

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #548
The Salem Witch Trials
23rd May, 2025

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Transcript

[00:00:05] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about the Salem Witch Trials.

[00:00:28] It's a story of suspicion, the devil, witchcraft–[alleged¹](#) witchcraft, I should add–mass [hysteria²](#), [hints³](#) of psychedelic drugs, and justice.

[00:00:40] OK then, let's step into the icy, [unsettling⁴](#) world of the Salem Witch Trials.

[00:00:48] The winter of 1692 was particularly cold in Massachusetts.

[00:00:54] The temperature rarely got above freezing point, and many of the ponds and rivers had been [frozen over⁵](#) since late the previous year.

¹ said to be true but not proven

² wild fear or emotion that spread

³ small signs or clues

⁴ making you feel worried or scared

⁵ covered in ice

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:01:04] In the small village of Salem, the 500 or so Puritan [settlers](#)⁶ did everything they could to stay warm.

[00:01:13] Church was, of course, a regular [occurrence](#)⁷.

[00:01:16] This was a highly religious community.

[00:01:20] And what these god-fearing men and women feared the most was, naturally, the devil.

[00:01:28] In Salem Village, the devil wasn't just a story whispered to scare children; he was real.

[00:01:35] To the 500 or so Puritans [huddled](#)⁸ in their icy wooden homes, he was an ever-present enemy, [lurking](#)⁹ in the shadows, waiting to [snatch](#)¹⁰ their [souls](#)¹¹.

[00:01:48] But why were they so afraid?

⁶ people who had moved to the place to live

⁷ something that happened, event

⁸ staying close together, because of cold or fear

⁹ hiding and waiting to do something bad

¹⁰ grab or take quickly

¹¹ people's spirits or essential nature

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:01:51] Why did this small, God-fearing community see the devil behind every misfortune?

[00:01:58] Well, these [settlers](#) weren't just a random collection of English people, they were Puritans, a group so [strict](#)¹², so [devoted](#)¹³, that they'd crossed an ocean to build a 'pure' life.

[00:02:12] Back in England, their parents or grandparents had watched the Protestant Reformation [unfold](#)¹⁴, and they believed the Church of England, the Protestant church, hadn't gone far enough to [strip away](#)¹⁵ Catholic [influences](#)¹⁶.

[00:02:29] So they sailed across the Atlantic, dreaming of a holy community, a shining "city upon a hill".

¹² following rules very closely

¹³ very faithful or devout

¹⁴ happen

¹⁵ remove completely

¹⁶ effects or control

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:02:38] But that dream came with a **catch**¹⁷: if they were God's chosen people, and of course, they **fervently**¹⁸ believed that they were, the devil would surely try to destroy them.

[00:02:52] And in early 1692, life gave them plenty of reasons to feel that the devil was **edging**¹⁹ closer.

[00:03:01] The winter was **brutal**²⁰, **crops**²¹ had failed, **smallpox**²² had **swept**²³ through, and Indian **raids**²⁴ from the north had left families **grieving**²⁵.

¹⁷ a hidden problem or disadvantage

¹⁸ with strong feeling or belief

¹⁹ moving slowly and carefully towards them

²⁰ very cruel or harsh

²¹ plants grown for food

²² a deadly disease that caused spots and fever

²³ moved quickly through the place

²⁴ surprise attacks

²⁵ feeling very sad because someone had died

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:03:13] Every **creak**²⁶ of the floorboards, every **howl**²⁷ of the wind through the frozen trees, felt like a sign.

[00:03:21] The Puritans believed the devil wasn't some distant figure, someone you might meet in hell if you didn't live a god-fearing life; he was here, or rather, his secret servants were.

[00:03:34] These servants were witches, people, almost exclusively women, who had made a **pact**²⁸ with Satan, a deal with the devil.

[00:03:44] And they weren't random strangers; they were neighbours, friends, even family, who were working with the devil.

[00:03:54] His tricks were clever: he could send '**spectres**²⁹,' invisible spirits, to **pinch**³⁰ or **choke**³¹ you in the night.

²⁶ a high sound made by something old or moving slowly

²⁷ a loud, sad cry

²⁸ a deal or agreement

²⁹ invisible spirits

³⁰ squeeze the skin between fingers

³¹ make you unable to breathe, strangle

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:04:02] He could turn your cow's milk **sour**³² or make your children fall ill and die.

