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Study Guide

for

**The Witch of
Blackbird Pond**

by **Elizabeth George Speare**



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Elizabeth George Speare



No, writing is not lonely. It is a profession crowded with life and sound and color. I feel privileged to have had a share in it.

—Elizabeth George Speare

People often say that writing is a lonely career, but Elizabeth George Speare never thought so. She simply imagined her characters' world and made the characters her friends. As she developed her stories, she felt that the characters' lives unfolded almost as if they were the lives of real people, standing in the room with her.

Speare felt that her writing was strongly influenced by her childhood. Born in 1908, she grew up surrounded by a large extended family in Massachusetts. Each member of the family provided a different model of character for her fertile writer's imagination.

Speare began writing for fun when she was eight. She joyfully remembered how a favorite cousin and she would hide themselves in a corner to share their most recent writings.

Speare did not, however, begin her career as a writer until relatively late in life. First,

she became a teacher, a career she found both challenging and rewarding. Following her marriage to Alden Speare, she moved to Connecticut, eventually settling in Wethersfield, the setting of *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*. The Speares had two children.

When Speare finally began writing in earnest, she described her own experiences. Her first published piece was about family ski trips. Later, she discovered that she wanted to write about places and times that she did not know firsthand. Speare got the idea for her first novel, *Calico Captive*, after reading the diary of a real girl who lived in Connecticut during the eighteenth century. After three tries, Speare found a publisher for *Calico Captive*, and the novel quickly became a success.

The Witch of Blackbird Pond, Speare's second novel, is grounded in New England history. Speare had read stories about English children sent from Barbados to New England for schooling. She researched Connecticut history, especially that of her adopted town of Wethersfield, to add accurate historical details to the story. She also based one of the characters in the novel on her real-life aunt, who was physically impaired.

In 1959 she won the Newbery Medal for *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*. Every member of the Newbery Medal committee voted to award the yearly prize to the novel. Such complete support for one book is rare. In her Newbery acceptance speech, Speare described the philosophy that has guided both her writing and her life:

I do not believe a historical novel should gloss over the pain and ugliness. But I do believe that the hero . . . should on the last page . . . still be standing, with the strength to go to whatever the future may hold.

Introducing the Novel

Speare was once inspired by a writer who said, “History is people.” This “personal approach” to history is apparent in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*.

The main character, Kit Tyler, is orphaned when her much-loved grandfather dies. Kit travels from the island of Barbados in the Caribbean Sea to Wethersfield, Connecticut. She hopes to find a home there with her aunt and uncle, settlers from England. Kit finds her new world to be very different from the one she left behind, and she must struggle long and hard to fit in. Her relatives are Puritans who have come to America to live according to their religious beliefs. The novel itself takes place when Wethersfield is still a fairly new settlement and survival is a challenging task. The place where Kit was raised in Barbados was a more established community with different ideas about religion and social behavior.

In reading the novel, you will also “meet” many other people from the seventeenth century. Some, like “the witch of Blackbird Pond,” become Kit’s friends and help her to adjust. Others fear Kit because she is different from them. Many critics have praised the novel for its portrayal of colonists. One critic says:

The strength of this book lies in its . . . well-drawn characters. They are neither wholly good nor wholly bad but a very human mixture.

Other critics speak glowingly of the vividness of the novel’s historical setting. Speare spent over a year researching the novel to make it realistic and historically accurate. Wethersfield is a real place in Connecticut, founded by Puritans in the 1600s. Other events in the story, such as the colonists’ efforts to preserve their charter, really did occur. Some of the characters in the story are based on real people as well.

For many readers, however, the most interesting part of this novel is its themes.

They include the ideas of loyalty and justice. As Kit bravely tries to understand her adopted community, she must often ask herself, Whom must I be loyal to? What is the right, or just, action to take?

THE TIME AND PLACE

The Witch of Blackbird Pond is set in Wethersfield, Connecticut, in 1687. The town of Wethersfield was, and still is, located on the banks of the Connecticut River. It sits about forty-seven miles north of the river mouth. In 1687 the town was a small and fairly new English settlement. It was founded in 1634 by Puritans from Massachusetts.

The first Puritans had come to Massachusetts from England in 1620. In England at that time, people were strongly discouraged from practicing any religion other than that of the Church of England. Some English people, however, did not wholly agree with the Church of England. These Puritans, as they were called, decided to leave England to build a community where they could worship God in their own way.

