

# PREPARING to Read

## The Examination of Sarah Good

SALEM COURT DOCUMENTS, 1692

### Key Standards

**R2.1** Analyze the features and rhetorical devices of different types of public documents.

**R2.3** Verify and clarify facts in expository texts by using a variety of consumer, workplace, and public documents.

**Other Standards R3.0**

### Connect to Your Life

**Justice Denied** Have you ever been accused of doing something that you didn't do, or do you know of someone else who was falsely accused? If so, how did you feel about the accusation? Why do you think it was made? Was it ever disproved? With your classmates, discuss the causes and effects of false accusations.

### Build Background

**Mass Hysteria in Salem** In 1692, the Massachusetts Bay Colony settlement of Salem was gripped by panic after a group of adolescent girls suffered mysterious symptoms such as convulsive fits, hallucinations, loss of appetite, and the temporary loss of hearing, sight, and speech. Diagnosed as being victims of witchcraft, the girls denounced certain townspeople for this crime, including a woman named Sarah Good. The selection you will read consists of excerpts from the court records of Sarah Good's preliminary examination on March 1, 1692, at the Salem meeting house. Good was later jailed, tried in court, and found guilty; she was hanged on July 19, 1692.

Between 1692 and 1693, more than 400 people in Salem and nearby towns were accused of being witches. Ultimately, 19 men and women were found guilty and hanged. When Puritan leaders began to doubt the accusers and their evidence, the Salem witch trials finally ended. Over the next 20 years, most of those falsely accused were pardoned and awarded financial compensation.



**LaserLinks: Background for Reading**  
Historical Connection

### Focus Your Reading

**LITERARY ANALYSIS TRANSCRIPT** A **transcript** is a written record of information communicated orally, such as a **speech**, an **interview**, or **legal testimony**. The transcript of Sarah Good's examination provides the actual questions she was asked and the answers she gave. Think of this document as the script of a real-life drama. Imagine the voices of Sarah Good and her questioners and the motives for their remarks. Also notice how the introductory summary, a brief description of events written by those who questioned Good, differs from the transcript as a source of information.

**ACTIVE READING DETECTING BIAS** A **bias** is a prejudice or mental leaning toward or against some topic, issue, or person. Writers can reveal their biases by using **loaded language**, words with strong emotional associations. The description "poor tormented children" reveals the writer's sympathetic attitude, or positive bias, toward the accusing girls. Similarly, interrogators can reveal their biases by asking **loaded questions**—questions that make unwarranted presumptions or that force a certain answer. For example, the question, "Why do you hurt these children?" assumes Good's guilt.

**READER'S NOTEBOOK** As you read, note examples of loaded language or loaded questions that reveal the biases of court officials.

# EXAMINATION of SARAH GOOD

SALEM COURT DOCUMENTS, 1692



## SUMMARY

SALEM VILLAGE, MARCH THE 1ST, 1691-92.

**S**arah Good, the wife of William Good of Salem Village, Laborer. Brought before us by George Locker, Constable in Salem, to Answer, Joseph Hutchinson, Thomas Putnam, etc., of Salem Village, yeomen<sup>1</sup> (Complainants<sup>2</sup> on behalf of their Majesties) against said Sarah Good for

Suspicion of witchcraft by her Committed and thereby much Injury done to the Bodies of Elizabeth Parris, Abigail Williams, Ann Putnam, and Elizabeth Hubbard, all of Salem Village aforesaid according to their Complaints as per warrants.

1. yeomen (yō'mən): farmers who cultivate their own land.
2. complainants (kəm-plā'nənts): people who make a complaint or file a formal charge in court.

**S**arah Good upon Examination denieth the matter of fact (viz.) that she ever used any witchcraft or hurt the abovesaid children or any of them.

The above-named Children being all present positively accused her of hurting of them Sundry<sup>3</sup> times with this two months and also that morning.

Sarah Good denied that she had been at their houses in said time or near them, or had done them any hurt. All the abovesaid children then present accused her face to face, upon which they were all dreadfully tortured and tormented for a short space of time, and the affliction and tortures being over, they charged said Sarah Good again that she had then so tortured them, and came to them and did it, although she was personally then kept at a Considerable distance from them.

