

The Witch of Blackbird Pond Study Guide

The Witch of Blackbird Pond by Elizabeth George Speare

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Overview

In *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, Speare creates strong and memorable fictional characters who interact with actual historical personages. The result is a vivid portrait of life in Puritan New England. Kit Tyler, a rebellious orphan who has grown up in Barbados, moves to Connecticut and is soon exposed to the restrictive rules of Puritan society. In her new home, she frequently finds herself in conflict with her Uncle Matthew. These domestic confrontations point up some of her conflicts with Puritan society at large, for Kit is temperamentally unsuited to following other people's rules. To survive she must curb her impulsiveness, and when she cannot she suffers "helpless rage." Kit's difficulties in adjusting to her new surroundings culminate in her being tried on the principal scene of the action, is several charge of witchcraft. miles south of Hartford, Connecticut, near the banks of the Connecticut River. Historically, this is the time of the Setting witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts.

The opening chapter introduces the The events of the tale begin in April cultural contrasts between the warm, 1687 and continue through the friendly island life of Barbados and the following spring. Wethersfield, the cold Puritan society of Connecticut, where religion rules everything from parties and husking bees to courting.

Kit sees constant reminders—"a pillory, a whipping post and stocks"—of the oppressiveness of Puritan New England.

She must put away her colorful dresses brought from Barbados and wear the drab colors that are standard in Wethersfield. Before coming to America, she swam in the warm Caribbean waters; now she finds that swimming in New England is suspect and that the waters are as chilling as the society.

Young people, Kit discovers, are to be seen and not heard in Puritan society, which is based on the premise that punishments are given in this world, rewards in the next world. The New England setting contrasts with Kit's former life and immediately introduces conflict into the story.

About the Author

A native New Englander, Elizabeth George Speare was born on November 21, 1908, in Melrose, Massachusetts. She now lives in Easton, Connecticut. For more than twenty years, she lived in Wethersfield, Connecticut, where the events of *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* take place.

After earning her bachelor's and master's degrees from Boston College, Speare spent some years as a teacher and mother before turning to research and writing full time. She was almost fifty years old before she published her first young adult novel, *Calico Captive*.

Speare is one of the few authors whose books have been awarded the Newbery Medal twice: *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* and *The Bronze Bow* were so honored in 1959 and 1962 respectively. Her latest novel, *The Sign of the Beaver*, was named a Newbery Honor Book and won the first Scott O'Dell Award for historical fiction.



Plot Summary

The year is 1687. Kit Tyler is a young orphan who grew up with her Grandfather in Barbados. She lived a very free and happy life in that sunny land. When her grandfather died, she is left alone and penniless at the age of sixteen. The only choice she has is to go to America, where her aunt lived. Without advising them, she boarded a ship to take her to Connecticut to her aunt and uncle's home. She is heading for the town of Wethersfield.

Aboard ship, she is well-treated by Captain Eaton and his wife, who take the young girl under their wings. Their son Nat is just a little older than Kit and a very lively young man. Her other fellow passengers are Mr. and Mrs. Cruff and their daughter Prudence, and John Holbrook, a serious and studious young man.

At one point, little Prudence's doll falls in the water. Without hesitation, Kit jumps in to get the child's toy. This behavior shocks everyone, which baffles Kit. Apparently it is a belief that a woman who manages to stay afloat in the water is a witch. This incident gives Kit her first inkling that life in the Colonies will be quite different from that in Barbados.

When she arrives in Wethersfield, her aunt and uncle are very surprised, but not overjoyed to see her. Wethersfield is a Puritan settlement. Her Uncle Matthew is a somber man who does not approve of Kit's frivolous clothes and easy manner. Her hardworking Aunt Rachel is kinder to Kit. The young girl finds out that she has two cousins, Mercy and Judith. Mercy is a very sweet girl, who has been crippled through fever as a child. Judith, on the other hand, is a high-spirited girl and a bit self-centered. They are both approximately the same age as Kit.

Kit has a hard time adapting to the Puritan New England society. Not only is everybody very severe, but also the work is very hard, and the weather harsh and cold. She stuck out like a sore thumb because of the colorful clothes she wore. Everything is dull and drab compared to her sunny Barbados.

Kit unwittingly attracted the attentions of the town's most eligible bachelor, William Ashby. William Ashby asked Kit's uncle's permission to court her. John Holbrook also take to visiting the house frequently, and Judith believed this is on her account. In fact, John is in love with Mercy, and Mercy is secretly in love with him. As there is trouble brewing in Massachusetts with the Indians, John joined the militia and went to fight.

