*THE CRUCIBLE*

*Background:*

*Early Puritanism and The Salem Witch Trials of 1692*

* “Puritan” is a word used to describe a number of Protestant groups of the 16th and 17th centuries.
* They first arrived in America in 1620.
* Puritans fled to the New World from England to avoid religious persecution.
* Puritans believed in simple forms of worship and a humble way of life.
* Puritans contributed to the American character through their moral, ethical, and religious convictions.
* They penned the Mayflower Compact, upon which the American Constitution is based.

PURITAN BELIEFS

* Puritans believed in the simple worship and church organization described in the New Testament.
* They valued self-reliance, industriousness, temperance and simplicity.
* They believed the Bible to be the literal word of God.
* They examined their inner and outer lives, as their beliefs dictated they should.
* The Puritans believed in predestination, that most of humanity was damned (the “unregenerate”), and that only a select number of people would gain eternal salvation (the “elect”).
* Determining whether an individual was part of the “elect” was a difficult and uncertain endeavour.  No one could be sure whether s/he was in God’s good graces, even with saintly behaviour.

PURITAN POLITICS

* The Puritans of the New World lived under a *theocracy,* or a system of government in which the church and state are closely linked and religious law is man’s law.
* The church’s officials were the government’s officials.  Thus, church and state were not separate.
* In such communities, the religious leader was also a civic leader, and the spiritual as well as social well-being of the community was the responsibility of the leader.

GOVERNMENT BY CONTRACT

* Puritans believed that people should enter into governmental contracts freely, as exhibited in the Mayflower Compact.
* Members of “the elect” were expected to exert great influence on the government, which resulted in undemocratic political views.

PURITAN WOMEN

* Puritan women held little power or influence in their communities, particularly unmarried women.
* Women were not allowed to own property.
* While its actual practice was unusual, husbands were allowed to punish or publicly humiliate their wives for infractions such as insubordination.

COTTON MATHER (1663-1728)

* Cotton Mather was Puritan minister and one of the first American medicinal scientists.
* He campaigned for inoculations during the smallpox outbreak of the early 1720s and potentially saved 300 lives.
* Cotton Mather was a published and respected scholar.

COTTON MATHER/REVEREND HALE

* Cotton Mather’s published works concerning suspected witchcraft cases gave more credibility to the idea that witchcraft was present in New England in the late 1600s.
* The character of Reverend Hale in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* is inspired by the life and works of Cotton Mather.

SALEM IN 1692

* The summer of 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts, was the setting for an infamous American witchhunt.
* 19 people were put to death after refusing to plead guilty to charges of witchcraft.
* The primary evidence presented to the court was the testimony of a number of young girls who claimed to be persecuted by the witches they named.

A QUICK OVERVIEW…

* Salem’s Reverend Parris’ slave, Tituba, was caught dancing in the forest with some young girls from the village.  When some of the girls began showing signs of “affliction” such as choking, chills, sleeplessness and other symptoms, the townspeople feared witchcraft.  Soon a court was established and trials commenced.  Those that plead guilty and begged forgiveness were sentenced to prison, while those who refused to admit guilt were put to death.
* The word “puritanical” means “marked by stern morality.”

SALEM TOWN VS. SALEM VILLAGE  

Salem Politics

* Economic Unrest caused many conflicts
* Salem Town: Modern; stylish; wealthy
* Salem Village: Fortunes diminished due to contesting of wills and division of land boundaries; farmers
* 1689: Parris becomes reverend
* 1691: Villagers vow to push Parris from town and stop contributing to his salary

THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS, 1692

* Innocent prank caused mass hysteria during time of unrest
* Hysteria implies Puritans deep belief in supernatural
  + Puritans cannot handle anything threatening the quest for perfection/religious purity (magic is out of place)
* Puritans brought pre-existing ideas about women & magic to colonies
  + Women = evil & sexual--targets for Devil

*The Crucible* is a play by Arthur Miller which explores the Salem Witch Trials. It demonstrates how hysteria and blind faith can corrupt individuals, even those with good intentions. The play is social commentary made by Miller in response to the McCarthy

Un-American, witch hunt trials of the 1950’s. "The reason why we find ourselves in a position of impotency is not because the enemy has sent men to invade our shores, but rather because of the traitorous actions of those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has had to offer - the finest homes, the finest college educations, and the finest jobs in Government we can give."