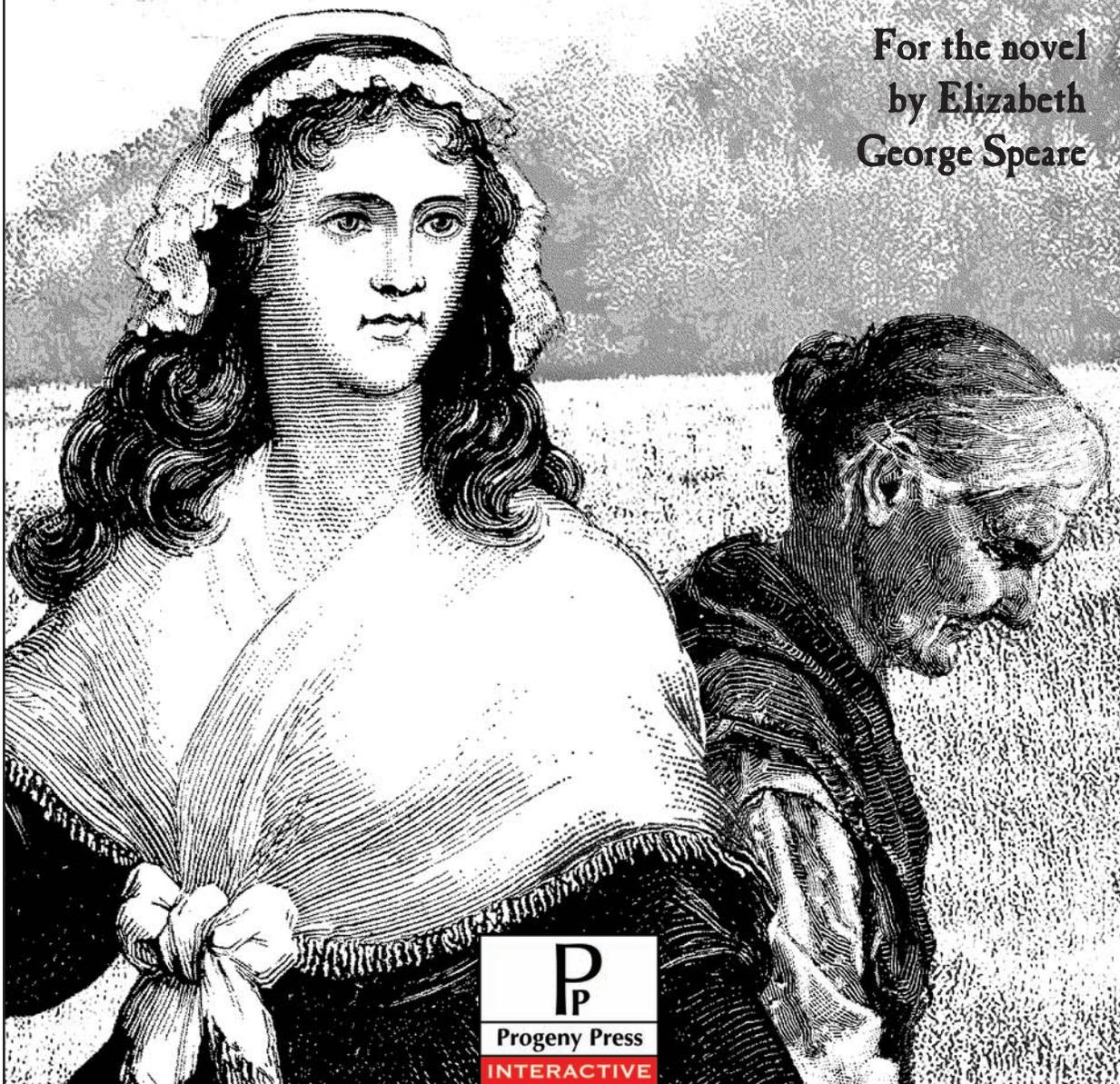


The Witch of Blackbird Pond

Study Guide

by Rebecca Gilleland

For the novel
by Elizabeth
George Speare



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The Witch of Blackbird Pond Study Guide
A Progeny Press Study Guide
by Rebecca Gilleland
with Andrew Clausen, Michael Gilleland

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Synopsis

After the death of her grandfather, Kit Tyler is forced to leave her home in Barbados to live with an uncle and aunt she has never met. Arriving in Connecticut, Kit encounters a stern Puritan community and quickly raises the suspicions of the superstitious Goodwife Cruff.

