Name: Date:

Ms. Centonze Period:

The Salem Witch Trials

The Reverend ***Samuel Parris*** was the pastor of the Puritan church in Salem Village, Mass.  He was a harsh man who gave sermons about the devil and hell and **damnation**1.  There was no softness in him.

There were many ministers like Parris in those days.   The devil was very real to them.  If a child became mysteriously ill - which was common in those days - it was thought to be the work of the devil.  This might seem silly to us today, but in the late 1600’s people accepted the idea that the devil was as real as the minister giving the sermon.  They believed the devil could actually appear and make people do his evil work.

Supposedly, the devil carried a black book with the signatures of people who would later become witches.  They did the devil’s evil work, and in return the devil promised to protect and reward them.  Great meetings were held called witches’ Sabbaths.  These were held to plan an evil deed for the devil.  They believed some witches traveled great distances, riding on broomsticks or pokers, or mounted on goats or hogs or dogs.  The devil, in the form of a cat, **presided**2  over such meetings while his followers offered him gifts and sacrifices.

During this time, most people really believed in the devil and his witches.  So, there were great witch hunts throughout Europe and the execution of witches was practically a daily occurrence.  This was ***not***common in the American colonies until it hit the small village of Salem in Massachusetts during the ministry of Samuel Parris.

As a new minister, Parris spent most of his time looking for signs of wrongdoing among members of the congregation.  His wife used her time trying to do good deeds about the village.  As a result, their house and children were left in the care of two part-Indian/part-Black slaves that Parris had brought back from the West Indies.  The man did the heavy chores, while the woman, ***Tituba***, cooked, swept, cleaned and took care of the two children.  They were ***Betty*** (11) and ***Abigail*** (13 and a troublemaker).

Tituba brought voodoo tricks from the West Indies with her.  One day in 1692, she used some of her magic to entertain the children during the cold winter days and nights.  Word spread and soon more and more children were coming to see the show.

Trouble began with Betty, who took her father’s sermons very seriously.   The devil was very real to her and she began to fear that he was in the kitchen.   There were times when she would burst into tears, choke and make sounds like a barking dog.  This upset Parris and his wife so they gave Betty lots of attention.  Then, her older sister, Abigail, maybe wanting the same attention, began to get down on all fours, barked and **brayed**3 and sometimes went into**convulsions4**.

Soon, other children sneaked into the kitchen to join the barking and convulsions.  Parris had no idea what was happening, but he concluded that the devil must have entered his holy household.  He called fellow ministers to help him battle these evil forces in a day-long meeting of fasting and prayers.

Some of the girls sat quietly staring while prayers were offered for them.  Others shrieked and held fits at every word.  The star was Abigail who shrieked, barked and threw herself on the floor.  During this activity Betty happened to mention the name Tituba. (the woman who cared for her.)

Soon many things seemed to become clear to the villagers.  Naturally the half Indian/half Black servant Tituba was an agent of the devil.  The “voodoo” she entertained the children with was the evil of the devil.  When Parris confronted her, she claimed they were only innocent tricks, but Parris wouldn’t believe her and began to beat her.  Tituba, was afraid she would be beaten to death, so she broke down and “confessed.”  Yes, she said, she had practiced witchcraft - and the witch hunts began.  Now she had to tell all she “knew”.

The **first** people Tituba named were **unpopular** people in Salem.  ***Sarah Good*** was a pipe smoking, dirty woman who went begging from door to door.  The other was ***Sarah Osbourne***, who had taken a handyman into her home without marrying him.  Also, she had not gone to church for more than a year.

These women were arrested and accused of being witches.  Judges were called to Salem to preside over their trials.  Samuel Parris took notes during the trial and asked the witness

Tituba many questions.  Tituba, remembering the beating, did exactly what was expected of her and told a story that kept the village spellbound for three days.  She told of red cats and red rats who told her: “Serve me.”  She described a “thing” that looked like a cat but had a woman’s face and wings.  It did whatever Sarah Osbourne asked.  She spoke of witch’s Sabbaths and said she had ridden to the meetings on a stick.  When she had signed up in the devil’s black book, she had seen nine names including the names of Sarah Osbourne and Sarah Good.  Now people wondered who the other seven witches were.  Neighbors began looking at each other with great suspicion. At first the girls were quiet during the trial.  Perhaps, they feared what Tituba might say about them.  As it became clear that they had nothing to fear from Tituba, they became bolder.  They began to yelp and cry out that they were being pinched and tortured.  No ordinary witnesses could see these attacks - only the victims.  However, few people doubted the truth of these stories of the attacks.