Sarah Good being Asked if, that she did not then hurt them who did it. And the children being again tortured, she looked

upon them And said that it was one of them we brought into the house with us. We Asked her who it was: She then Answered and said it was Sarah Osborne, and Sarah Osborne was then under Custody and not in the house; And the children being quickly after recovered out of their fit said that it was Sarah Good and also Sarah Osborne that then did hurt & torment or afflict them—although both of them at the same time at a distance or Remote from them personally—there were also sundry other Questions put to her and Answers given thereunto by her according as is also given in.

JOHN HATHORNE } ASSISTANTS  
JONATHAN CORWIN }

3. sundry (sün'drē): various.

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## TRANSCRIPT

**T**HE EXAMINATION OF SARAH GOOD BEFORE THE WORSHIPFUL ASSISTANTS JOHN HATHORNE, JONATHAN CORWIN.

Q. Sarah Good, what evil Spirit have you familiarity with?

A. None.

Q. Have you made no contract with the Devil?  
Good answered no.

Q. Why do you hurt these children?

A. I do not hurt them. I scorn it.

Q. Who do you employ then to do it?

A. I employ nobody.

Q. What creature do you employ then?

A. No creature, but I am falsely accused.

Q. Why did you go away muttering from Mr. Parris, his house?

A. I did not mutter, but I thanked him for what he gave my child.

Q. Have you made no contract with the devil?

A. No.

H[athorne] desired the children, all of them, to look upon her and see if this were the person that had hurt them, and so they all did look upon her and said this was one of the persons that did torment them—presently they were all tormented.

Q. Sarah Good, do you not see now what you have done? Why do you not tell us the truth? Why do you thus torment these poor children?

A. I do not torment them.

Q. Who do you employ then?

A. I employ nobody. I scorn it.

Q. How came they thus tormented?

A. What do I know? You bring others here and now you charge me with it.

Q. Why, who was it?

A. I do not know, but it was some you brought into the meeting house with you.

Q. We brought you into the meeting house.

A. But you brought in two more.

Q. Who was it then that tormented the children?

A. It was Osborne.

Q. What is it you say when you go muttering away from persons' houses?

A. If I must tell, I will tell.

Q. Do tell us then.

A. If I must tell, I will tell. It is the commandments. I may say my commandments I hope.

Q. What commandment is it?

A. If I must tell, I will tell. It is a psalm.

Q. What psalm?

After a long time she muttered over some part of a psalm.

Q. Who do you serve?

**Q. Why do you hurt these children?**

**A. I do not hurt them. I scorn it.**

A. I serve God.

Q. What God do you serve?

A. The God that made heaven and earth, though she was not willing to mention the word *God*. Her answers were in a very wicked spiteful manner, reflecting and retorting against the authority with base and abusive words, and many lies she was taken in. It was here said that her husband had said that he was afraid that she either was a witch or would be one very quickly. The worshipful Mr. Hathorne asked him his reason why he said so of her, whether he had ever seen anything by her. He answered no, not in this nature, but it was her bad carriage<sup>4</sup> to him and indeed, said he, I may say with tears that she is an enemy to all good.

SALEM VILLAGE, MARCH THE 1ST, 1691-92

WRITTEN BY EZEKIEL CHEEVER

4. carriage: conduct.

## Connect to the Literature

### 1. What Do You Think?

What is your reaction to Sarah Good's examination?

### Comprehension Check

- Who are Sarah Good's alleged victims?
- What charges made against her does Good deny?

## Think Critically

2. **ACTIVE READING DETECTING BIAS** How would you describe the court officials' attitude toward Sarah Good? Support your answer with evidence from your

**READER'S NOTEBOOK.**

THINK ABOUT

- the questions Good is asked
- the comments made about her at the end of the transcript

3. What do you think accounts for the court officials' attitude?
4. Why do you think Sarah Good accuses Sarah Osborne of being a witch?
5. Why do you think Sarah Good's husband testifies against her?
6. What explanation can you offer for the apparent torments suffered by the girls who accuse Sarah Good?

