

Week 1 Term 2

Culture and the Supernatural: The Salem Witch-Hunts



Success Criteria: students will gain a basic understanding of the events surrounding the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 in what is now Salem, Massachusetts in the United States, and be able to explain how a belief in witches and demons led to the deaths of innocent people. The picture above shows an old woman who was unpopular, being accused of witchcraft. In Salem, anyone who was different was at risk of being accused as a witch.

Class Discussion – What do we know about the Salem witch-hunts? (Teacher to write on the board accurate information).

Task 1: We will watch as a class the following short clips:

A. “What really happened during the Salem Witch Trials” at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVd8kuufBhM&list=RDLVNVd8kuufBhM&start_radio=1&rv=NVd8kuufBhM&t=0

and

B. “I Was There: The Dark History of the Salem Witch Trials.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVRSwQh6zgQ>

Class Discussion – how close was what students thought happened in Salem – to the truth?

Task 2: Read the article below and answer the questions that follow in your **Red Books**.

Reading:

This week we are going to look at what can happen when people believe in imaginary beings – such as the existences of witches and witchcraft. In 1692, the village of Salem was the scene of a great witchcraft fear. During the scare, at least 200 people were arrested on suspicion of bewitching others (casting spells) and put in jail to await trial. Some were tortured into confessing while waiting for their day in court; others died before ever going on trial. At least 20 residents died – 19 by hanging.

In 1692, it was widely believed that witches could take any shape or form, adding to the anxious atmosphere, as potential witches were everywhere. Two dogs were even accused and killed on suspicion of being witches. Of course, there are no such things as witches who have magical powers and can cast spells, but in Salem, local residents believed there were real witches, and they began to accuse people of witchcraft.

The Salem witch scare began in December 1691, at the home of Samuel Paris and his wife, Elizabeth. Inside the house two little girls began to act in a strange manner. Betty Parris, age 9, and her friend Abigail Williams, age 11, began to scream and twitch. The girls would appear confused, forgetful, and made animal-like sounds. Their bodies would shake, and they would speak in a language no one could understand. Before long other girls in the village were having similar fits. Soon Doc Griggs was called in to examine the girls. He concluded that the girls had been bewitched – that is, a witch had cast a spell on them, making them behave strangely.

In reality, we now know that the girls were suffering from hysteria - a condition that is triggered by stress. What would have caused the nervous excitement among the girls? Many of the girls were friends with a female slave named Tituba who would meet secretly with them at night and tell them scary tales about ghosts and voodoo. The stress from these stories were believed to have triggered their fits. If Doc Griggs had said he thought the girls were suffering from stress – the witch-hunts would probably have never happened. But because they concluded that they had been bewitched – the search was on to find the witch or witches who were believed to have caused their strange behaviours.

Targeting people who were different

Many of those who were accused of witchcraft were unpopular. The first 3 people who were arrested of being witches stood out for being unusual. Sarah Osburn frequently got into arguments with other residents and had stopped going to church. Sarah Good was a pipe smoker, rarely bathed, and was so poor that at times she was forced to beg for money. The third person, a slave woman named Tituba, was from the Caribbean islands. She dressed different to most residents and believed in voodoo. While Good and Osburn strongly protested their innocence, Tituba confessed to being a witch, sought forgiveness, was eventually let go and left the village after being sold to another master. In fact, all anyone accused had to do to go free was to confess to being a witch. The problem was, most of those accused of being witches refused to admit they were a witch even if it meant they would die. They were very religious and would rather die than tell a lie because they thought lying would hurt their chances of getting into heaven.

How to tell if someone was a witch?

These tests were used to determine if an accused person was a witch.

1. Lord's Prayer. If a person was unable to recite the Lord's Prayer (Our Father, who art in heaven...) without error, they were deemed a witch.
2. Spectral (ghostly) Evidence. The accused would claim to have seen the witch in their dreams at night, working with the devil.
3. Submersion. The accused was tied up and dropped into the water. If they floated, they were considered a witch. If they did not float, they drown.
4. Heavy stones were placed on the accused to force the confession out of the witch, but the person being pressed often had difficulty breathing and often could not give a confession even if they wanted to.

