



Landmark Events in American History

The Salem Witch Trials

Teacher's Guide written by Susan Nations, M.Ed.

Series Overview:

The *Landmark Events in American History* series examines important events in the history of the United States. It explores the causes and significance of key moments and developments and takes a fresh look at both myths and heroes. The legacies of these events, whether good or bad, are also explained. Each book is 48 pages in length and includes both full-color photos and archival illustrations. In addition, each book uses an array of informational text features to bring alive these stories of the nation's past, from the cultures of ancient America to the turning points of recent times.

Features of Informational Text:

Each title in the series *Landmark Events in American History* is filled with such features as clear maps, charts, time lines, archival illustrations, and primary-source documents that enhance and supplement the running text. These important features of informational text invite student inquiry and investigation both in the classroom and independently.

The Salem Witch Trials:

In 1692, Salem Village in the Massachusetts Bay Colony was rocked by a series of accusations made by young girls in the community. The girls accused other people in the village of witchcraft, setting in motion a series of events that led to the imprisonment, trial, and execution of many innocent people. This book looks at the background to the Salem Witch Trials, shedding light on the event with an examination of society in Puritan New England. It details the course of the trials and their impact over time, from the 1690s to the 1900s.

The following three pages of the Teacher's Guide include:

- Discussion Questions and Inquiries for Readers
- Introduction and prediction
- Reading the Introduction
- Chapter-by-chapter discussion questions and conversation
- Conclusion discussion
- Time Line investigation
- Focus on Informational Text Features
- Vocabulary Building
- Critical Reading Strategies and Test Preparation

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Discussion Questions and Inquiries for Readers:

Introduction and prediction. Ask students to read the back cover blurb about the Salem Witch Trials. After students read, explain that the blurb gives readers a glimpse into the contents of the book. Make a list titled *What We Know*. Ask students to come up with phrases that describe what they know about Salem Witch Trials simply by reading the blurb. Ask them to add any other information that they think they know from any prior knowledge they may have. After creating this list, ask students to browse through the rest of the book and make a prediction about what they will learn as they read.

Read the Introduction (pages 4–5). Students should read this section independently. Ask each student to make summary statement comparing life in 1692 with life today. Discuss any similarities and differences between communities then and now.

Chapter 1: Witches (pages 6–11). After students read this chapter, use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- What is the difference between “black” and “white” magic? (page 6)
- Explain the meaning of pagan religions. (pages 6–7)
- What were some of the early beliefs about witches? (page 9)
- Explain the term “malignant touch.” (page 11)

Chapter 2: The Accusations Begin (pages 12–19). Prior to reading this chapter, discuss the meaning of its title—“The Accusations Begin.” Ask students to share how the reading to this point helps support their discussion. Students can then read this chapter independently or with a partner. When they are finished, ask them to recall events that took place in the beginning of the time that led to the Salem Witch Trials. You may want them to compare their “oral time line” with the one on page 44 of the book.

Chapter 3: The Witch Trials (pages 20–29). Students should read this chapter independently. Each student should select one shaded text box and write two to three sentences to summarize its contents for the group. Discuss students’ summaries in the group.

Chapter 4: Doubts and Questions (pages 30–35). Before students read this chapter, ask each of them to create a simple T-chart labeled “Doubts” on one side and “Questions” on the other. Then divide the chapter into parts using the subheadings. Assign each student one or more parts to read. As they read, have them note some of the doubts and questions people began to have and ask as the witch trials continued. (Note: Students will have to imply questions that may have been asked using details and information from the text.) After reading, students should share their notes with the rest of the group.

Chapter 5: Making Amends (pages 36–41). After students read this chapter, discuss the following vocabulary words and phrases: *accusations, allegations, delusion, hysteria, repentance, unquestioning faith.*

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Conclusion (pages 42–43). After students read the conclusion of the book, have them revisit the What We Know list created during the introduction and prediction discussion. Ask each student to write one or two paragraphs telling what they learned about Salem Witch Trials from reading the book. Students can share their paragraphs in the group.

Time Line (page 44). Let students skim and scan the time line and make observations about the entries. (Note: You may need to help students notice that there are many entries for the year 1692.) Ask students how information prior to and after 1692 helps enhance understanding of the events of that year.

Choose one of the following activities to invite students to revisit the text:

Focus on Informational Text Features: Strategic readers know how to use chapter titles and subheadings to help them understand a topic or concept. Ask students to begin by looking at the Table of Contents on page 3. Discuss how the author might have decided to organize this book. Then assign one or more students to each chapter. They should note the subheadings in their chapter. Ask each student to explain how his or her chapter is organized. How do the subheadings support the reader's understanding of the chapter?

Vocabulary Building: When students read informational books and articles, it is important for them to think about the specialized vocabulary in the text. The vocabulary helps them know and understand more about the topic. Strategic readers can sort and organize vocabulary into categories. Write selected vocabulary words from the Glossary (on page 45 of the book) on small index cards. Students can practice thinking about word meanings and sorting the specialized vocabulary into the following categories: *culture, place, attitude, judicial*. Students can add other words from the text to each category.

Critical Reading Strategies and Test Preparation: There are many people who were part of the Salem Witch Trials. There is basic biographical information about many of them in this book, either in the context of the running text or in a sidebar of information. Ask students to use the form on page 4 of this guide to locate information about some of these people. Students can use the Index or skim and scan the book to find information about each person listed. Remind them that skimming is a quick look with the eyes for relevant information, while scanning is then used to confirm that the information is in fact the right information. After completing the chart in this activity, each student should also select one person to research further via the Internet or your school's Media Center.

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Name: _____ Date: _____

People of the Salem Witch Trials

Directions: Use the chart below to record information about some people who were part of the Salem Witch Trials. Remember to use the Index, Table of Contents, or skimming and scanning to locate information in the text.

Person	I found this on page(s)	Connection to the Salem Witch Trials	Interesting fact about this person	A question I have about this person
Bridget Bishop				
Martha Corey				
John Hathorne				
Tituba Indian				
Cotton Mather				
Increase Mather				
Rebecca Nurse				
Samuel Parris				
William Phips				
Abigail Williams				

Challenge: Select one of these people or another famous person from the Salem Witch Trials to research further. On a separate piece of paper, write what you learned about this person.

Susan Nations, M.Ed., is a literacy coach, author, and staff developer living in Sarasota, Florida. She has worked with teachers around the United States on literacy development and instruction in the elementary classroom. She is the co-author of *Primary Literacy Centers: Making Reading and Writing STICK!* and *So Much Stuff, So Little Space: Creating and Managing the Learner-Centered Classroom*.

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