Free spirited Kit strikes up a friendship with an older lady named Hannah Tupper, who lived in a hut on the outskirts of town, in the meadow near Blackbird Pond. Hannah is a Quaker and considered a witch by the Puritans. Kit has been forbidden to have anything to do with Hannah, but she became very fond of the older lady. Soon she discovered that Nat Eaton is also a friend of Hannah's, and he visited her every time his boat anchored in Wethersfield. Kit also began taking shy little Prudence Cruff to Hannah's. There, she taught the child to read and write.



In the background of the main plot, there are political stirrings in the settlement. The Colonists are divided between those who supported England's King James, and those who felt that the Colonies should have the right to keep their own charter and be more independent.

A serious fever broke out in the town. Most of the families have someone ill, and a few children die. The townspeople have to find somewhere to vent their frustrations, someone to blame. An enraged crowd made its way down to Hannah's house. Upon finding out what is happening, Kit runs to Hannah's house to help her escape. The crowd burns Hannah's hut down. Luckily, Nat's ship is just making its way up the river. Kit and Nat manage to get Hannah onto the boat and to safety.

Hannah reaches safety, as Nat takes her to his grandmother's house. The townspeople, however, discover that Kit has been a frequent visitor at Hannah's house. They arrest Kit and hold her up for trial as a witch. This is a serious charge and can be punishable by death. Nat and Prudence testify in Kit's defense. They prove that Kit has been teaching Prudence how to read, and not witchcraft as has been believed. Their testimony helps free Kit of the serious charges against her.

Nat has heard that William is courting Kit. Thinking that Kit is going to marry William, Nat leaves and returns to his boat. After the trial, however, Kit realizes that she has deeper feelings for Nat. She turns down William's marriage proposal. William turns his attentions to Judith, with whom he has more in common. To everyone's joy, John Holbrook returns and declares his love for Mercy.

When Nat returns from one of his journeys, he is delighted to find that Kit has not married William. Nat has acquired his own boat and now is his own captain. He has named the boat 'Witch', in honor of Kit. They realize that they are in love. The future holds much time spent at sea for them, and frequent trips to Barbados.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The year is 1687. Sixteen-year-old Kit Tyler is a passenger on the Dolphin. This ship is bringing her from Barbados to the American colonies. Kit is traveling alone. As the boat pulls into Saybrook Port, she is talking to Nat Eaton, the captain's son, on the deck. Kit is very excited, as she has never been to America before. She is disappointed when she hears that Mrs. Eaton, who has taken her under her wing, will be leaving boat. Kit begs to go ashore with her, just for the ride. Kit will be returning to the boat to continue on her journey to Wethersfield further up the river, where her aunt lives.

Saybrook is a bit of a disappointment to Kit. She is expecting a larger town. She is also surprised at the drab and sober dressing of the Puritans. The severe lines and the sober colors contrast with her fashionable wear.

In the longboat heading back to the ship, they are joined by new passengers, who are also headed for Wethersfield. The members of Cruff family are surly looking. Along with Mr. and Mrs. Cruff, is their little daughter Prudence. Prudence lets out a cry, as she drops her little doll in the water. Without a second thought, Kit immediately jumps in the water to retrieve the child's toy. Not realizing that Kit is a very good swimmer, Nat jumps in after to save her. There is no necessity for this, though, as Kit has been taught to swim very well as a child. She is even a better swimmer than Nat.

Much to Kit's dismay, the incident is met with everyone's disapproval. She realizes it might have been silly for her to jump in the water, but she can't understand why everyone is so annoyed. Later on, on the boat, one of the new passengers approaches her and apologizes for their attitude. His name is John Holbrook. He is studying to be a Minister and also heading for Wethersfield. John tries to warn Kit that society is different in the colonies.

Nat is sent to inform Kit that from then on, she will be dining with the Cruff family, as Mrs. Eaton has left the boat. He warns her that Mrs. Cruff is spreading her belief that Kit is a witch. One of the ways of recognizing if a woman is a witch is whether she sinks in water or not. If a woman manages to stay afloat, this is sign that she practices witchcraft. Kit has proved earlier on that she can float. Nat seems to find this amusing, but John Holbrook looks concerned.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Kit is traveling alone from Barbados to the American colonies. The reasons why are still unknown. However, in the year 1687, it certainly is not common for women to be traveling alone, and especially not sixteen-year-olds.

