

Salem Witch Trials

The town of Salem, Massachusetts has been thrown into hysteria thanks to a witch hunt! The citizens are betraying each other, accusing their neighbors, trying each other in court, and even hanging friends and acquaintances. Mrs. Rayburn, the town minister, is committed to ridding the town of these evils and leading the citizens through the trials.

Participants: Between 25 and 30 high school juniors.

Materials: Paper doll template

Accusation guidelines

House blueprints

Prison sheet

Court sheet

Hanging sheet

Graveyard sheet

Goals: Students will delve into the historical aspects of the Salem Witch Trials, making our reading of *The Crucible* more understandable and tangible. Students will have an opportunity to create characters and experiences choices for playable action. Students will become acquainted with other class members. Students will develop and maintain a character over several class days.

Tennessee Curriculum Standards (11th grade)

Reading

RI.KID.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Writing

W.TTP.3 Write narrative fiction or literary nonfiction to convey experiences and/or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

History

SSP.05.b Develop historical awareness by perceiving and presenting past events and issues as they might have been experienced by the people of the time, with historical empathy rather than present-mindedness.

SSP.05.c Develop historical awareness by evaluating how unique circumstances of time and place create context and contribute to action and reaction.

Theatre Standards

HS3.T.Cn2.B Explore how cultural, global, and historic belief systems affect creative choices in a theatrical work.

HS3.T.Cr2.B Develop and refine a dramatic concept or character to demonstrate a critical understanding of the historical and cultural influences of original ideas applied to a theatrical work.

HS3.T.Cr1.C Integrate cultural and historical contexts with personal experiences to create a character that is believable and authentic in a theatrical work.

HS3.T.P1.A Analyze and apply unique choices to create believable and sustainable characters in a theatrical work.

Day One Activities

- Welcome students to Salem. We will create and simulate the village of Salem, Massachusetts in 1692.
- In character. Introduce Mrs. Rayburn. I am now not only your teacher but your minister.
- We will be identifying people in the village who are suspected of being witches and try them to the full extent of the law.
- First we need to get into family groups and create the village.
- The students will be split into groups of four based on previous preference questionnaires.
- Each family group must pick a family name and design the family home.
- Each individual will make and decorate a paper doll proportional to the house to represent your character.
- After these tasks are complete, we will reconvene as a village to discuss the layout of the town.
- We need groups to create the town sign (with population), graveyard, church, jail, forest, and gallows and stocks.
- Write a journal entry about your first day in Salem, your family, and your character.

Day Two Activities

- It has been one week in Salem, so it is time for us to join the trials.
- Your ultimate goal is to keep your family together. The family with the most remaining members at the end of the simulation wins.
- The students will review the judicial process from *The Crucible*.
- Mrs. Rayburn will warn them against cavorting in the forest but encourage them to make alliances.

- The village will determine the reasons why someone might be accused of witchcraft. We will look at research for why people were accused in 1692 and in *The Crucible*.
- How can we make these reasons reflect modern times? NOTHING MEAN. Ex: then--birthmarks. Now--dyed hair
- The village will confer and create a list of characteristics of a witch.
- After conferring with Reverend Hale we have learned there are witches among us.
- Go home, pray with your family, and turn in the names of two suspicious people and three reasons for each.
- Mrs. Rayburn will announce the top three accused.
- The accused will be allowed to craft a defense for themselves, and the village will craft a prosecution.
- Write a journal entry answering these questions in the form of a narrative: how did you feel nominating people? Why did you nominate them? OR how did you feel being accused of witchcraft?

Day Three Activities

- Trial day.
- The accused will stand before the court and defend themselves.
- The village will nominate three representatives to provide a prosecution argument against each of the accused.
- After the arguments, the village will determine if the accused are innocent or guilty.
- The innocent will return home to their families.
- The guilty will be sent to the gallows.
- The guilty are allowed to confess to witchcraft. If they confess, they must name at least one other person they saw with the Devil. If they confess, they are sent back to jail.
- If the guilty do not confess or do not accuse with sufficient reasoning, they will be hanged in the gallows.
- The only way for the guilty and confessed to get out of jail is if the village determines someone else is guilty and you are innocent.
- Day three will repeat until the simulation reaches its conclusion.
- Write a journal entry answering these questions: did you feel that your defense was good enough to prove your innocence? OR how did you feel being responsible for sending people to their deaths?

End of Simulation Activities

- Write a final journal entry detailing what happened to your character or your character's family (if dead).
- Out of character.
- Discuss the dangers of the spread of misinformation and the unfairness of the justice system in *The Crucible* as a full group.
- Write these thoughts down in your journal.