During the 1600s, the Puritans were concerned by the many political changes taking place in England. From 1642 to 1648, King Charles I of England battled with some of his subjects for control of the government. He and his supporters wanted all English subjects to follow the laws of the Church of England and support the monarchy. His opponents wanted rule by a Parliament, or group of rulers, and more religious freedom. The Parliamentary forces won, and Charles I was removed as king and executed in 1649. The Puritans sided with Parliament and therefore gained power during the Civil War in England.

In 1660, however, Charles II brought back the monarchy, and the Puritans lost some of their power. At the time of *The Witch*

of *Blackbird Pond*, the Puritans' power was in even greater danger because James II, a Catholic, had become king in 1685.

The Puritan settlers who sought religious freedom in the Wethersfield area were at first welcomed by Native Americans. In fact, the leader of the Sequin invited Massachusetts colonists to settle Connecticut. He hoped for help in fighting his enemies, the Pequots. Some of Wethersfield's early settlers did help fight and defeat the Pequots in 1637. As more and more settlers arrived looking for land, local Native American groups were gradually pushed out.

In 1636 the three river towns of Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield joined together to establish the Connecticut Colony. A separate colony, Old Saybrook, was settled in 1635 but did not join the Connecticut Colony until 1644.

In 1639 the colony agreed on a set of laws called the Fundamental Orders. These laws were quite unusual for their time because they said that lawmakers had to get the people's agreement on their decisions. The colony also adopted a law requiring schools in towns of a certain size. In 1662 the colony received a charter from King Charles II. This document established the colony's boundaries, defined the colonists' rights, and granted the colonists a measure of self-government.

By 1687, when Kit Tyler arrived in Wethersfield, the community was well established. However, a threat was brewing in England. King James wanted to increase his power in the colonies by joining Massachusetts and Connecticut. Residents of Wethersfield had many different reactions to King James's efforts, especially his attempt to revoke the colony's charter.

Did You Know?

Not all English settlers went to mainland America. Some went to the islands of the Caribbean Sea, found south of what is now Florida. These early island settlers shared goals similar to the New England settlers. However, the island settlements were quite different from the settlements to the north. This was partly because of the Caribbean settlers' success at growing sugarcane. Sugar, which was easily produced in the warm tropical climate, was in great demand and made the

island settlers quite wealthy. Their riches, however, were largely acquired through the work of servants working off the price of their fare from England and enslaved people brought over from Africa.

Barbados, the island from which Kit Tyler comes, was England's prize Caribbean possession. It made the most money and had the wealthiest community. Sugar planters lived in fine houses, and some were even given titles by the British government.

Before You Read

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 1–8

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What if people suddenly expected you to behave differently from what you are used to? What are some ways you, or others, might respond if the rules of acceptable behavior suddenly changed?

Chart It

With a partner, brainstorm situations that might lead to major changes in expectations or rules. These situations might include moving to a new school or community, experiencing a change in the structure of your family, or reaching a certain age. Together, make a two-column chart headed “Changes” and “Reactions,” and record your responses.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how sixteen-year-old Kit responds to different expectations in her new surroundings.

BACKGROUND

Time and Place

Wethersfield’s earliest settlers laid out their town in the English style. Families were given a piece of land for a house and garden. They also had access to a forest area to find timber and firewood, as well as a meadow in which to grow hay. All the residents shared pasture land known as the “common.” Community life centered around the meeting house, where church and nonchurch officials worked together to govern the Puritans’ lives.

Puritans believed that religion was a very serious matter. Prayer was almost always the first and last activity of the day. On Sundays older children and adults spent most of the day praying and listening to sermons at the meeting house.

Did You Know?

