Salem Witch Trials, The Crucible, and Connections to Contemporary Society: A Process Drama

Target Demographic: High School Students  
Adaptable for English or Social Studies Classes

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This lesson plan includes a detailed learning plan for Day 1 of the unit, along with an outline of how the unit would progress on subsequent days.

Enduring Understanding: Students will critically analyze the ways in which a culture engages with fear and how that affects a society's power dynamics.

Tasks: Students will represent family structures in 17th Century Salem through an exploration of historical facts and embodying cultural traditions in creative ways, such as character driven journals. Through a process drama, students will be able to empathize with citizens of the time period. This exercise will serve as a precursor to reading Arthur Miller's The Crucible in conjunction with a unit on the Salem Witch Trials.

Intelligences: Linguistic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Musical, Kinesthetic

Learning Plan: Day 1

Warm Up:
House-Person-Tempest: To develop the idea that one single word can alter a “family” unit.

Process Drama:
Day 1 will consist of an introduction to the town, to each of the families represented, and to the culture. Below is an example of how the characters could be broken down, as well as instructions for launching the process drama.

Instructions to the students: Pick an index card and look over carefully. Note that there will be information you share with the class, and other information that is just for you. Organize yourselves by the color of your index card. These are your family units. (1-2 Minutes)

Information on the index cards:
- First/Last Names, ages, jobs if they have them
- A Secret or not-known fact about the character

Example Structure:
Puritan Family #1: The Goods High Socio-Economic Status
- Father - Pastor William (You know your wife is having an affair, but not with who.)
- Mother - Martha (You are having an affair with John Mayhew.)
- Son - Samuel (You are in love with Verity Webb, who is a lower status than you.)
- Daughter - Charity (You were dancing in the woods with Amity Aleworth.)
- (Amity Aleworth, orphaned maid)

Puritan Family #2: The Webbs Low Socio-Economic Status
- Father - Farmer Warner (You accused Amity Aleworth of dancing in the woods because your wife told you she saw her.)
- Mother - Winifred (You saw Amity Aleworth and other girls dancing in the woods.)
- Grandmother - Tabitha (You believe all of the infant deaths that have occurred in your family - to you and your daughter in law - are because of witchcraft. You believe Beloved Archer, the town's long-time midwife, to be a witch.)
- Daughter - Verity (You were dancing in the woods with Amity Aleworth, Charity Good, and Felicity and Weep-Not Mayhew. You are in love with Samuel Good, who is higher status than you.)

Puritan Family #3: The Mayhews Middle-class Socio-Economic Status
- Father - Merchant John (Having an affair with Martha Good)
- Daughter - Temperance (You know the other two girls in your house were gone last night, and you've been fighting with them.)
- Daughter - Felicity (You were one of the girls dancing in the woods with Amity Aleworth, Weep-Not, Verity Webb and Charity Good)
- Daughter - Weep-Not (You were one of the girls dancing in the woods with Amity Aleworth, Felicity, Verity Webb and Charity Good)

Puritan Family #4: The Archers Lower Socio-economic Status
- Grandmother - Beloved, the town’s midwife (Martha Good recently asked you to brew her a contraceptive tea.)
- Mother - Abigail (You often see Winifred Webb walking alone at night.)
- Daughter - Delilah (You were invited to go into the woods by Felicity Mayhew, but declined.)
- Son - Merchant Apprentice Thurgood (You’re in love with Verity Webb, and jealous because you know she loves Samuel Good.)

Families are instructed to meet each other and share the information they wish to share, and then they are welcomed:

Leader to the students: Welcome to our community, the year is 1692 and we live in Massachusetts. As a small town, there are a few rules to keep everyone safe. It is very important that within your own family you pass along the rules to each generation. Often, this is done through song or rhyme. Read through the rules with your family, pick one or two to teach to your children through Rhyme or Song this evening as they go to bed. (5-7 Minutes)

1. It is lewd and unseemly for a man to kiss his wife in public.
2. It is against the law not to attend church.
3. Families should pray before sleep and upon rising in the morning.
4. The wearing of lace is forbidden, and it is unladylike for a woman to show any ankle.
5. Women who gossip or ridicule their husbands may be punished by the ducking stool.
6. Satan created witchcraft; those found consorting with magic are doing the work of the Devil and are punishable by death.
7. It is illegal for a man to wear long hair.
8. Dancing will not be permitted under any circumstances.
9. A youth cannot court a maid without the consent of her parents.
10. Idleness is unacceptable, as are all the seven deadly sins.

