGE ARTS 10
MASS HYSTERIA**

Mass hysteria is a dangerous thing—as you can see in *The Crucible*. The panic, fear, and anxiety that are brought upon by mass hysteria are what make it so dangerous. People become completely emotional and lose all sense of rational thinking.

Just like a snowball or a line of dominos, once the initial idea has been “set in motion”, it is difficult to stop it and undo the damage. This is why law enforcement quickly has to “control the situation” when chaos breaks out. Chaos leads to emotional, not rational, decision-making. Emotional decision-making is rarely a good idea.

This is exactly what happens in *The Crucible*. In 1692, the settlement living in Salem followed Puritanical ideology. It was very black and white thinking. You were either “pure” (with God) or you weren’t (against God). One day, a slave woman takes the young girls into the woods to share her culture with them. They had fun—they danced and they sang. The next day, Betty gets sick. No one knows why. It must be witchcraft! The gossip and rumor mill starts churning out ideas. They spread like wildfire. And then there is this girl, Abigail, who is scorned that her affair with a married man has ended. He decided to stay with his wife. Abigail is confronted with the rumors, the embarrassment of being caught dancing in the woods, and the scorn from being rejected. She sees an opportunity to capitalize on the rumors, get the heat off her for being caught, and get revenge—all at the same time.

DIRECTIONS: In your table groups, take 5 minutes to find an example or two of mass hysteria.

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| **Page #** | **Situation (facts)** | **Result of Situation** |
| 9 | Betty won’t wake up and the doctor says unnatural causes might be the cause. Parris sends for Rev. Hale to find other causes. | The seeking of a Reverend further confirms the rumor in the village of witchcraft. |
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