Shipping was an important business in the seventeenth century. The British Navy controlled many sea routes, making trade between British colonies fairly safe. New England colonists began trading with the British West Indies around 1649. They sent foods such as potatoes, cheese, and a variety of onion known as the Wethersfield Red. They also exported horses, candles, and wood. In return the colonists received molasses, salt, coffee, spices, and some fruits. Nearness to the Connecticut River made Wethersfield a good shipping port, though the river was often hard to navigate. Most Wethersfield shipmasters made the trip to the Caribbean in the spring and again in the fall.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

auspiciously [ôʃ pɪʃ ‘əs lē] *adv.* in a manner that suggests a positive outcome; favorably

cowed [kəʊd] *adj.* intimidated

disheartening [dɪs hɑːt ‘ən ɪŋ] *adj.* likely to lower morale

fulsome [fʊl ‘səm] *adj.* insensitive

hankering [hæŋ ‘kær ɪŋ] *n.* strong desire

nonplussed [nɒn plʊsd ‘] *adj.* at a loss for words

punctilious [pʌŋk tɪl ‘ē əs] *adj.* concerned about following rules exactly

timorous [tɪm ‘ər əs] *adj.* fearful

Active Reading

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 1–8

In the opening chapters of the book, Kit often thinks of her old home. She notices the many ways her new surroundings in Connecticut are different from Barbados. You, as the reader, may notice even more differences. As you read, list details and emotions that contrast Kit's old life with her new life.

Old	New
<p>- warm climate</p>	<p>- cold climate</p>

Responding

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 1–8

Personal Response

In your opinion, did Kit make the right choice in coming to Wethersfield?

What might you have done in her place?

What might you suggest she do to fit into her new community?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Explain how and why Kit Tyler comes to be in Wethersfield, Connecticut. What is her reaction to Connecticut and the community she joins?

2. What warnings do Nat Eaton and John Holbrook give Kit? What events suggest that Kit may not fit in at Wethersfield?

3. How do Matthew Wood, Reverend Gershom, and William Ashby feel about King James? What do the men's views suggest about the Wethersfield community?

Responding

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 1–8

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Do you think Kit makes appropriate choices? Do you think she should have retrieved Prudence’s doll or offered clothing to Judith? Why or why not?

5. How would you describe Matthew and Rachel Wood as parents? What do you think of the lessons they teach their children?

Literature and Writing

Writing a Letter

As she faces a row of onions to weed, Kit remarks, “What a strange country . . . !” Imagine that you are Kit and want to tell a friend in Barbados about your new home. Write a letter in which you describe your new home and explain your reactions to it. Tell about your feelings for William Ashby and the other people you have met. Use information from your **Active Reading** chart and from your **Focus Activity** chart for help in imagining Kit’s reactions.

Extending Your Response

Listening and Speaking

Kit finds Dr. Bulkeley’s sermon dry and dull, yet she enjoys listening to John Holbrook read aloud from the Bible. With your group, experiment with different readings of a favorite book. Take turns as speakers and listeners. Then analyze the qualities that make spoken delivery successful or unsuccessful.

Internet Connection

Put yourself in Kit’s shoes as she travels from one climate to another. Use U.S. Weather Service Internet sites, or travel books for visitors to Barbados and New England, and find out about the climates in Kit’s “two homes.” Create a two-column chart showing typical temperature ranges for summer and winter as well as the average amounts of rain or snow.

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Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 9–16

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How would you feel if you and a friend disagreed about the best way to solve an important problem?

Debate

With a partner, work together to discover an issue about which you disagree. Take turns calmly presenting your side of the argument. Try to convince each other to change views, but hold firmly to your own position. Stop after ten minutes. Analyze your debate with your partner. Can you see the benefits of your partner's solution? How did it make you feel to disagree with your partner?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out some ways that Kit and the citizens of Wethersfield approach disagreements.

BACKGROUND

Time and Place

About the same time that the Puritan religious movement was getting started in England, another group called the Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers, was also forming. Like the Puritans, these people broke away from the Church of England. Members of the Society of Friends believed that everyone could communicate with God directly and interpret God's will. To them, ministers or priests and formal church rituals were not necessary to worship God.

Members of the Society of Friends were persecuted more harshly than were the Puritans in England. Even in America, Puritans frequently suspected Quakers of witchcraft. Some colonies refused entry to Quakers. They often fined, jailed, or whipped Quakers.

Did You Know?