[00:04:08] Every Sunday, Reverend Samuel Parris, the village minister, would stand in front of his **congregation**³³ and **preach**³⁴ exactly this.

[00:04:18] Beware the devil; he has evil and **cunning**³⁵ ways, and he is sending witches to test you.

[00:04:26] Perhaps it all sounded theoretical, but in January of 1692, he noticed something unusual happening in his own house.

[00:04:38] His daughter, Betty, and her cousin Abigail, started behaving strangely.

[00:04:44] They were only 9 and 11 years old, but suddenly, they weren't acting like children anymore.

³² bad or tainted

³³ a group of people at the church

³⁴ talk about religion in a serious way

³⁵ clever in a sneaky way

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:04:51] They **twitched**³⁶ and **shook**³⁷, cried out in pain, and complained of being **pinched**³⁸ or bitten. But there was nothing there. It wasn't mice, it wasn't some **pest**³⁹, or **bed bugs**⁴⁰. They seemed to be being attacked by some invisible force.

[00:05:13] At first, it might have seemed like a sickness. After all, the winter had been **harsh**⁴¹, and disease wasn't uncommon.

[00:05:22] But when a local doctor examined them and found no clear cause, he gave an altogether different explanation: witchcraft.

[00:05:34] To the Puritans, this made perfect sense.

[00:05:38] If the devil was real, and his witches were among them, then these girls were under attack.

[00:05:47] Word spread quickly through the village.

³⁶ moved quickly without meaning to

³⁷ moved back and forth fast

³⁸ squeezed or nipped

³⁹ small animal or bug that bothered people

⁴⁰ small insects that lived in beds and bit people

⁴¹ very hard or cruel

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:05:50] Salem was small, only about 500 people, so news travelled fast, from house to house, whispered over fences and church [pews](#)⁴².

[00:06:01] Soon, other girls in the village started showing the same signs.

[00:06:07] Ann Putnam Jr., a 12-year-old from a powerful family, and Mercy Lewis, a 17-year-old servant, joined Betty and Abigail in their [fits](#)⁴³.

[00:06:18] They screamed about invisible [tormentors](#)⁴⁴, pointed fingers, and [named names](#)⁴⁵.

[00:06:25] The first to be accused were the kind of people you might expect in a suspicious little village: [outcasts](#)⁴⁶, people on the edges.

⁴² benches in a church

⁴³ sudden shaking or strange behaviour

⁴⁴ people who hurt or scared them on purpose

⁴⁵ told on others or gave their names to get them in trouble

⁴⁶ people who were left out by the community

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:06:34] There was Sarah Good, a [beggar](#)⁴⁷ who smoked a pipe and [muttered](#)⁴⁸ under her breath when anyone [refused her charity](#)⁴⁹.

[00:06:43] Then Sarah Osborne, an older woman who'd shocked the village by marrying her servant and committing the most [scandalous](#)⁵⁰ crime of all: [skipping](#)⁵¹ church.

[00:06:55] And finally, Tituba, a black slave woman who worked in Reverend Parris's own home.

[00:07:02] Now, not much is known about Tituba.

[00:07:06] It's thought she might have come from the Caribbean, perhaps Haiti, and if so, she may well have told the girls stories about [Voodoo](#)⁵², spirits and fortune-telling. These might have sounded weird and fascinating, but with the accusation of witchcraft, to her Puritan master, they sounded like the work of the devil.

⁴⁷ a person who asked others for money or food

⁴⁸ spoke quietly and unclearly

⁴⁹ wasn't kind or helpful

⁵⁰ shocking or very bad for reputation

⁵¹ not attending or going to

⁵² a religion with spirits and magic, often misunderstood

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The Salem Witch Trials

[00:07:30] Under pressure, Tituba [confessed](#)⁵³.

[00:07:33] She was questioned for days, beaten, and likely told that [confessing](#)⁵⁴ could save her life, while denying it would mean death.

[00:07:43] In a village [gripped](#)⁵⁵ by fear, she had little choice but to give them what they wanted: a story.

[00:07:51] She described visions of black dogs, red cats, and witches flying through the air, details that matched Puritan fears perfectly.

[00:08:01] She said she'd met the devil, that he'd asked her to serve him, and that she'd seen other witches in Salem signing his book, a sort of evil guest list.

[00:08:15] Her [confession](#)⁵⁶ wasn't just a story; it was [fuel](#)⁵⁷.