Now write down and answer the following questions in your **Red Books:**

1. How many people were arrested on suspicion of being witches at Salem?
2. The witch scare began in December of which year?
3. List some of the symptoms that the girls who were thought to be witches, were exhibiting?
4. Who was believed to have triggered the witch scare after telling the girls scary stories?
5. Those who were suspected of being witches often stood out for being different in what way?

#

Week 1 Lessons 2 & 3: The Witch Trials

See **Reading A below** – “The Salem Witch Trials”– and answer the following questions. Please write the full question and answer into your **Red Books** under the heading,

1. Who were the Puritans? (see page 6)
- 2-3. The Puritans saw the world as a struggle between _____ and _____.
4. What does the word ‘malice’ mean? (p. 6)
- 5-6. During the winter of 1692, several young girls in Salem would meet up at the Paris house and listen to stories about _____ and _____. (p. 6)
7. What is the definition of a constable? (p. 6)
8. As the fear of witchcraft spread through Salem, the Reverend Paris called for a day of _____ at the church. (p. 7)
9. When the girls began to act oddly, what did Nicholas Noyes believe was wrong with them? (p. 7)
10. When the girls were asked who had taught them witchcraft, they said it was _____. (p. 8).

11. At first, Tituba denied that she was a witch but then admitted to practicing _____, hoping it would save her life.

12-14. Tituba said that the Devil appeared to her in the shape of a man. He carried a cane and a _____ of gold. A yellow _____ flew to him and perched on his shoulder. The bird began to _____.

15. Some of the young girls began to act strangely and were thought to be possessed by demons. List some of the symptoms the girls exhibited.

16. Rebecca Nurse was hanged for being a witch. What did some of the young girls claim she had done to them?

17-20. Name at least 4 people who were thrown in jail for being witches.

21-22. Who ordered a stop to the witch-hunts and when did it happen? (p. 9)

23. Who is the only girl who accused people of being witches – to later apologise and admit that they had accused innocent people of witchcraft?

The Reading appears below:

COLONIAL AMERICA

The Salem Witch Trials

In 1692, strange events spiraled out of control, resulting in the worst witch hunt in U.S. history

CHARACTERS

Reverend Samuel Parris, a minister
 William Griggs, a doctor
 Betty Parris, 9, Samuel Parris's daughter
 Thomas Putnam, a constable
 Nicholas Noyes, a minister
 Tituba, a slave from Barbados, owned by Reverend Parris
 John Hathorne, a judge
 Ann Putnam, Thomas Putnam's daughter
 Rebecca Nurse, a Salem resident
 Narrators A-E

All of the characters were real people. The dialogue is based on historical records but paraphrased for space and clarity.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **hysteria** [*n*]: an uncontrollable outburst of emotion or fear
- **malice** [*n*]: a desire to harm
- **Puritans** [*n*]: Protestants who settled Massachusetts Bay Colony after fleeing England to escape religious persecution

PROLOGUE

Narrator A: During the frigid winter of 1692, the children of Salem, Massachusetts, had to play inside. A group of young girls frequently met at Betty Parris's house. They played fortune-telling games and listened to stories of demons and witchcraft.

Narrator B: Many of the villagers believed in and feared witchcraft. Salem had been settled by English **Puritans** seeking religious freedom. The Puritans were strict people who saw life as a continuous struggle between good and evil. Fun was considered sinful, and many Puritans thought witchcraft was a sign of Satan's presence. Under English law, the practice of witchcraft was punishable by death.

Narrator C: When Betty and the other girls suddenly began acting oddly, the villagers grew concerned. Were the children ill, or was something more sinister at work? What took place next in Salem led to a **hysteria** that destroyed many lives.

SCENE 1

Narrator D: In January 1692, Dr. William Griggs enters the home of Reverend Samuel Parris.

Reverend Samuel Parris: Thank you for coming, Doctor. We're very worried about Betty's cousin



A girl describes supernatural events during the Salem witch trials.

Abigail. She's acting odd. She hasn't touched a bite of food in three days, and she stares up at the ceiling without saying a word! I don't know what to do.

William Griggs: I can understand your concern. How old is Abigail?

Parris: Eleven.

Narrator E: Betty Parris rushes down the stairs in a panic.

Betty Parris: Father, Abigail is not well! She's out of her bed and



down on all fours, barking like a dog. I'm afraid!

Parris: We'll pray for her.

Narrator A: Before long, Betty also begins acting strangely. Dr. Griggs cannot find an explanation for the girls' unusual behavior. Then, a few weeks later, he is called to Thomas Putnam's home.

