

## LESSON OVERVIEW

**Name:** Lauren Carlton

**Grade:** 10

**Subject:** English

**Location:** Foxborough, MA

### Context & Purpose:

I created this lesson to be used with Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*. We began the unit by studying the conditions that lead up to the Salem Witch Trials, and the psychology of mass hysteria. For this QFT, I wanted to use a primary source to remind the students that while this play is a work of fiction, there were real victims in this moment in history, and it's important not to forget that as we get wrapped up in the drama of it all. I thought that using a letter from the perspective of an incarcerated victim would be particularly powerful—it provides a new perspective that the play, for the most part, lacks.

### Lesson Procedure:

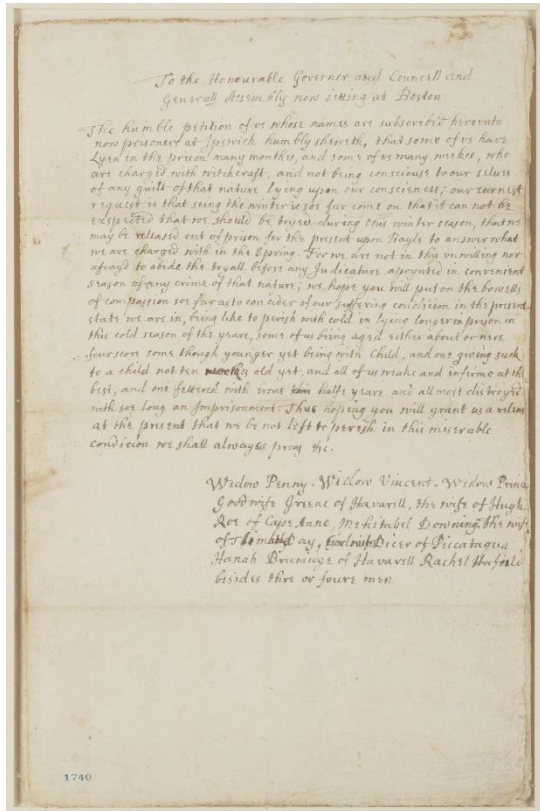
1. Due to the nature of the document (handwritten, some antiquated language and spelling), students will first read the letter on their laptops (so they can zoom in) while I read it out loud. They will generate their own questions for 2 minutes. We'll repeat this one more time before then getting into small groups to share their questions and generate more. More specifics are outlined in the [powerpoint](#). I will provide them with [a typed copy](#) of the document.
2. Students will follow the process of the QFT, with which they are already familiar. I will remind them of the rules.

### Next Steps (i.e. how student questions will be used after the QFT):

- Students will prioritize three types of questions: a) two questions they are most curious about, b) two questions most important for considering the perspective of the prisoners, and c) two questions most important for considering the letter itself
- Student questions about the letter itself will serve as a jumping-off point for analyzing the rhetorical devices used.
- Student questions about perspective will aid them in a [creative writing assignment](#) and [peer edit](#).

## LESSON OUTCOMES

### Question Focus:



[Petition for bail from accused witches, ca. 1692](#)

### Student Questions:

**Bolded questions= "Most curious about"**

1. Did they write it themselves or did someone write it for them?
2. **Did they ever get released?**
3. Why were they allowed to write a letter?
4. **If the women who were pregnant died, would the governor or the court get in trouble?**
5. Did the guards at the prison try to stop them from writing this?
6. **How long is four scores?**
7. Were the prisoners allowed to interact with each other in jail? If so, how did they communicate?
8. **Were the prisoners just trying to manipulate the governor into letting them out?**
9. Why did these specific people sign this? Were they more respected than others in jail?
10. Will the fact that so many women signed the document impact the assembly's willingness to take it into consideration?  
Do those in charge want the accused to suffer? Why else would the prisoners be kept in such conditions?
11. **Where was the baby that was born kept?**
12. Why have they not been tried yet?
13. What does "fettered with iron" mean (line 17)?
14. Why don't they think/want to be tried until the spring?
15. Is this their first attempt to be released?
16. Why are there a lot of widows?
17. Are they really unafraid to go to trial?
18. Who else is in support of this request whose names were not listed?
19. Who are the men and why can't they sign their names?
20. **Why did they have to write their marriage status when signing their name?**
21. **Why are the names of the women phrased differently from person to person?**
22. Did they try to guilt them by saying, "we hope you will put on the bonnets of compassion" to get what they wanted?
23. Could they have been punished for writing this?