[00:08:20] Suddenly, the village had [proof](#)⁵⁸, or so they thought.

⁵³ admitted doing something wrong

⁵⁴ telling that she had done something bad

⁵⁵ held tightly

⁵⁶ a formal statement admitting that she was guilty

⁵⁷ something that would cause passion, argument, or other intense emotion

⁵⁸ something that showed it was true

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:08:25] If Tituba was a witch, then the girls' **fits** weren't imagination; they were evidence.

[00:08:32] And if there were more witches out there, as Tituba claimed, no one was safe.

[00:08:39] Soon, fingers started to be pointed **every which way**⁵⁹.

[00:08:44] The accusations didn't stop with the **outcasts**.

[00:08:47] They **spread**⁶⁰ to people no one expected: a 71-year-old grandmother who went to church every Sunday and a well-respected farmer.

[00:08:57] When a woman named Martha Corey, who was in her 70s at the time, dared to question if the girls were telling the truth, she found herself accused of being a witch.

[00:09:08] Her husband, Giles Corey, an 80-year-old farmer, was another one of the few who refused to **play along**⁶¹, and of course, he found himself accused of witchcraft too.

⁵⁹ in all directions

⁶⁰ moved from one person to another

⁶¹ act like he agreed or believed in it

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:09:20] He wouldn't [confess](#)⁶² or [deny](#)⁶³ the charges, so the court ordered him to be pressed under heavy stones, a terrible [torture](#)⁶⁴ intended to get him to realise the error of his ways and [corroborate](#)⁶⁵.

[00:09:35] For two days, he lay there, saying only 'More weight,' until he died, a [stubborn](#)⁶⁶ stand against the madness.

[00:09:44] His wife was executed three days later.

[00:09:48] In a village of 500, where everyone knew each other, this had become personal.

[00:09:55] Neighbour turned against neighbour, enemy against enemy, friend against friend.

⁶² say he did something wrong, admit

⁶³ say he didn't do something wrong, refuse to admit

⁶⁴ practice of causing severe pain or suffering as punishment

⁶⁵ say the same thing as them to show it was true

⁶⁶ not showing that he would change his mind

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:10:01] By spring, the **panic**⁶⁷ had grown so big that the local magistrates couldn't **handle**⁶⁸ it anymore.

[00:10:09] A special court was set up in Salem Town, just a few miles away, to deal with the growing list of the accused.

[00:10:17] And here's where things got even stranger: the court didn't rely on normal evidence, like witnesses or **proof** you could touch.

[00:10:28] They used '**spectral**⁶⁹ evidence', the idea that the devil could send a witch's spirit to harm someone, even if her body were somewhere else.

[00:10:38] If a girl screamed in court and said she saw Sarah Good's **spectre**⁷⁰ **choking**⁷¹ her, that was enough.

[00:10:46] It didn't matter if Sarah was standing right there, clearly not doing anything other than trying to defend herself.

⁶⁷ sudden strong fear that made people act wild

⁶⁸ deal with or manage

⁶⁹ like a ghost

⁷⁰ ghost, spirit

⁷¹ making her not able to breathe, strangling

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:10:53] To the Puritans, the invisible world was just as real as the frozen ponds outside.

[00:11:01] As you might imagine, the courtroom was a [mess](#)⁷²: girls [fainting](#)⁷³, judges pushing for guilty verdicts, and even a ‘touch test’ where if an accused touched a girl and her [fits](#) stopped, it was proof of [guilt](#)⁷⁴.

[00:11:20] By summer, the jails were full, and the [gallows](#)⁷⁵ were busy.

[00:11:25] Nineteen people were hanged that year.

[00:11:29] Five more died in prison, including Sarah Osborne, who was worn out by illness and chains.

[00:11:37] And Giles Corey, of course, met his end under the stones.

[00:11:42] But it couldn’t go on forever.

⁷² a big problem or confusion

⁷³ suddenly falling down because they felt weak or scared

⁷⁴ wrongdoing, being responsible for a crime or sin

⁷⁵ a wooden frame where people were hanged

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:11:45] By late summer, the accusations had become a form of village [retribution](#)⁷⁶, a way to [settle scores](#)⁷⁷ with [quarrelling](#)⁷⁸ neighbours. If there was a dispute over land or some feeling of being wronged in the past, what better way to get your [vengeance](#)⁷⁹ than accusing your enemy of being in bed with the devil?

