

# Week 8 Student Workbook

## February 16-22, 2026: The Salem Witch Trials Doctors, Families, Frontier, and the Fight to Survive

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Started: \_\_\_\_\_

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### This Week's Focus

Here is a question to sit with before you start this week: what does it take to keep your integrity when lying would save your life?

This week you will meet a doctor whose two-word diagnosis launched a legal catastrophe, a family so large and so divided that some of its members were busy accusing people while others were busy defending them, a man who went to the gallows rather than say something he knew was not true, young people who survived frontier massacres and then ended up at the center of a witch hunt, the magistrates who left a fort defenseless two years before they started judging witches, and the creative and sometimes desperate ways people tried to survive a court where everyone was convicted.

It is a big week. Let's go.

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### Daily Learning (February 16-22)

#### February 16: The Doctor's Diagnosis

Here is how this week starts: on February 16, 1692, a physician named William Griggs Sr. bought a house in Salem Village for 71 pounds. Nine days later, his niece Elizabeth Hubbard began showing affliction symptoms. Soon after that, Griggs examined Betty Parris and Abigail Williams and reportedly told the community what was wrong with them.

Two words: evil hand.

Those two words changed everything. Before them, this was a medical problem. After them, it was a legal and spiritual one. Doctors had run out of answers, and in 1692 Massachusetts, when medicine failed, the supernatural was the next stop.

### Key Facts:

- Griggs is widely believed to have made the "evil hand" diagnosis, but the original historical source does not name the physician, so historians cannot be 100% certain it was him
- The Winthrop family ran medicine the way some families run law firms: Governor John Winthrop was a physician, his son John Jr. was a physician and alchemist and governor of Connecticut, and his grandson Waitstill Winthrop was also a physician
- Several Salem-area physicians died in the years just before 1692, leaving the community with fewer medical options
- Judge Bartholomew Gedney left behind 60 pounds worth of drugs when he died, and Martha Cory claimed some ointments found on her property came from his recipe
- In 1688, Boston physician Dr. Thomas Oakes diagnosed the Goodwin children as victims of "hellish witchcraft," setting a precedent that made the 1692 diagnosis feel familiar and legitimate

### Now look at this:

Salem physician Zerubabel Endicott, who died in 1684, left behind a remedy collection. Here are two of his prescriptions.

For bloody flux: take the liver of a stone horse (a stallion). Dry it in the bread oven. Powder it. Give a spoonful at a time in milk.

For difficult childbirth: find a virgin who is exactly half the age of the woman in labor. Cut a lock of her hair. Grind it into fine powder. Add twelve ant's eggs, also dried in the bread oven after the bread is removed. Serve in a quarter pint of red cow's milk. If no red cow is available, strong ale wort will do.

**Quick Question:** You are a colonial physician. A child is having violent fits and you cannot find any physical cause. Your available treatments involve horse livers and ant eggs. What do you do? And here is the harder question: if your medicine looks a lot like magic already, how big is the leap to blaming witchcraft?

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## February 17: The Putnams (It's Complicated)

### Key Facts:

- The Putnam family in Massachusetts started with John Putnam and Priscilla Gould, settled in Salem by 1641

- Three branches: Captain John Putnam Sr., Lieutenant Nathaniel Putnam, and Lieutenant Thomas Putnam
- Eight Putnams signed the petition supporting Rebecca Nurse
- Sergeant Thomas Putnam swore out complaints against 35 people, testified against 17, and recorded 120 depositions from his wife, daughter, and niece among others
- Three women in his household were among the afflicted: his wife Ann Carr Putnam, his daughter Ann Putnam Jr., and their servant Mercy Lewis
- Ann Putnam Jr. was the first afflicted person outside the minister's household; in 1706 she publicly apologized, the only accuser known to have done so
- Joseph Putnam, Sergeant Thomas's half-brother, opposed the trials so strongly that he reportedly kept a horse saddled at all times in case he and his wife needed to flee
- Joseph's son Israel Putnam became a general in the Revolutionary War, appointed major general by George Washington

### Sort It Out:

Place each Putnam in the correct column based on their role. Some may fit in more than one.