Thomas Putnam: I'm afraid that our daughter Ann is ill. She's thrashing around on the floor!

Griggs: I fear that they've all been bewitched by an evil hand!

Putnam: Who, Doctor?

Griggs: Your daughter Ann and the other girls. Reverend Parris reports the same strange symptoms in Betty and Abigail.

SCENE 2

Narrator B: As more girls begin to show signs of puzzling behavior, tales of witchcraft spread like wild-

fire through Salem. Reverend Parris calls for a day of prayer at the church. Nearly everyone in Salem attends. But cries from the girls interrupt the service.

Nicholas Noyes: Look how they moan and fall at the very mention of God! An evil spirit has robbed these girls of their will.

Parris (*shouting in frustration*):

continued on p. 8 →

Who are their tormentors? If only we knew!

Noyes (to the girls): What ails you, children? Is it a person who is doing this to you?

Narrator C: The girls don't answer but continue to cry and moan.

Noyes: This is very serious. What can we do, Reverend?

Parris: I've heard it whispered that my slave, Tituba, has made witch's cakes to break evil spells.

Noyes (in a suspicious tone): Isn't it true that someone who breaks spells can also cast them?

SCENE 3

Narrator D: Reverend Parris questions his daughter, who finally says that Tituba taught the girls witchcraft.

Betty: Yes, it was Tituba. She told us scary stories, and we watched her bake a witch's cake. She made the cake with rye meal and other strange ingredients, Father. She said the cake might help Abigail and me get better.

Narrator E: Enraged that Tituba would use a superstitious folk remedy rather than prayer to treat his daughter, Reverend Parris confronts

his slave in the family's kitchen.

Tituba (nervously wringing her hands): It was only a game—a game I learned when I was a child.

Parris: A game of witchcraft?

Tituba: No, a game to make the children laugh. I was just trying to keep the girls busy. Ask Betty. Ask Abigail. Ask Ann Putnam!

Parris: Enough, you evil woman!

Narrator A: Judges come to Salem from Boston to conduct a hearing on the witchcraft accusations. At first, Tituba denies everything. But finally she admits to witchcraft, hoping that it will save her life. Her story leaves the residents in shock.

Tituba: They made me do it!

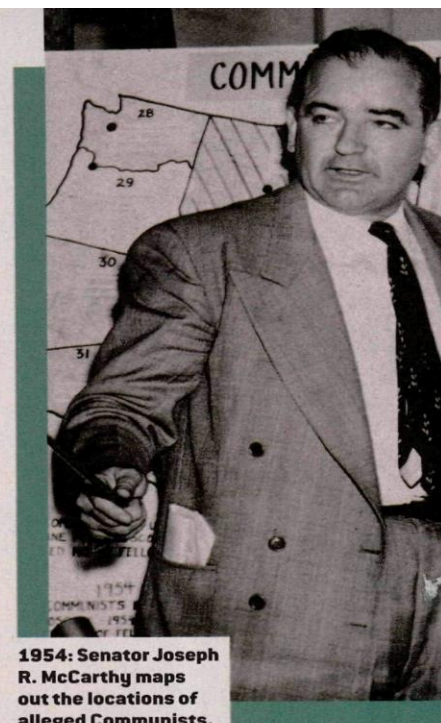
John Hathorne: Who, Tituba? Tell me now.

Tituba: I can't remember.

Hathorne: You must try to recall.

Tituba (pauses before speaking): Wait. Yes. I remember now. It was a shape. A shape like a man. He carried a cane and a book of gold. A yellow bird flew to him and perched on his shoulder. The bird began to talk.

Hathorne: And what was written in this devil's book?



1954: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy maps out the locations of alleged Communists.

Tituba: The names of his helpers, written in blood.

Hathorne: What names did you see in this book?

Tituba: I can't read, but the bird told me. One was Sarah Osborne, and the other was . . . Sarah Good.

SCENE 4

Narrator B: Tituba, Sarah Osborne, and Sarah Good are thrown in jail in Boston. With the accused now in prison, life in Salem begins to return to normal. But the peace doesn't last for long.

