

Were the Salem Witch Trials a rational reaction?



<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salem-witc..>

Supporting Questions

1. What sorts of ideas did residents of the Massachusetts Bay colony have about witchcraft, and where did these ideas come from?
2. What specific events led to the accusation of witchcraft in Salem Village in 1692?
3. How did courts go about proving witchcraft in the Salem cases, and what kinds of evidence or testimony did they use?

Were the Salem Witch Trials a rational reaction?

Inquiry Standard	North Carolina Essential Standard AH1.H.4.3 - Analyze the social and religious conflicts, movements and reforms that affected the United States from colonization through Reconstruction in terms of participants, strategies, opposition, and results (e.g., Second Great Awakening, Transcendentalism, abolition, temperance, mental illness, prisons, education, etc.).
Staging the Compelling Question	Provide students with a selection of news articles related to various events (either current or historical) referred to as "witch hunts" and have them examine these articles in groups to determine characteristics of "witch hunts."

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
What sorts of ideas did residents of the Massachusetts Bay colony have about witchcraft, and where did these ideas come from?	What specific events led to the accusation of witchcraft in Salem Village in 1692?	How did courts go about proving witchcraft in the Salem cases, and what kinds of evidence or testimony did they use?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
List evidence for the types of incidents that are blamed on witches as well as what kind of person tends to be labeled a witch. Incorporate this evidence for witchcraft and characteristics of witches into a visual format (e.g., chart, wanted poster, etc.).	Write a letter home (back to England) from the perspective of a resident of Salem Village talking about events surrounding the events of the Salem Witch Trials.	Write a short legal brief condemning an accused witch. Be specific about what evidence was used to reach this conclusion.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
Source A: Excerpts from the <i>Daemonologie</i> (1599) Source B: Excerpt from "Enchantments Encountered" by Cotton Mather (1693) Source C: History Channel Introduction to the Salem Witch Trials	Source A: Petitions Concerning Salem Village Source B: Salem Village Book of Record - Concerning Samuel Parris Source C: Samuel Parris' Sermon - "Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are"	Source A: The Case of Sarah Good Source B: The Case of Tituba Source C: Deodat Lawson on the Witch Trials Source D: History Channel Introduction to the Salem Witch Trials

Summative Performance Task	<p>ARGUMENT Construct an argument (e.g., essay, detailed outline, or presentation) that addresses the compelling question <i>Were the Salem Witch Trials a rational reaction?</i> using specific claims and relevant evidence from the featured sources while acknowledging competing views.</p>
	<p>EXTENSION Research one particular explanation for the events in Salem in 1692. Do you find this explanation convincing? Write a short statement detailing why or why not.</p>
Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND Identify a current event being described as a "witch hunt," and read a newspaper or magazine article about it that is approved by the teacher.</p> <p>ASSESS Determine the extent to which the chosen event being described as a "witch hunt" is problematic and what could be done to highlight these problems or help others learn more about them.</p> <p>ACTION Do something to highlight these problems or help others learn more about them, such as writing a letter to the editor of the newspaper or magazine explaining the extent to which the term "witch hunt" is problematic.</p>

Inquiry Description

This inquiry is an attempt to explore the question of whether the Salem witch trials were a rational response to events in and around Salem Village in 1692. Generally, when the events are referred to, words such as “hysteria” are thrown around with suggestions that the accusation of witchcraft was thrown around willy-nilly, and this may indeed be the case. However, such charges must be seen in their historical context. There was, for better or for worse, a general idea that certain events and calamities could be explained only through the actions of witches. Students should consider, even if they ultimately reject, the notion that perfectly rational people could believe in witches and see their actions in the world. In terms of the larger context, this inquiry will help develop students' critical thinking skills. We are accustomed to calling politically motivated investigations “witch hunts,” but what does it mean if the original “witch hunt” was not necessarily the product of mass hysteria, but rather a rational response to the world as New Englanders understood it?

Structure

In addressing the compelling question, *Were the Salem witch trials a rational reaction to events in Salem in the late 17th century?*, students will work through a series of supporting questions, performance tasks, and sources in order to construct an argument with evidence and counter-evidence from a variety of sources.

Staging the Compelling Question

Compelling
Question

Were the Salem Witch Trials a rational reaction?