[00:12:07] In fact, it took the accusations to reach the very top of Puritan society for the madness to end.

[00:12:15] People began pointing fingers at the wives of important men, like the wife of Governor William Phips, who was in charge of Massachusetts.

[00:12:25] This was a step too far.

[00:12:28] Phips had been away, dealing with Indian wars up north, but when he returned in October 1692, he saw the [chaos](#)⁸⁰ and shut the special court down.

⁷⁶ punishment for something bad someone had done

⁷⁷ take revenge on someone for something that they had done in the past

⁷⁸ arguing or fighting with words

⁷⁹ hurting people back for what they had done to you

⁸⁰ total confusion and no order

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:12:42] Or, more [cynically](#)⁸¹, he might have thought, “I don’t mind people accusing other people’s wives of being a witch, but you’re not going to accuse my wife of witchcraft!”

[00:12:53] He [banned](#)⁸² [spectral](#) evidence, saying it wasn’t reliable.

[00:12:57] Of course, it wasn’t reliable; it was invisible and was one person’s word against another's.

[00:13:04] Without that, most of the cases fell apart because there was no evidence.

[00:13:10] The trials slowed, then stopped.

[00:13:13] By early 1693, the jails started to empty.

[00:13:18] Tituba, who’d confessed, was sold to a new owner and disappeared from the records.

[00:13:24] The girls, Betty, Abigail, Ann and Mercy, went quiet, their [fits fading away](#)⁸³ as the village tried to move on.

[00:13:34] Years later, in 1706, Ann Putnam Jr. stood in church and apologised.

⁸¹ in a distrustful way that expresses a belief that people are motivated only by self-interest

⁸² did not allow anymore

⁸³ slowly disappearing

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:13:41] She said she'd been tricked—by the devil, she claimed—and hadn't meant to hurt anyone.

[00:13:48] By then, 20 people were dead, and Salem was a village full of [scars⁸⁴](#).

[00:13:55] In the immediate [aftermath⁸⁵](#), there were movements to try to undo some of the damage, or at least acknowledge the sheer [insanity⁸⁶](#) of it.

[00:14:05] In 1702, the trials were declared unlawful.

[00:14:11] Then, in 1711, the government passed a law to restore the rights and good names of many who'd been condemned.

[00:14:19] They even paid some money to the families, a [token⁸⁷](#) [compensation⁸⁸](#) payment by way of apology. It wasn't much, but it was something.

[00:14:30] Still, not everyone was included.

[00:14:33] Seven people's names stayed on the list of the guilty, forgotten by that first effort.

⁸⁴ marks left

⁸⁵ the consequences or after-effects of the events

⁸⁶ madness or craziness

⁸⁷ a small sign or gift

⁸⁸ something given to make up for the losses

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:14:39] It wasn't until 1957 that Massachusetts said sorry and tried to fix it again, clearing more names.

[00:14:47] But one person, a woman named Elizabeth Johnson Jr., was somehow missed out.

[00:14:55] She'd been accused and convicted but not hanged.

[00:15:00] She died of natural causes in 1747 at the [ripe](#)⁸⁹ old age of 77 but with no living descendants to fight to [clear her name](#)⁹⁰, legally speaking, she was still a witch.

[00:15:14] However, more than 300 years after this conviction, she found some unlikely supporters in the form of a particularly creative teacher called Carrie LaPierre and her middle school class.

[00:15:30] Mrs LaPierre found out about Elizabeth Johnson Jr and set her eighth-grade class a project: clear her name.

[00:15:40] The class worked tirelessly, [collating](#)⁹¹ records and writing letters, and in 2022, a bill was passed that officially [exonerated](#)⁹² Elizabeth Johnson Jr., thereby clearing the last convicted person in the Salem Witch Trials.

⁸⁹ advanced or full

⁹⁰ show she was not guilty

⁹¹ putting information together in order

⁹² officially said she was not guilty

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:15:59] Of course, she should never have been convicted in the first place, but it was better than nothing, and Mrs LaPierre definitely deserves some sort of prize for devising such an interesting class project.

[00:16:12] So, if we are to conclude that the residents of Salem were not being challenged by the devil, and there was not a mass transformation of the female population into witches, what was going on?

[00:16:26] Well, people have been trying to figure that out for centuries, and there are a few theories.

