

# Examining a Sample Research Paper

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Research Project 1: Informative Writing

Smith 1

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Hysteria, Hallucinations, & Hocus-Pocus:

Deciphering the Salem Witch Trials

In Arthur Miller's classic drama *The Crucible*, Deputy Governor Danforth makes a statement which epitomizes the attitude of the authorities of the court presiding over the infamous Salem Witch Trials: "[Y]ou must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between" (3.442-445). In making this

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## Introduction Paragraph

In Arthur Miller's classic drama *The Crucible*, Deputy Governor Danforth makes a statement which epitomizes the attitude of the authorities of the court presiding over the infamous Salem Witch Trials: "[Y]ou must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between" (3.442-445). In making this statement, Danforth exposes himself as an absolutist - one is either a servant of the Lord or a servant of Satan himself in Danforth's eyes. Indeed, Miller portrays the majority of the residents of Salem as subscribing to just this worldview, and such a worldview creates fertile ground for mass hysteria to run amok. While mass hysteria likely played a significant role in the unfolding of the actual events of this historic American drama, it was not alone as an instrumental factor. Climate was as influential in people's lives then as it is now, and research suggests that the "little ice age" of 1550-1800 may have produced an economic downturn that also contributed to the confluence of other possible ingredients in the mix, among which were a hallucinogenic fungus called ergot and a possible cases of encephalitis lethargica. Although the Salem Witch Trials are often simply attributed to religious superstition co-opted by fear-mongering finger-pointers, the explanation most likely involves a convergence of several factors operating in concert.

Signal phrase precedes quotation, providing context and capturing attention with an allusion to modern media.

Quotation is followed by explanation and analysis.

Hook is followed by transition to topic.

Edits to quotations indicated through the use of brackets.

Quote is cited parenthetically.

Overview of research references principle ideas the paper will address.

The thesis ends the paragraph, making a claim about the topic.

The first line of each body paragraph is indented 1/2"

Informative writing informs: The first body paragraph lays out basic information like the setting, events, and individuals involved in the topic.

First, though, consider the known relevant facts of the historical record: In what is today Danvers, Massachusetts, Salem Village was then an agrarian community home to yeoman farmers (Saxon). This tiny settlement bordered what is today Ipswich and Andover but what was then Salem Town, a home of wealthy merchants and expanding commercial interests (Saxon). It was in Salem Village that the first accusations of witchcraft occurred in February of 1692 (Brooks). The ensuing trials involved a series of cases brought before local magistrates which resulted by May of 1693 in the execution of fourteen women, five men, and two dogs for crimes deemed supernatural in character (Saxon). Chief among those involved were members of the Proctor family of Salem Town and the Putnam family of Salem Village (Molnar 2). All of the accusers were members of the parsonage of Salem Village lead by the Reverend Mr. Parris, and all of the accused held close commercial ties to Salem Town's leading family, the Proctors (Molnar 2). As Arthur Miller's play makes clear, the accusers, some fifty of whom came from the land-owning Putnam clan, were more traditionally Puritan in character and sought to settle previous property and personal disputes ostensibly through charging neighbors with devil worship and witchcraft (Molnar 2). Puritans followed a literal interpretation of the Bible (Brooks), including 1 Samuel, which relates how King Saul employed the Witch of Endor to summon the spirit of the prophet Samuel to help him annihilate the Philistine army, only to lose all of his sons in battle the next day and thereafter commit suicide himself (History of Witches). Indeed, Exodus 22:18 admonishes, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (History of Witches). Therefore, when considering the events of the Salem Witch Trials, one must grant that Puritans attributed to the hand of God all fortuitous events and all misfortune to the insidious reach of the Devil (Molnar 3).

## Body Paragraphs

Topic sentence use a simple transition and establishes the main idea of the paragraph.

Some continued references to the hook may be necessary to maintain the relevance of the information presented.

At the end of each paragraph, a concluding sentence leaves readers with take-away ideas to carry along as the paper transitions to the next point.