Person	Accused people	Signed Rebecca Nurse petition	Opposed the trials
Captain John Putnam Sr.			
Rebecca Prince Putnam			
Jonathan Putnam			
Lt. Nathaniel Putnam			
Benjamin Putnam			
Sergeant Thomas Putnam			
Ann Carr Putnam			
Ann Putnam Jr.			
Joseph Putnam			

**Quick Question:** Pop culture loves a villain, and the Putnams are often cast as the villains of Salem. But eight Putnams signed a petition defending Rebecca Nurse while others were busy accusing her. What does this complicate about the villain narrative? And does it make what Sergeant Thomas Putnam did better or worse that his own family saw things differently?

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**February 18: John Proctor**

Before you read the key facts, here is where this story ends: on the morning of August 19, 1692, John Proctor asked Reverend Nicholas Noyes to pray with him before he was hanged. Noyes refused. John had not confessed to witchcraft, and Noyes would not pray with an unrepentant witch. So John Proctor went to the gallows without a final prayer.

He could have avoided all of this by saying two words: I confess.

He did not.

**Key Facts:**

- John Proctor was born in England around 1632, making him approximately 60 years old in 1692, not the young passionate farmer Arthur Miller wrote in *The Crucible*
- He attended Elizabeth's examination on April 11, 1692, to defend her; the accusers turned on him during the proceedings and he was arrested on the spot, becoming the first male suspect taken into custody in the Salem witch trials
- From prison on July 23, 1692, he wrote to five Boston ministers comparing the magistrates to the Spanish Inquisition and describing how his sons and Martha Carrier's sons were tortured neck and heels to force confessions
- 32 neighbors signed one petition for the Proctors; 20 more signed a second one
- He was hanged on August 19, 1692, alongside George Jacobs Sr., John Willard, Martha Carrier, and George Burroughs
- Robert Calef recorded that Proctor behaved with great dignity at the gallows and forgave those who had acted against him
- Sheriff George Corwin seized the family's food and cattle while the children were left with nothing, despite the fact that John had not fled and his property should not have been legally forfeited
- Elizabeth survived because she was pregnant; she gave birth to a son named John in prison on January 27, 1693
- The attainder was reversed in 1711 and restitution was paid in 1712
- Abigail Williams was 11 years old in 1692; there is no historical record of any relationship between her and John Proctor, and the Proctors attended a different church than Samuel Parris's congregation, meaning the two probably rarely if ever crossed paths

**Fill in the blanks:**

John Proctor was hanged alongside \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

The Crucible portrays John Proctor as a young man having an affair with Abigail Williams. In reality, Proctor was \_\_\_\_\_ years old, Abigail Williams was \_\_\_\_\_ years old, and the historical record contains \_\_\_\_\_ of any relationship between them.

**Quick Question:** John Proctor wrote from prison that the trials were like the Spanish Inquisition. Fifty-five people confessed to witchcraft to save their lives. Proctor refused. What was he protecting by refusing? Was it worth it?

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## February 19: The Frontier Was Already There

People talk about the Salem witch trials as if they happened in a quiet farming village where something suddenly went wrong. This episode pushes back on that. The "quiet" village was full of people who had fled war. The fear was not imagined out of nowhere. It came from somewhere real.

### Key Facts:

- Historian Mary Beth Norton and others argue that King William's War, a brutal conflict involving the Wabanaki Confederacy and French forces, directly fed the Salem panic
- Refugees from frontier raids in Maine poured south into Essex County, bringing trauma and a siege mentality with them
- Puritans understood the northern wilderness as enemy territory inhabited by both military enemies and the devil himself, which meant that fear of the frontier and fear of the supernatural were not two separate things
- Mercy Lewis had lived on the Maine frontier and was orphaned after witnessing attacks; before the Putnam household, she had worked as a servant for George Burroughs in Maine
- Abigail Hobbs, a teenager from Topsfield, had lived at Casco Bay, Maine, and confessed to meeting the devil there "at the Eastward," the colonial term for Maine
- In 1648, Jane Walford of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, was accused of witchcraft; she took her accusers to court for slander and won
- Goody Cole of Hampton, New Hampshire, was accused at least three times between the 1650s and 1680s; in 1938 the town held a ceremony attended by approximately 3,000 people where they burned copies of her court records, mixed the ashes with soil, and buried them in an urn to rehabilitate her memory
- In 1682, flying stones pelted George and Alice Walton's tavern in Great Island, New Hampshire, for four straight months; this became known as the lithobolia case, and their neighbor Hannah Jones was accused after a twenty-year land dispute

