How can we prepare to learn about the Salem Witchcraft Trials?
Between February 1692 and May 1693, people were accused and brought to court on allegations of witchcraft.

- 150 arrested and imprisoned
- 29 convicted of felony witchcraft
- 19 hanged (14 women and five men)
- One man pressed to death with large stones
- Five died in prison

In reality, this isn’t a large number of people. Why are we still interested in what happened nearly 400 years ago?
The **Puritans** were a group of the Church of England who disagreed with certain religious practices: worship of idols and ceremonial rituals.

**Theocracy** – No separation of church and state. Religious rules would make up most of the laws that run society, and the church would be the head of government.

**Puritans** – Wanted to “purify” the church.
Crucible: A crucible is an extremely challenging burden or hardship that one endures. The Puritans believed that by having a personal crucible, they would prove themselves worthy of being admitted into heaven.

A crucible is a science instrument used to burn metals because of the high temperatures it creates.
• They believed they were God’s chosen ones.
• They felt God justified all their actions, so they stood firm in their resolve.
• If someone were to criticize them or harm them, they would turn the other cheek, believing that God would take care of them in the end.

What did the Puritans believe?
Puritan Beliefs: We’re all Sinners

1. First, they believed that humans were despicable beings – **Original Sin**

2. They subscribed to the belief of **unconditional election**. Before God created the world, he chose certain individuals to be saved.
3. The Puritans believed in Limited Atonement. Basically, only the true were predestined.

4. Irresistible Grace: Once God chose someone for salvation, that person could not resist God’s grace.
5. The Puritans believed in **Perseverance of the Saints**. A person elected by God's grace would never leave the path to salvation. The person would have complete power to understand the word of God, and would never turn towards evil.
Was against the law to not attend church.

Men and women sat on different sides of church. Children didn’t sit with parents; were expected to be completely silent.

Service began with a prayer, given by the minister, that lasted about an hour. Following prayer, the minister would give his sermon – which would last from two to four hours.

No music. No bathroom breaks. No heat or air conditioning.

Church for Puritans
What does this suggest?
No privacy – moral police and fines
Nothing could be immodest. If anyone did dishonest or immoral things, such as use profanity or have an affair, he or she would be fined and punished by the court.

Valued literacy and reading the Bible for direct interaction with God

How does this illustration depict Puritan life?
Examining Puritan Life

• Describe the painting. What are the mother and child doing? Describe their clothes.
• Describe the faces of the mother and child. How would you describe their emotions?
• What new information does this portrait give you about life for seventeenth-century Puritans?

Elizabeth Clarke Freake (Mrs. John Freake) and Baby Mary, about 1671 and 1674
Women: subservient to men and naturally evil, following the teachings of the Bible. Stems from Adam and Eve.

Social order: Men, married women, single women, children.
The Role of Puritan Women

Tombstones in Salem: Look closely at both of these tombstones. What do they tell you about the role of women in Puritan society?
Instructions on Good Manners for Colonial Children (1773)

“Make a bow always when you come home, and be immediately uncovered. Never sit in the presence of thy parents without bidding, tho’ no stranger be present. If thou passest by thy parents, and any place where thou seest them, when either by themselves or with company, bow towards them. Dispute not, nor delay to obey thy parents commands. Quarrel not nor contend with thy brethren or sisters, but live in love, peace, and unity.”

What does this suggest about the role of Puritan children?
The Nurse family were prosperous farmers who were well-respected in the community and devout Christians.

On the next few slides, pay attention to details from the inside of the house. What does this tell you about Puritan life?
Observations? What does this tell you about Puritan Life?
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Life With Native Americans

- Puritans thought it was their destiny to expand their domain, taking Native land
- Constant Native American fights on fringes of frontier
- Associated with the Devil
- Harsh living conditions and death. Widespread diseases (smallpox) killed many
The Puritans tried, unsuccessfully, to convert Indians to Christianity. They thought they were doing the Indians a favor by saving them from damnation.
Belief in the Supernatural

- Supernatural world coexists with real world
- Devils and angels compete for a person’s soul
- Must be on guard at all times – little things could be the work of the Devil
- Most at risk were young, single women as they might become “married” to the Devil
Belief in the Supernatural

- The Puritans believed people were **not born witches**
- At some point, they were approached by the Devil to come and be with him
- Those who followed signed his book, meaning they made a compact with him

“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”
Exodus 22:18
What is a Witch?

“A witch is a magician, who either by open or secret league, wittingly and willingly contenteth to use the aid and assistance of the devil, in the working of wonders…the woman being the weaker sex, is sooner entangled by the devil’s illusions with this damnable art, than the man…The more women, the more witches. His first temptation in the beginning, was with Eve a woman, and since he pursueth his practice accordingly, as making most for his advantage.”

William Perkins: A Discourse on the Damned Art of Witchcraft, So Far Forth as It is Revealed in the Scriptures and Manifest by True Experience, 1608
How to Determine a Witch?

