

**History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

Total Time: 45-60 minutes

Massachusetts History/Social Science Curriculum Frameworks Addressed:

Grade 3 Concept and Skills

2. Observe visual sources such as historic paintings, photographs, or illustrations that accompany historical narratives. (H)

Grade 3 Learning Standards

3.4 Explain how the Puritans and Pilgrims differed and identify early leaders in Massachusetts, such as John Winthrop; describe the daily life, education, and work of the Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. (H, E, C)

Grade 5 Concept and Skills

1. Identify different ways of dating historical narratives (17th century, seventeenth century, 1600s, colonial period). (H)

Grade 5 Learning Standards

5.8 Identify the links between the political principles and practices developed in ancient Greece and such political institutions and practices as written constitutions and town meetings of the Puritans. (H, C)

5.14 Explain the development of colonial governments. (H, G, E, C)

Lesson Plan:

1. **Introduction:** (5-10 minutes)

What really happened in Salem in 1692?

Brainstorm: What do you know about the “Salem Witch Hunts?”

2. **Demonstration: Witch Trial Activity** (15-20 minutes)

[Worksheet: Witch Hunting]

A. Witch Hunt: Have students participate in a “Witch Hunt” following the directions on the worksheet.

First, students will ask questions to their peers and log them on their charts.

Next, students will accuse the people they believe are witches. Each accused witch will defend themselves in front of the town (our classroom).

Finally, the instructor will reveal who the real witches are (no one, since this was a case of created paranoia) and hand out worksheet explaining beliefs related to witchcraft from the period.

[Worksheet: Debrief from Witch Hunt]

**History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

3. Activity: Comparing Primary Sources from the Salem Witch Trials (25-30 minutes)

- A. Have students write history mystery question on worksheet. (Step 1)
- B. Have students get in groups of 3-4. Have students read through documents/watch video. Write down facts/evidence from documents. (Step 2)
- C. Have groups create a hypothesis answering “What happened in Salem in 1692?” (Step 3)
- D. Have groups write down evidence that supports hypothesis. (Step 4)
- D. Have groups share hypotheses with class.
- E. Explain that the next step would be to have groups reconsider their hypotheses after listening to their peers. Groups would then complete Step 5.

**History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

Debrief from Witch Hunt

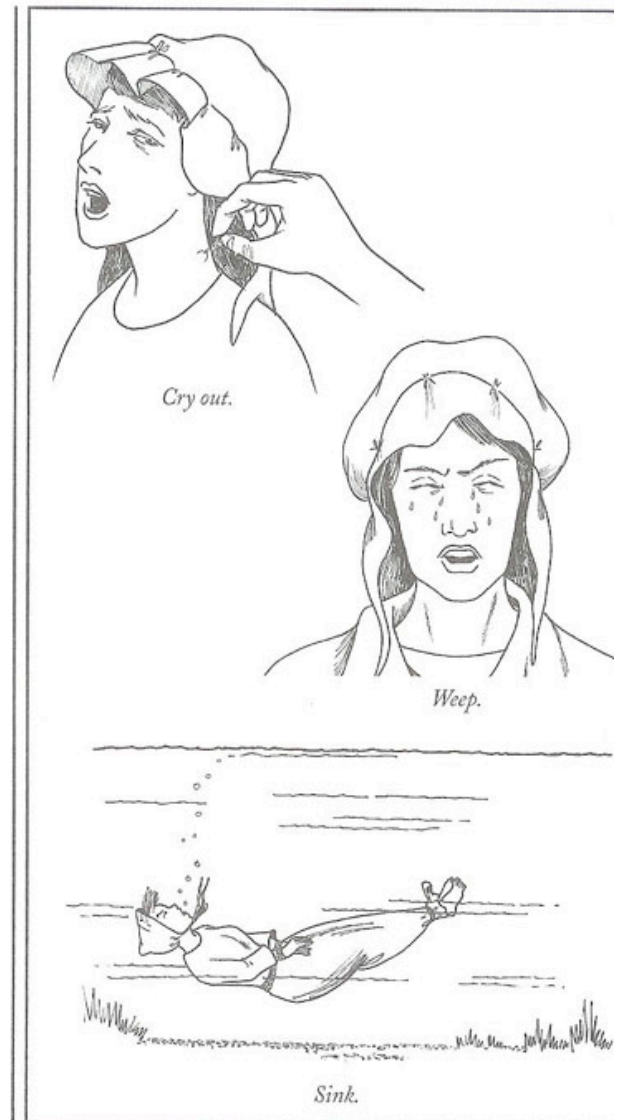
This activity was designed to simulate the feeling of mass paranoia and hysteria. Did your group accuse other students of being witches when the person in power (an authority figure) told you there were witches among us?

