

## RichMUNd II

### **Court of Oyer and Terminer: The Salem Witch Trials**

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*Chair*

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*Chair*

Hello Delegates!

Welcome to the Salem Witch Trials at RichMUNd II! My name is Chandrika and I am very excited to be your chair this year. I am currently a senior at Henrico. This is my fifth year doing Model UN and I absolutely love it! I have attended numerous conferences such as VAMUN, WMHSMUN, and NAIMUN. This year, I am fortunate enough to be the president of the Henrico MUN club. I absolutely love to read, watch Netflix, and spend time with family in my free time. In addition, I play field hockey for the varsity team at Henrico and I have been swimming since I was four years old. This is my second time chairing at RichMUNd and I cannot wait to see what this session has in store for us!

Welcome to RichMUNd II! My name is Joseph Zampetti, and I am a junior in the Center For the Arts studying Visual Art III. Something unique about myself is that I am the only actively involved CFA member in Henrico MUN, but have always felt welcomed and supported by my IB friends in this club. I was first introduced to Model United Nations in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and have continued to visit conferences ever since. This is my first year involved in RichMUNd and my first time in a Chair position; I could not have wished for a better position than Co-Chair for the Salem Witch Trials Committee. Hopefully you are all genuinely interested in the Salem Witch Trials, a turbulent and dramatic series of events, just as I am. The topics my Co-Chair and I have picked were realistic issues faced by the townspeople of Salem, however keep in mind that the debate and solutions should not be limited by the true events in History. I encourage all of you to become heavily involved in debate and crisis situations, which I hope you will handle with a professional attitude and efficiency. My optimism is high for this committee, and I am excited to see creative, pragmatic solution arrived upon, fueled by ingenuity and healthy debate. Best of luck in committee for all of you!

This committee will be set in 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts. It will run in a regular crisis style. We expect thorough knowledge of your character along with his/her influence on the trials. Throughout the entire conference, we will hold trials in our session that resemble the actual trials that took place. Keep in mind, however, that the results of these trials do not have to resemble the results of the actual trials. We strongly suggest that you email in your position papers to us before the conference, but make sure to bring in a printed copy as well. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at [chandrikad97@gmail.com](mailto:chandrikad97@gmail.com) or [josephzampetti@gmail.com](mailto:josephzampetti@gmail.com).

Best of luck,

Chandrika Dandamudi & Joseph Zampetti

*Co-Chairs*

## Topic 1. Defining Witchcraft and What Constitutes Evidence for Accusation

### *Biblical References to Witchcraft*

There are three major references to witchcraft in the Bible which are pertinent to this committee. It is necessary to be familiar with them in order to understand and clarify the origins of Colonial Massachusetts Legislature. In addition, these passages provide insight to the people's mindset in 17<sup>th</sup> century Salem, Massachusetts. The people of Salem were devout Puritans and were constantly in fear of external forces of evil working against them. In most cases, the Bible was the only book in many of their homes and the aforementioned passages provided the only understanding of witchcraft and its history. These passages are:

1. "Thou shall not suffer a witch to live." (Exodus 22:18)
2. "A man also or a woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they

shall stone them with stones; their

blood shall be upon them." (Leviticus

20:27)

3. "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer." (Deuteronomy 18:10-11)

### *Colonial Massachusetts Legislation*

"If any man or woman be a WITCH, that is, hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit, they shall be put to death. Exod. 22.

18. Levit. 20. 27. Deut. 18. 10. 11." (Statute of the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1641)

The primitive Massachusetts Colonial Statutes written in 1641 were a mix of biblical scripture, mainly the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, and dated passages from English Law. In 17<sup>th</sup> century Massachusetts, the definition of witchcraft was gathered from three passages of biblical scripture, Exod. 22:18, Levit. 20:27, and Deut. 18:10-11, and the punishment for those found guilty of witchcraft was death. The courts did not operate on the principle that defendants were innocent until proven guilty. Instead, individuals put on trial were assumed guilty by the law.

