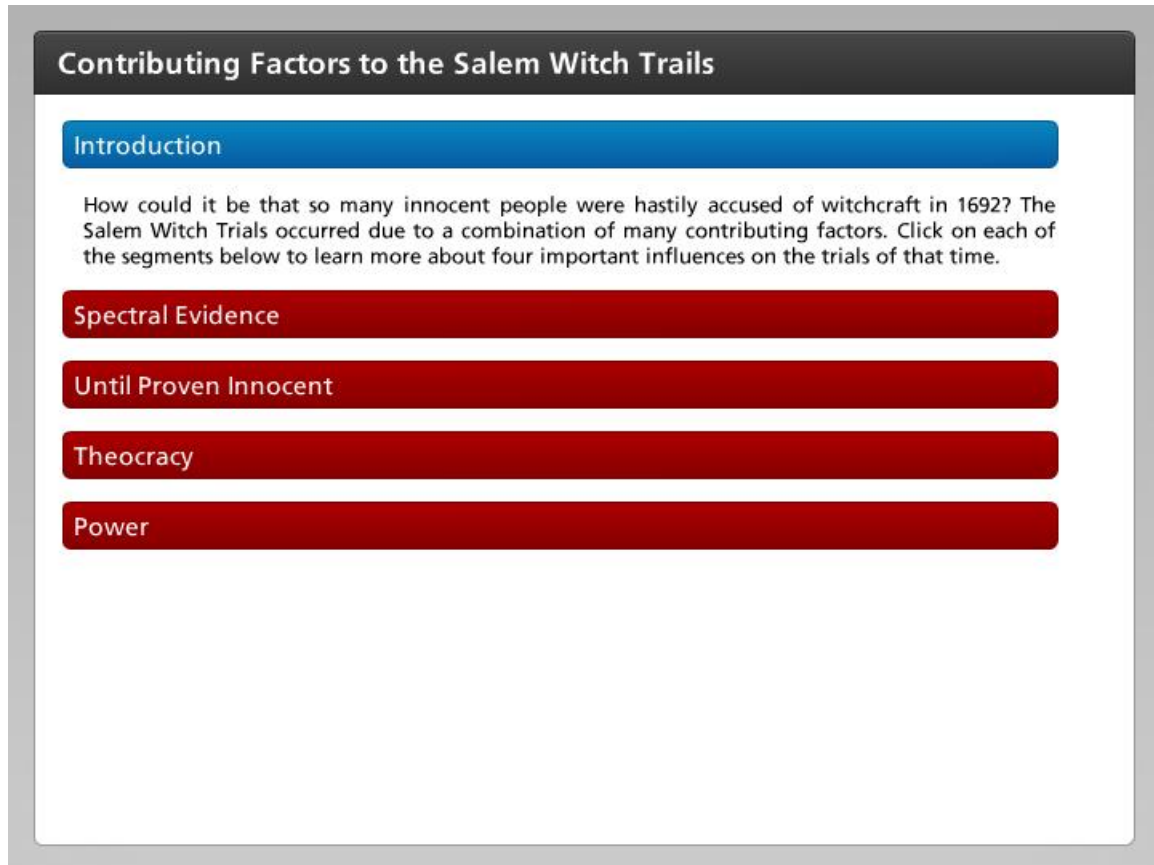


Module 4: Drama in American Literature

Topic 4 Content: Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trials

Introduction



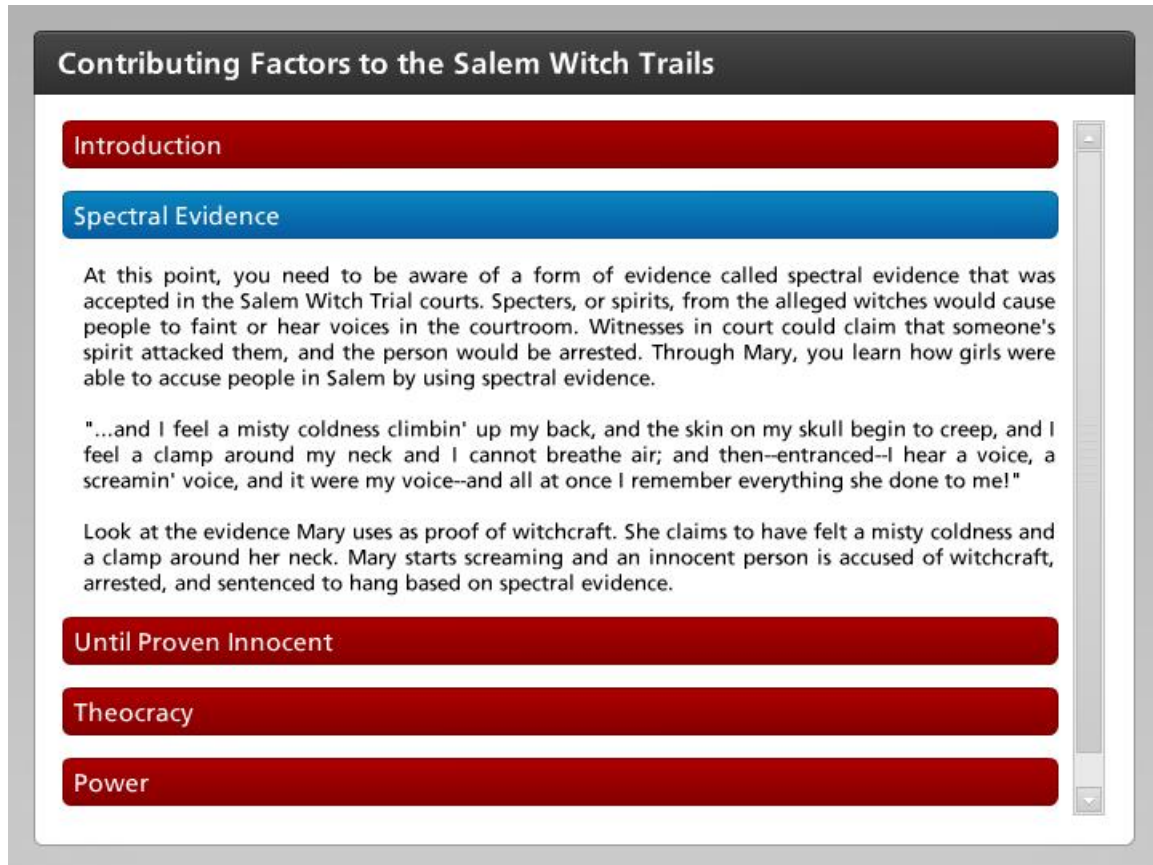
The screenshot shows a digital interface with a dark grey header containing the title "Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trails". Below the header is a blue button labeled "Introduction". Underneath the button is a paragraph of text: "How could it be that so many innocent people were hastily accused of witchcraft in 1692? The Salem Witch Trials occurred due to a combination of many contributing factors. Click on each of the segments below to learn more about four important influences on the trials of that time." Below the text are four red buttons, each representing a contributing factor: "Spectral Evidence", "Until Proven Innocent", "Theocracy", and "Power".