Two people, ***Giles*** and ***Martha Cory***, did have doubts.  They did not believe in witches.  Martha was a God-fearing woman who never missed a day of church.  But she also said whatever was on her mind, and since she was usually right many people did not like her.  She was visited by members of the church.  Martha told them bluntly, “I do not believe that there are witches.”  A warrant was put out for her arrest, but since it was Saturday the arrest had to wait for Monday.

When the girls saw Martha at church on Sunday, they went into their act of shrieking and crying.  “Look!” cried Abigail.  “There sits Martha Cory on the beam sucking a yellow bird between her fingers.”  The congregation looked in horror, but of course saw nothing.  However, they did not doubt that Martha’s shape was indeed sitting on the beam.

The next day Martha went to the hearing.  The girls were in the seat of honor on the front bench.  When Martha appeared, they began to shriek and twist their bodies.  The judge asked her why she did such things, and Martha said “I don’t.”

“Who does?” demanded the Judge.

“I do not know.  How should I know?” replied Martha.  The girls began to shriek.  They said they heard a drum and could see witches coming from all over the county to a witches’ Sabbath.  Martha, who thought her reputation of goodness would speak for itself, did not know what to do.  “You can’t prove me a witch!” she cried at the judge.

Unfortunately, she was missing the point.  In a witch hunt, the accused must prove he or she is not a witch - something that is almost impossible when people’s minds are already made up.

This trial made people of the village think.  If this god-fearing woman was a witch, who was safe?  And they wondered about the witches’ Sabbath mentioned by the girls.  The size of that gathering meant that the county must be crawling with witches.  Naturally, it was the duty of every good man to help to find them all.

The witch hunt that had begun by attacking those who were disliked and despised, had built up to a mass insanity.   And if accused, you were automatically convicted.

An example of this is the case of ***Rebecca Nurse***.  Rebecca and her husband Francis, developed one of the hardest working and most respected families in all Salem Village.

At the heart of the family was Rebecca Nurse, a wise and gentle woman.  She was 71 years old and sick in bed in the winter of 1692, when she was accused of by the girls at Martha Cory’s trial.

No denial could save her.  Still weak from her illness, she was taken before the judge.  The girls, as usual, started shrieking and going into convulsions.   “Oh, Lord, help me!” Rebecca cried, spreading her hands helplessly.  As she did so, the children spread their hands, too, in exact imitation of her, acting as if Rebecca’s spirit were forcing them to move as she moved.

Along with this, one other event impressed the judges.  Though Rebecca Nurse declared her innocence, and appeared to be about to collapse, she did not weep or cry.  This was highly suspicious, for it was believed that witches could not cry.  And so the aged, trembling Rebecca Nurse was led off to prison.

There were a few people in Salem who stood up to this madness.  One was a farmer by the name of ***John Proctor***.  When Proctor heard that Rebecca Nurse was to be hanged, he said he thought it was the girls who should be hung instead.

He did not realize that the man who stands up to a witch hunt names himself as one of the next victims.

As a result, Proctor’s wife, ***Elizabeth***, was named a witch by the girls.  While Proctor was at her trial trying to defend her, the girls screamed that Elizabeth was sitting on a beam of the meeting house (a favorite seat for witches) and that she had tried to get some of the girls to sign the black book.  Of course, the fact that no one except the girls could see Elizabeth seated on the beam, did not stop people from believing it.

The accusations increased until about 6 people a week were being put in jail.  One of these was the ***Reverend George Burroughs***, who had been the minister in Salem 10 years earlier and at that time was living in the wilderness in Maine.  At first, the judges hesitated to accept the idea of a **minister**, being an agent of the devil.  But Abigail put on a performance that topped everything she had done earlier.  Before a crowd of people in the village she cried out that she saw the minister right there on the street.  “There he stands!” she cried, pointing at the spot.  One man hurled a pitchfork at the spot.  The aim must have been good, for Abigail reported she could hear the minister’s coat tearing!