[00:16:33] One idea is that it all came down to a [fungus](#)⁹³. Ergot, to be exact.

[00:16:40] Ergot grows on [rye](#)⁹⁴, a grain the Puritans used to make bread.

[00:16:47] If the weather is wet and warm, like it might have been in the summer of 1691, ergot can spread fast.

[00:16:56] Now, here's the strange part.

[00:16:58] Ergot contains natural chemicals that are similar to LSD, the powerful hallucinogenic drug that became famous in the 1960s.

⁹³ a plant-like thing that grows in damp places (like mould)

⁹⁴ a grain used to make bread

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:17:08] LSD causes people to see and feel things that aren't real, and ergot can do something similar.

[00:17:17] If someone eats bread made with infected [rye](#), they might become very sick, have [convulsions](#)⁹⁵, feel like they're being [pinched](#) or burned, or even see things that aren't really there.

[00:17:31] In other words, make people do exactly what the young girls did.

[00:17:37] Some historians think this could explain the strange behaviour, not witches, just bad bread.

[00:17:45] But not everyone agrees.

[00:17:47] The symptoms don't match perfectly, nor does the timeline, and ergot poisoning would've hit more people, not just a handful of girls.

[00:17:58] Another theory is simpler: mass [hysteria](#).

[00:18:02] Salem was a pressure cooker; harsh winters, failed [crops](#), disease, and attacks from nearby tribes had nearly everyone [on edge](#)⁹⁶.

[00:18:13] Add in their deep fear of the devil, and it wouldn't have taken much to spark [panic](#).

⁹⁵ strong, uncontrolled shakings of the body

⁹⁶ nervous or easily scared

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:18:20] When the girls started [twitching](#)⁹⁷ and shouting, the village was ready to believe the worst.

[00:18:26] Fear spread like wildfire, and soon, people saw witches everywhere because they expected to.

[00:18:34] The girls might have kept it going, maybe for attention, maybe out of fear themselves, while adults fuelled the flames with old [grudges](#)⁹⁸ and power struggles.

[00:18:46] Then there's the idea of plain old jealousy and [spite](#)⁹⁹.

[00:18:52] Salem was tiny, 500 people, and everyone knew everyone else's business.

[00:18:58] Sarah Good was poor and [bitter](#)¹⁰⁰; Sarah Osborne broke the rules; Tituba was an outsider.

[00:19:06] Accusing them could [settle scores](#) or shift [blame](#)¹⁰¹.

⁹⁷ making a sudden small movement with a part of the body

⁹⁸ bad feelings kept for a long time

⁹⁹ wanting to hurt people back

¹⁰⁰ full of anger and sadness

¹⁰¹ responsibility for a fault or wrong

The Salem Witch Trials

[00:19:11] Once it started, it **snowballed**¹⁰²; people **piled on**¹⁰³, afraid of being accused themselves if they didn't join in.

[00:19:20] So, which is it?

[00:19:22] Maybe a bit of all three: some sickness, a lot of fear, and plenty of human messiness.

[00:19:29] Now, to wrap things up, this was a weird period indeed. 15 months, more than 200 people accused, the vast majority of whom were women.

[00:19:40] Nineteen people were hanged, one eighty-year-old man **crushed**¹⁰⁴ to death under heavy stones, and at least five more died in jail.

[00:19:50] It was a miscarriage of justice indeed, and to think, it might all have come down to bad bread.

[00:19:59] OK then, that is it for today's episode on the Salem Witch Trials.

[00:20:04] I hope it's been an interesting one, and that you've learnt something new.

[00:20:08] If you enjoyed it, we have another episode on the history of witches, it's episode number 322.

¹⁰² got bigger and worse very quickly

¹⁰³ intensified or exaggerated things for effect

¹⁰⁴ completely destroyed, pulverised

[00:20:15] I'll put a link in the show notes if you'd like to listen to that one. And we have a bunch of other “horror”-themed episodes, or ones about “weird history” too. Just click on the “horror” or “weird history” tab if you’re listening on our website, and I’ll put some links to all of those in the show notes as well.

