



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2023 Volume I: Histories of Art, Race and Empire: 1492-1865

Using Objects and Artifacts to Understand *The Crucible*

Guide for Curriculum Unit 23.01.02, published September 2023
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“Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn and caldron bubble.” The Salem Witch Trials and *The Crucible* have fascinated students and teachers alike for many years. This play does have it all -- the scandal of an affair, accusations of witchcraft, a girl gang like no other, unfair trials, multiple layers of meaning, and finally, there are the probing questions that get asked by students reading through their modern lens. These questions inevitably turn into heated, healthy discussions of problematic characterization, connections to our current world, patriarchy, racism, and using fear as a means of control. In this unit, I use objects and artifacts to help my students truly grasp the historical context of Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. This visual examination will also help my students understand the emotional intensity of Puritan cultural conformity, which generated a type of hysteria represented in the play. Through this study of the Puritan way of life and the images and rhetoric of witchcraft pamphlets circulating in the 16th/17th century, students will be able to clearly see the oppression, within the Puritan world, of those considered to be “others,” such as people of color, women and those who refused to conform to social norms.

(Developed for IBHL I, grade 11; recommended for IBHL I and AP Language and Composition, grade 11; and AP Literature and Composition, grade 12)

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