

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Tituba of Salem Village by Ann Petry

Book Information

Ann Petry, Tituba of Salem Village
Quiz Number: 20098
HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, 1964
ISBN 0-06-440403-X; LCCN
254 Pages
Book Level: 5.4
Interest Level: MG

The story of a young woman sold into slavery and accused during the Salem witch trials.

Topics: History, Colonial Period; Horror/Thriller, Witches/Warlocks; Mysteries, Magic; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12

Main Characters

Abigail Williams orphaned niece of the Parris's
Betsey Parris young daughter
Deacon Ingersoll Pim's owner in Salem Village
Gammer Osburne sickly, old woman accused of witchcraft
Goody Good poverty-stricken woman who begs food from the villagers; eventually accused of witchcraft
John and Tituba Indian slaves Reverend Parris purchases in Barbados and brings back to Massachusetts
Mary Sibley Salem Village friend of Tituba's
Mrs. Parris Samuel's sickly wife
Pim a stowaway on the Parris's ship
Reverend Samuel Parris minister who owns Tituba and John
Samuel Conklin the Parris's Boston neighbor and weaver who teaches Tituba his craft

Vocabulary

bound out an agreement where a young boy or girl works for their owner for a period of time, usually until they are twenty-one
box the ears hit on the side of one's head
keeping room the room used for dining, reading, and cooking

money cat a cat that brings a person good luck
simpler shop business selling herbs and drugs
the ordinary a tavern and inn

Synopsis

Tituba and her husband John are happy living and working in Barbados. Reverend Parris buys them and moves them to a rental home in Boston. Reverend Parris is hoping to get a calling to a parish in Boston, but settles on one in Salem Village.

Tituba sees her image in a watering trough and is confused by what she sees. A number of years later that vision comes back to her.

Several young girls in Salem have been taken with fits, and their behavior leads to talk of witchcraft. Tituba is mentioned as a possible witch, eventually tried in court, and sent to jail with Goody Good and Gammer Osburne. After more than a year, Tituba is released from jail when her old friend Sam Conklin pays her fees.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why do you think witchcraft was so popular during Colonial times?

People didn't understand the real reasons some events occurred so they invented an explanation. The religions of the times gave negative answers to many questions. Combined with the religious fervor the people experienced at that time, they were also very superstitious--a dangerous combination.

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Literary Analysis

Do you think the young girls who were having fits were acting or actually troubled by the seizures?

The fits seemed to end quickly, especially when a girl was touched by one of the suspected witches. The fits always come at the best time.

Inferential Comprehension

How does Tituba change during the story?

Tituba grows in skills and seems to do very well caring for the garden and house. Although she is sure she is not a witch, she begins to wonder if it is possible. After learning to cope in jail, she is freed and finds as much happiness as a slave in the 1600s could find.

Constructing Meaning

If you had been present in Colonial times, how would you have acted? Would you have been tolerant of others who were different from you? Compare yourself to Betsey and Abigail.

Answers will vary. Betsey was quiet and frail. She enjoyed hearing stories and learning about the world. Abigail was more active and mischievous. She seemed to gather friends around her, but didn't always make the best choices. Her circumstances (being orphaned and taken in by the Reverend and his wife) probably contributed to her behavior. The Reverend didn't seem to make her feel a part of the family. He always referred to her as his orphaned niece.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features Have the students read another book with a related theme. Make a list of the similarity and differences between these two works. Then have the students explain to the class why the themes are related. Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*, was written on this same subject and based on the same characters and events as in this story. Although it might be too difficult for the students to read independently, they might enjoy

comparing the two works as a group.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors This story is set in Salem Village, Massachusetts. Have the students research this area of Massachusetts in Colonial times. They will find that there was a servant named Tituba who was tried for witchcraft. This story is fiction, but it is based on real life. Have the students compare the story to the actual event. Research might also include the religious and cultural backgrounds of the people as a basis for why they reacted as they did.

Comparing and Contrasting Both Rev. Samuel Parris and Samuel Conklin had a major impact on Tituba's life. Have the students write a description of each one, including their personality traits, physical features, and attitudes. Discuss the similarities and differences between these characters. Choose a scene from the book that includes these two characters. Have the students act out this scene for the class.

Describing Actions or Events Tituba was accused and tried for witchcraft. What events in the book led the citizens of Salem Village to conclude that she and the others were witches? Have the students make a list of these events and discuss them in class. Have the students act out some scenes from the trial.