### Student Reflections:

- “It gives me a better understanding because it helps show the real life events that occurred from the witchcraft, I never realized the impacts it could inflict on people and how it could really impact families.”
- “Generating questions about the petition helped me consider the perspective of my chosen writer as in my questioning I explored the fact that the writers may not be honest, which gave my leverage in starting my letter written by someone who believes the prisoners are witches.”
- “Working with my group was definitely a highlight of the activity. I enjoyed hearing and found it interesting that everyone noticed different things about the letter. Through our collaboration, we were able to make new questions that dug deeper into the source like why these specific people wrote the letter and how those in charge felt about the prisoners. In further terms of collaboration, it worked well when we took turns sharing our ideas and then discussing new ideas that came up.”
- “When responding to other groups' questions, I noticed there were many similarities between questions of each group. Some of the questions that I read made me even more curious about the letter as I had not thought of those things before. It was also interesting to see what other classmates said in response to the questions, and personally made me think of even more questions that interested me.”

### TEACHER REFLECTIONS

#### Reflect on your QFocus. This might include the process through which you decided, or it might speak to how students responded.

It was interesting to think about a different “type” of victim in the witch trials—namely, people who were even more marginalized than other victims like John Proctor and Rebecca Nurse. We spoke a bit about the “hierarchy” of victims and why it’s not enough to consider the plight of only some of the victims in any case of historical injustice. I was also pretty fascinated by the questions students asked, and what sparked their curiosity. I noticed that some students got really hung up on the notion that some of the prisoners were pregnant, others had given birth, and still others may have had children at home; some of the students asked multiple questions about who was taking care of these children, how anyone could separate mothers from their children for months on end while the mothers awaited trial. I thought these were important questions for the students to consider in order to see the widespread and irrevocable effects of these injustices; perhaps, too, it would speak to why it is so vital for us to read works like this one and try to right similar injustices that are still taking place today.

#### Which student questions stood out to you? Why?

I think the one that stood out most to me was “Were they really unafraid?”. That question communicated to me that these students understood the nuances of language and rhetorical strategies—that maybe they were saying that they weren’t afraid because that message best served their purpose, but that it wasn’t an accurate depiction of their true feelings. It also told me that the students were thoughtfully considering the perspective of the prisoners and wondering how they were affected by their plight, and thinking about how it would feel to experience this terrible situation. That question suggests that the students understand that, during the witch trials, simply being innocent of a crime didn’t guarantee impunity—and that, despite the fact that the prisoners didn’t have any guilt weighing on their consciences, the prisoners should fear their trial.

#### How well did student questions achieve planned next steps?

The student questions served as a jumping-off point for [analyzing the rhetorical devices](#) used in the letter—the students began by asking questions about the document, and naturally paying attention to the word choice, tone, and selection of detail, and that lead into a more structured look at how the writers crafted their argument to best suit their intents. The questions also helped them to consider the perspective of the prisoners, which in turn, lead us to consider how other people in the situation might feel, which was one of the goals of the [final letter-writing assignment](#). I have included some [sample student work and pictures of the process](#).

#### Overall, what did you learn from this experience?

I think I learned to further trust in the QFT process, and to trust the kids to ask their own questions. When I initially created my “next steps” lesson with the rhetorical analysis, I reverted to being the question generator instead of letting the students ask questions about the document. I revised it before I used it with them, but I still think I would make it less guided in the future.

For this assignment, you'll be choosing a letter to write in response to the "Petition for Bail", within some guidelines. RAFT writing (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic) allows you to consider the perspective of many different people who might have been involved in this case and create a fictitious—but grounded in research and historical understanding—response. You'll choose one of these options below and write a narrative response of between 250-500 words.

In crafting your letter, you'll need to make sure you pay attention to the **elements of a letter**, consider **the tone that the writer would take with their audience**, employ **effective rhetorical strategies**, and maintain **language—and even spelling—that would reflect the time period**.