In order to tighten his control on the American colonies, King James II decided to unite the seven New England colonies into one "Dominion of New England." He also planned to take away the colonies' original charters, which had given them the right to govern themselves. The king asked Governor Andros of New York to head the new united colony. In 1686 Governor Andros asked Connecticut and the other colonies to turn in their old charters. Some colonists wanted to refuse; others wanted to cooperate. Andros kept asking, and the colonists kept refusing. Finally, Andros went to Connecticut on Halloween of 1687. He planned to take the charter and declare himself governor, but events took a surprising turn.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

adroit [ə droit'] *adj.* skilled

composure [kəm pō'zhər] *n.* calmness

decorum [di kôr'əm] *n.* conformity to standards of good taste

enthrall [en thrôld'] *v.* to hold spellbound

incoherent [in'kō hēr'ənt] *adj.* disorganized or hard to understand

ingenious [in jēn'yəs] *adj.* clever or original

obstreperous [əb strep'ər əs] *adj.* noisy; rowdy

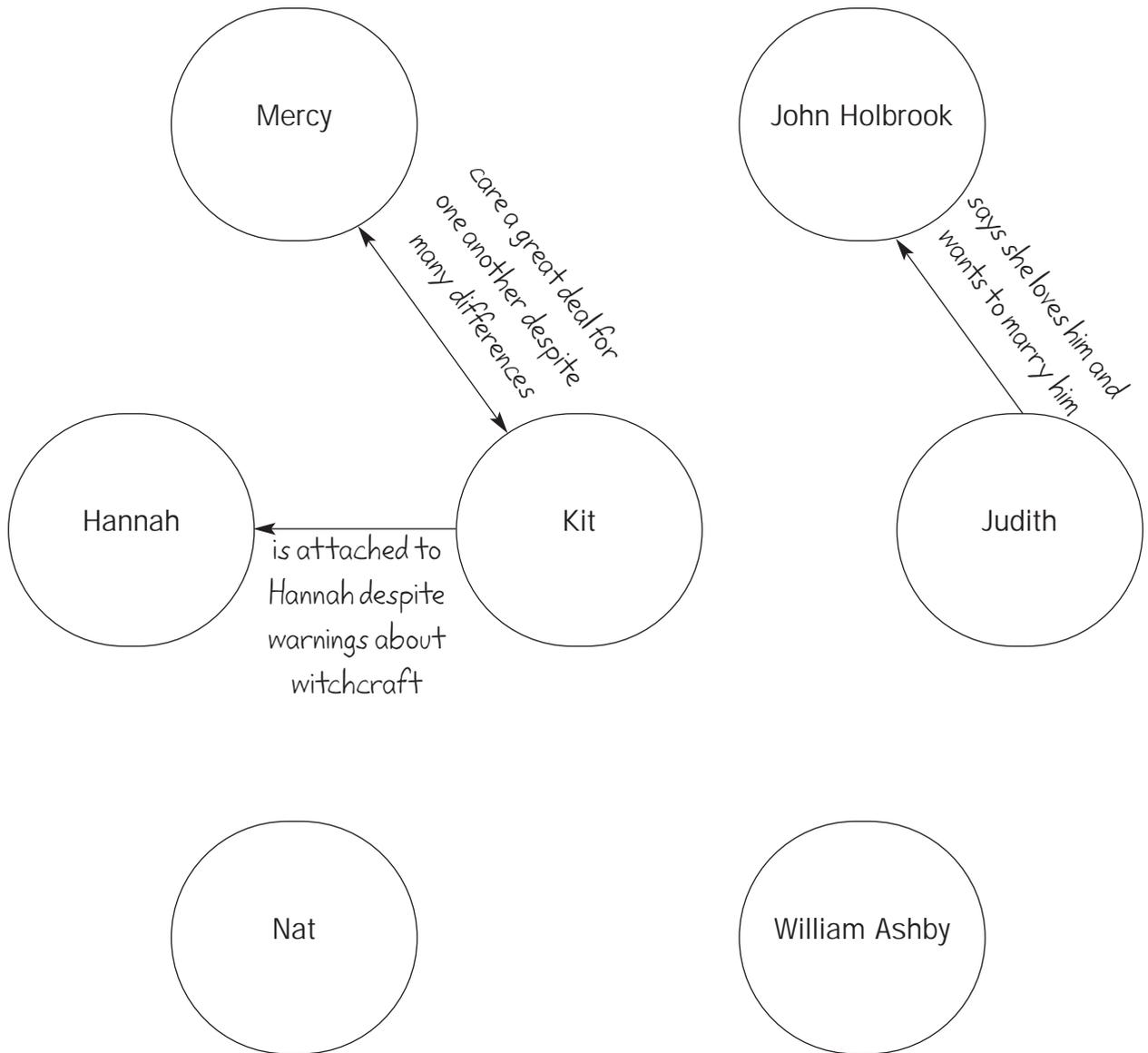
tryst [trist] *n.* secret agreement or meeting place