As the people moved into the meeting house the ghost of the minister supposedly came right along.  A man took out his sword and cut and slashed where he thought the minister was.  Abigail reported that the minister had changed into a grey cat and had been whisked away by another witch.  As soon as the lecture was over, the girls announced that shapes were coming in all the windows.  The men took out their swords and slashed and flailed at the air.

 This was enough for a warrant to be issued for the minister’s arrest.  Just as Burroughs was sitting down to dinner with his family in Maine, deputies marched in, arrested him, and took him back to Salem.  Of course it was sometime before Burroughs knew why he had been arrested.

The jails by now were bursting with “witches.”  It was time for the final trials.   ***William Stoughton***, the Deputy Governor, served as the chief judge.  The juries were made up of ordinary citizens.  When Rebecca Nurse was brought before the court some 20 people risked their lives to testify on her behalf.  Although the girls went through their usual cries, the jury decided that Rebecca was innocent.   Stoughton, however, was not satisfied and told the jury to reconsider their verdict.  After reconsidering, the jury came back to the court with a verdict of guilty.  Then trial after trial ended with the same verdict: guilty.

On August 19th, the Reverend George Burroughs was sent to the gallows where he was given a chance to speak.  His few words were effective, but then he calmly recited the Lord’s Prayer.  It was believed that witches could not speak holy words, which meant, of course, that Burroughs must be innocent.  But another minister said the devil was never more devilish than when he appeared as an angel; it was all a trick.  Burroughs was hanged.

 This witch hunt, like most witch hunts, finally broke down.  The girls became carried away with their success.  They “cried out” on nearly everyone.  They did not know where to stop.  And so they finally accused the ***wife of the Governor***.

This was too much for the Governor.  He knew that his own wife was not a witch.  And if the charges against her were false, how could anyone believe the charges against the other people. ***Governor Phips*** decided to end the whole business, so he ordered that there be no more arrests or commitments.

And that was all there was to it.  With no arrests and no trials, the public performances stopped.  Without all the yelling and crying out, the witch hunt ended.

 1**damnation**: eternal punishment

2**presided**: led the meeting

3**brayed**: make loud noises like a donkey

4**convulsions**: shaking violently

Questions:

1. What was the name of the pastor of the Puritan church in Salem, MA? What short of person was he?

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1. Name an example that shows that witches (and the devil) were very real to people at the time.

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Can you think of any reason why so many people (in the U.S. and Europe) believed in witches?

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1. Did Parris and his wife spend very much time with their children? Why Not? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How did Tituba entertain the children (Betty and Abigail)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What did Betty begin to do that seemed strange?

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How did Mr. and Mrs. Parris respond to Betty? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think Abigail began to act so strangely?

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1. Why did Tituba confess to being a witch?

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1. The first two people the children accused of being withes were Sarah \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and Sarah \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Why do you think many people were quick to believe that these two women were witches? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. How many witches did Tituba say were in the devil’s black book? \_\_\_\_\_\_ Why did this mean they had to find more witches? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. During the trial of the two Sarahs, could anyone actually *see* the girls being hurt? \_\_\_\_\_ Why do you think these people believed the stories anyway? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Martha Corey was a religious person who went to church every Sunday. Why was she disliked by many people?

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At her trial, Martha Corey said, “You cannot prove me a witch.” In most trials this is a good defense. Why didn’t this help in this trial?

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1. At the trial of Rebecca Nurse, two things happened that convinced the judge Rebecca was a witch. What were they?

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2)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. How did John Proctor “cure” Mary Warren? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What did John Proctor say that made people think he was a witch?

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1. What did many of the men in the village do when they heard that Reverend George Burroughs was nearby?

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1. The jury decided that Rebecca Nurse was innocent of being a witch. Why was she found guilty anyway?

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1. What did George Burroughs do that should have proved that he was not a witch?

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Why was he hanged anyway? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Why did Governor Phips stop the witch hunt?

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1. Why do you think the girls stopped “crying out” once the arrests and trials had ended? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why do you think the girls (Betty, Abigail, Mary and several others) Started “accusing people of being witches” in the first place? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think so many people believed them?

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