It is evident that Kit's life in Barbados is very different from what she will face in America. The coldness of the water, the sternness of the people, and the dullness of the town makes such a change to what she is used to.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

It takes nine days for the boat to make its way up the river to Wethersfield. During this time, Kit has a chance to observe her fellow passengers. She springs up a nice friendship with John Holbrook, who is a very studious young man, always involved with his books. Mr. and Mrs. Cruft are very harsh people and are very severe on their little daughter, Prudence. Prudence is a colorless and sad little girl, yet Kit is somehow drawn to the child. With the exception of John Holbrook, everyone else on the boat is very cold to her.

Kit is having a hard time understanding the somber New Englanders. She has been brought up in a very easy going and free atmosphere in Barbados. Her father has been born and raised on the island. When he is sent to England for school, he met Kit's mother. They married and went back to live in Barbados. Kit's parents died when she is still a baby, and she is brought up by her grandfather and cared for by slave women.

Her grandfather taught her how to read, write and appreciate poetry and plays. This type of reading is unheard of in New England, especially for a woman. John Holbrook is not only surprised that she knew how to read, but shocked at the types of literature she is used to reading. He considered that reading is work, and one did not read for pleasure.

Kit's grandfather also tells her how her mother has often spoken about her only sister, who has married a Puritan and moved to the colonies. When her grandfather dies, Kit's must find her only living relative, her aunt.

As they approach their destination, Kit becomes more and more uneasy. It becomes evident that life in the colonies is very different from that in Barbados. She has an argument with Nat when she thoughtlessly mentions that the boat has a disagreeable smell of horses. He retorts that it is preferable to be carrying a cargo of horses than dealing in the dirty slave trade. Nat is vehemently against slavery. Kit has grown up on a sugar plantation that used slave labor.

Things get worse when the boat arrives in Wethersfield and there is no one there to meet Kit. She has not advised her aunt that she is coming. The captain is very put out; he will never have let Kit sail with them if he has known that the young girl is traveling alone. He has to send Nat ashore with more men to carry Kit's trunks and to try to find her aunt.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter deals with differences in points of view. To John Holbrook, reading is work and very serious. Books are rare and hard to find in the colonies, and the only proper



use for reading is religious. To Kit, reading is a joy, a happy way to pass leisure time. What is exciting to John is dull to Kit. What is freedom to Kit is scandalous John. This difference in point of view comes from the way each is taught to read. It also stems from the different religious beliefs and cultural habits.

At another moment, the reader witnesses Kit's discomfort with the filth of the ship and the stench of the cargo of horses. To Nat, the ship is his livelihood and his home. The cargo of horses is good and clean work. He is proud of his ship and of his work.

Immediately afterwards, we see another difference in point of view. To Kit, slavery is a necessity for production. She has been brought up with it and has never given it a second thought. To Nat, slavery is an evil and shameful practice.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The town of Wethersfield is a great disappointment to Kit. It is just a very small settlement. When she arrives at her aunt's house, she meets her relatives for the first time. Her aunt Rachel, once beautiful, is a tired looking woman. She is very drably dressed. Matthew Wood, her uncle, is a somber and fierce-looking man. Her cousin Mercy is a lovely and sweet girl. Mercy is crippled due to a fever when she is a child. Mercy's sister, Judith, is very beautiful and lively, but has a haughty way about her. Though her aunt is thrilled to see her, she is not that well-received when she informs them that she has come to live with them and has no where else to go.

The house is warmed by a large fire, but sparsely furnished. It is very different to the opulence and luxury Kit has grown up in. When the family sits down to breakfast, Kit is surprised to find that their breakfast consists only of water and corn bread.

Kit explains to her family how her grandfather had been a very wealthy man, but in the last few years, had been ill and left more and more business matters in the hands of the overseer. The overseer, in the end, ran off after embezzling the plantation owner. When her grandfather died, he is indebted. Kit has to sell everything off to pay the debtors. She is practically penniless now.

Her lovely, colorful gowns and clothes fascinate Kit's cousins. Matthew Wood, however, is very disapproving of the amount of luggage (seven trunks) Kit has brought with her. As a Puritan, he feels that so much is wasteful and sinful. He is worried what the rest of the town will be saying about it all. Matthew, to Kit's surprise, also seems to disapprove of the fact that her grandfather has been a Royalist.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Kit shows up suddenly and unexpectedly at her aunt's doorstep. She doesn't really know what to expect. As she has been pampered to and loved all her life, she certainly doesn't expect the cold reception she receives. She doesn't realize the impression she makes in the Puritan society, with her fancy and colorful gowns. Actually, she has very little prior knowledge of or contact with Puritans at all. Everything is all so different from her world. It's a world of different diets, habits, ways of dressing, religions and even different politics. Will Kit ever be able to fit into this society?



