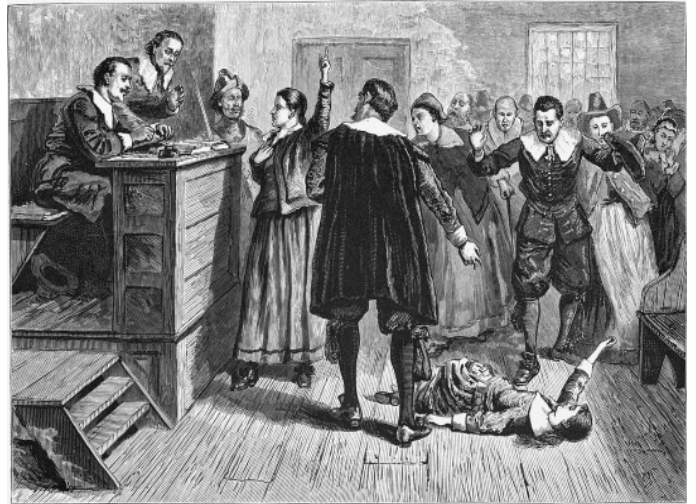


# The Salem Witch Trials

In the town of Salem Village, girls began showing strange behavior and painful spasms. And in the year 1692, it was pretty normal to blame witchcraft when anything odd or inexplicable happened. So the search was on to find the witch responsible. That January, the first fingers were pointed at Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne and a local Caribbean servant named Tituba.



More people came up with accusations of witchcraft against these women, and they were soon arrested. Even when they were in jail, more girls started to show signs of being "afflicted", as it was described back then. The hunt for witches went on. One of the girls, Mary Warren, finally confessed that she and the other afflicted girls were all lying. It didn't make any difference.

Fear was getting the best of the Salem villagers, and accusations and arrests kept on going for months. There were so many cases, that the Court of Oyer and Terminer was created to handle them all. One woman was making claims against people based on spirits she was seeing in her dreams. And believe it or not, this was accepted as real evidence in court. It was known as spectral evidence.

In June, Bridget Bishop was executed on Gallows Hill, the first of 20 people to eventually die for their "crimes".

Around this time, they decided that maybe it wasn't a good idea to allow spectral evidence to be used in trials after all. Even so, accusations, arrests and trials continued for the next few months. More and more cases came to their conclusions, usually ending with a guilty verdict and a death sentence. The next 3 months were filled with more executions.

Towards the end of the year, officials were starting to question the whole process that was going on since it was clearly out of control. At the end of October, the Court was disbanded and all witchcraft arrests were stopped. It took a few months, but eventually everyone who had been charged was eventually pardoned, found not-guilty or otherwise released.

By the time the town came to its senses, more than 200 people had been accused, arrested or tried for crimes of witchcraft. Today, the town is called Danvers and there is a large memorial so that the people who suffered through this ordeal are not forgotten.

# Salem Witch Trials Questions



## What You Learned

How long did the Salem Witch Trials last (approximately)?

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Could dreams or visions be used as evidence in court?

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When was the Court of Oyer and Terminer disbanded?

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Which of the girls admitted that they were lying?

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### Keep Going!

Some historians say that *ergot poisoning* was behind the strange behavior of the girls and perhaps even the hysteria that took over the village. What is ergot poisoning? (research and write a paragraph)

## Vocabulary



verdict - \_\_\_\_\_

inexplicable - \_\_\_\_\_

spasms - \_\_\_\_\_

## Where in the World?

Salem Village (now Danvers) is in the American state of Massachusetts. Find it and add it to your world map.