How could it be that so many innocent people were hastily accused of witchcraft in 1692? The Salem Witch Trials occurred due to a combination of many contributing factors. Click on each of the segments below to learn more about four important influences on the trials of that time.

Module 4: Drama in American Literature

Topic 4 Content: Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trials

Spectral Evidence



The screenshot shows a digital interface with a dark grey header containing the title "Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trials". Below the header is a vertical list of red navigation buttons: "Introduction", "Spectral Evidence", "Until Proven Innocent", "Theocracy", and "Power". The "Spectral Evidence" button is highlighted in blue. The main content area is white and contains the following text:

At this point, you need to be aware of a form of evidence called spectral evidence that was accepted in the Salem Witch Trial courts. Specters, or spirits, from the alleged witches would cause people to faint or hear voices in the courtroom. Witnesses in court could claim that someone's spirit attacked them, and the person would be arrested. Through Mary, you learn how girls were able to accuse people in Salem by using spectral evidence.

"...and I feel a misty coldness climbin' up my back, and the skin on my skull begin to creep, and I feel a clamp around my neck and I cannot breathe air; and then—entranced—I hear a voice, a screamin' voice, and it were my voice—and all at once I remember everything she done to me!"

Look at the evidence Mary uses as proof of witchcraft. She claims to have felt a misty coldness and a clamp around her neck. Mary starts screaming and an innocent person is accused of witchcraft, arrested, and sentenced to hang based on spectral evidence.

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Module 4: Drama in American Literature

Topic 4 Content: Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trials

Until Proven Innocent

Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trails

- Introduction
- Spectral Evidence
- Until Proven Innocent**
- Theocracy
- Power

In the year 1692, the legal principle "presumed innocent until proven guilty" had not become a familiar phrase. In Puritan times, the accused were guilty and had to prove their innocence. This is illustrated in Act Two when Mary Warren explains how Sarah Osburn was proven to be a witch because she mumbled under her breath and lied about knowing her commandments.

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Module 4: Drama in American Literature

Topic 4 Content: Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trials

Theocracy



Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trails

- Introduction
- Spectral Evidence
- Until Proven Innocent
- Theocracy**
- Power

The Puritans, having fled England because of religious persecution, founded their colony on the ideals that they would be free to worship as they chose without government involvement. What they really meant was that they wanted a theocracy free of involvement from any outside governments or settlements. A theocracy is, in essence, a religious government where God is seen as the supreme leader and God's laws are interpreted and enforced by the clergy, or religious leaders. As a result of such strict laws and rule, the villagers of Salem were under an immense amount of stress and severe code of behavior. Only toddlers were allowed to play, which was an activity considered irreverent for anyone else. The Puritans had no real ways to relax, and having fun was unthinkable. As a result, it was very easy for the girls to believe they were being afflicted even when they were not. These girls became empowered by their newfound status and attention. Additionally, once the girls began accusing, it would have been hard for them to stop without being punished themselves.

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Module 4: Drama in American Literature

Topic 4 Content: Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trials

Power

Contributing Factors to the Salem Witch Trails

- Introduction
- Spectral Evidence
- Until Proven Innocent
- Theocracy
- Power**

Historian and moralist Lord Acton is quoted as once saying, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." It is quite possibly this power surge that leads many of the young girls to continue to accuse people of witchcraft. These are girls who, due to their unmarried status, had absolutely no power in Puritan society or even in their personal lives. Mary flaunts her newfound power to the Proctors. When John yells at her, she states she is "an official of the court." The girls' influence over the Salem judges demonstrates their power. Mary Warren is now an official of the court because she has declared someone a witch based on the spectral evidence already mentioned.

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