Kit's Aunt Rachel and her two cousins Judith and Mercy warmly welcome her into their family. But Kit's Uncle Matthew is a strict man, and he expects her to work hard if she is to be part of his household. Kit is willing to work, though she is unused to manual labor and unskilled at the many tasks she is given to do. Nevertheless, Kit struggles to fit in and soon finds herself hired to help Mercy teach school. She also attracts the attention of William Ashby, a wealthy young man who begins courting Kit.

Then Kit discovers the Meadows, the great level sea of green grasses that remind her of her home in Barbados. The Meadows become Kit's peaceful refuge from the seemingly endless struggle to adapt to the Puritan way of life. Kit also finds refuge at the home of Hannah Tupper, a kindly old woman living near Blackbird Pond on the edge of the Meadows. Hannah is a Quaker, considered by many of the townspeople to be a heretic, and who some suspect of being a witch.

Though she is forbidden from visiting Hannah, Kit cannot stay away. She finds that she needs Hannah's comforting friendship just as much as Hannah, living alone in a tiny ramshackle house, needs her help. Hoping to keep her relationship with the old woman a secret, Kit continues to work at being a contributing part of the family and community.

When an illness sweeps through the community, the townspeople blame Hannah for bringing disease and death to their town. Risking everything to save Hannah from a violent mob, Kit's relationship with the old woman is revealed, and Kit finds herself standing trial before the community on the charge of witchcraft.

Chapters 1–3

Vocabulary:

When you know the *antonym* (opposite) of a word, it helps give a clear picture of the word's meaning. Choose an antonym from the Word Box for each of the underlined words in the following sentences. Then write a *synonym* (a word with similar meaning) of the underlined word.

<i>Word Box</i>		
set sail	disrespectful	believing
cheerful	specific	attentive
concern	freedom	disagreed

1. With dismay, Kit saw the captain's wife among the passengers preparing to disembark.

Antonym:

Synonym:

2. Four new passengers were embarking for the trip up the river, a shabby, dour-looking man and wife and their scrawny little girl clutching a wooden toy, . . .

Antonym:

Synonym:

3. She had made them both laugh, but underneath her nonchalance, Kit felt uneasy.

Antonym:

Synonym:

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4. Captain Eaton treated her with punctilious caution.

Antonym:

Synonym:

5. Kit was aware again of that intangible warning that she could not interpret.

Antonym:

Synonym:

6. As though to prove that the constraint between them was broken, in the next wait for the rowboat Nat strolled over to join her where she stood watching.

Antonym:

Synonym:

7. “What sort of books?” John’s voice was incredulous.

Antonym:

Synonym:

8. Even John Holbrook’s farewells were abstracted.

Antonym:

Synonym:

9. “Yes,” her husband conceded harshly. “She was right, I suppose, since we are her only kin.”

Antonym:

Synonym:

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Similes and Metaphors:

A *simile* is a figure of speech used to describe something through comparison. A simile uses words such as *like* or *as* to indicate that a comparison is taking place. For example: The carpet was green *like* moss.

A *metaphor* is a figure of speech that creates a picture by saying that one thing *is* another. For example: White-fingered hands of water reached out to crush the tiny raft. Here we have the image of waves looking like hands reaching out for the raft.

Find and complete these sentences from Chapters 1–3, then indicate whether that sentence contains a *simile* or *metaphor*. One is done for you as an example.

1. Her spirits bobbed _____ like the whitecaps in the harbor _____
as the boat pulled away from the black hull of the *Dolphin*.

