THE EXAMINATION OF REBECCA NURSE, MARCH 24, 1692

(Examination of Rebecca Nurse Reader’s Theater)

Characters:

Magistrate Hathorne - Mr. John Hathorne

Defendant - Rebecca (Goody) Nurse

Abigial Williams (afflicted child)

Child who has been afflicted (not named)

Mr. Putnam (accuser)

Mrs. Putnam (accuser and one of the afflicted)

Ann Putnam (daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Putnam, one of the afflicted)

Kenny (one of the afflicted)

Mary Walcot (one of the afflicted)

Elizabeth Hubbard (one of the afflicted)

Mrs. Pope (one of the afflicted)

Reverend Sam Paris (likes to fan the flame)

(11 jurors)

Setup: Arrange room into a horseshoe shape with a podium and seat at the front of the room. All of those afflicted sit together on one side of the classroom. The family of Mr. and Mrs. Putnam, and daughter Ann sit together. Abigail Williams and Elizabeth sit next to each other. Magistrate Hathorne stands at front of class at the podium. Nurse is seated next to him facing the audience. The jurors all sit together on the other side of the class, opposite those afflicted. The rest of the class and Sam Paris sit opposite the podium and Nurse. These would be the audience watching the trial as it happens.

Magistrate Hathorne: What do you say (speaking to the child) have you seen this Woman hurt you?

Child: Yes, she beat me this morning

Magistrate Hathorne: (speaking to Abigail) Have you been hurt by this Woman?

Abigail: Yes

Ann Putman: Screams out “she hurt me too!”

Magistrate Hathorne: Goody Nurse, here are three people: Ann Putman, the child, and Abigail Williams, who are complaining of your hurting them. What do you say to that?

Nurse: I can say before my Eternal father I am innocent, and God will clear my soul

(Kenny stands up to speak)

Magistrate Hathorne: Kenny what do you say

Kenny: A few days ago, Goody Nurse came into the house. Since then, I have seized twice and fallen into fits.

Magistrate Hathorne: Here are not only these, but here is the wife of Mr. Putnam (pointing to Mrs. Putnam) who accuseth you by credible information of tempting her to sin, and of greatly hurting her.

Nurse: I am innocent and clear, and have not been able to get out of doors for 8 or 9 days. I never afflicted no child never in my life.

Magistrate Hathorne: You see these accuse you (waving to accusers), is it true?

Nurse: No.

Magistrate Hathorne: Are you an innocent person relating to this Witchcraft?

Mrs. Putnam: (stands up trying to cut off Nurse from answering and cries out) Did you not bring the dark man with you and bid me to tempt God? (Sits down once Nurse speaks)

Nurse: (Looking up with hands open palms up as if asking God for help) Oh Lord help me!

All person afflicted: (at the motion of her hands facing up begin twitching as if in fits at the movement of her hands. When she folds her hands back together, the fits stop. Fits stop once Magistrate speaks)

Magistrate Hathorne: Do you not see what a grave condition they are in? (Motioning to the afflicted) When your hands are loose, the persons are afflicted.

Mary Walcot: (standing and pointing at Nurse) She bit me before! (sits down)

Elizabeth Hubbard: (Also stands and points at Nurse) She has pinched me! (sits down)

Magistrate Hathorne: Here are these two grown women now accusing you. What do you say to that? Do not you see these afflicted persons, and hear them accuse you?

Nurse: The Lord knows I have not hurt them. I am an innocent person.

Magistrate Hathorne: It is very awful to all to see these agonies, and you, an old Professor, thus charged with contracting with the Devil. Why do you not cry when so many others are crying?

Nurse: You do not know my heart.

Magistrate Hathorne: You would do well if you are guilty to confess and give Glory to God.

Nurse: I am as clear as the child unborn.

Magistrate Hathorne: What uncertainty there may be in apparitions I know not, yet this with me streaks hard upon you that you are at this very present charged with familiar spirits. It is your bodily person the spirits speak to. These witnesses say they have seen these familiar spirits come to your bodily person. Now what do you say to that?

Nurse: I have no spirits Sir.

Magistrate Hathorne: If you confess and give glory to God, I pray God will clear you if you be innocent, and if you are guilty, discover you and therefore give me an upright answer. Have you any familiarity with these spirits?

