

Primary Source Analysis



Pendle Witch Trials

Background: In 1612, an entire family along with other residents of Pendle Hill, in Lancashire, England, were accused of witchcraft. The witchcraft hysteria was fueled by superstitions and generations of prejudice. By the end of the trials ten of the twelve people accused were found guilty of witchcraft.

Directions: Read each primary source statement from the Pendle Witchcraft Trials. Then underline or highlight key words or phrases that show prejudice against the people who are accused. Answer the questions following the statements.

1. *"Alizon Device confessed that she met a black dog on the road, which spoke to her and asked her to sell her soul to him. She said she agreed to let the dog hurt a man, John Law, after a disagreement. She further confessed that her grandmother, known as 'Old Demdike,' had taught her witchcraft from a young age." --The Examination of Alizon Device*
2. *"She is a very old, crooked woman, and a dangerous witch, known for practicing sorcery and evil spells for many years." --Roger Nowell, magistrate*
3. *"And she saith, that about two years ago, her grandmother, Elizabeth Sothernes, alias Old Demdike, did counsel her to let a Devil or familiar appear to her, and to give her soul to him, as she had done, and he would do for her what she wished." --The Examination of Alizon Demdike*

4. *"She was always cursing, swearing, and using bad words, which made everyone believe that she was a witch."* --James Device, accuser
5. *"She was branded with the mark of a witch, having a fierce and hostile countenance, and her deformed body gave much suspicion to the common people."* --Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*

Questions:

1. What kind of assumptions are being made about the people in the statements?
2. What evidence is being used against these people? Is it based on facts or superstitions?
3. Whose perspectives are missing from these accounts?
4. Write a short summary to share with the class explaining whose perspectives are missing and how their stories might change our understanding of what really happened.