Simile or Metaphor? _____ simile _____

2. The others stared at her in suspicion. As though . . . _____

Simile or Metaphor? _____

3. Kit was ready to _____
with frustration.

Simile or Metaphor? _____

4. She saw that John was scandalized at the way she had grown up on the island,
running _____ in a
world filled with sunshine.

Simile or Metaphor? _____

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5. It was almost too much to bear when she heard a splash directly below her and saw that Nat and two of the other young men had taken advantage of a wait for the rowboat and were thrashing about _____

Simile or Metaphor? _____

Characterization:

Many of the characters in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* are introduced in the first few chapters. On the next page, complete the table describing the characters we meet at the start of the book. Be sure to give your personal impression of each of the characters listed.

Questions:

1. What is Kit's first impression of America upon stepping ashore at Saybrook?
What gives her this impression?

2. What factors motivate Kit to dive into the water to retrieve Prudence's doll?

3. For what reason (or reasons) does Goodwife Cruff suspect Kit may be a witch?

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Name of Character	Something about that Character	Your first impression of that Character
	She moves to Connecticut from Barbados to live with her aunt and uncle.	
Nat Eaton		
Matthew Wood		
	She is Kit's aunt and Matthew's wife. She warmly welcomes Kit to their home.	
Judith		
	She is Matthew and Rachel's oldest daughter. She must use crutches to get around.	
	He is going to Wethersfield to study under Reverend Bulkeley.	
Goodwife Cruff		
	A "scrawny little girl," Kit rescues her doll and gains her admiration.	

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4. Describe the method used to “walk” the ship up the river.

5. Why aren't Kit's aunt and uncle there to meet her when the ship comes in to Wethersfield?

6. What chain of circumstances led Kit to come to America and find her Aunt Rachel?

Thinking About the Story:

7. John Holbrook jumps to false conclusions when Kit tells him about her childhood. What does he assume her childhood was like? How does Kit describe her childhood?

8. Read again the first paragraph of Chapter 3. Kit's first impression of Wethersfield is not a very favorable one. List some words and phrases from this paragraph that the author uses to give a negative impression of the town.

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9. *Foreshadowing* is a technique authors use to prepare us for changes coming in the book or lives of the main characters. Study these two sentences from the book.

In spite of his mocking tone, Nat had unmistakably warned her, just as she knew now that John Holbrook had been about to warn her. There was something strange about this country of America, something that they all seemed to share and understand and she did not. (*Chapter 1*)

“Don’t forget, your aunt has been away from England for a long time.”

Kit was aware again of that intangible warning that she could not interpret. Every day of this delay made it harder for her to shake off her uneasiness. (*Chapter 2*)

What does the author seem to be foreshadowing? What words does she use to help create this feeling?

10. Nat’s parting words to Kit were a reminder that “only the guilty ones stay afloat.” Why do you think he said this to Kit just before he left?

Dig Deeper:

11. Throughout the New Testament, believers in Christ are admonished to exercise self-control. (For some examples, see Galatians 5:22, 23; Titus 2:2–6) What do you think it means to be self-controlled?

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Kit admits that she is always doing foolish things, and her Grandfather had often cautioned her to think before she flew off the handle. How might this relate to the matter of being self-controlled?

12. Read Romans 7:15–8:4 and 2 Peter 1:5–9. What do these verses tell us about self-control? Do you think God can still use people who lack the self-control they wish they had? Can you think of examples from the Bible?

13. Define *hospitality* in your own words.

14. Read Leviticus 19:33, 34; Isaiah 58:6, 7; Matthew 25:34–40; 1 Peter 4:9, 10. In these passages, what attitude should we take toward being hospitable?

15. Consider the effect Kit's arrival has on the Wood family. Do they show her the hospitality that is commanded? List each family member and indicate whether you think that person is following the Biblical command to show hospitality.

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Connections to History:

16. When John Holbrook asks Kit if she is a Puritan, Kit replies, “Puritan? You mean a Roundhead? One of those traitors who murdered King Charles?” Research King Charles I of England and briefly explain the historical event to which Kit is referring.

What does this statement tell us about Kit’s loyalties?

