

## **Unit Description**

### **A History of Fear: Why the Salem Witch Trials Keep Happening**

*Michael Pollock*

Our seminar, “Numbers and Social Problems: Considering What Counts,” examines how public attitudes and perception can be influenced by number-based claims. Numbers are created by people, argues seminar leader and University of Delaware sociology professor Dr. Joel Best. They are used with a purpose in mind. While this unit presents case studies that include the use of numbers and number-based claims, it is more interested in exploring how rapidly public attitudes towards an issue can change, and what happens when these concerns turn into fear and paranoia. Specifically, we look at how the characteristics and lessons of the Salem Witch Trials, as dramatized in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, can be applied to modern-day examples that include post-9/11 racial profiling and the case of the West Memphis Three. Students will learn what a modern-day witch-hunt looks like by identifying markers (perception of a threat, especially to children and of a foreign nature, and the use of extreme measures), then designing questions that reflect their critical thinking of these issues. This unit intended for use in an 11<sup>th</sup>-grade English Language Arts class.