uproariously [up rôr'ē əs lē] *adv.* in a very noisy or funny manner

Active Reading

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 9–16

In this section, many of the characters in the book begin to reveal their feelings or attitudes toward each other. The reader also begins to understand past and present relationships among the characters. As you read these chapters, make notes about these relationships and attitudes by completing the chart below. Draw arrows to link characters. Then describe the relationship and feelings each has for the other. Some characters will have arrows to more than one other character.



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Responding

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 9–16

Personal Response

What are your reactions to the people of Wethersfield and the problems they face?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What methods does Kit use as a teacher—in the schoolroom and with Prudence? How do various people in the community react to her methods? What do these reactions reveal about people's attitudes?

2. Why don't the people of Wethersfield like Hannah Tupper? How does Hannah help Kit find a place in Wethersfield?

3. What happens when Governor Andros arrives to take the charter? How do these events change Kit's understanding of both Matthew and William?

Responding

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 9–16

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Why is Nat punished in the stocks? How does the author use this incident and others to show the many feelings Nat and Kit have for one another?

5. In her attempt to help both Prudence and Hannah, Kit sometimes disobeys community and family rules. Do you think she is a good friend? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Peace Treaty

Recall your **Focus Activity** debate over contrasting sides to an argument. Now consider the problem facing the Connecticut colonists. Draft a treaty or an agreement that will satisfy all sides. Invite other classmates to highlight weaknesses in the treaty and suggest alternative solutions.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In the novel, the people of Wethersfield try to work out their thoughts and ideas on different issues. Often, they hide their feelings or do not communicate them directly. With your group, review the text to find examples of hidden feelings. You may want to use your **Active Reading** chart as a guide. Then discuss the kinds of problems that can come from keeping secrets or not being honest with others. Consider, for example, the relationship between Kit and Matthew Wood. In what ways might they be able to improve the communication between them? Make a list of some of the results produced by a clear line of communication.

Learning for Life

Imagine that you work for a colonial news service. Because few printed newspapers exist, your job is to spread the news by word of mouth. Now that you've just received "the scoop" on the Charter Oak incident, write a draft of the story you plan to tell other people. Remember to address the five *W*'s and the *H* of journalism—*who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how*. Present your story orally to the class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 17–21

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Do you think people who hold beliefs that are different from most people's beliefs are generally treated fairly?

Think-Pair-Share

With a partner, answer and discuss the following questions:

- What are some ways that people react to those who are different from themselves? These differences might include differences in background or beliefs.
- What factors may keep people from acting fairly and reasonably?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Kit and her friend Hannah are treated by the Wethersfield community.

BACKGROUND

Time and Place

The 1680s were a difficult time for Wethersfield. People became ill from unknown diseases. Natural disasters destroyed crops and wrecked ships. Settlers worried about their colony's independence, attacks by Native Americans, river floodings, and religious and political disagreements within the community. Sometimes people who knew no other way to explain catastrophes or problems labeled them as witchcraft. In New England, witchcraft was a crime punishable by death. The first such trial and execution took place in Connecticut in 1647. Ten other similar trials and executions took place in Connecticut in the twenty years following. Three of those "witches" were from the real town of Wethersfield.

Did You Know?

Psychologists who study human behavior say that sensible, honest people may act in an uncharacteristic manner when they are part of a large group. This tendency to be influenced by others is called "mob behavior." Experts say that people in a mob feel less responsible for their actions and less worried about possible consequences. Also, noise and crowding may excite people and blur their judgment. In any case, people are more likely to act violently or even just unfairly in a group than on their own. This is especially true when they feel frightened or threatened in some way.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