Staging the compelling question

Students will be placed in groups and given an article on a current or historical event that is described as a "witch hunt." They will be asked to determine what the narrative of the event is, who is targeted, and who is claiming that a witch hunt is underway. The groups will then be reassembled jigsaw-fashion, so that one member has familiarity with each of the initial events. They will attempt to answer the following: (1) What do the so-called "witch hunts" have in common? (2) How do they differ (3) What is it about them that leads participants to refer to them as "witch hunts"? (4) What would you say are the important characteristics of a so-called "witch hunt"? Afterwards, there will be a general class discussion to see where different groups came down on the question of witch hunts. To prepare for the coming task, the teacher will then provide a short introduction to the Salem Witch Trials.

Supporting Question 1

Supporting Question	What sorts of ideas did residents of the Massachusetts Bay colony have about witchcraft, and where did these ideas come from?
Formative Performance Task	List evidence for the types of incidents that are blamed on witches as well as what kind of person tends to be labeled a witch. Incorporate this evidence for witchcraft and characteristics of witches into a visual format (e.g., chart, wanted poster, etc.).
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Source A: Excerpts from the <i>Daemonologie</i> (1599)● Source B: Excerpt from “Enchantments Encountered” by Cotton Mather (1693)● Source C: History Channel Introduction to the Salem Witch Trials

This inquiry asks students to explore some of the things 17th century New Englanders would have believed about witches. What did they do? What sorts of calamities were they likely to be seen as responsible for? New Englanders did not blame everything on witchcraft, and the range of phenomena for which they were seen as responsible was culturally conditioned. For the purposes of this inquiry, we use excerpts from the *Daemonologie* written by King James (r. 1603-1616). King James saw the hand of witches in some of his own troubles and wrote this book to help witch finders identify witchcraft. In its way, it is an English version of Kramer and Sprenger’s 15th century *Malleus Maleficarum*, the definitive guide to witchcraft. Additionally, it employs sermons by Cotton Mather to speak about the specific circumstances of Salem at the time.

Formative Performance Task

Students will read excerpts from a 17th century work on witchcraft (Sources A and B) and watch the History Channel’s introduction to the Salem Witch Trials (Source C). Using these sources, students will be asked to work in small groups and create a list of phenomena for which witches might be blamed, as well as what sorts of persons are most likely to be labeled “witches.” They will be asked to create some sort of visual representation of this information, whether a chart, a “wanted poster,” flash cards, or some other formats. In the process, they should come to understand that not all bad things were blamed on witchcraft and, hopefully, to expect that the charge would not have been thrown around willy-nilly.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source A

Excerpts from the Daemonologie (1599)

Excerpt

In 1597, moved by the “fearefull aboundinge at this time in this countrie [Scotland] of these detestable slaves of the Devill, the witches or enchanter,” King James VI, later James I of England, wrote this treatise on witchcraft. He had seen the hand of witches in some near-disasters that befell him and had taken an active role in the Berwell Witch Trials of 1590, hoping to provide guidance to those tasked with hunting witches. When he became King of England, the *Daemonologie* was an important resource for witch finders. Written in the form of a dialogue between two characters named Philomathes and Epistemon, it lays bare the practices of witches and how to uncover them. The excerpts from the *Daemonologie* are included below:

Excerpts from Chapter V

Epistemon: As for the little trifling things women do, [the Devil] makes them joint dead corpses and make powders thereof, mixing such other things as he gives to them...

Philomathes: ...What can be the cause that there are twenty women given to [witchcraft], where there is one man?

Epistemon: The reason is easy, for that sex is frailer than man is, so it is easier to be entrapped in these gross snares of the Devil, as was shown to be true, by the Serpent’s deceiving of Eve at the beginning, which makes him homelier with that sex.

...

Epistemon: To some others [the Devil] teaches how to make Pictures of wax or clay: that by the roasting thereof, the persons that they bear the name of, may be continually melted or dried away by continual sickness. To some he gives such stones and powders, as will help to cure or cast on diseases. And to some he teaches kinds of uncouth poisons, which Mediciners understand not (for he is far cunninger than man in the knowledge of the occult properties of nature...They can make men or women to love or hate one another... They can lay the sickness of one on another...They can bewitch and take the life of men or women, by roasting of the pictures...They can raise storms or tempests in the air...They can make folks to become frenetic or Maniac...They can make spirits either to follow and trouble persons, or haunt certain houses...And likewise they can make some to be possessed with spirits and so to become very Demoniacs.