17. How does John respond to Kit’s question? What does his response tell us about *his* loyalties?

Writing Activities:

Choose one or both of the following topics and write a one- to two-page essay on the subject.

- People often say that one never gets a second chance to make a first impression. This opening section of the story contains a number of first impressions: Kit’s first impressions of America, of her new home, of her new family and neighbors, and of course their first impressions of her.

How important to you are first impressions? Do you draw conclusions about people or places based on your first impression of them? Are you often aware of what impression you leave with people? Use personal experiences if possible.

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- Look back at the chart on page 13 and consider your first impressions of the characters introduced in the novel so far. Choose two characters and fully explain your first impression of these characters. What actions on the part of the characters or words and phrases used by the author helped form your impression?

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12. Hannah tells Kit that she doubted the flower bulb would grow there, “but it just seemed determined to keep on trying,” and eventually it blossomed. Hannah’s “answer” is that Kit will eventually “blossom” in Connecticut if she is determined to keep on trying.

Chapters 10–12

Vocabulary:

1. adjective; showing the will to do harm to another
2. adjective; not giving any outward sign of emotion
3. noun; someone who flatters and serves another in hopes of attention or advantage
4. verb; having given offense to others by contradicting their sense or moral or social correctness
5. adjective; opposed, doing the opposite of what is expected or wanted, being contrary
6. adjective; devout, showing religious devotion
7. noun; twinges of guilt or anxiety
8. adjective; dextrous and nimble
9. adjective; teasing, gently mocking
10. noun; surprise, alarm, astonishment, dismay

Questions:

1. Both met Hannah after running away to the meadows “crying as though their hearts would break.” Nat, like Kit, had been left in America in the care of a relative and did not like it. Both had found boldness after talking with Hannah. They later discover that they both share a love of books.
2. Mercy says that a long time ago she mentally listed all the things she would never be able to do, then she considered all the things that she *could* do. “Since then, I’ve just never thought much about it.” Mercy is apparently satisfied in the knowledge that she is useful, that she is able to do her share of the housework, that she can earn wages teaching, and that she can enjoy the quiet joys available to her.
3. Prudence tells Kit, “Ma says I’m too stupid.” Also, Prudence has been forbidden from speaking with Kit. Kit proposes that they meet at the meadows. There, Kit gives her a hornbook and begins teaching her to read.
4. Hannah’s cure is blueberry cake and a kitten. Kit believes the secret ingredient is love. Answers will vary.
5. Rachel gives Kit a bit of leftover apple tart to take to Hannah.

Thinking About the Story:

6. Though Nat teases Kit quite a bit, he also shows Kit—and particularly Hannah—much kindness. “Always putting [Kit] at a disadvantage somehow, and yet, now and then, surprising her, letting her peek though a door that always seemed to slam shut again before she could actually see inside.”
7. Answers will vary.
8. The light in the room flares up as John is reading and Kit sees Mercy looking at him with an open, undisguised look of love. Speculation will vary about the future of their relationship.
9. Nat wanted to take the colorful bird back to Saybrook for his grandmother. His father explained that it wasn’t meant to live in Saybrook because “the birds here would scold and peck at it.” Nat is saying that Kit is like the brightly colored bird in that she doesn’t belong in Wethersfield where others will scold and peck at her. He says that he can “still see the green feathers” if he looks hard enough, but he adds that they are doing their best to turn Kit into a sparrow—a common, dull, colorless bird.
10. Answers will vary. “There is nothing I can possibly tell them, Kit thought, except the truth.” Kit noticed her aunt’s “barely restrained tears.” Because Aunt Rachel knew where Kit had been, Kit may have told the truth so that her aunt would not be forced into covering for her. She may have simply decided to boldly state the truth as she had boldly approached the schoolmaster after a previous visit to Hannah. Uncle Matthew forbids Kit from going to visit Hannah again.

Dig Deeper:

11. Answers will vary.
12. Answers may vary. Have students consider Romans 5:7, 8. These verses tell us that God did not wait for us to deserve his love, but that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

For Discussion:

13. Answers will vary, and should result in a lively discussion. Have students consider the importance of seeking counsel and wisdom from the Bible, from prayer, and from older, perhaps wiser Christians in our decision-making.