concoct [kon kɒkt'] v. to put together

instigation [ɪn'stə gə'shən] n. act of urging, or inciting

intercede [ɪn'tər sɛd'] v. to act as a mediator to resolve differences

inveigle [ɪn vā'gəl] v. to persuade through tricks

perforce [pər fɔrs'] adv. by force of circumstance

preternatural [prē'tər nɑtʃ'ər əl] adj. beyond what is ordinary

sundry [sʌn'drē] adj. various

surreptitiously [sʌr'əp tɪʃ'əs lē] adv. secretly

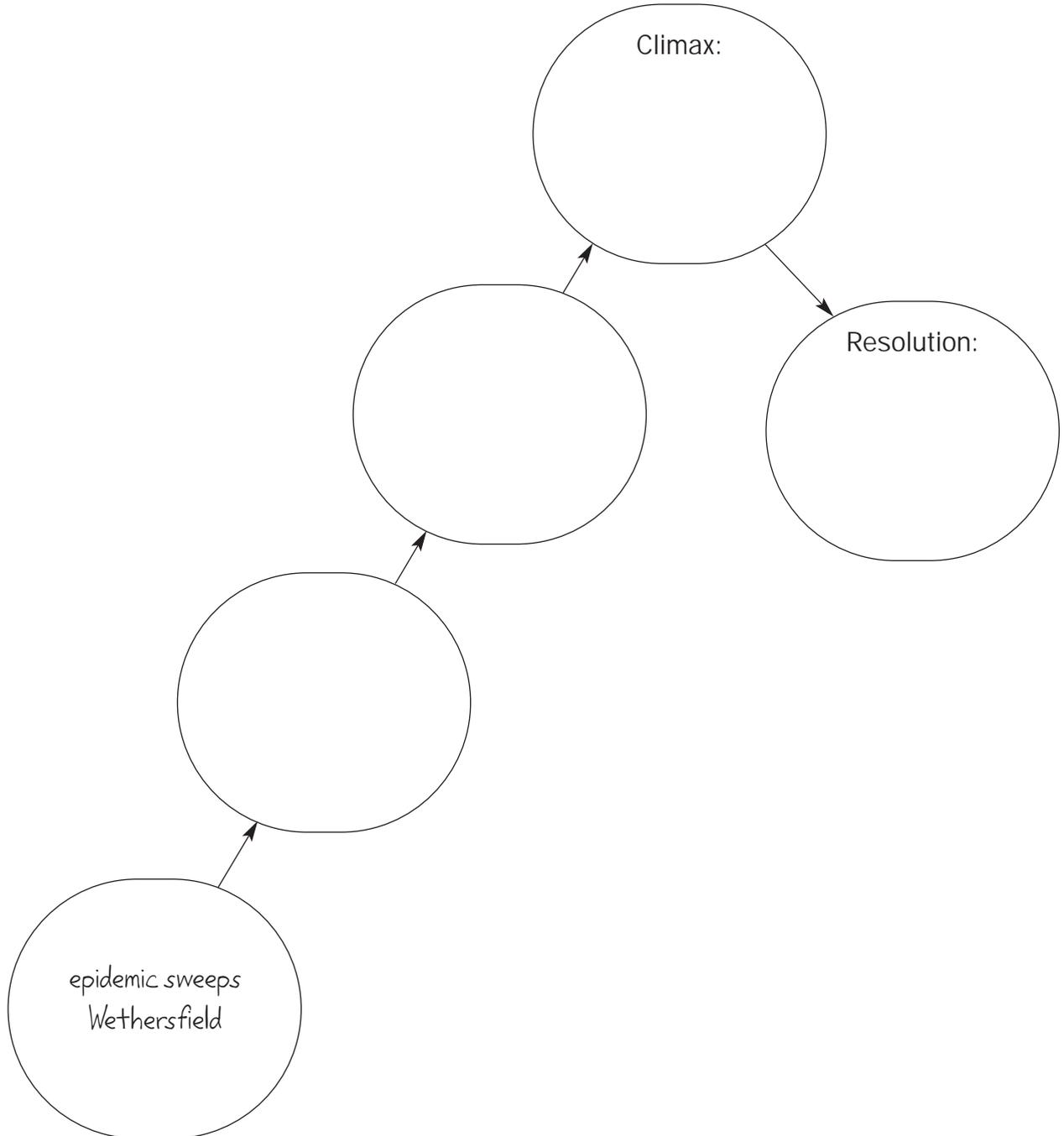
tantalizingly [tɑn'təl ɪz'ɪŋ lē] adv. mockingly, teasingly

vengeance [ven'jəns] n. punishment made to pay back an earlier injury

Active Reading

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 17–21

The novel reaches its climax in its final section. The climax is the point of greatest dramatic tension or excitement in a story. Earlier events in the story lead up to this event. After the climax, the resolution tells you what happens to all the characters and how the central problems of the story have been solved. As you read, use the circles to record the events leading up to the climax. Then briefly describe the story's resolution in the final circle. Add circles if you need to.