joint: To cut up, as a butcher does

entrapped: Caught up in

homelier: Comfortable, as in "at home with"

Mediciners: Doctors

occult: Literally "hidden," but also meaning magical

Source:

Adapted from the *Daemonologie*, Book Two, pages 43-48 accessed through Project Gutenberg at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/25929/25929-h/25929..>

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source B

Excerpt from “Enchantments Encountered” by Cotton Mather (1693)

Excerpt

Cotton Mather (1663-1728) was a preacher and important member of the Puritan elite in Massachusetts Bay Colony. He was an important preacher and proponent of the Salem Witch Trials, writing extensively on the phenomenon of witchcraft. In this sermon, delivered in October 1692, after the height of the trials, Mather creates a history of New England, speaking of it as a utopia into which the evil of witchcraft came. He views witchcraft as part of a long plot against pious New Englanders. The excerpt is included below:

“We have been advised from some Credible Christians yet alive that a Malefactor, accused of Witchcraft as well as Murder, and executed in this place more than Forty Years ago, did then give Notice of, An Horrible PLOT against the Country by WITCHCRAFT, and a Foundation of WITCHCRAFT then laid, which if it were not seasonably discovered, would probably Blow up, and pull down all the Churches in the Country. And now we have with Horror seen the Discovery of such a Witchcraft...Houses of the Good People [of Massachusetts] are filled with the doleful Shrieks of their Children and Servants, Tormented by Invisible Hands, with Tortures altogether preternatural.

“...our poor Afflicted Neighbours, quickly after they become Infected and Infested with these Daemons, arrive to a Capacity for Discerning those which they conceive the Shapes of their Troublers; and notwithstanding the Great and Just Suspicion, that the Daemons might Impose the Shapes of Innocent Persons in their Spectral Exhibitions upon the Sufferers, (which may perhaps prove no small part of the Witch-Plot in the issue) yet many of the Persons thus represented, being Examined, several of them have been Convicted of a very Damnable Witchcraft: yea, more than one Twenty have Confessed, that they have Signed unto a Book, which the Devil Show'd them, and engaged in the Hellish Design of Bewitching and Ruining our Land. We know not, at least I know not, how far the Delusions of Satan may be interwoven into some Circumstances of the Confessions; but one would think, all the Rules of Understanding Human Affairs are at an end, if after so many Voluntary Harmonious Confessions, made by Intelligent Persons of all Ages, in sundry Towns, at several Times, we must not Believe the main strokes wherein those Confessions all agree...”

malefactor: evildoer

seasonably: in time

doleful: sad

preternatural: supernatural

Source:

Adapted from *Cotton Mather on Witchcraft: Being the Wonders of the Invisible World* 15-16.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source C

History Channel Introduction to the Salem Witch Trials

Excerpt

This source presents a brief introduction to the Salem Witch Trials:<http://www.history.com/topics/salem-witch-trials>

Source:

The History Channel - www.history.com

Supporting Question 2

Supporting Question	What specific events led to the accusation of witchcraft in Salem Village in 1692?
Formative Performance Task	Write a letter home (back to England) from the perspective of a resident of Salem Village talking about events surrounding the events of the Salem Witch Trials.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Source A: Petitions Concerning Salem Village● Source B: Salem Village Book of Record - Concerning Samuel Parris● Source C: Samuel Parris' Sermon - "Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are"

Once the background has been established, students will examine some aspects of life in Salem Village. Relations between the unincorporated village and the larger Salem Town were fraught, especially concerning the desire of the residents of the village to have their own church. Students will read briefs concerning the creation of a separate church for Salem Village, and then they will read about troubles that the Salem Village church had with its fourth pastor, Samuel Parris, a key figure in the witchcraft trials. They will also read a warning Parris gave to his congregation about the forces of evil being loosed in Salem.