Leader to the students: Before everyone goes to sleep, please introduce your family and share your family Rhyme or Song with the class. (5-10 minutes)

Leader/Narrator: Everyone goes to sleep. In the morning, the entire community is called to a town meeting with the leaders of the town.

Leader: Good Morning everyone. I’m Judge Belcher. We’ve called this town meeting to discuss an event that occurred last night. A group of young girls were sighted dancing around a fire deep in the far woods. As you know, dancing is explicitly forbidden in accordance with God’s law. While there were at least five maids, only one has been identified. We’d like to call her to the front and investigate this matter. Amity Aleworth, please step forward.

(Amity, played by a different teacher in-role, will step forward.)

Judge Belcher: Amity, as you are new to town, please tell us a bit about yourself.

Amity: I come from a neighboring community, about a day’s ride from here. I was recently orphaned and left alone in the world, but fortunately, my distant relative, [Reverend William Good,] was generous enough to take me in, and I thank the Lord for it daily.

Judge Belcher: Do you deny the accusation that you were dancing with other young maids in the wood?

Amity: I cannot deny it, though I did not do it willingly.

Judge Belcher: How do you mean?

Amity: I must have been possessed. I’m a good girl, I am. I never would have gone into the woods to dance, but a spirit possessed me last night and I could not help it. I was helpless before its power.

Judge Belcher: What spirit possessed you? Was it witchcraft?

Amity: Ay, I fear so.
Judge Belcher: What about the other young women with you?

Amity: I don’t know if they were also bewitched or did it willingly, but [Weep-Not Mayhew] was the one who suggested the sinful act.

Judge Belcher: This is a serious accusation. Weep-Not, do you have anything to say for yourself?

At this point, the Leader facilitates a town hall meeting where anyone is allowed to speak by a raised hand.

Potential Leading Questions:
- [Farmer Webb], you were the one that accused Amity in the first place. What exactly did you see? What were you doing outside your home that late at night?
- Can anyone corroborate Weep-Not’s where-abouts (if she denies)
- Has anyone seen any other examples of witchcraft in the village?

Once the teachers feel the conversation has run its course, whether by a series of secrets revealed or accusations made, the town hall meeting concludes:

Judge Belcher: In light of this new information, I’d like you to return home for the evening. Especially if you were accused of something, expect the Court Officers to visit, following our own investigation.

Leader: The conversation had gone on so long, evening had fallen, and everyone returned to their separate houses for dinner. Take time now to have a conversation around the dinner table with your family about the events that transpired today.

Court Officers (teachers) walk around the room as the students in families discuss the day, “knocking” on doors and interrupting “dinner” to ask leading questions.

Leader: In this town, at the end of the meal, it is customary for a family unit to create an image encompassing how they feel about the day and the day’s events. Take time now to create a tableau about where your family stands in this town before going to bed this evening.

Wrap Up:
The day would end with journal reflections in character that could be done for homework.

Process Drama Continued: An Overview of Day 2 and Day 3
- An accusation of witchcraft is announced, a citizen is put on trial, and new information is released 1-2 more times when needed to help keep the chaos and confusion maximized, developing a sense of doubt during the trial at every turn. The process drama will conclude with a class (town) vote on whether or not to hang the accused.
- Each day concludes with a character-driven journal about the day’s events.
- Other activities to develop family and town dynamic may be utilized:
  - Family Crest Drawings
  - Sunday Church Sermon Improvised Scene
  - A Flashback to the dance around the fire
  - Unpacking the dance and what it was supposed to mean