“The Crucible” is a play by Arthur Miller set in Salem, Massachusetts in the 1600s. It is about the drama that occurs in a small very religious village when witchcraft accusations multiply. To fully understand characters in “The Crucible” and their behaviour, one only has to refer to Kollberg’s Moral Precepts for explanation.

People in “The Crucible” are conventional. The conventional level of morality is when one behaves in a way in order to fit in with others and be accepted by the group. Loyalty and respect for authority is valued. The girls in the play are being conventional when Abby is getting everyone to copy whatever Mary Warren says. They hysterically yell “Stop it!” after Mary Warren says the same. This demonstrates that they are all trying to fit in with Abby, who acts as the leader. The social order of the group is what is most important. They don’t seem to value Mary Warren’s signs of frustration at their constant copying of everything she says. They keep on doing it. A second example of conventional morality is “that woman will never lie, Mr. Danforth.” This shows that she is conforming to the stereotype of a good Christian woman. Even when Danforth questions Proctor that it might be a possibility, Proctor’s immediate response is “never, sir, never.” He cannot believe the possibility that it would be possible to not follow the rules and order of the Christian religion. Another example of conventionality is when Abby cries out that she also has seen people with the devil. Abby shrieks “I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil!” Abby is pretending to have seen all of these people with the Devil because she wants to fit in with the rest. She feels more powerful and important if she is part of the group. They act in act in a conventional way to be part of the group.

Characters also behave in a pre-conventional manner. To be preconventional is to behave and be obedient in order to avoid physical punishment. A person is driven by their own needs. A good example of this is when Tituba, who has no power since she is a Black slave member of the community, feels that if she does not confess, she will be greatly punished. She provides false confession rather than get beaten. Parris gives her no other option by stating to her “You will confess yourself or I will take you out and whip you to your death”. This cause Tituba to be terrified and fall to her knees as she does not want to be whipped to her death. She decides to obey rather than get whipped to death. Another example of being driven by the fear of punishment is when Betty falls into a fake illness so that she escapes punishment. This is shown when she cannot be woken up even by Abby furiously shaking her, “Betty, dear, wake up now”. Betty still plays sick even when Abby threatens “I’ll beat you, Betty!” Betty knows that the punishment when she wakes up will be worse than being beaten so she pretends to stay asleep. Abby continues to lie about people in the community being witches because she wants John Proctor as the reward. She demonstrates this by accusing Elizabeth of being a witch. Elizabeth is aware of Abby’s plan. “She wants me dead, John, you know it.” Elizabeth trembles with fear knowing the punishment of being accused of being a witch. The physical consequences drive the characters’ behaviour.

Characters in “The Crucible” can also be post-conventional. Post-conventional is when a person stands up for what they believe, even when it means going against the group or getting punished. By doing this, you maintain your values and act according to your own opinion. Elizabeth Proctor acts in a post-conventional way when she replies “no, sir” to Danforth when he accuses her husband of being a lecher. Even though she knows that she should be agreeing, she stands up for her husband, despite angering Danforth with this answer. Another example of this behaviour is when Hale and Proctor get into an argument about Mr. Proctor’s wife being “secretly a Devil’s bitch”. Proctor answers back, “I come to church or stay at home. My wife were sick this winter”. Proctor is standing up for his beliefs that it is more important to stay at home with his sick wife than go to church, even though it is against the religion to not go to church. Giles also shows post-conventional behaviour when he denies a charge and ended up being stoned. He shows strong will by saying “more weight,” as he is given two last words before they lay stones upon his chest until he pleads guilty. However, Giles dies and does not plead guilty. He refuses to bow to other’s power until the end of his life, so that his children will get his land after he dies. These actions demonstrate the strength of individual will.

Kolberg’s moral precepts of conventional, pre-conventional, and post-conventional are all demonstrated in this play between various characters. Their behaviour at times is driven by loyalty and respect for order, fear of punishment, or their own values. These moral precepts help us have a better understanding of why characters and ultimately real people in the world behave the way that they do.