

Eighth-graders lead effort to pardon wrongly convicted “witch”

Associated Press

Required Annotations	Student-Created Annotations	Summary / Questions / Reflection
Student-created		Required (bold)

More than 300 years ago, Eizabeth Johnson Jr. was wrongly found guilty of witchcraft and sentenced to death. Finally, she's about to be declared innocent thanks to a group of curious eighth-graders.

Massachusetts State Senator Diana DiZoglio is a Democrat from Methuen. She has introduced legislation to clear Johnson's name. Johnson was condemned in 1693 at the height of the Salem Witch Trials, but she was never executed.

DiZoglio says she was inspired by **sleuthing** done by a group of 13- and 14-year-olds at North Andover Middle School. The students carefully researched Johnson and also researched the steps that would need to be taken to make sure she was formally declared innocent.

"It is important that we work to correct history," DiZoglio said. "We will never be able to change what happened to these victims, but at the very least, we can set the record straight."

If lawmakers approve the measure, Johnson will be the last accused witch to be cleared, according to Witches of Massachusetts Bay. The group is devoted to the history and legends of the witch hunts.

Twenty people from Salem and neighboring towns were killed and hundreds of others were accused during a burst of injustice that began in 1692. The witch hunts were stirred by superstition, fear of disease and strangers, **scapegoating** and petty jealousies. Scapegoating is blaming someone for something that someone else did. Nineteen people were hanged, and one man was crushed to death by rocks.

Dozens Cleared, But Johnson Left Behind

In the 328 years that have **ensued**, dozens of suspects officially were cleared, including Johnson's own mother. She was the daughter of a minister whose guilty verdict also eventually was reversed. For some reason, though, Johnson's name wasn't included in various legislative attempts to set the record straight.

Johnson was 22 years old when she was caught up in the **frenzy** of the witch trials. She was sentenced to hang, but it never happened. Then-Governor William Phips threw out her punishment as people began realizing how tremendously unjust the witchcraft trials were.

However, Johnson wasn't among those whose guilty verdicts were formally set aside. Thus, hers still technically stands.

"It showed how superstitious people still were after the witch trials," said Artem Likhanov, 14 years old, a rising high school freshman who participated in the school project. "It's not like after it ended people didn't believe in witches anymore. They still thought she was a witch and they wouldn't exonerate her."

DiZoglio's bill would include Johnson among others who were pardoned after

being found guilty of witchcraft.

Why Elizabeth was not pardoned is unclear, but no action was ever taken on her **behalf** by the General Assembly or the courts, DiZoglio said. "Possibly because she was neither a wife nor a mother, she was not considered worthy of having her name cleared. And because she never had children, there is no group of descendants acting on her behalf."

In 2017, officials created a semi-circular stone wall memorial. It was carved with the names of people hanged at a site in Salem known as Proctor's Ledge. The memorial was funded in part by donations from descendants of those accused of being witches.

Carrie LaPierre teaches the civics class in which students worked to have Johnson pardoned. LaPierre said some of her students initially were uncertain about the effort to pardon Johnson. They launched it before the 2020 presidential election and at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic was raging.

"Some of the conversation was, 'Why are we doing this? She's dead, isn't there more important stuff going on in the world?'" she said. "But they came around to the idea that it's important that in some small way we could do this one thing."

1. Which sentence from the section "Dozens Cleared, But Johnson Left Behind " BEST explains why Johnson likely was never pardoned?
 - a) For some reason, though, Johnson's name wasn't included in various legislative attempts to set the record straight.
 - b) Then-Governor William Phips threw out her punishment as people began realizing how tremendously unjust the witchcraft trials were.
 - c) "And because she never had children, there is no group of descendants acting on her behalf."
 - d) LaPierre said some of her students initially were uncertain about the effort to pardon Johnson.
2. Read the claim.

Many accused witches from the Salem Witch Trials have already been declared innocent.

Which selection from the article provides the BEST support for the claim?

 - a) "We will never be able to change what happened to these victims, but at the very least, we can set the record straight."
 - b) If lawmakers approve the measure, Johnson will be the last accused witch to be cleared, according to Witches of Massachusetts Bay.
 - c) Johnson was 22 years old when she was caught up in the frenzy of the witch trials. She was sentenced to hang, but it never happened.
 - d) The memorial was funded in part by donations from descendants of those accused of being witches.
3. Which option MOST influenced the North Andover Middle School students' decision to research how to declare Johnson innocent?
 - a) Diana DiZoglio
 - b) Johnson's descendants
 - c) Carrie LaPierre
 - d) the COVID-19 pandemic
4. According to the article, why did DiZoglio introduce legislation to clear Johnson's name?
 - a) She recently paid for a memorial for Johnson.
 - b) Other lawmakers pressured her.
 - c) She researched Governor William Phips.
 - d) She believed it was important to correct history.