Paranoia: Noun. A tendency on the part of an individual or group toward excessive or irrational suspiciousness and distrustfulness of others. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Below are two pages from a popular culture book (at an upper elementary reading level) on the common beliefs among Europeans about witches during the 16th and 17th centuries. Many of these same beliefs were brought to the American colonies by the English and other European immigrants.

HOW TO PROVE YOU'RE NOT A WITCH

- 1** **Get rid of any pets.**
Witches use animals as agents to carry out the devil's commands, so any animals in your charge, including any insects that enter the courtroom during your trial, may be interpreted as your "familiar" and offered by prosecutors as further proof of your status as a witch.
- 2** **Weep.**
Witches are unable to shed tears, so cry when you are arrested.
- 3** **React to pain during the needle ordeal.**
All witches have a devil's mark somewhere on their bodies to show that they have made a pact with Satan. During the needle test, any blemish, wart, scar, mole, or other imperfection will be poked to test your reaction. It is believed that the devil's mark is immune to pain and cannot bleed, so wince and cry out as each blemish is pricked.
- 4** **Sink during the water ordeal.**
Witches float in water because they weigh less than ordinary people. During the water ordeal, you will be tied at the hands and feet and thrown into a body of water in the presence of the court and members of the public. When your body hits the water, tense all of your muscles and imagine that you are made of lead or



**History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

another heavy substance. Take short, shallow breaths before going under rather than filling your lungs with air. The guards will judge your ability to float, and if you sink to the bottom, they will probably pull you up before you drown.

Be Aware

- You are a witch if you have:
 - made a pact with the devil
 - practiced harmful magic
 - flown through the air
 - communicated with “familiar spirits” in the form of animals
 - murdered children to eat them or to make ointment from their rendered fat
 - met with other witches
- Because witchcraft is a *crimen exceptum*—an exceptional crime, on the same level as treason, conspiracy, forgery, and robbery with murder—the courts suspend normal rules of evidence to ease conviction.
- Unless you are a child or pregnant, any circumstantial evidence will lead to your torture in order to force a confession. Such evidence can include:
 - being named a witch by another witch testifying under torture
 - being a relative of someone executed for witchcraft
 - being homeless
 - committing adultery
 - learning too quickly

- making threats against another person that have come true
 - being in the fields shortly before a hail shower
 - making a sick person well
 - attending church services sporadically
 - attending church services regularly
 - showing fear during arrest
 - remaining calm during arrest
- If you are found guilty of witchcraft, you will be burned alive or hanged. In some regions, you will be strangled before your body is burned as an act of mercy.

Nota Bene

Witch hunts were most common in Europe from 1580 to 1630. More than 110,000 people were tried as witches, and 60,000 of them were convicted and put to death. About three-quarters of those convicted of witchcraft were women.

Local Connection:

Thomas Danforth, a Massachusetts Bay official and one of the judges at the Salem Witch Trials, had acquired land west of Boston (now Framingham, then named Danforth’s Farm). After the trials, Danforth realized that those who were accused and survived would be ostracized. He decided to help the Cloyes family, as well as a dozen other escaping Salem families, who were “all related by blood or marriage,” to find refuge on his land. Today, this area of Framingham is called Salem End (located next to the campus of Framingham State University) and the main route through it is Salem End Road.

