Crisis:
The Salem Witch Trials 1692

Background Guide
Chair: Reece Hall
Letter From the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Hello! My name is Reece Hall, and I am extremely excited to be chairing the Salem Witch Trials 1692 crisis at the inaugural SKYMUN conference. I am currently a junior at Fort Myers High School in the IB program, and have been involved in both Model UN and Youth In Government for the past two years. In addition, I am an officer at my school’s chapters in both organizations. I am thrilled to have the unique opportunity to have a role in bringing together both of these organizations.

This committee is a crisis, and ideally it will move at a quick pace. It is very important for you to be familiar with the nuances of a crisis-style committee (which are provided in this background guide) prior to the conference. The idea behind the committee is the Salem Witch Trials in 1692 Massachusetts, a historical event, so researching the time period and historical analysis of the events is a good idea and will be essential for you to know what is happening in committee.

With that being said, because this is a crisis committee, crisis staff will be taking historical liberties in order to provide you with the best experience possible. I would love to see outside of the box directives, and to situations you will encounter throughout the session, both expected and unforeseen. In general, the ability to adapt to unexpected situations, think on your feet, and make the best of your position will serve you very well in this committee. I can’t wait to see your take on this event in March!

Sincerely,

Reece Hall
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I. Committee Structure

A. Crisis
A Model UN Crisis simulates situations that cannot be handled, or exist, in the calm methodical setting of a traditional committee. In crisis, problems and situations can flare up at any moment and they must be dealt with accordingly or things could get much worse. Moment to moment action is tense and unpredictable, a crisis forces delegates to think quickly and decisively. Sometimes errors are made, or remedied, within a short time span or not at all which brings an element of excitement for the delegate. Through the use of crisis notes, directives, portfolio powers, discussion, and debate, delegates will work towards not only the long-term goals of the committee, but also the short-term situations that arise from session to session.

B. Crisis Notes
Crisis notes are the main line of communication between the crisis room, the people who write the crisis updates, and individual delegates. Crisis notes can be simple questions regarding information about the crisis update, information regarding the resources or abilities you have, or information about some other subject. However, crisis notes are more importantly used to take actions.

Unlike directives, which are passed by committees and therefore public knowledge, crisis notes are secret, unless you choose to tell another delegate about what you wrote. The success of an action formulated in a crisis note depends on how well it is written. Crisis notes should be folded up, have “crisis note” written on the back and handed to the dais so they can be picked up and sent to the crisis room.

C. Directives
These are mini-resolutions that address an immediate issue that is upon the committee room in which the majority of the members want to act. These should not be as long or as complicated as resolutions. In fact, the best directives are comprised of only short, operative-phrase-like clauses. Directives must be submitted to the chair and then passed by a super majority vote. Directives can take the form of a simple directive, a press release or a request for information. Press releases are used to impact the committee by revealing information to the public, perhaps in an effort to calm them in times of crisis.
Directives work to take specific, collective actions. Request for information are passed in order to have a speaker enter the room to present more information on a specific problem linked to the crisis at hand. Directives are usually given pithy names using puns or a play-on-words so that they can easily be remembered, rather than being known as Directive A-1.

D. Portfolio Powers

These are the powers and special actions that your specific character, country, body, etc. can use in committee. Some powers may not be listed and it is up to you as a delegate to research your position in order to find out your capabilities in committee. Crisis is all about creativity, so be creative in your use of portfolio powers. The crisis team will be able to do a lot more if delegates send in directives and crisis notes that utilize your portfolio powers in a creative and interesting way.

E. Miscellaneous

Portfolio Request - At any time during committee, you can request information on your character’s powers and a short biography on their importance to the committee. This is typically done when someone dies and in crisis, dying is expected.

Trials - This committee is on the Salem Witch Trials, so having someone tried for witchcraft is to be expected. During committee a special motion can be made to start a trial. If this motion is passed, a trial will be planned for some time later, most likely 20-30 minutes as all parties need time to prepare.
II. Background

A. Puritanism and Catholicism

Puritanism was a religion reform movement that arose from the Church of England in the late sixteenth century. Persecution from the church and crown caused a migration of Puritans to the New World English Colonies in the early 17th century. The roots of Puritanism trace back to the 1530s with the formation of the Church of England by King Henry the VIII. The newly formed Church of England kept many aspects of Roman Catholicism, and what little reform there was seemed pithy to dissenters. Furthermore 16th Century priests were often poor and barely literate, so many worked at multiple parishes. The resulting rotation of priests in addition to their immunity of some civil laws added to anticlerical sentiments and separation from the people.

In the following years the Puritanism movement continued to grow despite the execution and exile of revolting clergymen under the rule of Protestant King Edward VI and Catholic Queen Mary. Many in East Anglia as well as the lawyers and merchants of London supported the movement, mainly due to discontent with economic policy. However, the conflict would settle to a more amicable state in the late 16th century with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

Upon Discovery of the American Continents, many English Puritans took the opportunity to start a new life in the New England region of North America, part of the British Colonies where they used their newfound religious freedom to establish Puritan only towns with laws that held all residents to strict adherence to (their interpretation of) biblical law. These regulations, known as blue laws, prohibited many activities that we today would consider commonplace, such as wearing clothes usually worn by those of a higher class, doing anything other than going to church on a Sunday, interacting with members of the opposite sex in a one on one manner before marriage, not being a puritan, drinking, celebrating holidays not specifically mentioned in the Bible (including Christmas and Easter), perhaps most importantly, dancing.
Puritans are, of course, diametrically opposed to any type of witchcraft, as it is highly heretical. If any witchcraft is present or suspected, the puritan religion clearly encourages taking whatever measures necessary in order to end the threat and prevent the spread of witchcraft.

