



## What Were the Salem Witch Trials? (What Was?)

By Joan Holub

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Something wicked was brewing in the small town of Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. It started when two girls, Betty Parris and Abigail Williams, began having hysterical fits. Soon after, other local girls claimed they were being pricked with pins. With no scientific explanation available, the residents of Salem came to one conclusion: it was witchcraft! Over the next year and a half, nineteen people were convicted of witchcraft and hanged while more languished in prison as hysteria swept the colony. Author Joan Holub gives readers an inside look at this sinister chapter in history.

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

Joan Holub is the author of *What Was the First Thanksgiving?*, *What Was the Gold Rush?*, and other *Who Was...?* titles, including *Who Was Marco Polo?* and *Who Was Babe Ruth?* She lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.

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### What Were the Salem Witch Trials?

In the winter of 1692, trouble came to the village of Salem in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Witch trouble!

Suddenly, two girls got a strange illness. Their bodies twitched and shuddered. They spoke nonsense and seemed to be choking. They said they were being pinched and poked by something invisible. Soon more girls in Salem began acting strangely, too. If this was an illness, no one could find a cure.

Some villagers thought it might be the work of witches! Witches were serious stuff in the New England colonies. Scary stuff. Many people believed witches were real and that they wanted to hurt people. A hunt began in Salem to catch and punish the witches who were making the girls sick. But who were the witches? Could they be neighbors? Family members? Frightened villagers panicked. They pointed fingers at one another and cried, "Witch!"

Over the next ten months, about two hundred people in Salem Village and surrounding areas were accused of witchcraft. Most were women. A few were children. Almost all went to jail. There were trials. There were hangings. Innocent people were convicted of witchcraft and killed. It was horrible! For a while, it seemed there would be no end to this awful time. But eventually, the witch hunt did stop and so did the trials.

So, what was really going on in Salem in 1692?

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