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

After Matthew leaves for work, Rachel takes the leftover cornbread to a needy neighbor. The three cousins are left alone. Mercy and Judith are fascinated with Kit's clothes; they have never seen anything like them. Opening her trunks, Kit gives some garments to her cousins, as presents. Judith looks at the dress given her and wonders how William will react when he sees her at Prayer Meeting. Rachel returns home to find the girls trying on clothes. She worries about the work that is being left undone. Kit convinces her to accept a bonnet as a present.

Matthew comes home early and is very angry at what is going on. Much to the girls' disappointment, he demands that all the clothes be returned to Kit. He considers the clothes flippant and sinful. Matthew warns Kit that, if she is to stay with them, she is to abide by their customs and not interrupt the work schedule with frippery. His daughters are not allowed any vanity.

Kit is very surprised that the Wood family has no servants, but does all the work themselves. She offers to help with the work, but finds it much more difficult and burdening than she has imagined. She first starts carding wool with Mercy, but has no talent for the chore. Judith impatiently has to take over from her when she is halfheartedly stirring soap. When asked to make the corn pudding, she impatiently adds the ingredients too quickly, causing their meal to be disastrous.

Mercy is kind and patient to Kit. She explains that Matthew did not mean to be unkind, but that life is very hard for them. Judith, however, is not very helpful at all and made quite a fuss when Rachel suggests that Kit share a bed with her. Judith is resentful and comments that Kit won't be able to carry her share of work, and they will have been better served had their cousin been a boy. Kit cries herself to sleep that first night.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Things seem to be getting harder for Kit, rather than easier. She never realized how difficult life can be in the colonies. She has never done a day's work in her life. The Woods, on the other hand, can not understand Kit's difficulties. They are all hard workers, and there is a lot of work to be done. One more person in the house increased the workload for everyone else.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

On the Sabbath, the Wood family, with the exception of Mercy, goes to Prayer Meeting. Kit is expected to go with them, even though she doesn't want to. Everybody in the community is expected to go to the Meeting. Wethersfield is a Puritan community and has norms that have to be abided by all.

Matthew is further angered by the clothes Kit is wearing. He feels that she can not possibly go to the meeting in such scandalous clothes. Rachel comes to Kit's aid by telling him that the other members of the congregation will surely understand that Kit has not had time to acquire new and more modest clothing.

Kit finds the prayer service very long and boring. Religion has not played a big part in her upbringing. On leaving the church, Kit is appalled to discover that they will be returning for a further afternoon service. At the Meetinghouse, Kit meets John, who is pleased to see her. Dr. Bulkeley, John Holbrook's professor, has led the prayer service. Outside the service, Kit is also introduced to William Ashby, on whom she made quite an impression.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Up until then, Kit has never gone to church regularly. Her grandfather has only taken her to church on Christmas. The Puritans not only worked very hard, but also seemed to spend all their leisure time in prayer.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Reverend Bulkeley and John Holbrook are invited over to the Woods for dinner. Rachel and the girls have worked very hard to put a nice meal out for them. The only one who doesn't seem very pleased is Kit's uncle, Matthew. When, after dinner, the Reverend expresses his approval of the Royalists, Matthew is even more put out. There are sharp words exchanged between the two men. The Reverend is in favor of the appointment, by King James, of Andros as Governor of the Colonies. Matthew resented the interference from England in the Colonies' administration. Massachusetts has readily accepted Andros, Connecticut is taking a bit longer. Politics in Wethersfield are a very touchy issue.

During the long prayer that evening, the Reverend says a special prayer for Mercy in her weakness and affliction. This annoys Kit. After a few weeks in the house, she has come to realize that the staying force of the household is Mercy, even though she is lame. Mercy is definitely not weak. She has a special quality about her that makes all depend on her force and understanding. She is everyone's comfort.

After the guests take their leave, Matthew informs the family that William Ashby has asked him for permission to court Kit. This comes as a huge surprise to Kit. She has only met William very briefly. The three girls begin to gossip. Judith is put out by this new turn in events. She has her cap set for William. She quickly recovers, however, now deciding to marry John Holbrook instead. Judith has previously had her hopes up to marry William.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Politics and religion play a very big part in the colonists' life. Unfortunately, these are dividing factors. It would seem that, as the colonists have to overcome so many difficulties, they will be better off if they unite their forces. Surely, fighting the Indians, guaranteeing food for the winter, and surviving the harsh weather should bring them together.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

William Ashby comes to court Kit. She has absolutely no idea what to talk to him about. They sit side by side, feeling very uncomfortable. She hardly knows William at all. William however, is content just to sit quietly outside. Much to Kit's relief, John Holbrook comes calling that night, so the couple join the conversation inside. William mentions that he is planning on building a house for himself on his father's land. William has just been appointed Viewer of Fences, an important responsibility. Now, he should be able to settle down.