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Responding

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 17–21

Personal Response

How did you feel about the story's ending?

Would you change what happens to the characters? Explain why or why not.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. After John Holbrook leaves to fight a group of Native Americans, what happens to Judith, Kit, and Mercy? How does the community respond?

2. What happens to Kit after she helps Hannah to reach Nat's ship? What is revealed in these events about the Wethersfield citizens? What is revealed about Matthew and the other leaders of the community?

3. How do John, Judith, Mercy, Kit, Nat, and William become romantically involved? How have Kit's feelings for Wethersfield and its people changed?

Responding

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Chapters 17–21

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Do you think Kit deserves her uncle's confidence when he defends her to the witch hunters? Why or why not?

5. In the end, Matthew shows himself to be law-abiding, even though he is prejudiced against those with different ideas. Do you think it is possible for a good and decent person to have prejudices? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Trial Argument

What do you think are the main issues involved when people display prejudice? Explore this question by writing a trial argument defending Kit Tyler. Your argument should examine the accusations and then put them to rest by presenting information about Kit's true intentions. Refer back to the **Focus Activity** for help. If you wish, present your argument in writing or orally to a mock jury of classmates.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In Chapters 17 through 21, the forces of reason are threatened by mob behavior. In your group, find passages where each side seems to gain ground against the other. Discuss the emotions each side appeals to in the community. Then pantomime the tug-of-war as one group member reads aloud some of the passages identified. Decide where you think the battle ends.

Create the Sound Track

Review the dramatic scenes of this section of the novel. What moods surround Kit and the community as the story reaches its climax? How might these moods be emphasized through music? Think about films or plays you've seen and the music used in sad, scary, exciting, or tense scenes. Choose or create some music to go with one of the final scenes in the novel. Play your sound track for the class, if possible.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Responding

The Witch of Blackbird Pond

Personal Response

This novel raises several questions about right and wrong, about loyalty, and about friendship. What questions did you find most interesting? Explain.

What ideas or messages did the novel offer you in answer to these questions?

Writing about the Novel

Though the novel takes place more than three centuries ago, it focuses on values—such as compassion—that are still important today. On a separate sheet of paper, explain the importance of compassion. Use examples from the novel to show why and how compassion can outweigh other values. What lessons can people learn from reading this book?

from Stranded at Plimoth Plantation, 1626

Gary Bowen

Before You Read

Focus Question

If you were a writer, how would you bring historical settings and events to life for readers?

Background

Like the founders of Wethersfield, the Pilgrims of Plymouth, Massachusetts, struggled daily to stay alive, to worship their God, and to settle the wilderness around them. Writer Gary Bowen re-creates early Plymouth through the eyes of Christopher, a fictional young boy. In these journal entries, Christopher describes his experiences as an early settler of New England.

Responding to the Reading

1. How does Christopher come to be in Plymouth?

2. Why might the author have chosen to describe Plymouth through the eyes of a newcomer? Would an established member of the community describe everyday life in the same way? Explain.

3. Give two or three examples of historical details that make the setting seem realistic.

4. **Making Connections** Both Gary Bowen and Elizabeth George Speare use historically accurate details to depict the life of New England settlers. However, Bowen uses a journal format whereas Speare uses a third-person narrative. In what ways might the journal format limit the author's ability to provide a broad picture of historical events?

Literature and Writing

Historical fiction is usually based on carefully researched facts. The blend of fact and fiction creates a realistic yet personal picture of the past. Imagine that you are creating a story for a time capsule. Choose a place that you know well, such as your neighborhood or hometown. Create a character, perhaps based on yourself. Then write two or three brief journal entries or letters that paint an accurate picture of the setting and convey the character's experiences in that setting.

Immigrants in Their Own Words

from *Kids Discover*

Before You Read

Focus Question

What advice might you give to someone moving to your community from another country?
What would you want to know if you were moving to another country?

Background

Since 1980 a large number of immigrants have come to the United States. Like Kit Tyler, these immigrants must adjust to their new surroundings. In this article from *Kids Discover* magazine, seven young immigrants tell about their experiences.