Formative Performance Task

Using the featured documents and a timeline provided to them of the events in Salem (such as this one from the University of Missouri: <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/sale..>), students will be asked to write a "letter home" to England talking about the tensions within the community in Salem. In this letter, students should try to detail some of the events leading up to and immediately after the first accusations of witchcraft. They should also incorporate material from the first formative question and offer an opinion on the question of witchcraft.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source A

Petitions Concerning Salem Village

Excerpt

Salem Village was an unincorporated township within the larger unit of Salem Town. This meant that they were not politically autonomous and had to contribute to common-use projects, especially the meetinghouse (church) and the pay of the minister. Salem Village was at least five miles from the church, which made attendance difficult. In the 1670s and 1680s, other villages had been granted independent status, but not Salem Village. They were granted the right to have a meetinghouse and minister, but had to collect taxes within the village, in addition to those paid to Salem Town, to pay for these. Some leading families from the village were important within the larger town, especially the Putnam family. The following documents deal with aspects of ongoing disputes between the village and the town:

Petition of Salem Village to the General Court (1690)

"...this honored Court in October 1672 was pleased to grant us an order in which they did empower us for the erecting of a meeting-house and maintaining a minister amongst ourselves, and therein also declaring that when we did so we should be freed from the maintaining of the ministers of Salem;

Therefore our most humble petition to this honored Court is to give us an explanation of that court order; whether or not this honored Court did intend that we should be freed from building and repairing and tending the meeting-house at Salem, as well as maintaining their ministers; which we have been forced to do, and also to build and repair our own without any help from the town of Salem—which has cost us near four hundred pounds* besides yearly salary...And we have several times made our application to the Town of Salem but can get no relief.

Therefore we most humbly petition that we may be freed from building and repairing their meeting-house at Salem Town, or else that our public charges relating to the building and repairing of our meeting house may be equally borne by the town of Salem.

So hoping your Honors will be pleased to grant us our petition, we leave your Honors to the direction of the Most High in all weighty affairs that come before you; praying always for you."

Action of the General Court

Upon hearing this petition, it is ordered that the petitioners shall be free from any charge towards the meeting-house of Salem Town, or the maintenance of the ministry there, from the date hereof: Feb. 10 1690/91.

Petition of Salem Town to the General Court (1691)

"We [leaders of Salem Town]...do present this briefly as our answer:

1. The terms which Salem Town holds our neighbors of the Village to are no other than what they gladly accepted of and were dismissed upon, as may appear by the Town record relating to that affair.
2. The whole township of Salem, of which the Village is a part, was granted by the General Court for the bearing of public charges amongst us, and therefore we humble conceive that no part thereof can be justly taken from us without the Town's consent.
3. They Village contains the best part of the land belonging to our township, so that should the inhabitants thereof be dismissed from bearing public charge with us, we should be greatly disabled** for defraying those charges that necessarily come upon us.
4. Notwithstanding all of this, to demonstrate to mankind how favorably we will deal with them, we will on the next town-meeting-day propound to the town that if our neighbors of the Farms will at their cost and charge maintain their minister and meeting-house and all charges thereunto belonging, and maintain the highways within their limits, and half the highway parts between them and us, then we will maintain our

ministers and defray the charges of our meeting-house and repair our highways and half the highway that parts between them and us."

*A free resident of Salem Village probably earned about seven pounds per year.

**disenabled: made unable

Source:

Adapted from *Salem Village Witchcraft: a Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England* p. 237-239.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source B

Salem Village Book of Record - Concerning Samuel Parris

Excerpt

June 18, 1689

It was agreed and voted by a general concurrence that for Mr. Parice [Parris] his encouragement and settlement in the work of the ministry amongst us we will give him sixty-six pounds for his yearly salary, one-third part in money, the other two third parts in provision at the prices following: wheat at four shillings per bushel, rye and barley malt at three shillings per bushel, Indian corn at two shillings per bushel, and beef at three half pence per pound, pork at two pence per pound and butter six pence per pound, and Mr. Parice to find himself firewood. And Mr. Parice to keep the ministry house in good repair. And that Mr. Parice shall also have the use of the ministry pasture and the inhabitants to keep the fence in Repair and that we will keep up our contribution and our inhabitants to put their money in papers and this to continue so long as Mr. Parice continues in the work of the ministry amongst us. and all provision to be good and merchantable.* And li it please God to bless the inhabitants we shall be willing to give more and we expect that if god shall diminish the estate of the people that then Mr. Parice do abate of his Salary according to proportion.

October 28, 1690

It was agreed and voted by a general concurrence that the Instructions for the Committee for this year shall be as followeth:

1. that our Committee shall make a rate of sixty pounds for Mr. Parris his salary for this year already begun: one-third parte to be paid in money the other two thirds to be in provisions according to the prices set in the vote made by our Inhabitants the 18th June 1689: Mr. Parris having relinquished the six pounds voted there for firewood:
2. Voted that the Committee now In being are Empowered to Repair our meeting house and keep it decent and the Inhabitants to bear the Charge of it...