The Assembly has handed out new concessions of land grants. Matthew thinks this is a good move, as it will prevent the King from giving land to whomever he wants. Here, an argument ensues as William believes that it will be better for the colonies to accept the new Governor, while Matthew resents what he considers interference. Matthew fears that the arrival of Andros, the charter that the colonists have been given by King Charles, will be at risk. Matthew was one of the earlier settlers, who faced difficulties in setting up the colony. Matthew feels very strongly against the Royalists.

When the guests leave. Judith and Mercy inform Kit that William is preparing for marriage. It is common knowledge in town that William will start building a house, once he has decided on a wife. Kit is a bit put out by this. She certainly did not know whether she wanted to marry William, and she is angry that the man has made such a one-sided decision.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The spirit of liberty and freedom are deeply ingrained in the colonists. They want to be able to decide their own destiny. Matthew feels strongly about this freedom. He has struggled very hard for it. One of the principal issues is the land distribution. Many of the colonists resent that after they opened the frontiers and faced all the difficulties, King James might try to dispose of this land how he pleases, granting it to his friends and allies of royal blood.

Another issue is that of taxes. The colonists are already feeling the weight of the taxes imposed by the King. On the other hand, the colonists are still dependent on England in many ways. Most of their supplies are brought out from there. This dependence causes many colonists, like William, to feel it more convenient not to revolt against the established rule.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Rachel and Mercy make Kit a plain calico dress, so she no longer has to ruin her fine clothes in hard work. She no longer sticks out so much, as she is wearing the same clothes as the other women.

One day, Judith and Kit are sent out to the meadows to weed the onion fields. Kit is delighted to be out in nature on such a sunny day. The nature and the sun give her a sense of freedom and remind her of her happy life in Barbados. When the girls come to the Great Meadow, the beauty of the green fields stuns Kit. Judith informs her that the soil is very fertile, but that no one lives there because, in spring, it always floods. The settlers have rights to plots of this land to work on. Matthew Wood will have a right to a bigger plot, but did not have anyone to help him out with the land, so he had to turn it down and chose a smaller one.

On their way to the Woods' plot, Kit sees a little house on the edge of a marshy pond. There is smoke coming from the chimney. When questioned, Judith tells Kit that Hannah Tupper lives in that little house with her cats. Hannah is said to be a witch. She is different and does not frequent the Meetings.

Kit finds the work of weeding the onions very strenuous. She wonders whether, if she married wealthy William, she can escape the workload she has. Kit is amazed that Judith, who is usually so vain and uppity, should work so vigorously at a job that "a high class slave in Barbados will rebel at."

When they arrive home at lunchtime, Mercy happily tells them that the town selectmen have decided that Kit can help Mercy in teaching young children their letters before they go to formal school. The little school is in the Woods' kitchen, and both Mercy and Kit will earn wages. This will be a great help to the family.

Mercy explains to Kit that a son would have been a great help to Matthew in his work. It is very hard work for a man, alone, to provide for his family. Rachel's first child was a boy, but he died of the same fever that left Mercy lame. After Judith, Rachel gives birth to another boy, but he also died when he was a week old, after being taken out in the freezing cold to be baptized.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Kit has been brought up in a wealthy atmosphere, where slaves and servants did all the work. In that society, manual labor is considered humiliating. A gentleman or lady dedicated themselves to the pleasures of life. Women are expected to be frivolous.



In the community that Kit is now a part of, it is the other way around. Hard work is expected of all. Industriousness is a very important quality in a person. The Puritan society rejected any kind of frivolity. One must remember that the conditions in the northern colonies were very difficult. Winters were very harsh. Production was very demanding. The settlers were not wealthy. They had not received land grants from the king, nor did they have slaves. To the contrary, they denounced slavery.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Kit and Mercy have begun teaching the young children their letters. There are eleven in their class. Kit enjoys the teaching and resorts to entertaining tricks to keep the children's attention. She remembers the pleasure she has in learning. Mercy, on the other hand, patiently takes the children through the rote of repeating and studying catechism. They get into the habit of Kit telling a story at the end of the classes. Of course, these stories are always religion-related. The children love coming to their lessons, and Kit is a great favorite of theirs'.