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14. Responses will vary.

15. Answers will vary. Rachel could be saying that Hannah may look “innocent and harmless” but may actually be dangerous. However, Rachel has already told Kit she doesn’t believe Hannah is a witch. Rachel apparently does have grave misgivings over Hannah’s Quaker beliefs, but it is more likely that the evil and danger Rachel mentions may be the result of Kit’s actions. Kit’s visits to Hannah appear quite harmless now, but may lead to grave consequences later.

Chapters 13–15

Vocabulary:

1. lightheartedly; 2. favorable; 3. sorry; 4. uncommon; 5. prize; 6. resilient spirit; 7. haughty; 8. mounted infantrymen; 9. mounted soldier; 10. rebellion

Questions:

1. While the others go to the husking bee, John intends to spend an evening visiting Mercy. Kit realizes that John loves Mercy.

2. When John tells Judith he wants to speak with her father, Judith immediately assumes that John wants to ask Matthew for permission to marry her. Before John can deny it, Matthew gives his blessing. John cannot bring himself to shatter the “utter happiness and trust” that shone from Judith’s eyes at that moment. Mercy also gives her blessing, and John and Judith head off to the husking bee.

3. The colors of the autumn trees, the “mellow warmth” of the days, and even the aromas of the season cause her excitement, a heightened awareness, and a “sense of expectancy.” Rather than dreading her new home, every morning she “woke with a new confidence and buoyancy she could not explain.”

4. Even before his house was raised, William found that he had to pay very high taxes on his land. This seems to have caused him to change his mind.

Thinking About the Story:

5. Answers will vary. It may be that finding a red ear of corn is something like catching a bouquet at a wedding, signifying that the finder will soon marry, or that it gives the possessor the right to declare who he or she “likes” or that the person who has it gets to claim a kiss from someone. Clues: Judith expresses a strong desire to find a red ear. She also teases Kit by saying that she’ll make certain William gets one, too. After it appears she will marry John, she says that she doesn’t need a red ear anymore. When she finds one, she tosses it to William, which causes Kit embarrassment when he comes to claim his “prize.”

6. Kit had decided that she would agree to marry William Ashby. She thinks that as William’s wife she would have more freedom to come and go as she pleased, she would have servants, and “she could snap her fingers at a woman like Goodwife Cruff.” She would gain prominence in the community. Answers may vary, but should be supported with good reasoning. Students will likely respond that Kit’s expectations are not realistic. Kit is creating a dream in which she would do no work. This was untrue for most people in the late 1600s, even those with some servants. The foreboding she feels is most likely because she knows in her heart that she doesn’t love William and that they are unsuited.

7. Kit says that she is still young, still a stranger, and still has much to learn. “She had thought that her answer was all ready,” but after witnessing the incident with Judith and John, all of Kit’s misgivings and doubts seem to surface.

8. Kit sees her uncle scoop up a handful of dirt from the garden, hold it for a moment, and then let it crumble through his fingers with a passionate gesture. Answers will vary. Matthew holds the soil “with a curious reverence, as though it were some priceless substance.” His actions reflect his strong feelings about the land, possibly a deep love for it.

9. Kit is hoping to see Nat. Answers may vary. This could indicate that Kit has stronger feelings for Nat than even she realizes.

10. Nat tells her that William has ordered only the best windows for the new house he is building for his bride. Answers may vary, but he seems to be jealous.

11. Nat is saying that he should not have worried about Kit (the “little bird” to which he had compared Kit in Chapter 12) because she has found a rich husband (William—the “nice fat partridge”) to provide for her.

12. At the end of Chapter 15, Kit finds herself feeling very proud of her uncle. “There was a sort of magnificence about him, even without the fine uniform . . .” She had already vowed to try to understand him better. Seeing him standing in the garden holding the soil (Chapter 14) made her think of him as “lonely and defiant.” Now, at the end of Chapter 15 she witnesses his fire and determination to remain free.