**History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

3. Establishing the Hypothesis: Using the clues as evidence, what is a possible answer (hypothesis) to the history mystery question? (Teacher Tip: For 3rd graders, you should help scaffold this activity by putting possible hypotheses on the board for students to choose from.)

4. Explaining the Hypothesis: You will present your possible answer (hypothesis) to the history mystery question and clues (evidence) to the class. Use the space below to list evidence you will use to back up your possible answer (hypothesis). Your classmates will challenge your possible answer (hypothesis) to the history mystery question.

5. Evaluating the Hypothesis: Based on your classmates' feedback and after hearing their hypotheses, discuss with your group what the final answer (claim) should be to the history mystery question. We will share each group's answers and also discuss how groups may reach conflicting answers based on the same clues (evidence).

**History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

Clues (Evidence) from the Salem Witch Trials

(Primary source documents were edited for language and ease-of-use with elementary students. Teacher Tip: For 3rd graders, you should help scaffold this activity by adding guiding questions to each primary source – see Clue 7 for an example. Teachers may also reduce amount of text for the lower grades.)

CLUE 1: Summary of the Salem Witch Trials from the University of Virginia

The Salem witchcraft trials began in late February 1692 and lasted through April 1693. They were held in Salem Village (now Danvers) in Massachusetts Bay Colony. The people of the town believed Samuel Parris' 9 year-old daughter, Elizabeth "Betty" Parris, and her cousin, Abigail Williams, were possessed by the Devil through witchcraft. Betty and Abigail accused the Parris' slave Tituba, (who was from Barbados), of having taught the girls witchcraft. Later, Betty and Abigail also accused Rebecca Nurse, an elderly widow, of spreading witchcraft. The girls, along with their neighbors the Putnams, then accused many in town of being witches. In the end 25 people were convicted: 19 were executed by hanging, 1 was crushed to death under heavy stones, and at least 5 died in jail. Over 160 people across Massachusetts Bay Colony were accused of witchcraft and most were jailed.

CLUE 2: Testimony (words said at a trial) of Tituba, Samuel Parris' slave from the Caribbean island of Barbados

John Hathorne (Judge): What familiarity have you with the Devil?

Tituba: The Devil, I am not sure. I saw a man in the night. I was sorry and I said, I would do so no more, but told him I would fear God. This man then came to me and said the Parris children was first hurt. He said he would kill the children if I would not serve him...

John Hathorne: Is that the same man that appeared before to you that appeared the last night and told you this?

Tituba: Yes. Sometimes he had a great black dog, four times...

John Hathorne: What other Creatures have you seen?

Tituba: A bird. A little yellow bird. He told me if I would Serve him I should have the bird. I also saw 2 cats, one red, another black as big as a little dog.

John Hathorne: Did they hurt you or threaten you?

Tituba: They did scratch me. After prayer, because I would not serve them and when they went away I could not see but they stood before the fire. The man then sends the cats to me and forces me to pinch the girls... They tell me, they will hurt me; last night they tell me that I must kill some body with the knife.

John Hathorne: Did you never practice witchcraft in your own country (Barbados)?

Tituba: No. Never before now.

**History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

CLUE 3: Testimony (words said at a trial) of Rebecca Nurse (a 76 year-old woman charge with being a witch in Salem)

Before this testimony Ann Putnum Jr. started screaming saying she was being possessed by Rebecca Nurse.

John Hathorne: Explain for the charges of witchcraft given by Williams and Putnam.

Rebecca Nurse: I can say before my Eternal Father that I am innocent and God will clear me...

John Hathorne: Are you an innocent person relating to this witchcraft?

(Ann Putnum Jr. and other girls act as if they are being pinched by invisible people, crying out in pain.)

Rebecca Nurse: The Lord knows I have not hurt them. I am an innocent person.

John Hathorne: Why do you make no face when you see the girls are suffering.

Rebecca Nurse: You do not know my heart. I am as clear as the child unborn.

John Hathorne: They accuse you of hurting them and if they are not lying and you say they lie, you will die.

Rebecca Nurse: If so, I cannot help it, then the Devil may be in me.