Rhetorical devices like this question keep the reader engaged.

Informative writing is unbiased: Subsequent body paragraphs offer multiple viewpoints on the topic to allow readers an objective perspective.

But what prompted such God-faring people to such sinful behavior? Various researchers have offered hypotheses, including climate change, fungal poisoning, and brain disorders. First, Harvard Ph.D. Emily Oster claims that a climatic event known as the "little ice age" brought temperature drops beginning in the fourteenth century that led to crop failures and concomitant food shortages, the worst of which occurred between 1680 and 1730 - prime time for the events in Salem (Oster). Such shortages, she claims, led to scarcity and economic hardship that may have pushed the Puritan people to see the Devil's hand at work (Oster). Second, Linnda Caporeale, a Fulbright-Hayes Scholar with a Ph.D. in psychology, argues that the accusing girls suffered from a condition called convulsive ergotism, which is caused by the ergot fungus found in grains like rye (Caporeale). The symptoms of ergotism include vertigo, crawling and tingling sensations, seizures, and hallucinations, and it is from ergot alkaloids that lysergic-acid-diethylamide, commonly known as LSD, can be made (Caporeale). Rye was a common crop in Massachusetts Bay Colony at the time, and the conditions of scarcity described by Oster may have necessitated hoarding, and therefore long-term storage, of the grain, which in the damp climate could have resulted in ergot infestation (Saxon). Independent scholar and author Laurie Winn Carlson offers a third more controversial perspective, claiming that the accusers instead suffered from encephalitis lethargica, a inflammatory disorder of the brain that produces double vision, neck rigidity, tremors, high fevers, headaches, lethargy, muscle weakness, erratic eye movements, and psychosis (Saxon, Encephalitis Lethargica). Historical records do show that some accusers exhibited symptoms similar to these, which are Carlson's chief source of evidence, but the only documented cases of encephalitis lethargica occurred

## Body Paragraphs

Intra-paragraph transitions create a sense of flow.

Evidence is offered from authorities on the topic, and these sources' qualifications are clearly established.

When the current state of scholarship on a topic is unsettled, informative writing indicates where matters remain uncertain and highlights shortcomings of experts' claims.

## Conclusion Paragraph

Inter-paragraph transitions signal to the reader that the paper is switching from informative to summative tone.

In the conclusion paragraph, the author restates the thesis in a new way, making the central interpretation seem at once novel and familiar.

between 1917 and 1928, and the disorder, which is caused by a bird and insect-borne virus, has not since recurred (Saxon, Encephalitis Lethargica).

In the final analysis, without a time machine, no one can be certain what confluence of factors brought about the Salem Witch Trials. While Oster and Carporeal offer plausible scientific hypotheses based on empirical data and economic principles, one cannot discount the possibility of an outbreak of encephalitis lethargica at a time when the concept of mental illness and disorders of the brain were inconceivable and the occult offered ultra-religious Puritans a scapegoat for everything from stillborn infants to mild indigestion. Though the exact ingredients of the brew that brought about the mass hysteria that resulted in the deaths of nineteen human beings and two kanines may not be clear, the Salem Witch Trials themselves remain a testament to the dangers of demagoguery and chauvinism in judicial proceedings. One is left haunted by the words of Arthur Miller's tortured character John Proctor from *The Crucible*, defiantly defending his honorable name in the face of outrageous accusation:

Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How can I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name! (4.910-916)

See previous slide regarding highlighting the shortcomings of experts' claims.

A succinct summary revisits each of the major points established in the body paragraphs, reminding the reader of key take-home sentiments.

The author closes with a call-back to the hook, leaving the reader a sense of having come full circle on the topic.

## Works Cited

The works cited list utilizes the page break feature to start at the top of a new page following the paper.

Sources are organized alphabetically by author (or title where no author is listed).

A hanging indent indicates divisions between individual citations.

Works Cited

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