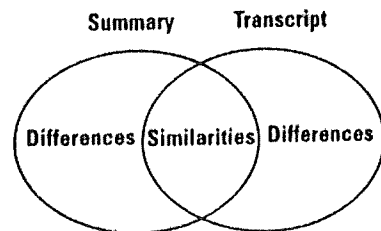
## Extend Interpretations

7. **Different Perspectives** In the preface to her book on the Salem witch trials, the 20th-century historian Marion L. Starkey writes, "Who in my day has a right to be indignant with people in Salem of 1692?" Why might she have made this comment? Do you agree that people of our time cannot or should not make judgments about people of earlier times?
8. **Connect to Life** Do you think that something similar to the Salem witch trials could happen in your community today? Why or why not? Consider the Connect to Your Life activity in which you discussed false accusations.

## Literary Analysis

**TRANSCRIPT** A **transcript** is a written record of information that was originally spoken aloud. The **summary** of Sarah Good's examination you read first provides a brief narrative account of what occurred in the courtroom. The transcript that followed shows what was actually said in the courtroom. The phrasing of the questions and answers are in the interrogators' and Good's own words. Did reading the transcript change your view of the trial?

**Activity** Compare and contrast the summary and the transcript. What did you learn or infer from the transcript that you didn't learn from the summary? What did the summary tell you that the questions and answers on the transcript did not? What parts of the summary accurately reflect the transcript, in your view? Record differences and similarities in a large Venn diagram, as shown. Then decide which document seems to be the more **credible**, or trustworthy, source of information about the trial. Consider the possible **motivations** of the persons who wrote each document and the kind of information included. Discuss your opinion with classmates.



## Writing Options

**1. Courtroom Drama** Rewrite part of the transcript as a dramatic scene from a play. Using a script form, include the name of each character who is speaking and stage directions that show the character's tone of voice, feelings, gestures, or actions.

**2. Plea for Mercy** Write a letter of appeal asking panel members to reconsider their decision to hang Sarah Good. Tell why the court documents you have read do not convince you of her guilt. Save your writing in your **Working Portfolio**.

**3. Explanation of Motives** Write a brief essay in which you explain the possible motivations of either the girls who accused Good of witchcraft, the men who pressed charges against Good, or the men who conducted Good's preliminary examination.

**Writing Handbook**  
See page 1283: Analysis

## Activities & Explorations

**1. Courtroom Sketches** Assume the duties of a courtroom artist and draw sketches of the people and events involved in Good's examination. ~ ART

**2. Media Coverage** With a group of classmates, create a newscast in which you report on Sarah Good's examination. At the beginning of the newscast, have a news anchor recap what has happened so far. Then have reporters interview Sarah Good, the examiners, the afflicted girls, and Salem residents. If possible, make a videotape of the interviews. ~ SPEAKING AND LISTENING

**3. Legal Discussion** A basic premise of the U.S. legal system is that a person charged with a crime is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Also, the Bill of Rights in the Constitution provides that a

defendant is not required to testify against himself or herself. Meet in a small group to discuss why you think such ideas became so important in our legal system. Base your discussion on Sarah Good's experiences with the justice system in Puritan New England. ~ GOVERNMENT

*Dear Panel Members:  
Sarah Good does not  
deserve hanging.*

## Inquiry & Research

**1. Salem Witch Trials** Find out more about the Salem witch trials, researching questions such as these:

- Which girls in the community were afflicted?
- Whom else did they accuse?
- How many people confessed?
- How was a person's guilt proven in court?

Report your findings to the class.

**2. Salem Memorials** Find out how the town of Salem has memorialized those people who were executed as witches. You might research the memorial park that was built in 1992, exactly 300 years after the trials. Also look at the Related Reading on page 150, which describes a clash over ways to commemorate Salem's history.



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## Art Connection

**Mental Picture** The engraving on page 145 depicts the examination of an accused witch in Salem. How closely does it match the image of the courtroom you formed as you read about Sarah Good's examination?