One day, Kit decides to improvise. She decides to have the children pretend they are the characters of the story of the Good Samaritan. Mercy is very much in doubt about this, but Kit insists that a game of make-believe will be good. The small children get a bit over-boisterous in this game. Unfortunately, just then, the schoolmaster and the Reverend come in to inspect the school. They are flabbergasted at the ungodliness of the scene before them. The Puritans considered play-acting sinful. The inspectors dismiss Kit from teaching and are going to decide whether the school will be able to continue or not.

Kit is very upset by the incident. She runs out to the Great Meadow. Throwing herself on to the tall grass, she bursts out crying. Hannah Tupper comes across the crying girl and invites her back to her simple home. At first, Kit is frightened, having heard that Hannah is a witch and seeing a nasty scar on the woman's forehead. However, Hannah is kind to Kit. She shows Kit where she can clean herself up before heading home. Hannah gives the girl a nice meal, listens to her story and comforts her.

When Hannah hears that Kit is from Barbados, she tells the girl that she has a sailor friend who comes to see her, and who tells her all about that sunny land. In the small but comfortable home, Kit sees a coral and a tropical plant that she recognizes from her childhood home. Hannah explains that these are gifts from her seafaring friend.

Hannah tells Kit how she and her husband Thomas had walked all the way from Massachusetts to Connecticut. They were not allowed to stay in town because of the brand on their foreheads, so they had gone to the river. Thomas built the pretty and cozy little house with his own hands.

Kit asks for advice on how she can go back to the Woods' house to face their annoyance and disappointment. She wonders whether she will ever adapt to this new life. Hannah shows her a tropical flower that grew in her garden. She said that she thought the flower would never grow there, but the plant kept on trying and now is beautiful.



Encouraged, Kit leaves Hannah's and heads straight to Mr. Kimberly's, the schoolmaster's house.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Adaptation to a new place is difficult in the best of circumstances. When added to this difficulty one has to adapt to different customs, religions, ideas, diets and habits, it can be very depressing. On top of all this, Kit is not well accepted in the community and is often disapproved of. She is trying to fit in, but will always end up doing something wrong. Kit is sorry about the incident at the school. She realizes how important the school is to Mercy and to the family finances. She has overstepped the boundaries again, and she regrets this. Kit is new to the whole situation and, in truth; she doesn't really know where the boundaries are.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

This chapter begins back at the Wood's home. Kit is happily telling Mercy and Rachel that Mr. Kimberly went back on his decision and is going to allow them to continue with the dame school. She has explained the whole story to him, and he has reluctantly understood that Kit is new and doesn't know. Kit promised that, from then on, she will abide by the rules and not disappoint them again.

Kit went on to tell them of her meeting with Hannah Tupper. Rachel is very distressed about this. No one in town has anything to do with Hannah. She is a Quaker. Quakers don't believe in the sacraments, and they are considered to be troublemakers and heretics. In Massachusetts, many Quakers are hanged, others are branded. In Connecticut, this did not happen. Still, Quakers are not welcome or accepted. Hannah has never done anyone harm, but she is considered evil and dangerous because of her faith. Kit is forbidden to go back to her house.

Kit is disappointed, because she does not believe Hannah is evil. She decides that it is best not to argue or further discuss the issue. She wants to know more about Quakers. However, there is no one she can talk to. William wouldn't be interested. John Holbrook will probably agree with Rachel. She feels lonely.

Kit decides to disobey the rules and visit Hannah anyway. She finds Hannah spinning flax. Hannah spins flax for some of the townspeople, so as to have money to pay tax and the fines for not going to Prayer Meeting. Kit is very surprised to hear that there is a fine for those who do not go to Prayer Meetings. She thinks the taxes and fine are unfair.

Much to Kit's surprise, Nat Eaton arrives at Hannah's house while Kit is there. Nat is Hannah's seaman friend. Nat tells Kit how, when he was a small boy, he ran away from home to the Great Meadow. He ran away because his father decided that Nat would have to stay ashore and go to school in Saybrook. Hannah found him crying in the fields and comforted him. She had then taken him back to the ship and to his father.

Hannah is very happy to see Nat. Nat asks Kit how she is adapting in Wethersfield. She tells him that she is fine and teaching school. Nat asks Kit to keep an eye on Hannah.