October 16, 1691

The Inhabitants of this village are desired to meet at their ordinary places of meting one the 1 day of December 1691 at 10 of the clock in the morning to consider by what means the Inhabitants were convened together on the 18 of June 1689 then there was a committee chosen and a yearly salary stated to Mr. Parris that day but no warrant appearing in the Book for it, and to consider of a vote in the Book on the 10 of October 1689 where in our right in the ministry house and land seeme to be impaired and made void. Also to consider about our ministry house and 2 acres of land given to Mr. Parris and a committee chosen to make conveyances to Mr. Parris in the name of the inhabitants And to consider about Mr. Parris his maintenance for this year whether by voluntary contributions or by subscription.**

*merchantable: marketable

**subscription: a fee for membership in the church

Source:

Adapted from the Salem Village Record Book accessed at <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/texts/tei/SalVRec> on November 7, 2015

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source C

Samuel Parris' Sermon - "Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are"

Excerpt

"Occasioned by the dreadful Witchcraft that broke out here a few weeks past, and one member of this Church, and another of Salem, upon public examination by Civil Authority vehemently suspected for she-witches, and upon it committed...

Christ knows how many of these devils there are in his churches. As in our text there was one among the twelve. And so in our churches God knows how many devils there are: whether one, two, three, or four in twelve, how many devils, how many saints. He knows whom he has chosen (John 13:18), he also knows who they are that have not chosen him, but prefer farms and merchandise above him and above his ordinances...

Christ knows who these devils are. There is one among you, says Christ to the Twelve: well, who is that? Why it is Judas. Why, so Christ knows how many devils are among us—whether one, or ten, or twenty; and also who they are. He knows us perfectly; and he knows those of us that are in his church, that we are either saints or devils, true believers or hypocrites and dissembling Judases that would sell Christ and his kingdom to gratify a lust. We do not think we are such...

Let none then build their hopes of salvation merely upon this: that they are church members. This you and I may be, and yet devils for all that...

Let none then be stumbled at religion, because too often there are devils found among the saints. You see, here was a true church, sincere converts and sound believers, yet here was a devil among them...

Terror to hypocrites who profess much love to Christ but indeed are in league with their lusts, which they prefer above Christ. Oh! Remember that you are devils in Christ's account. Christ is lightly esteemed of you, and you are vilely accounted for by Christ. Oh! If there be any such among us, forbear to come this day to the Lord's table, lest Satan enter more powerfully into you..."

Source:

Adapted from *Salem Village Witchcraft: a Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England* p. 129-132

Supporting Question 3

Supporting Question	How did courts go about proving witchcraft in the Salem cases, and what kinds of evidence or testimony did they use?
Formative Performance Task	Write a short legal brief condemning an accused witch. Be specific about what evidence was used to reach this conclusion.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Source A: The Case of Sarah Good● Source B: The Case of Tituba● Source C: Deodat Lawson on the Witch Trials● Source D: History Channel Introduction to the Salem Witch Trials

Students will examine some of the documents related to the arrest and deposition of those accused of practicing witchcraft. These sources serve as the entry point into the process of determining who is or is not a witch. The documents students will use come from the beginning of the crisis, dealing with Sarah Osborne and the Indian slave Tituba, who were two of the first three to be charged. Subsequent cases, while interesting, will be tainted since they all build on these first instances. Finally, they will read excerpts of an account of the March trials written by Deodat Lawson, minister of Salem Village prior to Samuel Parris. Using this information, students will determine what sorts of evidence were used to convict witches of their misdeeds.

Formative Performance Task

Students will be asked to write a short legal brief in which they present the case against a resident of Salem Village of witchcraft. The legal brief should include details of the charges and evidence against them. They should refer to the featured sources and be attentive to the sorts of witnesses who were called. They should also be reminded that witchcraft was a crime; therefore, they should be attentive to details and to the path the trials took.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source A

The Case of Sarah Good

Excerpt

Sarah Good, Sarah Osborn, and an enslaved Indian named Tituba (property of Samuel Parris) were the first to be accused of witchcraft after Abigail Williams and Elizabeth Parris were afflicted by fits in late January, 1692. Anne Putnam, Jr., and other girls would soon after begin making accusations, too. It should be remembered that witchcraft was not simply a religious crime, but a crime against the state. The next two document sets relate to the cases of Sarah Good and Tituba. Sarah Good was hanged on July 19, 1692; Tituba was released in 1693 and sold to a new master.