**Did you notice?**

The lithobolia case, the Goody Cole accusations, and the Salem witch trials all started with the same ingredient: a dispute. A land argument. A refused request. A neighborly grudge. The supernatural explanation came after.

**Quick Question:** If you grew up watching your family members die in raids, then moved to a place where you were expected to testify in a court about invisible attackers, how much of what you described might be your own history talking? How does trauma shape the stories people tell?

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## February 20: Falmouth, Maine: One Town, Three Stories

Falmouth is now Portland, Maine. In 1692 it was a settlement at Casco Bay that had survived multiple devastating attacks and was still paying the price. Three of the most dramatic figures in the Salem crisis had deep roots there.

**George Burroughs:** Minister in Maine in the 1670s. Salem Village minister from 1680 to 1683, where he clashed with the Putnam family over unpaid salary. Back to Falmouth from 1683 to 1689, surviving multiple attacks. Moved to Wells, Maine, months before Fort Loyal fell. In 1692, accused of being not just a witch but the ringleader of all the witches, a conjurer organizing the entire conspiracy. Arrested in Wells and transported to Salem. Executed August 19, 1692.

**Mercy Lewis:** Born around 1673 in Falmouth. Her grandparents were killed in the August 11, 1676 attack. Two uncles killed, two aunts captured. Mercy and her parents escaped to an island in Casco Bay. Her parents are believed to have been killed in the September 21, 1689 attack. She found shelter at Fort Loyal. Her uncle Thomas Cloyce was killed when the fort fell in 1690. Thomas was the brother of Peter Cloyce, who was married to Sarah Towne Cloyce, one of the accused in 1692. Mercy Lewis carried Maine with her everywhere she went.

**Abigail Hobbs:** About 15 years old when arrested in April 1692. Had lived at Casco Bay four years earlier. Confessed to meeting the devil in the Maine woods as a child, first when a man approached her, then when a cat offered her a book to sign. Said she made a pact with men who came to her and promised to serve them for two years. Witnesses described her as disrespectful to her father and stepmother, spending nights alone in the woods, threatening to raise the dead, and speaking about "Old Nick" as though he were a friend.

**Quick Question:** All three of these people passed through Falmouth before ending up at the center of the 1692 crisis. Burroughs was accused because of it. Mercy Lewis's testimony was shaped by it. Abigail Hobbs's confession was set there. What does it mean that so much of 1692 has roots in one specific traumatized place?

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## February 21: The Fall of Fort Loyal

Two years before the Salem witch trials, some of the men who would later judge the accused helped make a decision that got approximately 200 people killed.

**Key Facts:**

- In April 1690, the Massachusetts council sent John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin north to inspect Maine's frontier defenses
- They found the defenses in poor shape; some garrisons had no soldiers at all
- At Falmouth, Captain Simon Willard commanded 60 men at Fort Loyal
- Meanwhile in Boston, William Stoughton and Samuel Sewall had traveled to New York to promise Massachusetts soldiers for a combined attack on Montreal, meaning those troops were committed elsewhere
- Hathorne and Corwin's inspection led to the conclusion that Willard's 60 soldiers were no longer needed at Fort Loyal
- On May 15, Willard marched his men out following orders
- At daybreak on May 16, 400-500 Wabanaki and French soldiers attacked
- A five-day siege followed; the attackers burned all the houses
- The French promised safe passage; the English surrendered; the promise was broken; the wounded were murdered; approximately 200 people were lost
- Historian Mary Beth Norton argues that Hathorne and Corwin's failure to advocate for keeping the soldiers was a catastrophic miscalculation
- The settlements east of Wells were abandoned; refugees flooded south

**Connect the dots:**

The men who helped leave Fort Loyal defenseless in 1690:

Hathorne: \_\_\_\_\_ in 1692

Corwin: \_\_\_\_\_ in 1692

Stoughton: \_\_\_\_\_ in 1692

Sewall: \_\_\_\_\_ in 1692

**Quick Question:** Samuel Sewall eventually apologized for his role in the witch trials. He stood up in church and publicly said he was wrong. William Stoughton never apologized for anything. Knowing what you now know about what these men did before 1692, does the apology mean more or less to you?