**R = Role: Who are you as a writer?**

**A = Audience: To whom are you writing?**

**F = Format: What form will the writing take?**

**T = Topic: What is the subject?**

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
The "Honourable Governor"	The prisoners who wrote the original letter	Letter	The governor responds to the prisoners, addressing their concerns, answering their plea, introducing his own concerns, and issuing his decision
One of the prisoners	A trusted family member	Letter	The prisoner reveals her true, candid feelings about her situation and the conditions in the prison. She addresses the concerns and suggestions presented in the original letter without the rhetorical persuasions used by the women when addressing the governor, and what she predicts will be the outcome of the letter.
A member of the general assembly in Boston	The "Honourable Governor"	Letter	A member of the general assembly expresses his feelings after having read the prisoners' pleas and advises the governor about what he feels they should do. This could be a staunch and unyielding supporter of the governor and the witch trials, or it could be a sympathizer who feels conflicted about his duty when weighed against the request of the prisoners.
A lawyer working on behalf of the prisoners	The "Honourable Governor"	Letter	A lawyer focuses on the legal and logical arguments advocating for the temporary release of these prisoners.
A lawyer working on behalf of the government	The "Honourable Governor"	Letter	A lawyer focuses on the legal and logical arguments advocating to deny these prisoners' bail.
A family member of one of the prisoners	The "Honourable Governor"	Letter	One of the prisoner's loved ones beseeches the governor to consider the request of the prisoners. The family member must come up with justification for the temporary release of the prisoners above and beyond what the prisoners have already stated; otherwise, the governor won't have much incentive to read the letter.
An accuser/ "victim" of the witches	The "Honourable Governor" and general assembly	Letter	An accuser advises the governor and general assembly about how to proceed with the prisoners. They will have to speak about their experience with the accused, any fears they may have about releasing or holding the witches in prison, and any warnings they may have for the assembly and the town.
A leader of the Puritan Church	The "Honourable Governor" and general assembly	Letter	A member of the church advises the governor and assembly about how best to proceed according to the strict, relentless, and unforgiving nature of the Puritan faith. The church leader may weigh the complexity of this decision, given the religion's stance on witchcraft and its view of God, while also considering his own personal feelings about the suffering of people he considers to be a part of his parish.

## Sample Student Work

12/01/1693

To the Prisoners of Ipswich and who else this may concern,  
I have received your letter requesting release, and after careful consideration of your letter with the general assembly we have concluded that your release shall not be granted. Is it not the work of the court to keep the devil and the workers of the devil off the streets of society? Your request for release is not only short sighted and ridiculous, but the sheer action of inking this letter and sending it to the court is blasphemy. You bid to do the devils work in Salem and if I was to release you, I would not be doing my civil duty as a servant of God or as an upstanding member of this court. For your release would give you more opportunities to send your spirits out and harm even more individuals of the Salem community. As for the people in the jail, the devil's workers come in many forms, and if one is aged a fourscore or a child, they are just as subject to Satan's grasp as the rest of you. The conditions of Salem jail I can assure you, are very hospitable as compared to the other communities, and I think that you will find that you shall not perish in the coming months. For those of you that Satan does not find strong enough to save, unfortunately that is not a problem of the court and Salem will be much better without their tarnished souls. It would not only be unholy and an act of heresy for me to release those who's souls are clearly tampered by Satan, but a stoppage in the necessary purge of the devil from Salem. For the love of God and the church as well as the well-being of the people of Salem, your request has been denied. If you would like to confess yourselves, a release may be arranged, but until then the court is to do Gods work and Gods work only. For those who die without confessing with a tarnished immortal soul, shall burn in the fiery depths of hell for all eternity. For those of you who do survive the winter months, your trials shall be held in the Spring.

Instead of Prayer, confess in the name of God if you wish to be saved,  
The Honorable Governor

