

American History: Colonial America

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9–12

Curriculum Focus: U.S. History

Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Program Description

Explore the difficult roots of America's past when Assignment Discovery takes you behind the history of Jamestown and the struggles of colonial life. Then meet the Puritans and explore the tragic history behind the Salem Witch Trials.

Onscreen Questions

Part 1, "America's Roots" and "Colonies Take Hold"

- How did Renaissance ideas influence the creation of American government?
- How did religion influence the formation of colonies in the Americas?

Part 2, "Settlement at Jamestown," "Colonial Life," and "The Salem Witch Trials"

- Could Jamestown have survived without John Smith's leadership?
 - What were the advantages and disadvantages of living in a small colony?
-

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Understand basic facts about the Salem Witch Trials and different theories for the hysteria.
- Explore primary source documents to understand the stories of various people involved in the trials.
- Write a fictional first-hand account as if living in Salem Village in 1692, which reflects one or more of the theories.
- Describe characteristics of Puritanism and its role in 17th-century Salem.

Materials

- *American History: Colonial America* video
- Computer with Internet access

Procedures

1. After watching the video, review basic facts about the Salem Witch Trials with the class. Where and when did the trials occur? What were the accusations? Who were some of the accusers and accused? What was the outcome of the trials? Students will find a six-minute movie that summarizes the events at the following Web site:
 - Salem Witch Trials: The Story
<http://school.discovery.com/schooladventures/salemwitchtrials/story/>
2. Next, talk about how the witch trials were different from a typical court trial today. (*People were accused and convicted based on evidence that only the accuser could see, such as apparitions or ghosts.*) The great mystery of the Salem Witch Trials is how an entire town believed this evidence, triggering mass hysteria. Have students discuss the different theories for the Salem Witch Trials that were presented in the video:
 - Chemical poisoning from ergot
 - Fear of devil inflamed by the Indian Wars and distrust of those opposed to war
 - Group psychology or the power of suggestion
3. Tell students that these are just three possible factors in the mass hysteria during the witch trials. Have students work individually or in pairs to explore other factors at the Web site below. (Emphasize that none of these theories is meant to offer a single explanation for the witch trials.) Have them take notes as they read, paying close attention to the characteristics of Puritanism and its role in 17th-century Salem.
 - Salem Witch Trials: Life in Salem 1692
<http://school.discovery.com/schooladventures/salemwitchtrials/life/>
4. Explain to the class that they've been exploring theories presented by modern-day experts. Now they will turn their attention to some of the actual people who experienced the witch trials. There is a wealth of documents from this time period, including extensive transcripts from the trials. These primary sources provide a first-hand account of the events that are invaluable to historians today. Divide the class into six groups and assign each group to one of the people highlighted at the following Web site:
 - Salem Witch Trials: The People Behind the Trials
<http://school.discovery.com/schooladventures/salemwitchtrials/people/>
5. Have each group read the biography and the primary source excerpt for their assigned person. Then have them give a brief presentation to the class, first describing the person's role in the witch trials, then reading aloud from the primary source. After each presentation, ask the class to consider the person's feelings or beliefs at the time of the trials. What might have been the motivations behind his or her actions?
6. Finally, have students consider some the stories they just heard in light of the theories they explored in the beginning of the lesson. Their final assignment is to write a fictional first-hand account as if they were living in Salem Village in 1692. They could write from the point of view of an accuser, an accused, or a supporter or critic of the trials. Their accounts should reflect one

or more of the possible theories for the witch trials. They should also describe Puritanism and its role in the lives of 17th-century Salem colonists.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students shared several facts about the Salem Witch Trials and possible theories for the hysteria; gave an accurate and complete presentation about their assigned primary source; wrote a thorough, engaging first-hand account that reflected at least one theory for the witch trials and clearly described Puritanism and its role in the lives of 17th-century Salem colonists.
- 2 points: Students shared some facts about the Salem Witch Trials and possible theories for the hysteria; gave an accurate and complete presentation about their assigned primary source; wrote an acceptable first-hand account that reflected one theory for the witch trials and clearly described Puritanism and its role in the lives of 17th-century Salem colonists.
- 1 point: Students did not share any facts about the Salem Witch Trials or possible theories for the hysteria; gave an incomplete presentation about their assigned primary source; wrote a vague or inaccurate first-hand account that did not clearly reflect any of the theories for the witch trials or describe Puritanism and its role in the lives of 17th-century Salem colonists.

Vocabulary

colony

Definition: A country or area that is ruled by another country

Context: The English colony of Jamestown was established in 1607, and it endured much hardship in its early years.

ergot

Definition: A toxic fungus that infects rye; contains toxins that cause tingling in the fingers, hallucinations, and convulsions

Context: Ergot poisoning may have inflicted some girls early on, perhaps even triggering the hysteria.

hysteria

Definition: A state of uncontrollable and exaggerated emotion

Context: The hysteria in Salem began with convulsions in a handful of teenage girls.

pharmacologist

Definition: Someone who studies how drugs are produced and used to treat diseases and their effects

Context: The team contacted a pharmacologist to learn how the poisonous chemicals in ergot might have affected the girls in Salem.