John has become a frequent visitor at the Woods house. Though he has not formally asked, everyone imagines he is courting Judith.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter deals very clearly with religious bigotry. Religious intolerance is very common. Yet, it is hard to understand how the colonists, who had come to America in

search of religious freedom, should be so intolerant themselves. This is the age of the Protestant Revolution. The Puritans, at the time, are non-conformists to the Church of England, ruled by King James. Yet, they, themselves permitted no freedom of thought or expression amongst their own followers. They segregated and persecuted those of other faiths.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Summer sets in and Kit settles well into teaching. She is perplexed that, for a few days, someone has been leaving little flowers for her. She is surprised to discover that it is Prudence Cruft, the little girl she met on the ship. Prudence would have liked to learn how to read and write, but her parents will not allow it. Her mother thinks she is too stupid.

Kit takes pity on the child and decides to teach her. This has to be done in secret. So, Kit tells Prudence to meet her in the Meadow. She finds her old little hornbook in her trunks to take to the child. That afternoon, she gives Prudence class under a tree and taught her the alphabet from the hornbook. When it is time to go home, Prudence comments that she can not take the hornbook Kit has given her back to her house. Kit then has the idea of leaving the hornbook at Hannah's house. At first, Prudence is scared, because Hannah is a witch. Kit convinces her that it is all right, and that Hannah is just a kindly soul. Prudence and Hannah immediately take to each other. Hannah now has a new little friend.

That same night, William Ashby and John Holbrook come on their usual evening visit to the Wood home. Kit is bored and impatient at the way William goes on and on about the details of the house he is building. Judith, though, is very interested and makes comments and suggestions. When John Holbrook does his customary reading aloud, Kit notices the way Mercy lovingly looks at him.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Prudence is a little girl who is very badly treated by her mother. Her mother has no patience with her, did not allow her to go to school or have toys. According to the little girl, as long as she did her chores, no one ever bothered about her. She is a sad and lonely child. Mrs. Cruft is very harsh on Prudence and seemed to reject her completely.

The lonely and different characters seem to naturally attract each other. Hannah, Kit and Prudence have in common the fact that they are not accepted in the community and this gives them a very strong tie.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

One day after helping her aunt to make candles, Kit went to visit Hannah. Rachel suspecting where Kit is going, gives her a tart to take. Though she disapproves of Kit seeing Hannah, she can't take the idea of someone going hungry. Kit finds Nat there fixing the older woman's roof. Kit climbed up and helped him. She enjoyed the easygoing atmosphere that made her feel alive.

Kit confessed to Nat that though she is being well treated, she isn't really happy and that she doesn't fit into the community. Nat is not surprised at this. The two young people got along very well, and talked about different things. Kit discovered that Nat loves reading and has read Shakespeare. When they finished thatching, Hannah gives them supper. Nat insisted on walking Kit home.

They arrive back at the Wood home late. The whole family and William are waiting for Kit. When Matthew questioned where she has been, Kit truthfully tells him that they has been fixing Hannah's roof. Matthew is very annoyed and forbade her from going back to visit Hannah again.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Thatching a roof is very strenuous and hard work, and Kit has never enjoyed manual labor. Any and all work in the northern colonies has to be done by the settlers. All through the book, the author has been showing the difficult chores and hard work necessary for survival. From soap and candle making to spinning of wax and wool; planting, weeding, harvesting, milking, cooking, sewing, cleaning, etc. are all very necessary chores that have to be shared by all family members. Life for a woman alone in those days was very difficult and almost impossible.

Kit is one who can not adapt to the heavy load of work faced by the colonists. However for the first time she felt very free and happy fixing the roof with Nat. This is very hard work, but the freedom she feels takes a great part of the load and tiredness away. She feels free and happy to work because for once she is accepted as who she is. She appreciates the sunshine and open air.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

After harvest, the settlers have the custom of getting together merrily to husk the corn. While working, they sing and picnic, making a festivity of it. Judith's enthusiasm and excitement soon allay Kit's misgivings. Unfortunately Mercy will once again not be going because of her condition. Judith announces that she is going to somehow make John formally propose. Kit realizes that William is infatuated with her and ready to propose also. Kit knows that she will be freer as William's wife but is still not sure that that is what she wants.

After work that day, Kit slipped by to see Hannah quickly. Hannah tells her Prudence has been by and is dedicating herself to learning.

On Kit's way home, she runs into John Holbrook. He asks her where she is coming from and when she tells him, he also is disapproving. John also believed Hannah besides being a Quaker, is a witch. Kit tries to explain to John about Hannah. It's been five months since Kit and John arrive in Wethersfield together on the Dolphin. He seems to think Kit will be very happy married to William. When she asks about him, John confesses that he is love with Mercy, and that he is planning on proposing that night. Kit is overjoyed for both Mercy and John.