Massachusetts courts in the 17<sup>th</sup> century accepted three types of evidence as substantial grounds for trial. The first being confession by the accused of the use of witchcraft. The second being the testimony of two eye-witness accusers. The third, and most controversial form of evidence, being the testimony of spectral evidence. Spectral

evidence is defined as the accused person's spirit or spectral shape appearing to his/her witness in a dream or dream-like state while the accused was at a different location. Defenders of spectral evidence during 17<sup>th</sup> century witch trials cited *A Tryal of Witches*, the contemporary report of proceeding of the Bury St. Edmunds witch trial of 1662 which served as a model for the proceedings of future witch trials.

#### *Precursor: Bury St. Edmunds Witch Trials*

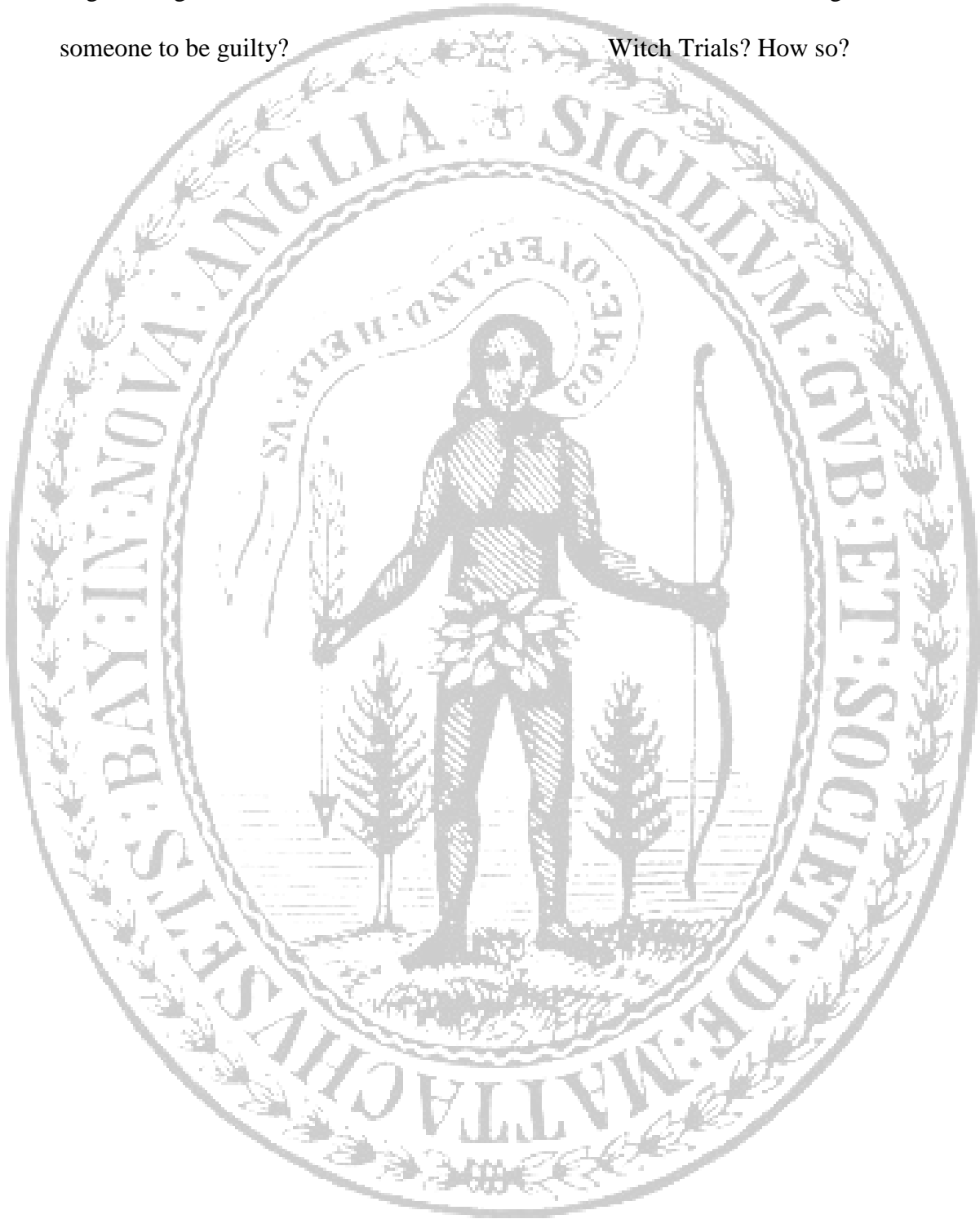
The town of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, England was the location of several witch trials starting in 1599 and resurfacing throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The trial of 1599 resulted in the execution of Oliffe Bartham for counts of witchcraft. In 1662, Amy Deny and Rose Cullender were accused of witchcraft by their neighbors