Puritans

Definition: A group of Protestant colonists in 17th-century America who believed in strict religious discipline and followed a strict moral code

Context: The Puritans believed that before they arrived in America, America was the devil's territory.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- U.S. History – Colonization and Settlement (1585–1763): Understands how political, religious, and social institutions emerged in the English colonies
- U.S. History – Colonization and Settlement (1585–1763): Understands why the Americas attracted Europeans, why they brought enslaved Africans to their colonies and how Europeans struggled for control of North America and the Caribbean

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
 - People, Places, and Environments
 - Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 - Power, Authority, and Governance
-

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
-

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video—This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index—Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units—These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link—Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources—This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. America's Roots

See how civilizations spread across the Americas with religion at the forefront. Later, many changes that took place in Europe during the Renaissance and Reformation became the foundation of American society.

II. Colonies Take Hold

By the mid-1700s, settlers had colonized many regions of what is now the United States. Compare life in New England with life in the middle and southern colonies.

III. Settlement at Jamestown

The Jamestown settlement got off to a rocky start, but thanks to strong leadership and determination it eventually thrived as one of Europe's first American colonies.



IV. Colonial Life

Life in the colonies could be harsh as settlers faced disease, fierce weather, and fear of the unknown. Examine the hardships, triumphs, and realities of life in colonial America.

V. The Salem Witch Trials

Why did the Salem Witch Trials occur? Join a team of experts who examine possible theories for the mass hysteria that gripped Massachusetts in 1692.

Curriculum Units

1. Influences on European Civilization

Pre-viewing question

Q: How have other cultures influenced your life?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What religions and traditions helped shape early European civilization?

A: Judaism and Christianity, two religions of the Middle East, provided moral guidance and helped people understand their place in the world. European civilization was also greatly shaped by the democratic traditions of ancient Rome, which later became the basis of American democracy.

2. The New England Colonies

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about colonial life in New England?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did early settlers in New England make a living?

A: Most settlers in New England became farmers, but some made goods and tools. The shipbuilding industry provided work, and trading goods across the Atlantic Ocean became lucrative.

3. The Middle and Southern Colonies

Pre-viewing question

Q: What are some industries in your city or region?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did the southern colonies differ from the middle colonies?

A: By the early 1700s, more than 20,000 people had settled in Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia and New York had become the largest cities of the middle colonies. These colonies enjoyed diverse populations and economies and did not rely on any one crop or industry for survival. In the southern colonies cash crops formed the basis of the economies. Growing tobacco, rice, and sugar required a large number of workers, so landowners imported enslaved Africans to work on their farms.

4. The Survival of Jamestown

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about Jamestown?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How might history have been changed if John Smith had been hanged?

A: Answers will vary.

5. Colonial Cultures and Social Classes

Pre-viewing question

Q: What are some differences between colonial life and the present?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Describe the social classes in colonial America.

A: Colonial society consisted of three social classes. Most people belonged to the middle class, and they owned farms or businesses. The small upper class, or gentry, included wealthy landowners, government officials, and lawyers. The lowest class included indentured servants and enslaved Africans.

6. The Salem Witchcraft Epidemic

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about the Salem Witch Trials?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How and when did the Salem witchcraft epidemic begin?

A: The epidemic that led to the Salem Witch Trials began in a town called Danvers, at the time known as Salem Village. Sometime early in 1692, several children in the Samuel Parris household had convulsions and hallucinations. At first they accused Tituba, a Caribbean serving woman, of being a witch. Soon more cases of convulsions and accused witches spread throughout the county, and an epidemic began.

7. Fighting Evil in 17th-Century America

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever been unfairly accused of something?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How might the social atmosphere of 17th-century America have helped bring about the witchcraft epidemic?

A: The Massachusetts colonists were in the middle of a brutal war with the Wabanaki Indians in 1692.

The war was like fighting the devil to the Puritans, who believed that the Americas had been the devil's territory prior to their arrival. So they may have seen a clear connection between the hysteria of young girls and the raging war with the Wabanaki.

8. Disproved Theories

Pre-viewing question

Q: What are some historical examples of mass hysteria?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What was the prevailing 19th-century theory on the mass hysteria in Salem, and how was it disproved?

A: The leading 19th-century theory was that the girls faked symptoms and judges hanged witches so the state could confiscate their lands. According to historical documents, a person found guilty of witchcraft could have any movable possessions confiscated, but not real estate. Historians have found evidence in at least two instances of two hanged people who had willed their land to family members.

9. Searching for a Cause

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever experienced food poisoning?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What are the connections between ergot and Salem witch-hunting?

A: Ergot is a toxic fungus that affects rye; the toxin causes tingling in the fingers, hallucinations and convulsions – all symptoms that appeared in those who accused others of being witches. Ergot thrives in wet summers followed by cold summers, conditions that were present in Salem during January and February of 1692. Ergot poisoning among of the accusers may have been a contributing factor.

10. Poisoning: The Cause of Mass Hysteria?

Pre-viewing question

Q: Do you think ergot poisoning was responsible for the hysteria in Salem?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did the scientists discount ergot poisoning as the cause of the mass hysteria in Salem?

A: After consuming bread that contains ergot, the tissue on a person's fingers and toes become gangrenous. During the Salem trials, no mention of gangrene was made. If ergot were the cause of mass hysteria, people would have had to ingest it over a long period of time, and symptoms of gangrene would have been observed. Therefore, ergot poisoning was ruled out as the primary factor in the mass hysteria behind the Salem witch trials.

11. The Power of Suggestion

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever been persuaded to believe something?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What does the experiment tell you about the power of suggestion?

A: Answers will vary.

12. An Unfair System

Pre-viewing question

Q: Do you think the United States legal system is always fair?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you think something like the Salem witch trials could occur in the United States today?

A: Answers will vary.

Credit

Joy Brewster, curriculum writer, editor, and consultant