

## Group Three: General Context

“Witch hunts” are not simply relics from the past. Some argue that this enduring feature of human behavior is the true “context” of Miller’s play. The following, taken from Wikipedia (citation follows), will provide you with some important background information.

A **witch-hunt** was traditionally a search for witches or evidence of witchcraft, which could lead to a witchcraft trial involving the accused person. Today such events are recognized as a type of moral panic. Witch hunts may still occur in the modern era, in the sense that ignorant or uneducated people, isolated peoples, or people living a traditional lifestyle may persecute people that they believe are "witches". However, the term is now widely used in a modern sense to refer to any search for a perceived or hidden enemy, with the same connotations of hysteria, prejudice and injustice that accompanied historical witch hunts.

Some have remarked that the witch hunt in *The Crucible* is eerily similar to the McMartin Preschool Case. McMartin preschool case. The McMartin preschool owner and employees were accused of child molestation and satanism. The "evidence" used against them were accounts told by children as young as 3, many whom were repeatedly asked the same question until they claimed they were abused.

Children were led around town by parents to point out abusers, much like children in the Salem witch trials. Many were led to believe the workers were devil worshippers and in the trial the fact that one of the defendants had a high school graduation gown was used as evidence of a satanic cult.

This led to a larger scare of Satanic ritual abuse that crossed the United States during the 1980s. Many people were charged with abuse and had their lives ruined as a result. Since then many of the cases have turned out to be completely baseless.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch-hunt#Modern day witchhunts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch-hunt#Modern_day_witchhunts))

Research other "witch hunts" that the class is likely to find interesting.

Your research should aim at answering the following questions:

1. Briefly, what happened?
2. What makes the events you have found “witch hunts”?
3. What were the causes? Focus here on the beliefs of the society and of the leading actors in the hearings.
4. What were the consequences? Try to find out the consequences for the individuals accused, the accusers, and for the wider society.
5. Describe some ways to have avoided these causes and/or consequences. Please consider solutions appropriate for the historical time period.

Here are a few Web sites to get you started, but you’ll probably need to do a little extra research.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/innocence/>

<http://www.curriculumunits.com/crucible/whunts/huntable2.htm>