[00:20:32] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:20:37] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Alleged	said to be true but not proven
Hysteria	wild fear or emotion that spread
Hints	small signs or clues
Unsettling	making you feel worried or scared
Frozen over	covered in ice
Settlers	people who had moved to the place to live
Occurrence	something that happened, event
Huddled	staying close together, because of cold or fear
Lurking	hiding and waiting to do something bad
Snatch	grab or take quickly
Souls	people's spirits or essential nature
Strict	following rules very closely
Devoted	very faithful or devout

The Salem Witch Trials

Unfold	happen
Strip away	remove completely
Influences	effects or control
Catch	a hidden problem or disadvantage
Fervently	with strong feeling or belief
Edging	moving slowly and carefully towards them
Brutal	very cruel or harsh
Crops	plants grown for food
Smallpox	a deadly disease that caused spots and fever
Swept	moved quickly through the place
Raids	surprise attacks
Grieving	feeling very sad because someone had died
Creak	a high sound made by something old or moving slowly
Howl	a loud, sad cry
Pact	a deal or agreement

The Salem Witch Trials

Spectres	invisible spirits
Pinch	squeeze the skin between fingers
Choke	make you unable to breathe, strangle
Sour	bad or tainted
Congregation	a group of people at the church
Preach	talk about religion in a serious way
Cunning	clever in a sneaky way
Twitched	moved quickly without meaning to
Shook	moved back and forth fast
Pinched	squeezed or nipped
Pest	small animal or bug that bothered people
Bed bugs	small insects that lived in beds and bit people
Harsh	very hard or cruel
Pews	benches in a church
Fits	sudden shaking or strange behaviour

The Salem Witch Trials

Tormentors	people who hurt or scared them on purpose
Named names	told on others or gave their names to get them in trouble
Outcasts	people who were left out by the community
Beggar	a person who asked others for money or food
Muttered	spoke quietly and unclearly
Refused her charity	wasn't kind or helpful
Scandalous	shocking or very bad for reputation
Skiping	not attending or going to
Voodoo	a religion with spirits and magic, often misunderstood
Confessed	admitted doing something wrong
Confessing	telling that she had done something bad
Gripped	held tightly
Confession	a formal statement admitting that she was guilty
Fuel	something that would cause passion, argument, or other intense emotion
Proof	something that showed it was true

The Salem Witch Trials

Every which way	in all directions
Spread	moved from one person to another
Play along	act like he agreed or believed in it
Confess	say he did something wrong, admit
Deny	say he didn't do something wrong, refuse to admit
Torture	practice of causing severe pain or suffering as punishment
Corroborate	say the same thing as them to show it was true
Stubborn	not showing that he would change his mind
Panic	sudden strong fear that made people act wild
Handle	deal with or manage
Spectral	like a ghost
Spectre	ghost, spirit
Choking	making her not able to breathe, strangling
Mess	a big problem or confusion
Fainting	suddenly falling down because they felt weak or scared

The Salem Witch Trials

Guilt	wrongdoing, being responsible for a crime or sin
Gallows	a wooden frame where people were hanged
Retribution	punishment for something bad someone had done
Settle scores	take revenge on someone for something that they had done in the past
Quarrelling	arguing or fighting with words
Vengeance	hurting people back for what they had done to you
Chaos	total confusion and no order
Cynically	in a distrustful way that expresses a belief that people are motivated only by self-interest
Banned	did not allow anymore
Fading away	slowly disappearing
Scars	marks left
Aftermath	the consequences or after-effects of the events
Insanity	madness or craziness
Token	a small sign or gift
Compensation	something given to make up for the losses

The Salem Witch Trials

Ripe	advanced or full
Clear her name	show she was not guilty
Collating	putting information together in order
Exonerated	officially said she was not guilty
Fungus	a plant-like thing that grows in damp places (like mould)
Rye	a grain used to make bread
Convulsions	strong, uncontrolled shakings of the body
On edge	nervous or easily scared
Twitching	making a sudden small movement with a part of the body
Grudges	bad feelings kept for a long time
Spite	wanting to hurt people back
Bitter	full of anger and sadness
Blame	responsibility for a fault or wrong
Snowballed	got bigger and worse very quickly
Piled on	intensified or exaggerated things for effect

Crushed completely destroyed, pulverised

Language spotlight

1. Clear her name

- **Meaning:** To prove that someone is not guilty of something bad that people said they did.
- **Synonyms:** Prove innocence, defend reputation
- **Antonyms:** Accuse, blame, stain someone's name
- **Examples:**
 - She was wrongly accused, but the new evidence helped her **clear her name**.
 - After years of silence, he spoke out to **clear his name**.