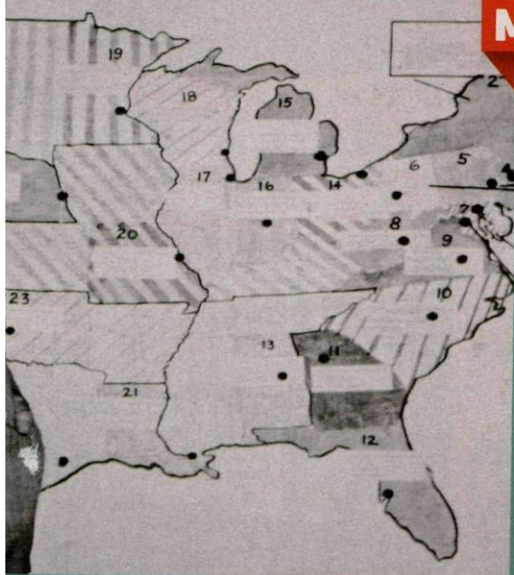
Narrator C: Soon, Betty and the other girls are acting stranger than ever. They begin twitching and speaking incoherently. They claim that someone—or something—is pinching and biting them all over. The girls accuse more people of being witches.

Putnam (to his daughter Ann): Rebecca Nurse? She's a witch?

Ann Putnam: Yes, Father. Just this morning she beat me. Then she bit



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MODERN-DAY WITCH HUNTS

Witch hunts through history have taken many different forms. The term has come to describe a frenzied search for perceived enemies. During a witch hunt, hysteria and fear replace common sense. People can be convicted of wrongdoing based on mere accusation.

The best-known example of a modern-day witch hunt occurred in the 1950s, during the Cold War. That was a nonmilitary conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union and their allies. During this time, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy charged that many Communists were secretly working inside the U.S. government.

McCarthy, a Republican from Wisconsin, held several congressional hearings that were broadcast on national TV and radio. As a result of McCarthy's inquiries and accusations, the lives and careers of many innocent people were destroyed.

In 1953, playwright Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible*, an account of the events in Salem, Massachusetts, as an allegory of McCarthy's "witch hunt." [An *allegory* is a story in which characters and their actions are equated with meanings that lie outside the text.]

me and made me write in her book. Ask Abigail. She hurt her too!

Putnam (*looks up to the ceiling, shaking his fists*): Is there no one who can withstand the devil's power? I must write to Judge Hathorne in Boston.

SCENE 5

Narrator D: Rebecca Nurse is called to the village meetinghouse for questioning on March 24. Many of Salem's residents are stunned to hear that Nurse, a 71-year-old mother and respected member of the community, has been accused of witchcraft. A large crowd of Nurse's friends and supporters attends her hearing before Judge Hathorne.

Hathorne: Rebecca Nurse, Ann Putnam complains of your hurting her. What do you say?

Rebecca Nurse: I have never harmed a child in my life.

Hathorne: Are you in any way involved in all this witchcraft?

Nurse (*touching a hand to her*

throat): I am innocent, and God will clear my name!

Narrator E: Across the room, Ann and the other girls begin to mimic Rebecca Nurse. They also touch their throats. Every time Nurse makes a move, they cry out in pain, as if she is harming them with unseen magical powers.

Nurse (*shouting in desperation*): The Lord knows I have not hurt them! I cannot help it if the devil may appear in my shape.

EPILOGUE

Narrator A: Rebecca Nurse's case went to trial. The jury initially found her innocent, but a judge asked the group to reconsider its decision. Nurse was declared guilty of practicing witchcraft, and she was hanged on July 19, 1692. By then, the witch hunt had spread to other towns in Massachusetts. Before the chaos was over, more than 200 people had been accused of being witches. Nineteen people

were hanged, a 71-year-old man was pressed to death with heavy stones, and many others died in jail.

Narrator B: Finally, in October 1692, Massachusetts Governor Sir William Phips ordered an end to the witch hunt. Public opinion turned against the accusers.

Reverend Parris, in whose house the witchcraft scare started, was forced to move away. In time, some of the accusers began to express regret for their actions. Nearly 14 years later, Ann Putnam, by then an adult, made a public confession.

Putnam: The people I accused were innocent. What I did was done not out of **malice**, but because I was tricked by Satan! I beg God's forgiveness for all the sorrow and suffering that I caused by my actions.

Narrator C: As far as it's known, Ann Putnam was the only one of the girls to ever formally confess to any wrongdoing.

—Louis C. Adelman & Brooke Ross