



*The Witch of
Blackbird Pond
Study Guide*

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For the novel
by Elizabeth George Speare



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INTERACTIVE

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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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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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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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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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7. Kit is hired to help Mercy teach the dame school for the younger children during the summer months.

8. Kit encourages the students to play-act a Bible story and a tussle erupts just as the schoolmaster and a preacher walk in. Both men are horrified by the idea of play-acting with the Bible. The schoolmaster dismisses the school, dismisses Kit, and says that they will consider seriously whether Mercy is responsible enough to continue in her position.

Thinking About the Story:

9. Kit is impressed that William is able to intelligently discuss the issue with her uncle and remain firm in his conviction. “William Ashby was neither speechless nor dim-witted. He even dared to stand up to her uncle!”

10. Possible answers include: “short-cropped white hair”; “faded, almost colorless eyes”; “incredibly wrinkled face”; “thin stooped shoulders”; “tattered gray shawl”; “odd-shaped scar”; “leathery wrinkles”; “a humorous gleam”; “a toothless smile.”

11. Answers will vary. Students may suggest that Hannah’s kindness toward Kit shows her to be a kind, gentle woman. She makes Kit feel welcome. She is the first person to show a genuine interest in Kit’s home in Barbados and her life with her grandfather. There is certainly nothing to suggest, beyond some superficial and stereotypical physical traits, that Hannah is a witch.

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.