Nurse: No, I have none but with God alone.

Magistrate Hathorne: How did you become sick? For there is an odd discourse of that in the mouths of many.

Nurse: I am sick at my stomach.

Magistrate Hathorne: Have you no wounds?

Nurse: I have none but old age.

Magistrate Hathorne: You know whether you are guilty and have familiarity with the Devil, and now when you are here present to see such a thing as these testify that a dark man whispered in your ear, and birds flew about you, what do you say to it?

Nurse: It is all false. I am clear.

Magistrate Hathorne: Possibly you may apprehend you are no witch, but have you not been led aside by temptations that way?

Nurse: I have not.

Magistrate Hathorne: (looking down and shaking head in sorrow) What a sad thing it is that a church member here and now, another of Salem, should be thus accused and charged.

Mrs. Pope: (falls into a grievous fit, and cries out. Once the Magistrate speaks, cease the fit.)

All others who are afflicted: (begin shaking and fall into fits. Once the Magistrate speaks, cease the fits.)

Magistrate Hathorne: Tell us, have not you had visible appearances more than what is common in nature?

Nurse: I have not nor never had in my life.

Magistrate Hathorne: (pointing to the group of afflicted people) Do you think these people suffer voluntary or involuntary?

Nurse: I cannot tell.

Magistrate Hathorne: That is strange everyone can judge.

Nurse: (acting as if she has given up, shaking head) I must be silent.

Magistrate Hathorne: They accuse you of hurting them, and if you think it is not unwillingly but by design, you must look upon them as murderers.

Nurse: I cannot tell what to think of it.

Magistrate Hathorne: Well then give an answer now, do you think these suffer against their wills or not?

Nurse: I do not think these suffer against their wills.

Magistrate Hathorne: Why did you never visit these afflicted persons?

Nurse: Because I was afraid I should have fits too.

Magistrate Hathorne: Is it not an unaccountable case that when you are examined these persons are afflicted?

Nurse: (again, she opens her hands up to the heavens as she speaks) I have got nobody to look to but God.

All who are afflicted: (Again upon opening her hands the afflicted persons were seized with violent fits of torture. When Nurse begins to speak, the fits stop)

Magistrate Hathorne: (pointing to the afflicted, yelling loudly) Do you believe these afflicted persons are bewitched?

Nurse: I do think they are.

Magistrate Hathorne: During an earlier trial of Tituba, Mr. Paris’s Indian Woman, when this witchcraft came upon the stage there was no suspicion of Tituba. She admitted much love to the child Betty Paris, but it was her apparition that did the mischief. Why should not you also be guilty, for your apparition doth hurt also?

Nurse: (Turning neck to the side and opening hands up in a questioning gesture) Would you have me degrade myself?

All who are afflicted: (As Nurse holds her neck to one side, begin fits again. Once Nurse rights her head, all of the afflicted stop their fits)

Nurse: (holds head straight)

Magistrate Hathorne: At this moment we would ask Sam Paris to read some of what Tituba said about her spirits.

Sam Paris: (stands up looking at Nurse in an accusatory way, and begins reading):

Tituba was asked by the Magistrate Hathorne what form the spirits take and how do they communicate with her. She responded: “like a man I think yesterday, I saw a thing like a man. He told me to serve him and I told him no. I would not do such a thing”. At this moment she charged Goody Osborne and Sarah Good as those that hurt the Children, and would have had her done it. She said she saw four people, two of which she did not know. She saw them last night as she was washing a room. “They told me to hurt the children and would have hurt me if I did not go and hurt them. At first I did agree with them, but afterward I told them I do so no more.

(Paris sits down)

Magistrate Hathorne: What do you think of this?

Nurse: I cannot help it, the Devil may appear in my shape.

Nurse: (holds her head on one side and rests it on one hand with eyes closed in dismay)

Elizabeth Hubbard: (copies Nurse by holding her head to the side, but it a much more exaggerated way, like she cannot control that it is bending to the side

Abigail Williams: (Cries out to Nurse “set your head upright Nurse or Elizabeth’s neck will be broken!)

Nurse: (Sets head upright)

Abigail Williams: (her head is righted as Nurse straightens her head)