

Salem Witch Trials:

Directions: Summarize each paragraph in your own words. Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1692. Salem, MA. An Overview:

The Salem witchcraft crisis began during the winter of 1691- 1692, in Salem Village, Massachusetts, when Betty Parris, the nine- year-old daughter of the village's minister, Samuel Parris, and his niece, Abigail Williams, fell strangely ill. The girls complained of pinching, prickling sensations, knife-like pains, and the feeling of being choked. In the weeks that followed, three more girls showed similar symptoms.

Summarize:

1) When did the Salem witchcraft crisis begin?

2) List the historical figures mentioned in the paragraph:

The symptoms of these girls greatly worried the townspeople since they were so strange. Reverend Parris and several doctors could not pinpoint the cause of the girls' symptoms, so they began to suspect that witchcraft was responsible for the girls' behavior. They questioned the girls to name the witches who were tormenting them. The girls eventually named three women who were then arrested: Sarah Good (a homeless beggar), Sarah Osborne (an outsider in the church community), and Tituba, Reverend Parris' Indian slave. Tituba had excited the girls with her scary stories, magical tricks, and exciting games. Under examination, Tituba confessed to being a witch and testified that four women and a man were causing the girls' illness.

The girls continued to accuse people of witchcraft, including some respectable church members. The new accused witches joined Tituba and the other two women in jail.

Summarize:

3) Why did the townspeople suspect witchcraft was the cause of the girls symptoms?

4) Who was accused of being a witch? Who admitted to being a witch?

The accused faced a difficult situation. If they confessed to witchcraft, they could escape death but would have to provide details of their crimes and the names of other participants. More importantly, the Puritans of Salem were very religious and believed that admitting to witchcraft condemned their souls for all eternity. On the other hand, it was very difficult to prove one's innocence. Admitting to witchcraft might have been the only way to avoid execution.

Summarize:

5) Why would people confess to being a witch?

6) Why did the Puritans care about witches?

The Puritans believed that witches were real, knew magic, and could send spirits to torture people. However, only the victims could see the spirits that witches sent. The afflicted girls were often kept in the courtroom while the accused witches were examined. The girls screamed, moaned, and claimed that the accused witch was torturing them. However nobody could see anything the girls claimed to be seeing. Being a strict Puritan himself, the judge would have to believe their visions, even if the accused witch was not doing anything visible to the girls.

Between June and October, twenty people were convicted of witchcraft and killed, and more than a hundred suspected witches remained in jail.

Summarize:

7) Why did the judge believe the accused girls?

By May 1693, 19 were hanged on Gallows Hill, a 71-year old man was pressed to death with heavy stones, and several people died in jail. Nearly 200 people had been accused of practicing "the Devil's magic." By 1697, people began to realize the error in their ways. The presiding judge, Samuel Sewall, publicly confessed error and admitted guilt for the events. In 1711, the colony passed a bill that restored the good names of those accused. Massachusetts would not formally apologize until 1957 - more than 250 years later!

Summarize:

8) How did Salem try to correct their mistake of the witch trials?