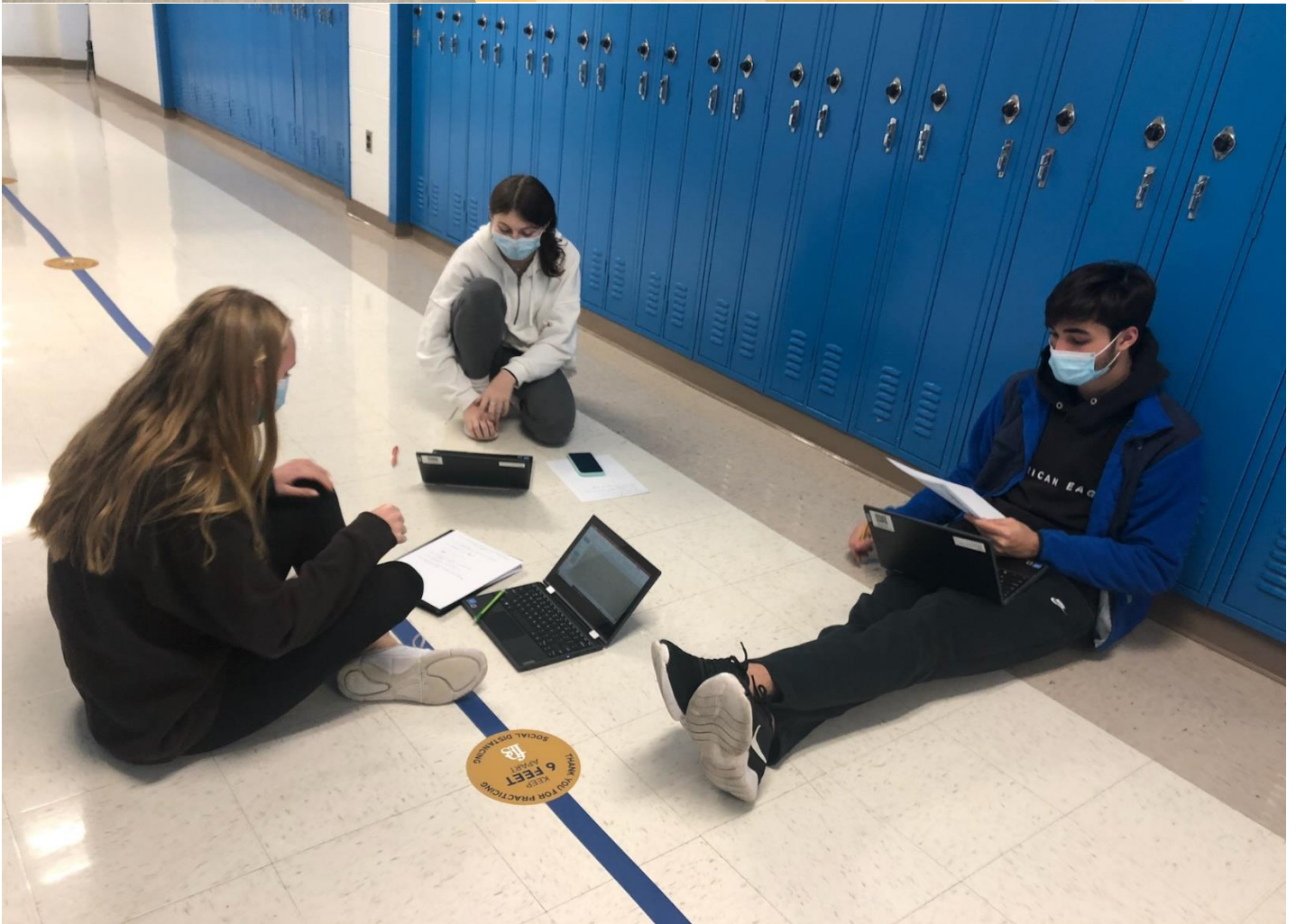
23 of November, 1692

To the Honorable Governors and Generall Assembly in Boston

I hope this letter finds you in good health. I have heard that the prisoners we so righteously fought to put in jail are now petitioning for release during is cold winter season. Though I understand their discomfort, it is my firm belief that those combined with anti-Christ surely must be locked up for our own safety. Have you forgotten for what reasons the prisoners are to be put on trial? They have summoned Hell upon Salem with their witchcraft, you must not fall to their trickery. Though it is difficult to abstain from sympathy for their regrettable conditions, they have been corrupted by evil and have shown inability to confess. We must put our faith in God and those He has chosen to do his work. God has shown us the way to cleanse our village of evil. As a Reverend and servant of the Lord I believe it to be God's will that we carry on His mission without risk of a second coming of the Devil in Salem. I have used my expertise in the Bible and Christ to rid members of my own parish from the Devil's grasp, and if those sitting in prison have not confessed, they are surely lost. Think of your own families, is it not a possibility that if the witches are let to roam once more, they would not find and destroy all responsible for their misery? Those working with the Devil have shown to be capable of committing evil wherever their body may be by projecting their soul upon the afflicted. I believe that keeping those accused subdued with the cold and unfavorable conditions to be the safest for all innocent members of our community. It is most grievous that some overcome by the Devil are with child, however, think of the consequences of a child raised by a witch. We must not allow for a cycle of children of the Devil, it is for the best of all good Christian men and women. For these reasons I humbly implore you not to let the accused free from their confinement. I pray God will lead your decision.