CLUE 4: Testimony (words said at a trial) of Ann Putnum Sr. (a woman who claimed Rebecca Nurse was a witch and whose daughter claimed to be possessed by the witchcraft of Rebecca Nurse)

Ann Putnum, Sr.: My daughter also told me that Rebecca Nurse and her sister were witches, for their mother was a witch. Because of her, six children in winding sheets (a sheet for wrapping dead people – like a ghost) which called me their aunt, which did frighten me. They told me that they were my sister's children of Boston and that Rebecca Nurse, an old deft (quick and skillful) woman at Boston had murdered them. They asked me to go and tell these things to the judges or they would tear me to pieces. Rebecca Nurse must be a witch.

History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.

CLUE 5: A Drawing of the Rebecca Nurse Trial



CLUE 6: Jurors' First Verdict (Decision) for Rebecca Nurse

July 4, 1692. I, Thomas Fisk, being one of the Jury at Salem-Court, upon the Trial of Rebecca Nurse, brought her a verdict of not Guilty.

**History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

CLUE 7: Accounts of the Verdict for Rebecca Nurse

The following is a summary of the trial verdict for Rebecca Nurse.

The jury came back with a verdict of “Not Guilty.” When this was announced there was a large outcry from the townspeople. The judges urged the jury to change their verdict to guilty. Chief Justice Stoughton asked the jury if they had considered what Rebecca Nurse had said of Abigail Hobbs, a 17 year-old girl, also accused of witchcraft. Rebecca Nurse said, “She is one of us.” Nurse was old and almost deaf. When Nurse was asked by the judges to explain her words “She is one of us,” she did not hear the question. The jury took her silence as guilt. The jury deliberated a second time and came back with a verdict of guilty. Rebecca Nurse was later sentenced to death for practicing witchcraft.

CLUE 8: A Modern Scientific Study: Was Salem Food Poisoning?

Watch the following video clip on the classroom computer:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU8GvfeaOMo>

Answer this question: What did this modern-day scientist think caused people in Salem to act funny?

If you do not understand the video, please ask your teacher for help.

**History Detectives: Using Historical Inquiry to Teach the
Salem Witch Trials in the Elementary Classroom
Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

Tips for Using Primary Sources: Students as History Detectives

Help Steps for Using Primary Sources with Elementary Students:

1. Choose a mystery question that targets content standards, is broad enough to have multiple perspectives (as represented in the clues), and could have more than one right answer.
2. Examining and Interpreting Clues: Students collect data by examining clues, taking notes on a clue organizer sheet, and look for patterns or relationships among the clues and their sources.
3. Establishing the Hypothesis: Using the clues as evidence, students generate a hypothesis that proposes a possible answer to the mystery question.
4. Explaining the Hypothesis: Students present their hypothesis and evidence in a performance assessment. If time allows, students may have a choice of products for this stage of the lesson.
5. Evaluating the Hypothesis and the Effort: Students reflect on both the accuracy of their hypothesis as well as the investigative process, i.e. their performance as history detectives.

Helpful Locations to Find Primary Sources:

1. National Archives - www.archives.gov
2. Stanford History Education Group - sheg.stanford.edu
3. Internet Modern History Sourcebook - www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook.html
4. Library of Congress - <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/>

Basic Tips for Scaffolding Primary Sources for the Elementary Grades:

1. Reduce text to less than 100 words (less than 50 for the lower grades)
2. Assess the primary source vocabulary. Alter the text if the vocabulary is too difficult for elementary students. If you choose to not alter the text, supply students with a vocabulary sheet.
3. Don't forget to include maps, charts, artifacts, photographs, film, primary, and secondary sources

Recommended Readings for Teachers on Using Primary Sources with Elementary Students:

Kirchner, J., Helm, A., Pierce, K., & Galloway, M. (2011). History + mystery = inquiring young historians. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*. 63(3), 14-15.

Levstik, L. S., & Barton, K. C. (2011). *Doing history: Investigating with children in elementary and middle schools*. New York: Routledge.