From the Warrant for the Apprehension of Sarah Good, March 1, 1692

Whereas Masters Joseph Hutcheson, Edward Putnam, and Thomas Preseton, Yeomen of Salem Village in the County of Essex personally appeared before us, and made complaint on behalf of Their Majesties [i.e. William and Mary] against Sarah Good, the wife of William Good of Salem Village abovesaid, for Suspicion of Witchcraft by her committed, and thereby much injury done to Elizabeth Parris, Abigail Williams, Anna Putnam, and Elizabeth Hubert all of Salem Village aforesaid sundry times within this two months and lately also done at Salem Village contrary to the peace of our Sovereign Lord and Lady William and Mary, King and Queen of England...You are therefore in their Majesties names hereby required to apprehend & bring before us the said Sarah good, tomorrow about ten o'clock in the forenoon at the house of Nathaniel Ingersalls in Salem Village, or as soon as may be then & there, to be examined related to the abovesaid premises, and hereof you are not to fail at your peril.

Examination of Sarah Good, March 2, 1692

Sarah Good upon Examination denied the matter of fact, that she ever used any witchcraft; or hurt or abused Children or any of them. The ... children being all present positively accused her of hurting of them sundry times within this two months and also that morning.

Sarah Good denied that she had been at their houses at said time, or near them, or had done them any hurt.

The abovesaid children then present accused her face to face, upon which they were all dreadfully tortured and tormented for a short space of time, and the affliction and tortures being over, they charged said Sarah Good again. That she had so tortured them, and came to them and did it although she was personally then kept at a considerable distance from them...Asked if she did not then hurt them; who did it? And the children being again tortured, she looked upon them and said it was one of them we brought into the house with us.

We asked her who it was, she then answered and said it was Sarah Osborne, and Sarah Osborne was then under custody and not in the house. And the children then being quickly after recovered out of their fit said it was Sarah Good...

Deposition of Ann Putnam, Jr., v. Sarah Good

The Deposition of Ann Putnam {Junior} who testifies and says that, "On the 25th of February 1691/1692, I saw the apparition of Sarah Good, which did torture me most grievously, but I did not know her name till the 27th of February, and then she told me her name was Sarah Good. And she did prick me and pinch me most grievously—and also since several times urging me vehemently to write in her book, and also on the first day of March, being the day of her examination, Sarah Good did most grievously torture me and also several times since. And also on the first day of March 1692, I saw the apparition of Sarah Good go and afflict and torture the bodies of Elizabeth Parris, Abigail Williams, and Elizabeth Hubbard, and I have seen the apparition of Sarah Good afflicting the body of Sarah Vibber.

*forenoon: in the morning

Source:

Adapted from Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*; pp. 125-130, 138

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source B

The Case of Tituba

Excerpt

Sarah Good, Sarah Osborn, and an enslaved Indian named Tituba (property of Samuel Parris) were the first to be accused of witchcraft after Abigail Williams and Elizabeth Parris were afflicted by fits in late January, 1692. Anne Putnam, Jr., and other girls would soon after begin making accusations, too. It should be remembered that witchcraft was not simply a religious crime, but a crime against the state. Sarah Good was hanged on July 19, 1692; Tituba was released in 1693 and sold to a new master. The excerpts included below document the case of Tituba:

Examination March 2, 1692

Q: What covenant did you make with the man that came to you? What did he tell you?

A: He tell me he God & I must believe in him & serve him six years & he would give me many fine things.

Q: How long agone was this?

A: About six weeks & a little more, Friday night before Abigail was ill.

Q: What did he say you must do more? Did he say you must write any thing? Did he offer you paper?

A: Yes. The next time he come to me & showed me some fine things, something like creatures, a little bird something like green & white.

Q: Did you promise him then when he spoke to you? Then what did you answer him?

A: I then said this—I told him I could not believe him god. I told him I ask my master & would have gone up, but he stopped me & would not let me.

...

Q: Did not he make you write your name?

A: No, not yet, for my mistress called me into the other room.

Q: What did he say you must do in that book?

A: He said [to] write and set my name in it.

Q: Did you write?