#### Questions to Consider:

1. What evidence was used to accuse people during the witch trials?

2. What is considered enough evidence  
to go through with trials and accuse  
someone to be guilty?

3. Has your character been affected by  
evidence found during the Salem  
Witch Trials? How so?



## Topic 2: Proceedings of Trial

The town of Salem, originally referred to as Naumkeag, was established in 1626 in Massachusetts. The town was considered Puritan being that it was located in Massachusetts. During this time period, the British had just got out of a war with France that took place in the American colonies in 1689. The aftermath of the war was prominent in the town, and was one of the leading reasons for the trials.

### *Pre-Trial Tensions*

Smallpox epidemic, attacks from neighboring Native American tribes, and rivalry amongst the townspeople of Salem were all controversies that had to be dealt with in early-17<sup>th</sup> century Salem. In addition to these constant tensions, townspeople of Salem also had a constant suspicion of their neighbors.

### *Proceedings of Trial*

The Salem Witch Trials themselves began in early 1692. They started when

several girls in Salem Village began showing unnatural symptoms: muscle spasms, seizures, and delusion. Many of the town's people claimed that they were possessed by the devil. The girls also accused several women from the local area to be participating in witchcraft. These accusations led to chaos amongst the citizens of Salem Village. The two girls who were first involved in the witchcraft situations were 9 year old Elizabeth Parris and 11 year old Abigail Williams. Elizabeth was the daughter of Samuel Parris, who was the minister of Salem Village during that time period. These two girls started to behave in a strange manner, with fits and outbursts that were uncontrollable. The girls were then diagnosed with bewitchment, and soon after, many other young girls from town were happening to show the same symptoms. Ann Putnam, Mercy Lewis,

Elizabeth Hubbard, Mary Walcott, and Mary

Warren were some of the girls who started to experience the same problems as Parris and Williams.

After the possession of these girls, they blamed a slave, Tituba, and two other poor women, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborn, for their bewitchment. After these accusations, the trials began. First, the three women were questioned by magistrates Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne. During the trials, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborn kept denying their accusations and guilt. Tituba, on the other hand, confessed to bewitching the children. In order to decrease her sentence, Tituba claimed that the devil and other witches were alongside her and helping with the bewitchment of the girls. These trials were treated as a chain reaction and many other women, including Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse, were accused of bewitchment.