Reverend Gifford







## CONSIDERING PERSPECTIVE

Analyzing a primary source document using the QFT

## RULES FOR PRODUCING QUESTIONS

1. Ask as many questions as you can
2. Do not stop to answer, judge, or discuss
3. Write down every question exactly as stated
4. Change any statements into questions

## THE PROCESS

**Step One:** Listen to and read the document at least twice.

**Step Two:** Write down your own questions (4 minutes).

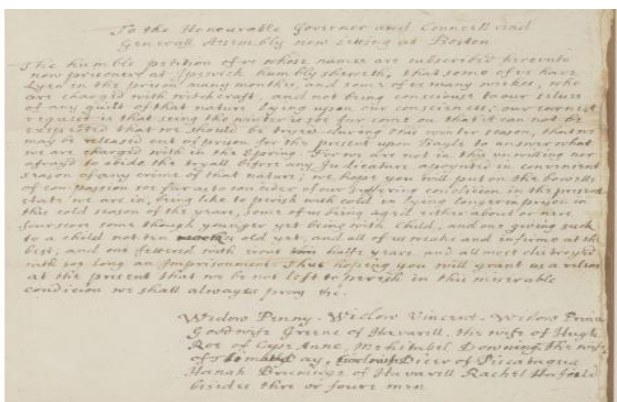
**Step Three:** Small groups— create a document and share/create your group questions (12 minutes).

**Step Four:** Prioritize your questions (3 minutes).

**Step Five:** Class share

**Step Six:** Next steps

## QUESTION FOCUS:



## PRIORITIZE QUESTIONS

### Review your list of questions

- Highlight in YELLOW the two questions about which you are the most curious.
- Highlight in BLUE the two questions you consider most important when considering the perspective of the prisoners.
- Highlight in PURPLE the two questions you consider most important when considering the letter itself.

### After prioritizing...

- Share the document on our Cohort page.

## NEXT STEPS: COMMENTS, RHETORICAL ANALYSIS, AND WRITING ASSIGNMENT

- \* Read the documents posted by the other group(s). Post a comment on each— what question interested you the most? What question did you also have? Did one of their questions spark a new question for you?
- \* On Thursday, you will work on a rhetorical analysis of the document— let's talk about what that means.
- \* In our next in-person class, we will share our thoughts about the rhetorical elements of the letter and brainstorm a creative writing piece.
- \* You will write the first draft of your piece at home on Monday! ☺

## Rhetorical Analysis of Prisoners' Petition

Now that you have read and considered this letter, let's take a closer look at the prisoners' appeal, and whether it was effective. To do this, we need to talk about **rhetoric**.

**Rhetoric** is the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech and other compositional techniques. This means that we will be considering what the speaker wants to achieve, and how he attempts to achieve it.

To be an effective speaker or writer, one must have awareness of three elements in particular: **ethos, pathos, and logos**. These elements come together in what is known as the "rhetorical triangle".

**Ethos** refers to the speaker/writer. Who is he/she, and what do we know about him/her? Is he/she a credible source? How do we know? We must consider our prior knowledge of the speaker/writer as well as how he/she establishes his/her credibility in the piece.

For example: Who am I (Mrs. Carlton)? What do you know about me? How have I established myself as a credible source for information so far in this class? Think about anything you know about me as well as anything I have said or done—and the ways in which I have said/done those things. Can you trust me as a good source of information as your teacher?

**Pathos** refers to the audience/reader. Who is the intended audience for this piece? This is especially important to consider in our studies, because **we** are generally not going to be the originally targeted audience. It's important to consider this, because any good speaker/writer will have awareness of who is listening/reading his/her piece, and that awareness will be reflected in the piece. How does the speaker want his audience to feel? How does he achieve this effect?

For example: When you speak to your friends, do you use different words than when you speak to your parents or teachers? Do you talk about different subject matters with your friends than with your parents or teachers? Why is that? What happens when someone who is NOT your targeted audience overhears you? How do you make someone feel a certain emotion? For example, how would you try to garner someone's sympathy? How would try to make someone feel outraged? The same goes for writing—think about how you text your peers versus how you text your parents, or how you message your teachers. What changes? Subject matter? Style? Word choice? Grammar? We are always aware of our targeted audience when we speak or write—and so are the authors of the pieces we read.

**Logos** refers to the piece itself. Is the argument reasonable? How so, or why not? How does the speaker achieve that? Why does the speech exist? What is the purpose of this piece? Has the speaker's goal been attained? How so? What did the speaker/writer do to inform/entertain/persuade you?

For example: What are some ways in which you try to persuade or convince people in your life? What are your techniques or strategies to get what you want, or to encourage someone to agree with you? How do you win an argument? Likewise, if you want to entertain someone, how do you achieve that goal? What are some of the ways in which you try to gain—and keep—someone's attention? If you need to inform someone about something, how do you get them to listen? How do you make sure they are paying attention? How do your teachers do this when they want you to learn something? Let's think about this letter, and figure out how the prisoners tried to win over their audience.