A: Yes. Once I made a mark in the book & made it with red like blood.

Q: Did he get it out of your body?

A: He said he must get it out the next time he come again. He gave me a pin tied to a stick to do it with...

Q: Did you see any other marks in the book?

A: Yes, a great many. Some marks red, some yellow, he opened his book [which had] a great many marks in it.

Q: Did he tell you the names of any of them?

A: ...[Sarah] Good & [Sarah] Osborne & he say they make their marks in that book & he showed them [to] me.

Q: How many marks do you think there was?

A: Nine.

Q: Did they write their names?

A: They made marks. Goody Good said she made her mark, but Goody Osborn would not tell, she was cross to me.

Depositions of Elizabeth Hubbard and Ann Putnam, Jr. v. Tituba

The Deposition of Elizabeth Hubbard, aged about 17 years, who testifies that on the 25th of February 1691/1692, "I saw the apparition of Tituba [the] Indian, which did immediately most grievously torment me by pricking, pinching, and almost choking me, and so continued hurting me most grievously by times, till the day of her examination, being the first of March, and then also at the beginning of her examination. But as soon as she began to confess she left off hurting me and has hurt me but little since.

The Deposition of Ann Putnam, who testifies and says that on the 25th of February 1691/1692, "I saw the apparition of Tituba, Mr. Parris' Indian-woman, which did torture me most grievously by pricking and pinching me most dreadfully, till the first day of March, being her examination, and then most grievously also at the beginning of her examination. But since she confessed, she has hurt me but little.

Source:

Adapted from Rosenthal, *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*; pp. 132, 135-136, 139-140

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source C

Deodat Lawson on the Witch Trials

Excerpt

Deodat Lawson had preceded Samuel Parris as minister of Salem Village. He suspected infernal powers in the deaths of several family members. In these excerpts of a brief narrative he wrote about the trials, we hear about accusations against Rebecca Nurse and Martha Cory, who were eventually hanged on July 19 and September 22, 1692, respectively.

Excerpts from “A Further Account of the Tryals”

On the Lord’s Day, the Twentieth of March, there were sundry of the afflicted persons at Meeting, as Mrs. Pope, and Goodwife Bibber, Abigail Williams, Mary Walcut, Mary Lewes, and Doctor Grigg’s maid. There was also at Meeting Goodwife Cory (who was afterward examined on suspicion of being a witch). They had several sore fits in the time of public worship, which did something interrupt me in my first prayer, being so unusual...

In sermon time, when goodwife Cory was present in the Meeting-House, Abigail Williams called out, “Look where Goodwife Cory sits on the beam, suckling her yellow bird betwixt her fingers!” Ann Putnam, another girl afflicted, said, “There was a yellow bird in my hat as it hung upon the pin in the pulpit,” but those that were by restrained her from speaking aloud about it.

On Monday the 21st of March, the Magistrates of Salem appointed to come to the examination of Goodwife Cory. And about twelve o’clock they went into the Meeting-House, which was thronged with spectators. Mr. Noyes began with a vary penitent and pathetical prayer, and Goodwife Cory, being called to answer to what was alleged against her, she desired to go at prayer, which was much wondered at, in the presence of so many hundred people. The Magistrates told her, they would not admit it; they came not there to hear her pray, but to examine her, in what was alleged against her...

The number of afflicted persons were about that time ten...[they] did vehemently accuse her in the Assembly of afflicting them, by biting, pinching, strangling, etc. And that they did in their fit see her likeness coming to them, and bringing a book to them. She said she had no book. They affirmed she had a yellow bird, that used to suck betwixt her fingers, and being asked about it, if she had any familiar spirit, she said she had no familiarity with any such thing...

She said they could not prove a witch; she was that afternoon committed to Salem Prison; and after she was in custody, she did not so appear to them, and afflict them as before...

