



Day 15 Colonization Unit
70 Minutes

Salem Witch Trials

Lesson Title

The Salem Witch Trials: Fear, Evidence, and Justice

Grade Levels: 5–9

Time: 60–75 minutes

Unit: Puritan New England / Colonial Government & Society

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain what caused the Salem Witch Trials
 - Define and understand the dangers of *spectral evidence*
 - Describe the role of Tituba and explain what a coerced confession is
 - Analyze how fear and hysteria can lead to injustice
 - Apply historical understanding creatively through a billboard design
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Materials

- PowerPoint: *The Salem Witch Trials (Grades 5–9)*
- Differentiated Article: *The Salem Witch Trials* (from your site)
- Reading Comprehension Options (teacher choice):

- Online or printable activity: **“Welcome to Salem” Billboard Maker**
 - Student notebooks or organizers
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Lesson Structure Overview

- **PowerPoint & Guided Discussion:** 20 minutes
 - **Article Reading & Comprehension:** 25–30 minutes
 - **Creative Culminating Activity:** 15–20 minutes
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Part 1: PowerPoint With Teacher Script (20 Minutes)

<https://lernaboutamerica.com/13colonies/plans/salem.pptx>

Slide 1 – The Salem Witch Trials (1692–1693)

Teacher Script:

“Today we’re learning about the Salem Witch Trials, a tragic event in colonial Massachusetts. During this time, fear and suspicion caused people to accuse their neighbors of witchcraft. More than 200 people were accused, and many innocent lives were lost.”

Slide 2 – Life in Puritan New England

Teacher Script:

“Puritan life was strict and deeply religious. People believed God controlled everything that happened. When something went wrong—like illness or crop failure—many Puritans believed it was caused by sin or the Devil.”

Slide 3 – Where Did the Trials Take Place?

Teacher Script:

“The trials mainly took place in Salem Village and Salem Town. These communities had tensions over land, money, and power. Stress and conflict made people more likely to suspect one another.”

Slide 4 – How Did the Accusations Begin?

Teacher Script:

“The trials began when a group of young girls behaved strangely—crying, screaming, and having fits. Doctors could not explain what was happening, so witchcraft was blamed. Once accusations began, they spread quickly.”

Slide 5 – Who Was Accused?

Teacher Script:

“People from all walks of life were accused—women, men, and even children. Often, those accused were social outsiders or people involved in disputes. In Salem, no one was truly safe from suspicion.”

Slide 6 – The Trials and Evidence Used

Teacher Script (key vocabulary):

“One of the most dangerous ideas used during the trials was *spectral evidence*.

Spectral evidence meant someone claimed they saw a person’s spirit or ghost harming them. There was no physical proof—only visions or dreams. Today, this kind of evidence would never be allowed in court.”

Slide 7 – Tituba and Confessions

Teacher Script (important clarification):

“One of the first accused was **Tituba**, an enslaved woman from the Caribbean. After being threatened and pressured, she confessed to witchcraft. This is called a **coerced confession**, meaning someone admits guilt because they are afraid or forced—not because it is true. Her confession increased fear and encouraged more accusations.”

Slide 8 – Punishments and Executions

Teacher Script:

“As a result of the trials, 19 people were hanged. One man, Giles Corey, was pressed to death for refusing to plead. Others died in prison. These punishments show how serious and deadly the hysteria became.”

Slide 9 – Why Did the Trials End?

Teacher Script:

“Eventually, leaders began to question the fairness of the trials. The governor stopped the court, and spectral evidence was no longer allowed. Later, the colony admitted that mistakes had been made.”

Slide 10 – Lessons from the Salem Witch Trials

Teacher Script:

“The Salem Witch Trials teach us the dangers of fear, rumors, and unfair justice. They remind us why evidence matters and why protecting people’s rights is essential.”

Part 2: Differentiated Article & Reading Comprehension (25–30 Minutes)

Article Reading

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/admin/pages/american-history/13-colonies/events-of-the-13-colonies/salem-witch-trials>

Differentiation Options

Click “simplify article” for younger readers (if you are a subscriber)

Guided Reading Prompts

- “Highlight examples of fear or hysteria.”
- “Underline how evidence was used unfairly.”
- “Circle details about Tituba and confessions.”

Review the discussion questions and the vocabulary terms at the bottom of the article

[LearnAboutAmerica.com](https://learnaboutamerica.com) offers many reading comprehension options for the Salem Witch Trials. Choose the option that best suits the needs of your class.

- [Salem Witch Trials Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1000
 - [Salem Witch Trials Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1000
 - [The Examination of Sarah Good: Primary Source Super Comprehension](#) - Lexile 950
 - [Tituba of Salem Village Printable/Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 720; 920
 - [Life in Puritan Massachusetts Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 900
 - [Life in Puritan Massachusetts Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 900
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Part 3: Culminating Activity – “Welcome to Salem” Billboard (15–20 Minutes)

Activity Overview

Students create a “**Welcome to Salem**” billboard that reflects what Salem was like during the trials. This can be done using our online Salem billboard maker, or, offline using our printout.

Online -

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/13-colonies-fun-activities/welcome-to-salem-billboard-maker>

In this creative digital activity, students step into the year **1693**, just after the Salem Witch Trials. Their task is to design a colorful “**Welcome to Salem**” billboard using a fully interactive online tool. Students can edit text, choose from spooky colonial fonts, use a **fill tool** to change the background, and decorate their sign with **witch-themed stamps**—including multiple kinds of witches, brooms, potions, and more. They can also generate a humorous, witchy slogan to spark ideas or write their own. When finished, students can **save** their design or **print** their completed billboard as a final product. This activity blends history, creativity, and technology to help students imagine what a 17th-century welcome sign *might* have looked like—with a fun twist!

[Printable Version](#)