B. Witchcraft

The origin of witches is unclear, but the earliest mentions start sometime between 900 to 700 BC in the Bible. Even then, Catholicism saw witches and witchcraft as dangerous and unholy. But the true spread and recognition of witches most likely began with the publication of *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches) which was written by two well-respected German Dominicans in 1486. The book discussed the identification, hunting, and interrogation of witches and most likely started the witch hysteria. The Hammer of Witches labeled witchcraft as blasphemy and this belief was adopted by Puritans and Catholics who were seeking to oust the witches among them.

Suspected witches were captured, tortured, and eventually killed after confessing due to being torture. This practice of witch hunts became commonplace within the next century and most of the accused ended up burning at the stake, being hanged, were drowned, or killed in other ways. With witch hysteria rapidly growing in Europe and the exodus of Puritans to the New World, it came as no surprise that the hysteria also spread to the colonies. In 1647, Alse Young was executed for witchcraft in Windsor, Connecticut. However, the best-known witch trials were held in Salem, Massachusetts.

C. The Town of Salem

The town of Salem on Massachusetts bay was first settled by English Puritan Settlers in 1626. Salem is divided into the Salem Village and Salem town, with Salem village being located more inland and Salem town being located closer to the sea. As the sea is the catalyst of most of the economic activity in Salem, Salem village is generally more well-off economically than the town. Additionally, the area around Salem is ridden with multiple Native American tribes, some of which are not particularly fond of English settlers.
Being located in New England, the winters are very harsh, and, while able to be farmed, the soil is difficult to grow many crops. Fishing and logging are other ways that colonists can make money and obtain food. In addition to dealing with the challenges posed to Salem by the existence of witchcraft, delegates should keep in mind the challenges posed by trying to survive in the colonial Salem.

D. Witchcraft in Salem

At the start of our committee in January 1692, strange things are happening around Salem. Children have been seen dancing in the forest and acting erratically. Other little girls have gone catatonic for weeks on end, only to have no memory when they are finally woken up. There have been rumors of other, more sinister, things happening, such as unmarried couples meeting up in the forest, and people dancing and dishonoring the sabbath. Because the citizens of Salem are piously devout puritans, you can go ahead and conclude that there is a darker force at work in Salem: witchcraft. While there isn’t much room to question the fact that the devil is at work (and appearing through witchcraft in some vile humans), nobody knows who is at fault and, up until this point, no one has presented concrete evidence that any certain people are responsible.

Although there is not enough evidence to convict any individuals of witchcraft beyond a reasonable doubt, the threat of witchcraft must be addressed and dealt with very soon. If the devil is at work through witches in Salem, the eternal souls of every man, women, and child in Salem is being threatened, meaning that it is imperative that the witches are eradicated before their dark ways can infect the souls of anyone else.
III. Conclusion & Expectations

There is a wide variety of challenges that come with the sudden appearance of witchcraft in colonial Salem. With that in mind, the main issues that we will set out to solve in this committee are:

- How to deal with charges of witchcraft, including determining credibility of accusations and deciding how much evidence, if any, is necessary to proceed with trying a witch.
- Creating a court for the trials of suspected witches, holding trials to decide the guilt or innocence of suspected witches, and deciding the most appropriate methods of punishment if needed.
- Doing everything possible to prevent the spread of witchcraft and the indoctrination of the populace to ways of devilry, especially the children, in order to ensure that all citizens of Salem are following the standards of Puritanism and living life for God.
- Generally surviving amidst the harsh conditions of colonial Massachusetts.

Delegates will be expected to follow all rules and procedures as well as maintain a respectful and cordial decorum at all times. We understand that, especially in crisis, debate will get heated, but we ask that delegates please be mindful and respectful of others.
IV. Crisis Specific Vocabulary and Terms

*Break Our Fast* - To eat the first meal of the day. To have breakfast

*Chamber Pot* - A container to go to the bathroom in during the night or during bad weather. In the days before indoor plumbing, people usually went to the bathroom outside

*Cod* - A kind of ocean fish

*Curds* - A soft cheese, like cottage cheese

*English Corn* - Grains that were grown in England, such as wheat, rye, and oats

*Fortnight* - Two weeks

*Goodwife* - A title of address used like we use “Mrs.” A child would call a married woman Goodwife to show respect. A married man would be called “Goodman”

*Husbandmen* - Men who make their living through agriculture, or farming the land

*Indian Corn* - The kind of corn found in the new world. Maize

*Kindled* - Set fire to

*Marjoram* - An herb (plant) used for cooking and medicine

*Master* - A title of address given to someone respected like the Governor. Also, the wife of the Governor would be addressed as “Mistress”

*Persecuted* - Punished with pains and penalties for holding a certain belief or opinion

*Physic* - Medical treatment

*Sabbath* - A day of rest and worship; for the Pilgrims it was Sunday

*To Stand Watch* - To guard the town. A group of men would take occasional military training so that they could defend their town from attack

*Weary* - Very tired

*Willful* - Stubborn

*Yoke* - Used to fetch water. A piece of wood that goes over the shoulders, with a bucket hanging on each side

*Witch Hunt* - The act of seeking and persecuting a perceived enemy

*Mass Hysteria* - The mass public near-panic induced by the speculation of witchcraft in Salem

*Puritans* - A group of people who discounted the church of England and worked towards religious, moral, and societal reforms

*Witchcraft* - The practice of using the powers of the devil in a malicious way
V. Resources

https://www.history.com/topics/colonial-america/puritanism

https://www.history.com/topics/folklore/history-of-witches#section_1


http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17209/17209-h/17209-h.htm

https://www.landofthebrave.info/new-england-colonies.htm

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/a-brief-history-of-the-salem-witch-trials-175162489/