

The Salem witch trials

1692 | Grade 8 · Analyze & connect

Teacher note: this topic includes loss, violence, discrimination, or criminal allegations. Preview and choose a suitable reading together. No reenactment of harm is needed.

Words to know

accuse — say that someone did something wrong

evidence — information that helps support or question a claim

fair — treating people justly

Look closely



Modern topic illustration created for Massachusetts History Explorers. It is not a historical artifact.

Read the story

People accused neighbors of witchcraft. Courts accepted claims without sound proof. Nineteen people were hanged. Giles Corey also died because of the court's actions. Others died in jail. These were real people, not storybook witches.

The crisis spread beyond Salem. Fear, accusations, and flawed procedures produced injustice. Spectral evidence involved claims about invisible appearances. An accusation is not proof that a person committed a crime.

Rights written in a document and rights experienced in daily life can differ. People challenge unequal treatment through organizing, petitions, elections, public debate, and courts. These methods operate in different settings. Identify who had authority and whose participation was restricted. Then ask what changed, what continued, and what further evidence would be needed before making a broader claim.

Think, talk, and show evidence

1. Write an objective summary. Separate the event from the writer's interpretation of its importance.
2. Explain a cause, consequence, or continuity supported by the text. Identify a connection that would need more evidence.
3. Open the research source. Identify its creator or institution and purpose. Is it a contemporary source, a later account, or both?
4. Evaluate the image's date and purpose. Explain one useful detail and one limitation without treating an illustration as eyewitness evidence.

Follow-up reading: The Boston News-Letter

1704

The Boston News-Letter began in 1704. It became the first continuously published newspaper in English America. An earlier Boston newspaper had lasted one issue. Newspapers help us study what people chose to report.

Postmaster John Campbell began the newspaper. Official approval shaped publication. Shipping news, foreign reports, and advertisements reveal priorities and biases; printing a claim did not automatically make it true.

Write a paragraph comparing these events. Use evidence from both passages, distinguish chronology from causation, and identify a perspective missing from the readings.

Teacher guide & source trail

Original classroom adaptation. Suggested reading levels are instructional choices, not standardized readability certifications. Use professional judgment and learner feedback.

ELA practice: RI.8.1: cite evidence; RI.8.2: objective summary; RI.8.6: analyze purpose and viewpoint; RH.6–8.1–2: evidence and summary in history; W.8.2: explanatory writing.

These tasks support selected skills in the [Massachusetts 2017 ELA framework](#); they do not establish mastery of an entire standard.

Answer guidance

Factual anchor: People accused neighbors of witchcraft. Courts accepted claims without sound proof. Nineteen people were hanged. Giles Corey also died because of the court’s actions. Others died in jail. These were real people, not storybook witches. The crisis spread beyond Salem. Fear, accusations, and flawed procedures produced injustice. Spectral evidence involved claims about invisible appearances. An accusation is not proof that a person committed a crime.

Accept accurate main ideas and explanations supported by the text. Vocabulary meanings are in the opening word bank. For picture questions, use the caption and credit below; distinguish what is visible from what is inferred. For comparison, accept a specific connection supported by both readings. Do not require personal accounts of trauma.

Continue the inquiry

[Research source for this event ↗](#)

[Research source for follow-up ↗](#)

[Event page, accessible HTML reading, and vocabulary game ↗](#)

Image: Original site illustration.

[Image source and rights record ↗](#)

The PDF contains selectable English text and embedded fonts. For adjustable text and browser reading tools, use the event’s [HTML page](#). External sources may need adult guidance.