Responding to the Reading

1. What are two common problems faced by the immigrants interviewed? What are two features of life in the United States that these young people enjoy?

2. Overall, how do the immigrants feel they have been treated by people living in the United States?

3. In general, how do these young people feel about the communities they left behind?

4. What future role in their adopted country do these immigrants envision for themselves?

5. **Making Connections** Compare Kit Tyler's experiences adjusting to Wethersfield with those of the immigrants interviewed here. Look at the general conclusions you came to in questions 1 through 4 as you make your comparison.

Learning for Life

Plan and gather materials for an immigration survival kit. Think about the challenges facing a newcomer to the United States. Consider practical problems such as language barriers and cultural differences as well as emotional challenges such as loneliness and isolation.

	The Wonders of the Invisible World	Cotton Mather
	How to Recognise a Witch	Roald Dahl

Before You Read

Focus Question

Are your first impressions of people usually accurate? Recall a time when your first impressions proved to be wrong. What caused you to change them?

Background

These two readings focus on witches and people’s fear of them. Cotton Mather was a Boston-based Puritan minister in the late seventeenth century. In the selection, he reveals his community’s fear of evil and announces the real trials and executions of several New Englanders convicted as witches. Roald Dahl, a fiction writer, pokes fun at the idea of identifying and labeling someone as a witch because of her physical appearance.

Responding to the Readings

1. What link does Mather make between witches and the devil?

2. How does Mather describe the presence of evil in his world?

3. According to Dahl, how can one identify a witch?

4. In Dahl’s story, Grandmamma says, “You can still never be absolutely sure whether a woman is a witch or not just by looking at her.” What point is Dahl making?

5. **Making Connections** Dahl gives a list of odd appearances and behaviors to describe a witch. Does Hannah Tupper fit Dahl’s description? Using Hannah as an example, describe how Puritans would define a witch.

Music Connection

Select a song or other piece of music that would put people in the right mood for Dahl’s story. Practice reading the story aloud as the music plays. Then play the music for your class as you read the story aloud.

First Amendment

Moving Toward Religious Freedom

U.S. Constitution
Irene Cumming Kleeberg

Before You Read

Focus Question

How important to you is religious tolerance? Why?

Background

Though Puritans like those in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* were intolerant of other religions, they did help found a nation that eventually guaranteed freedom of religion. These two readings help to explain the important role religious freedom has played in American history.

Responding to the Readings

1. Put the First Amendment in your own words. How does the amendment help protect freedom of religion?

2. According to Kleeberg, why did the writers of the Constitution want to guarantee separation of church and state?

3. What role did early churches have in colonial government?

4. What historical factors contributed to the separation of the church's powers from those of the government?

5. **Making Connections** How is the gradual move toward freedom of religion foreshadowed in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*? Think about the Wethersfield men's resistance to the rule of their colony and church by King James.

Literature Groups

In your group, discuss whether a democracy can exist without religious freedom.

Instructions for joining a new society

Heberto Padilla

Before You Read

Focus Question

How important is it to you to “fit in”? What factors determine whether or not a person fits in with a group?

Background

Heberto Padilla has been called “Cuba’s foremost living poet.” He was a childhood friend of Fidel Castro and was once a supporter of the Cuban Revolution. However, as a result of publicly praising a novel by a writer who was against the Revolution, he was seen as a traitor and sent to prison. In 1971 Padilla was released from prison; in 1980 he was allowed to leave Cuba. He now lives in the United States. His poem offers biting advice on how to fit into a new society.

Responding to the Reading

1. What do you think it means to be “well turned out”?

2. In your opinion, does the poet say that to fit in, a person “must have made the grade in sports”?

3. In your opinion, what does the poet imply is the personal cost of joining a new society? State this idea in your own words.

4. How might Padilla’s experiences in Cuba have contributed to this poem?

5. **Making Connections** Rewrite the poem from the perspective of Kit Tyler or Hannah Tupper. What three rules would either give newcomers to Wethersfield to help them “fit in”?

Literature Groups

Scan your local newspaper to find examples of stories about a person who has been singled out for praise because of his or her accomplishments. Based on what you have learned about colonial America, discuss whether you think this person would have been praised or ridiculed during that time in history. Discuss the ways in which our country’s attitudes about accomplishment have changed over time.