

# [Modern day witch hunts essay sample](https://assignbuster.com/modern-day-witch-hunts-essay-sample/)

When the words “ witch hunt” are heard, most people think back to the Salem witch trials, where religion governed the lives of people. They were searching for people who they believed practiced malificium. However, witch hunts are not just a thing of the past, as modern day witch hunts are happening right now. In 1993, West Memphis was shaken up after three eight year old’s were found dead in a drainage ditch. The deaths of the three young boys caused an uproar. The police were rushed to find the murderer, and in the eyes of the policemen, Damien Echols, Jessie Misskelley, and Jason Baldwin were the only people capable of committing this heinous crime. Discourse played a major role in what ended up happening throughout the case. Boundary maintenance also helped in separating Damien, Jessie, and Jason from the rest of the population in West Memphis.

Stevie Branch, Michael Moor, and Christopher Byers went missing on the night of May 5, 1993. The next day searchers found a show floating down a creek, which lead them to the three boys. The boys had been tied up and the autopsy revealed that Christopher had passed away due to “ multiple injuries” and Michael and Stevie had passed from “ multiple injuries and drowning”. Two days after the bodies were discovered, police officers brought in Damien Echols for questioning because they believed that the crime had cult overtones and Damien had an interest in occultism. Jessie Misskelley and Jason Baldwin were dragged into the case as well. One month after the murdered boys were found, Damien, Jason, and Jessie were arrested.

Jessie Misskelley was tried separately from Damien and Jason. Jessie was borderline mentally retarded. Misskelley was being interrogated for twelve hours by police, even though he was a minor and there was no parental consent. Jessie ended up confessing to being a part of the murders. The police seemed to focus on Jessie because he was en easy target and they thought they could control him. It was later found out that the story that he told was very inconsistent, and he had repeated what the police wanted to hear, so he recanted his confession. Some of the other evidence that the police had found was also questionable, such as the knife found in the pond of the trailer park, which could have belonged to anyone. “ There was a remarkable lack of physical evidence against anybody.” Prosecuter John Fogleman.

Jessie Misskelley’s trial was based heavily on the confession that he had made earlier. Much of what was used against Jessie in his trial was inconsistent with what happened. Jessie said that the murders had happened around noon, but as soon as he said that the police asked if it had happened after school, and he agreed, later the officers changed the time to around 6: 00, and Jessie agreed again. Jessie was being coerced by the police during his questioning, and those false confessions were used against him, and he was convicted of one count of first degree murder, and two counts of second degree murder. He was sentenced to life plus forty years in prison. Damien and Jason started their trial three weeks later. The court believed that Damien knew too much about the murders for him to not be a part of them. Damien said that the reason he knew so much about the murders was because he had seen it on the television. Damien and Jason’s trial was based heavily on “ evidence” that made no logical sense. Jason was sentenced to life in prison. Damien on the other hand, had been labeled the ring leader, so he was sentenced to death.

Religion was an overwhelming factor in witch hunts in early witch hunts. Religion also had a hand in the West Memphis Three trials. Religion played different roles in each of the cases. In traditional witch hunts, both the accused and the accusers were of the same religion, but in this case here, it is almost like one religion is trying to eliminate the other. Damien, Jason, and Jessie were a part of a religious town, and the boys weren’t your average teenagers, so they already had targets on their backs for being different. Damien practiced Wicca, and had books about the subject in his room. The court used the books against Damien in court saying that they preached about satanic ritual killings, which they in fact did not. The court tried to turn Wicca into Satanism. They said that because Damien read those books, he was probably the one that killed the boys, because they looked to be satanic ritual killings. Besides religion, the boys were also easy targets for the crime, because of their discourse. The boys wore black and listened to Metallica. They were “ goth” or “ emo” before it was even cool, and even before it actually had a name. The town’s discourse was much different than the young men’s, therefore they were automatically picked out of the crowd as suspects of the crime.

Years past and still there was no answer, but people were still interested in the case. People wanted to know what happened years after the fact, because they wanted justice, but also because they trials were highly dramatic. People were drawn to the strange boys that were accused of the crime. In 2007, DNA testing was done that was not previously available in 1993. The DNA at the crime scene was tested and it was found that it did not match Echols, Baldwin, or even Misskelley. On August 19, 2011, Damien, Jason, and Jessie entered Alford Pleas which allowed them to assert their innocence while acknowledging that prosecutors have enough evidence to convict them. They were sentenced with time served. They had served eighteen years, and now they are free. All but one of the parents of the murdered boys, says that they believe that Echols, Baldwin, and Misskelley were wrongfully convicted, and they tried to help get them out of their prison cells. Damien said that they won’t feel like justice is served until their names are cleared from the case. Now they have the opportunity to fight for their names on the outside of prison instead of inside of a cell.

The West Memphis Three were wrongfully accused of the awful crime of murdering three young boys, because they had a different discourse than what was seen as normal for a teenage boy. Their discourse worked against them in getting convicted of the crime. The satanic nature of the crime lead the people of the town, and the police officers go on a witch hunt looking for answers to a question that may never be answered.