2. Settle scores

- **Meaning:** To get revenge on someone for something they did to you in the past.
- **Synonyms:** Get revenge, get back at someone
- **Antonyms:** Forgive, let go, make peace
- **Examples:**

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- Some people used the trials to **settle scores** with neighbours they didn't like.
- He wasn't angry about the money—he just wanted to **settle scores**.

3. Play along

- **Meaning:** To pretend to agree or cooperate, often to avoid trouble or for personal benefit.
- **Synonyms:** Pretend, go along with, act
- **Antonyms:** Refuse, resist, speak out
- **Examples:**
 - She didn't believe the story, but she decided to **play along** to stay safe.
 - I knew he was lying, but I **played along** until I had proof.

4. On edge

- **Meaning:** Feeling nervous, worried, or ready to react quickly.
- **Synonyms:** Nervous, tense, anxious

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- **Antonyms:** Calm, relaxed, peaceful
- **Examples:**
 - Everyone in the village was **on edge** because of the strange events.
 - He's been **on edge** all week waiting for the test results.

5. Snowballed

- **Meaning:** To grow bigger or more serious very quickly.
- **Synonyms:** Escalated, grew, worsened
- **Antonyms:** Died down, calmed, shrank
- **Examples:**
 - What began as a small rumour quickly **snowballed** into a full panic.
 - Her success **snowballed** after she won that big award.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. Why did the people of Salem start accusing others of witchcraft?
 - a) They wanted to punish criminals
 - b) They were afraid of Native American attacks
 - c) They believed the Devil was at work
 - d) They needed more land for farming

2. What did the two young girls begin to experience that worried the village?
 - a) Fever and coughing
 - b) Strange visions and convulsions
 - c) Memory loss
 - d) Sleepwalking

3. Why did people "name names" during the trials?
 - a) They wanted to make new friends

- b) They were offered money
- c) They were told it would help them avoid punishment
- d) They wanted to become witches too

4. What role did the ministers and judges play during the trials?

- a) They defended the accused
- b) They were neutral observers
- c) They fled the village
- d) They encouraged the accusations

5. What eventually helped bring the trials to an end?

- a) The governor's wife was accused
- b) A public confession of lies
- c) A royal decree
- d) The village ran out of people to accuse

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True or False

6. The Salem Witch Trials happened in the 1800s. (True/False)
7. Only women were accused of being witches. (True/False)
8. Some people confessed to being witches to avoid punishment. (True/False)
9. The trials were based on strong physical evidence. (True/False)
10. The governor eventually stopped the trials. (True/False)

Fill-in-the-Blank

11. They screamed about invisible tormentors, pointed fingers, and named _____.
12. There was Sarah Good, a beggar who smoked a pipe and muttered under her breath when anyone _____ her charity.
13. And if there were more witches out there, as Tituba claimed, no one was safe. Soon, fingers started to be pointed every _____ way.
14. People piled ____, afraid of being accused themselves if they didn't join in.
15. The girls, Betty, Abigail, Ann and Mercy, went quiet, their fits _____ away as the village tried to move on.

Vocabulary Practice

Choose the correct definition for each word from the podcast:

16. **Spectres**

- a) Heavy rainstorms
- b) Angry villagers
- c) Ghosts or spirits
- d) Strange dreams

17. **Hysteria**

- a) A calm discussion
- b) A type of punishment
- c) Wild fear and panic
- d) A legal decision

18. **Confess**

- a) To admit having done something wrong

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- b) To sing in church
- c) To tell a joke
- d) To travel far away

19. What does "**gripped**" mean in "the town was gripped by fear"?

- a) Held tightly or controlled
- b) Touched softly
- c) Waved at
- d) Shaken awake

20. **Guilt**

- a) A type of illness
- b) A small town
- c) A group of people
- d) The feeling or state of having done something wrong

Answers

1. c) They believed the Devil was at work
2. b) Strange visions and convulsions
3. c) They were told it would help them avoid punishment
4. d) They encouraged the accusations
5. a) The governor's wife was accused
6. False
7. False
8. True
9. False
10. True
11. names
12. refused
13. which
14. on
15. fading
16. c) Ghosts or spirits
17. c) Wild fear and panic
18. a) To admit having done something wrong
19. a) Held tightly or controlled
20. The feeling or state of having done something wrong