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**February 22: How Do You Survive a Court That Convicts Everyone?**

Here is a fact that should stop you cold: every single person who was tried before the Court of Oyer and Terminer in 1692 was convicted. Every one. The court had a 100% conviction rate. So when we talk about "survival strategies," we are not talking about strategies for winning. We are talking about strategies for not being there, or for buying enough time that the court stopped sitting before your case came up.

**Key Facts:**

- At least 25 people died: 19 hanged, 1 pressed to death, 5 from jail conditions
- Even those found not guilty could die: Lydia Dustin was acquitted but could not pay her jail fees and died in her cell
- Of 55 people who confessed, only 1 was executed, and that was after recanting the confession; confession was a stalling tactic, not a pardon
- Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail Faulkner Sr. survived by pleading the belly (pregnancy); the law would not execute an unborn child
- Four ministers petitioned Governor Phips to give Dorcas Hoar one month to prepare spiritually before execution; the court shut down during that month
- Allen Toothaker accused his own aunt Martha Carrier; he was not accused himself
- John Indian became afflicted after his wife Tituba was arrested; if you were the one having fits, you could not also be the witch
- Mary Warren switched from afflicted to accused and back to afflicted again; the charges against her were never pursued
- Marilynne K. Roach identified 21 individuals who fled rather than face the court; New York's governor was protecting some of the refugees
- Since everyone who stood trial was convicted, not being there was the most reliable path to survival

**Rank the strategies:**

If you had been accused in 1692, rank these strategies from most likely to try (1) to least likely (8):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Confess to something you did not do
- \_\_\_\_\_ Claim you are pregnant
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ask ministers to petition for more time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Accuse someone else first

- \_\_\_\_\_ Start having fits yourself
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gather neighbors to sign a petition for you
- \_\_\_\_\_ Find character witnesses to testify on your behalf
- \_\_\_\_\_ Run

**Quick Question:** Every strategy on that list involves either lying, compromising, or getting lucky. None of them involve the court recognizing your innocence. What does that tell you about what justice meant in 1692?

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## This Week's Big Ideas

**Words Have Power, Especially Diagnoses:** When a physician called the afflictions an "evil hand," he did not just describe a symptom. He redirected an entire crisis from medicine to law. Two words, and everything changed.

**Families Are Not Monoliths:** The Putnams drove more accusations than almost any other group in Salem. They also signed more petitions defending the accused than almost any other group. Both things are true. People in crisis do not all move in the same direction, even in the same household.

**Integrity Can Be a Death Sentence:** John Proctor knew the deal. Confess and live. Refuse and hang. He refused. He is remembered for it. That does not make it a happy story.

**Trauma Travels:** The frontier war did not stay in Maine. It followed its survivors south into Salem Village. Mercy Lewis, George Burroughs, Abigail Hobbs: they brought Maine into the courtroom with them. You cannot understand 1692 without understanding what happened at Falmouth.

**The Judges Had Blood on Their Hands Before the Trials Started:** Hathorne, Corwin, Sewall, and Stoughton helped leave Fort Loyal undefended in May 1690. Two hundred people died. Two years later, the same men were deciding who was a witch. That context matters.

**The System Was Not Broken, It Was Working Exactly as Designed:** A 100% conviction rate is not a failure of justice. It is the absence of it. The survival strategies this week are not clever workarounds. They are what people had to do when the court offered them nothing.