Similarly to Tituba, many women who were accused went on to confess that

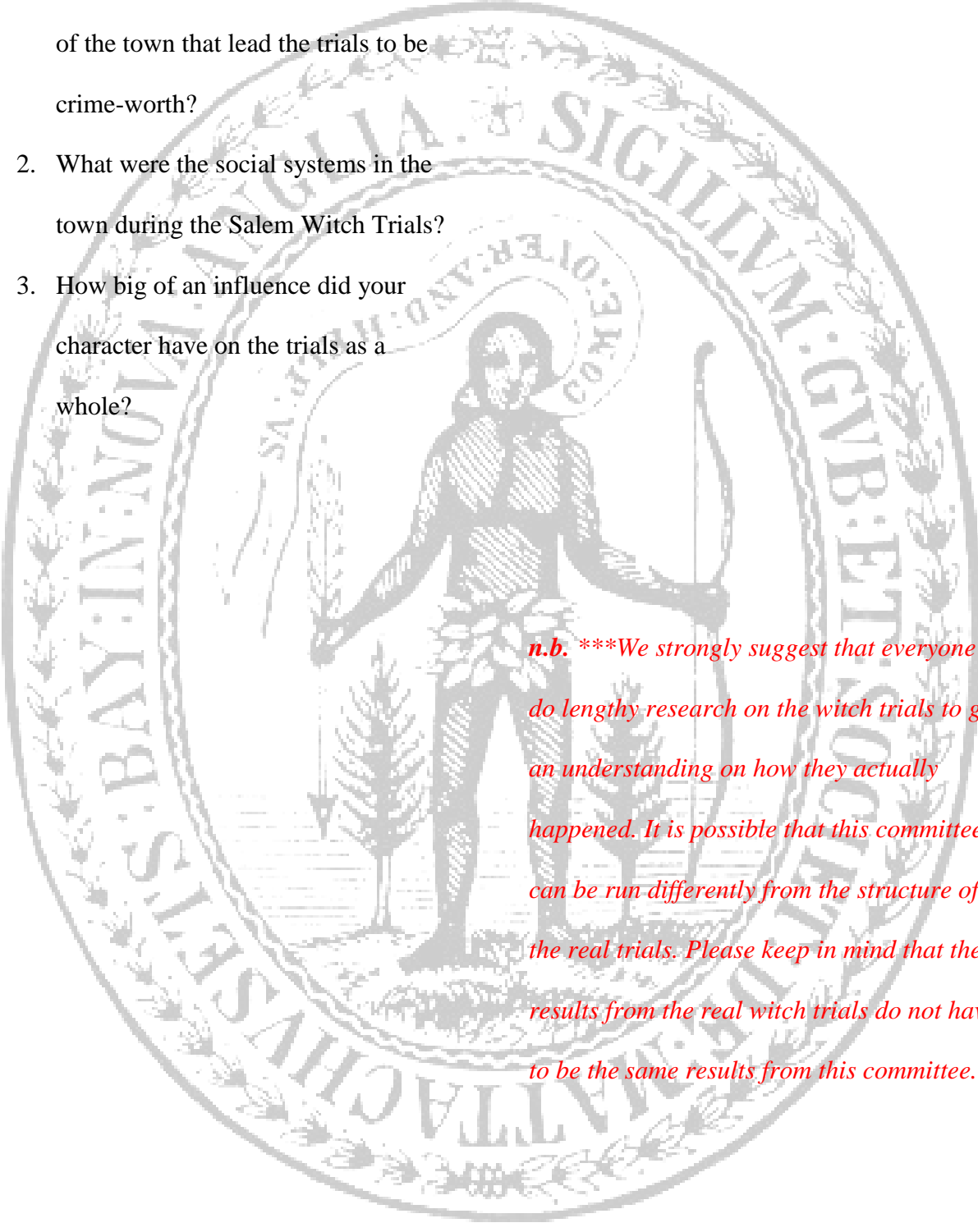
there were other partners involved in this case. After several more confessions, the

Salem Witch Trials took over the entire justice system in Salem village. As a result, the governor, William Phips, appointed the establishment of two different courts: the Court of Oyer and the Court of Terminer. The Court of Oyer was the specific court where all of the hearings occurred whereas the Court of Terminer was the court where all the punishments would be decided.

The first conviction occurred eight days after the courts were established. Bridge Bishop was hanged on June 2<sup>nd</sup> in Gallows Hill. This later became known as the place where all the witches would be regularly hung. Later that July, five more people were hanged. There were more trials in August and September that resulted in five and eight people being hanged, respectively. Other sentences included being held in jail for a certain number of years to lifetime.

Questions to Consider:

1. What were some customs and events of the town that lead the trials to be crime-worth?
2. What were the social systems in the town during the Salem Witch Trials?
3. How big of an influence did your character have on the trials as a whole?



***n.b.** \*\*\*We strongly suggest that everyone do lengthy research on the witch trials to get an understanding on how they actually happened. It is possible that this committee can be run differently from the structure of the real trials. Please keep in mind that the results from the real witch trials do not have to be the same results from this committee.*



## Works Cited

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