

Name _____

Date _____

The Salem Witch Trials

The Salem Witch Trials took place in Salem, Massachusetts. Overall, nineteen men and women were hung at Gallows Hill from June through September in 1692. They were hung because they were convicted of witchcraft. The story of the Salem Witch Trials begins in an unexpected way.

In 1688, Samuel Parris was invited to become the preacher at the church in Salem Village. He was invited by John Putnam, an influential elder of Salem Village. After a year of negotiations, Parris accepted the job and moved with his wife, Elizabeth, and their six-year-old daughter, Betty. They also brought their niece, Abigail Williams and an Indian slave named Tituba.

In February of 1692, Betty Parris became ill. She complained of fever, contorted in pain, dove under furniture, and behaved oddly. Historians have proposed many possible causes for her behavior, including epilepsy, stress, psychosis, and convulsive ergotism. Convulsive ergotism is caused by eating rye that has been infected with the ergot fungus.

At the time of Betty's illness, Cotton Mather had recently published a book called *Memorable Providences*. His book described the suspected witchcraft of a woman in Boston. Betty's symptoms and behavior were somewhat similar to what Mather discussed in his book.

Betty's playmates, Anne Putnam, Mercy Lewis, and Mary Walcott, also began showing the same strange behaviors. A doctor by the name of William Griggs was called to examine the girls. He failed to find a cure and suggested that the girls' problems might have a supernatural cause. At the time, it was widely believed that witches targeted children. This made the doctor's diagnosis seem like it was correct.

A neighbor named Mary Sibley recommended a form of counter magic. She told Tituba to bake a rye cake with the urine of the afflicted child and then feed the cake to a dog. At the time, witches were believed to use dogs as agents to carry out their commands from the devil.

Suspicion was already falling on Tituba, because she would tell the girls tales of voodoo and witchcraft from her native land. On February 29th, arrest warrants were issued for Tituba and two other women. Abigail Williams and Betty Parris had named these women as their afflictors. The stories that Betty Parris and Abigail Williams told actually suggest that the two girls may have planned their stories together.

The first three women accused of witchcraft were Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborn. The Putnams brought their complaint against these women to the magistrates, Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne. These magistrates scheduled examinations of the suspected parties.

Hundreds showed up for the examinations, and the girls told stories of how they were attacked by specters of the three women being charged. The entire process may have only led to a warning, but Tituba actually declared that she was a witch. Her confession turned her into a central figure and expanded the prosecutions. After Tituba's confession, the witch hunt began with zeal.

The first child accused of witchcraft was Dorcas Good, the daughter of Sarah Good. She was accused after the three girls said that they were bitten by the specter of Dorcas. These trials continued throughout the summer of 1692, and several were put to death, even those that claimed not to be witches.

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The Salem Witch Trials Questions

Multiple Choice:

1. The Salem Witch Trials took place in:

- a. Salem, Massachusetts
- b. Salem, Pennsylvania
- c. Salem, Minnesota
- d. Salem, Wisconsin

2. People were hung at:

- a. Bunker Hill
- b. Gallows Hill
- c. Hudson River
- d. Erie Canal

3. The trials convicted people of:

- a. shoplifting
- b. animal theft
- c. arson
- d. witchcraft

Fill In:

4. _____ is caused by eating rye that has been infected with the ergot fungus.

5. The first three women accused were Tituba, Sarah Good, and _____.

6. The first child accused of witchcraft was _____.

7. A doctor by the name of _____ was called to examine the girls.

True or False:

___ 8. Tituba actually declared that she was a witch.

___ 9. A neighbor named Mary Sibley recommended a form of counter magic.

___ 10. 30 people were hung after being convicted at the trials.

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The Salem Witch Trials Answers

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