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# Vocabulary

Evil hand:

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Maleficium:

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Attainder:

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Plead the belly:

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King William's War:

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The Eastward:

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Lithobolia:

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Court of Oyer and Terminer:

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Ringleader (in the 1692 context):

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Spectral evidence:

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## Weekly Reflection

1. Three people in this week's content carried Falmouth, Maine, with them into 1692: George Burroughs, Mercy Lewis, and Abigail Hobbs. Each of them ended up at the center of the crisis for different reasons. What does their shared geography tell us about the relationship between place and the stories people tell under pressure?

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2. John Proctor refused to confess. The 55 people who did confess mostly survived. Was Proctor's choice admirable, foolish, or both? What would you have needed to believe to make the same choice?

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3. The "evil hand" diagnosis came from a doctor who could not explain what was wrong with two girls. Zerubabel Endicott's treatments used horse livers and ant eggs. What does colonial medicine tell us about how people handle the unexplainable, and does that impulse look different today?

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4. Hathorne and Corwin inspected Fort Loyal in April 1690 and left it defenseless. They were back in Massachusetts presiding over witch trials two years later. Samuel Sewall eventually apologized. William Stoughton never did. Does knowing what these men did before 1692 change how you judge their actions in 1692?

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5. This week showed that surviving the Salem witch trials had almost nothing to do with being innocent. It depended on luck, timing, and whether you were willing to lie. What does that say about the relationship between justice and survival?

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## Share Your Learning

Did you:

- Explain Zerubabel Endicott's remedies to someone and watch their face?
- Tell someone that the Putnams both accused and defended people in the same crisis?
- Share why John Proctor refused to confess and what it cost him?
- Explain to someone that Mercy Lewis was a Maine war survivor before she was a Salem accuser?
- Tell someone about the fall of Fort Loyal and who was responsible?
- Asked someone which survival strategy they would have used?
- Posted on social media using #SalemWeek8?

What did you share? How did people respond?

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## Progress Check

Week 8 of approximately 75 weeks | approximately 10.7% complete | January 2026 - May 2027

You completed Week 8!

You now understand:

- How a two-word medical diagnosis launched a legal catastrophe
- The Putnam family in its full contradictory reality
- Why John Proctor chose the gallows over a false confession
- How the Maine frontier seeded the Salem crisis with real trauma
- The fall of Fort Loyal and the men who helped cause it
- What it actually took to survive a court with a 100% conviction rate

**Next week:** The first formal examinations begin on March 1, 1692. The accused are brought before the magistrates. It is about to get real.

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## Your Badges

#SalemDailyStudent  #SalemWeek8  #SalemDescendantPathStudent (if applicable)

Post your progress using: #SalemDailyStudent #SalemWeek8 #ThingAboutSalem

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You crushed Week 8! See you next week.

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## Resources and Links

**This Week's Content** Video Playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UClis4vjMIUgg3wcA0pXeYQ/> Podcast: The Thing About Salem at <https://aboutsalem.com> Salem Witch Trials Daily Hub:

<https://aboutsalem.com/salem-witch-trials-daily/>

**Previous Week** Week 7 Blog:

<https://aboutsalem.com/week-7-blog-families-geography-and-the-machinery-of-accusation-february-9-15-2026/>

**Useful Websites** The Thing About Salem: <https://aboutsalem.com> The Thing About Witch Hunts: <https://aboutwitchhunts.com> Primary Sources: <http://www.17thc.us/primarysources/accused.php>

**Books** Bernard Rosenthal, ed., *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*:

<https://bookshop.org/a/90227/9781107689619> Emerson W. Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft*:

<https://bookshop.org/a/90227/9780190627805> Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Day-by-Day Chronicle*: <https://bookshop.org/a/90227/9781589791329> Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*: <https://bookshop.org/a/90227/9780375706905> Richard Hite, *In the Shadow of Salem*: <https://bookshop.org/a/90227/9781594164378> Ben Wickey, *More Weight: A Salem Story*: <https://bookshop.org/a/90227/9781603095600> George Francis Dow, *Every Day Life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony*: <https://bookshop.org/a/90227/9780486157856>

**Support the Project** End Witch Hunts is a nonprofit. Donate: <https://endwitchhunts.org/donate/> Help seek justice for accused witches: [www.change.org/witchtrials](http://www.change.org/witchtrials) Massachusetts exoneration project: <https://massachusettswitchtrials.org/>