

What happens when 'persuasion' goes wrong?

The Salem Witch Trials: 1692-1693

During this year...

- Over 200 people in the small town of Salem were accused of witchcraft
- 'Witch hunters', townsfolk, and people in government tried to 'prove' who was a witch
- 30 people were convicted and sentenced
- 25 of those people died



So what happened? Were there really witches in Salem? Was this persuasion gone wrong? Or is there some other explanation?

Who was
accused of being
a 'witch'?



The following were all common 'signs' that someone could be a witch (1600s-1800s):



Do you identify as female?

Just being a woman was often enough to be accused of witchcraft! Over 80% of people accused during the Trials were women/girls.

Especially if you went against strict gender norms (ex: not getting married, having a job)



Are you very old? Very young? Or somewhere in the middle?

People as old as 80 and as young as 5 were accused of witchcraft in Salem!

However, most people accused were between the ages of 30-50.



Do you have a pet (dog, cat, bird, snake, fish, etc.)?

Witches were thought to have animal 'familiars' (servants or helpers).

Extra points if you have a black cat, snake, or goat!



Have you ever borrowed money from someone?

People experiencing poverty, or those who asked for money, were often accused of witchcraft.

Many times, people would accuse someone who had asked for/borrowed money from them of being a witch!



Are you bad at public speaking? Are you shy?

According to the handbook, witches could not read 'holy words' out loud.

Witch hunters would 'test' to see if you could read page after page of scripture out loud... if you made any mistakes, stuttered, or were nervous that was taken as a 'sign' of your guilt!



Do you have any moles, freckles, or birthmarks?

These could be seen as 'evil markings' + where a bat or snake had bitten you.

Witch hunters would 'test' these marks by poking them with sharp objects... if you yelled in pain, it could be a 'sign' you were a witch!



Has anyone ever been jealous of you?

Often, envy and jealousy had a huge role in who was accused of witchcraft.

In 1692, Rebecca Nurse was accused of being a witch right after she and her husband bought a big new house.



Have you ever talked to yourself or muttered under your breath?

Talking to yourself or muttering was seen as a witch cursing someone or casting a spell...

Whispering was seen as 'evil' too!



Do you prefer to work alone? Do you get into arguments?

Witch hunters believed that evil “encouraged discord”, which meant if you had a hard time getting along with anyone (or if people thought you were grumpy, mean, or aloof), you could be accused.

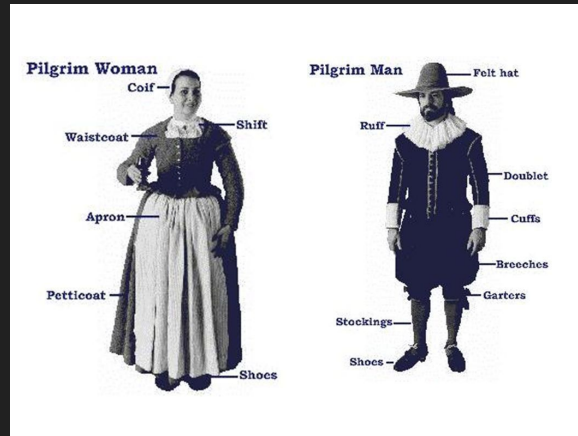
‘Loners’ were often the first people to be accused of witchcraft!



Are you wearing something that goes against this 'dress code'?

Showing too much skin, wearing bright colours, not enough colours, etc. could mean accusation of being a witch. Hand-me-down clothing was also a sure sign.

Bridget Bishop was accused of witchcraft because she wore 'too much black' and her coat was 'torn and old'.



Has milk or cheese ever gone bad/expired in your house?

People commonly blamed everyday inconveniences/issues on witches... even something as simple as milk or cheese going mouldy!

When people didn't understand the science behind something, often they would blame curses from witches (ex: bad crops, catching a cold).



Unmarried? No kids?

Anyone (especially women) who was not married could be accused of witchcraft.

If you were married, but did not have children, it was seen as very likely you could be a witch!



Are you left handed?

Being left handed was seen as 'sinister' or supernatural at this time.



Has anyone ever been mad at you?

All it took was a simple accusation for someone to be put on trial as a witch. This meant that if you had ever wronged someone (ex: ending a friendship, not doing someone a favour), they could accuse you of witchcraft as revenge.