What do you notice about the writers? What questions might you ask about them and their credibility as sources?

What is the subject of this letter? What questions do you have about the letter's subject?



How does the **content** of this letter establish the writers' credibility? Think about what they say in the letter that indicate they might be reliable sources of information here. Be specific.

What do you notice about the writers' **feelings** about this subject? How do they express those feelings? What questions might you ask about the ways in which they demonstrate their feelings?

Find some specific words, phrases, images, and/or literary devices that indicate the writers' tone **toward the subject** and record them in the chart below.

Tone toward subject	Evidence (specific word/s, quote)	Intended Effect

Who was the intended audience for this letter? How do the writers acknowledge their awareness of, and attention to, the targeted audience? Give specific examples.

How do the writers want their intended **audience** to feel? How do they achieve this goal? Be specific. What do you notice about the choices the writers made in trying to elicit their desired response?

What is the letter's **tone toward the audience**? Why? Record your ideas in the chart below.

Tone toward audience	Evidence (specific word/s, quote)	Intended Effect



What is the **purpose** in writing this letter? What do the writers hope to accomplish?

Based on what you know about the witch trials, and having read *The Crucible*, do you think this letter would have been effective? Why or why not?

Can you think of any additional “strategies” the writers could have used to appeal to their audience? Again, base this on your knowledge of the trials and the play.

If you were the intended audience for this letter, how would it make you feel? What were the most compelling aspects for you?

### Peer Feedback

**Editor's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Writer's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Look over the format of the letter. Does it reflect the elements of its genre? Is it missing anything? Most letters include the date, a greeting, and a closing with a signature. Comment on anything that is missing or inappropriate (for example: "Hey Gov!" is probably not an appropriate greeting; "Love, Sarah" isn't appropriate for a lawyer's letter to the governor).

How well does the letter reflect the time period (1692)? What do you see as appropriate for the time (i.e., antiquated words, spelling, concerns)? Is there anything at all that is too modern for the letter? Do you have any suggestions to make the letter more 17<sup>th</sup> century?

Describe the tone of the letter. \_\_\_\_\_

What about the letter made you think this was the tone? Give some specific examples.

Is this tone appropriate for the writer's point of view? Is it appropriate for the recipient? Is it appropriate for the subject? Explain a bit. If it's not appropriate, why isn't it? What suggestions do you have to make the tone more fitting?

How well does the letter reflect the perspective of its writer? Do you think it captures how the person (i.e., a family member of a prisoner, the governor, a prisoner, a victim, etc.) would really feel? Did your peer miss any key arguments that the person "would" make? Does anything in the letter ring false for you? If so, what? Why doesn't it feel right to you? How would you change it?

What rhetorical strategies/devices do you see in the letter? Be specific.

Are the rhetorical strategies/devices effective? Why? If not, or if you don't see many, make some suggestions of how the writer could improve their argument.

What are the best aspects of the letter? What did your peer do really well?

What might you change about the letter? What further suggestions do you have for your peer?

To the honorable governor and council and general assembly now sitting at Boston:

The humble petition of us whose names are subscribed here unto now prisoners at Ipswich humbly share, that some of us have lain in the prison many months, and some of us many weeks, who are charged with witchcraft, and not being conscious to ourselves of any guilt of that nature lying upon our consciences; our earnest request is that seeing the winter is so far come on that it cannot be expected that we should be tried during this winter season, that we may be released out of prison for the present upon bail to answer what we are charged with in the spring. For we are not in this unwilling nor afraid to abide the trial before any judicature appointed in convenient season of any crime of that nature; we hope you will put on the bonnets of compassion so far as to consider of our suffering condition in the present state we are in, being like to perish with cold in lying longer in prison in the cold season of the year, some of us being aged either about or near fourscore, some, though younger, being with child, and one giving such to a child not ten weeks old yet, and all of us weak and infirm at the best, and one fettered with irons this half year and almost destroyed with so long an imprisonment. Thus hoping you will grant us a release at the present that we be not left to perish in this miserable condition we shall always pray, etc.

Widow Penny, Widow Vincent, Widow Prina, Goodwife Greene of Haverhill, the wife of Hugh Roe of Cape Anne, Mehitabel Downing, the wife of [text illegible] of Piscataqua, Hanah Brumidge of Haverhill, Rachel Hafield, besides three or four men