Option One
“The free and voluntary confession of the crime, made by the party suspected and accused after examination…”

Option Two
“The testimony of two witnesses, of good and honest report, avouching before the magistrate upon their knowledge . . . that the party accused, hath made a league with the devil.”

Option Three
“The party hath entertained a familiar spirit, and had a conference with it, in the for or likeness of mouse, cat.”

From The Wonderful Discovery of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, 1619
In the 16th century, a new Christian theory developed based on Christian theology, law and philosophical ideas. This theory was that a *witch had made a deliberate pact with the devil* – almost a form of a personal arrangement – but that a *witch did not act alone*. Therefore if one witch existed in a locality, there had to be more. This led to a shift in the persecution of witches. Whereas a village may have punished an individual in the past, now the Christian witch theory demanded that more be found within one locality.
Europe had many witch hunts during the 16th century, killing thousands, predominantly women.

Practice became more obsolete during the 17th century.

**Witch Hunt:** An investigation carried out to uncover subversive activities but actually used to harass those with differing views.

**Subversive:** intended to overthrow or undermine the government.
Witchcraft Act of 1563: Under Queen Elizabeth I of England, witchcraft received the death penalty only where harm had been caused. Lesser witchcraft offences were punishable by a term of imprisonment.

Witchcraft Act of 1604: Under King James I, the penalty of death without benefit of clergy was given to anyone who invoked evil spirits or communed with familiar spirits.

Witchcraft Act of 1735: A person who claimed to have the power to call up spirits, or foretell the future, or cast spells, or discover the whereabouts of stolen goods, was to be punished as a vagrant and a con artist, subject to fines and imprisonment.
• **Spectral evidence:** Evidence based on ghostly or supernatural proof.
• Poppets (Voodoo dolls)
• Books other than the Bible
• “Witch’s teats” on accused – mole or blemish insensitive to touch,
• Cries caused by a dog eating a “witch’s cake”
• The touch test
Puritan Punishments

- **Excommunication** – sent to the forest with the Native Americans
- Formal expulsion for the Church and refusal to enter Heaven in the afterlife
- **Hanging:** Public and a form of entertainment. Not all died instantly when they were hanged and it served as a visual reminder not to perform evil actions
- **Jail and seizure of property**
- Pleading guilty to witchcraft would save your life, but gave grounds for the Crown to seize property that might not be given back later
Puritan Punishments

Giles Corey, 80

- Pressed to death with large stones as a way to “press” a confession out of him
- *peine forte et dure* – practice not used by British for years
- Died two days after pressing without entering plea
- Refusal to plead a way to prevent estate being confiscated by crown and a protest against the trials
Salem Village vs. Salem Town

**Salem Village:** 550 people, 90 houses – mostly farmers  
**Salem Town:** 1,400 people in 1692 – wealthy merchants

**Parish pastor debate:** Burroughs vs. Parris

**Parsonage compensations:** In addition to the money wanted land

**Land disputes:** Multiple families claimed ownership of same land or would hunt in forest property that did not belong to them

At the time of the trials, there began a movement away from traditional Puritan practices
How did it all begin?

Betty Parris, the nine year-old daughter of the village’s minister, Samuel Parris, and his niece, Abigail Williams, became strangely sick. The girls complained of pinching, prickling sensations, knifelike pains, and the feeling of being choked. Soon, three more girls showed similar symptoms.

Reverend Parris and several doctors began to suspect that witchcraft was responsible. They pressed the girls to name the witches tormenting them. The girls named three women, the third being Parris’s Indian slave, Tituba. Tituba confessed to being a witch, testifying that four women and a man were causing the girls’ illness.
This is a recreation of the actual meetinghouse, built on the Rebecca Nurse Homestead for the 1984 movie, *Three Sovereigns for Sarah.*

Most of the events of the trials (hearings, examinations) would have taken place in the Salem Village Meetinghouse.
Inside the Meetinghouse

Seating
What caused the hysteria in Salem?

- Native American fears – Indian wars
- Fear that the Devil’s men (Indians) were lurking in the forests
- Xenophobia: Racism toward Spanish Indians and Native Americans
- Spread of smallpox and other diseases
- Especially harsh winter

What caused the hysteria in Salem?
Why did the girls behave in such a manner?

- Bored teens
- No freedom
- Treatment of teenage girls as property and inferior status
- Strict and humorless life
- Ability to gain power and prestige
Other causes?

- Property feuds
- Congregation fights
- Family grudges
- Personal issue between the accuser and the accused
- Ergot poisoning

- A way to get desires fulfilled
- A way to rid the community of those considered unworthy of living on the “city upon a hill”
Paying Tribute – Danvers, MA

Most excommunications reversed by 1712
In 1957, the rest were cleared of any charges
Salem Memorial

Dedicated in 1992
by Elie Wiesel
A monument was erected to honor Rebecca Nurse on her homestead in the 1800s. It is believed her children took her body after she was hung and buried it in an unmarked footstone in the homestead’s graveyard.
Salem Village Parsonage

1892 illustration of the Salem Village Parsonage, Reverend Parris’ house
Archaeological Site
Salem, MA today