On Thursday the 24th of March, Goodwife Nurse was brought before the Magistrates...about ten o’clock in the forenoon, to be examined in the Meeting-House. The Reverend Mr. Hale begun with prayer, and the warrant being read, she was required to give answer—Why had she afflicted those persons? She pleaded her own innocence with earnestness. Thomas Putnam’s wife, Abigail Williams, and Thomas Putnam’s daughter accused her that she appeared to them, and afflicted them in their fits; but some of the others said that they had seen her, but knew not whether she had hurt them. Amongst [them] was Mary Walcut, who was presently after she had so declared bitten, and cried out of her in the Meeting-House, predicting the marks of teeth on her wrist. It was so disposed, that I had not leisure to attend the whole time of examination, but both Magistrates and Ministers told me, that the things alleged by the afflicted, and the defenses made by her, were much after the same manner as the former was. And her motions did produce like effects as to biting, pinching, bruising, tormenting, at their breasts, by her leaning. And when bended back, [they] were as if their backs were broken. The afflicted persons said, the Black Man [i.e. the Devil] whispered to her in the Assembly, and therefore she could not hear what the Magistrates said unto her.

They said also, that she did then ride by the Meeting-House, behind the Black Man. Thomas Putnam’s wife had a grievous fit in the time of examination, to the very impairing of her strength, and wasting of her spirits, insomuch as she could hardly move hand or foot when she was carried out. Others also were grievously

afflicted, so that there was once such a hideous screech and noise (which I heard as I walked at a little distance from the Meeting-House) as did amaze me, and some that were within told me that whole Assembly was struck with consternation, and they were afraid that those that sat next to them were under the influence of Witchcraft. This woman also was that day committed to Salem Prison.

The Magistrates and Ministers also did inform me that they apprehended a child of Sarah Good and examined it, being between 4 and 5 years of age. And as to matter of fact they did unanimously affirm that when this child but cast its eye upon the afflicted persons, they were tormented. And they held her head, and yet so many as her eye could fix upon were afflicted...this was also committed to Salem Prison. The child looked hale and well as other children...

After the commitment of Goodwife Nurse, Thomas Putnam's wife was much better, and she had no violent fits from that 24th of March to the 5th of April. Some others also said that they had not seen her so frequently appear to them, to hurt them.

Source:

Adapted from *Cotton Mather on Witchcraft: Being the Wonders of the Invisible World* pp. 161-166

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source D

History Channel Introduction to the Salem Witch Trials

Excerpt

This source presents a brief introduction to the Salem Witch Trials:<http://www.history.com/topics/salem-witch-trials>

Source:

The History Channel - www.history.com

Summative Performance Task

Compelling Question	Were the Salem Witch Trials a rational reaction?
Argument	Construct an argument (e.g., essay, detailed outline, or presentation) that addresses the compelling question <i>Were the Salem Witch Trials a rational reaction?</i> using specific claims and relevant evidence from the featured sources while acknowledging competing views.
Extension	Research one particular explanation for the events in Salem in 1692. Do you find this explanation convincing? Write a short statement detailing why or why not.

Argument

In response to the compelling question, students should include a strong thesis statement with claims supported by evidence from the sources included in this inquiry. They should address the understanding of witches that would have been prevalent at the time, the events that occurred, and how they would (or would not) have led a rational New Englander to suspect witchcraft. Possible arguments include: (1) it makes sense to hunt for witches when certain things happen since those things only happen because of witches; (2) it makes sense to hunt for witches sometimes because there are no better explanations for events; (3) it never makes sense to hunt for witches because there are no such things as witches; (4) it never makes sense to hunt for witches because witches are always the powerless.

Extension

Here, students should become immersed in one explanation of the events of Salem in 1691 and 1692. Was it simple hysteria? Political tensions? Religious in-fighting? Commercial interests vs. agricultural interests? An outbreak of ergotism? It would also be interesting to see if students' understanding of the rationality of the witch-hunt changed because of this.

Taking Informed Action

Understand	Identify a current event being described as a "witch hunt," and read a newspaper or magazine article about it that is approved by the teacher.
Assess	Determine the extent to which the chosen event being described as a "witch hunt" is problematic and what could be done to highlight these problems or help others learn more about them.
Action	Do something to highlight these problems or help others learn more about them, such as writing a letter to the editor of the newspaper or magazine explaining the extent to which the term "witch hunt" is problematic.

In this inquiry, students have been asked to address the rationality of “witch hunts” by examining aspects of the Salem Witch Trials. The term “witch hunt” is often used to describe a politically-motivated prosecution (or persecution) of a person (or group of people) for reasons having little to do with the actual charges being pressed. The Taking Informed Action task asks them to put their understanding to use by looking at current events. Specifically, students will assess whether the prosecution (or persecution) in question is indeed a “witch hunt” as we traditionally understand it, relying on what they have learned from the formative and summative tasks to support their stance.