When John arrives at the house that evening, Judith, Kit and William are ready to go to the husking bee. John explains that he won't be going, because he wants to talk to Matthew. Judith jumped in, putting John in a very uncomfortable position, as she makes it seem that he will be asking permission to court her. There is nothing John can do to remedy the situation without humiliating Judith. He knows that if he hurts Judith, Mercy will never forgive him.

At the husking, William proposes to Kit. Kit admits that she is still in doubt. William understands and willing to wait until Kit is sure. The house won't be ready in spring anyway.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Everybody needs some type of distraction. Husking corn is a very important activity to guarantee the community's food supply over the winter months ahead. It is also a festive occasion because harvest is over. All the community's life revolves around work and survival. The author depicts what life is like in colonial times very well.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Autumn sets in, and Kit is enchanted with nature changing colors. One day she watches as her uncle gazes at the land before him. She realizes then how much this man loves his land and how hard he has to fight for it.

The Dolphin has once again docked, and the townspeople go out to meet it. Kit goes along with Judith. Kit is happy and looking forward to seeing Nat. First, he asks her to take a length of cloth he has brought to Hannah. He won't be able to go himself, as the ship has to set sail soon so as not to lose the wind. He, however, is very cold and sarcastic to her. He then goes on to tell her that the ship is carrying a cargo of English glass ordered by William Ashby, who is making a house for his bride to be. Nat has heard that William is planning on marrying Kit. The seaman is annoyed that Kit hasn't told him herself. Nat's harsh tone hurts Kit.

When Kit and Judith arrive home, they hear the news that Governor Andros is coming to Connecticut, and that he is going to take over as Royal Governor of the colony.

Chapter 14 Analysis

What the reader has been suspecting for a few chapters now becomes more apparent. There is an attraction between Nat and Kit. Kit is anxious to see Nat. Nat is hurt, because he thinks Kit is going to marry William. He doesn't ask her or wait for her explanation.

Misunderstanding and lack of communication can cause a lot of heartbreak.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Matthew Wood is very upset about the nomination of Governor Andros. He feels it will be the end of all they worked for. He is totally against having to abide by the laws set out in England. Kit is surprised to hear that William has gone over to Matthew's way of thinking when he finds out how much tax he has to pay. The anti-royalist feelings are very strong in the colony. The governor considers that the land deeds that had been handed over by the Indians are worthless. The settlers will have to ask for new land grants on the land that they have already paid for and pay taxes on. They believe that their charter, their courts and councils will lose all their power. Some of the colonists are calling for armed rebellion. It is quickly decided there will be no violence.

On the day Governor Andros arrives, the people are quiet. In the ensuing meeting, the colonists managed to save and hide their charter. It will seem as if it is William who has safeguarded the important document. This is a serious insubordination to the King.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The right to religious freedom and self-government is one of the reasons the colonists had left England for the colonies. When the settlers first arrive in America, they had to brave the elements alone. They organized themselves in the way that they thought best, considering their own needs. It is very frustrating to many of them that suddenly they will lose all they built. The charter King Charles has drawn up for them gives them relative independence to run their own affairs. Now, they will apparently have to submit to English laws made to benefit those in England and not the colonists. These colonists realize that they are too weak to fight against the strong royalist army.

Others, though, still feel very English and think that England is taking a renewed interest in them. They feel comforted and closer to their homeland. The colonies are already strongly divided between royalists and those against England's rule.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Matthew Wood is very annoyed. Governor Andros decides to change the date of their Thanksgiving celebration. Matthew considers this a totally unnecessary interference in the settlers' business. To make things worse, there has been quite a disturbance in the town on the last night. Some of the young sailors have gone into town to celebrate All Hallows Eve. They are boisterous and have put Jack-o-lanterns into the windows of the house William is building. This behavior is considered ungodly and blasphemous. The young men have been caught and put into the stocks.

Kit has the suspicion that the sailors are from the Dolphin. When she goes down to the town square, she does indeed see the Dolphin sailors and Nat in the docks. A group of young boys are throwing mud and fruit at them. As a part of their punishment, the sailors will have to pay a fine and are forbidden from coming into town ever again. Kit is very upset to see Nat in such a situation. She asks him if he needs anything, or if there is anything she can do. She is rebuffed.

Kit needs someone to talk to. Therefore, she takes the opportunity to take the length of cloth Nat has sent to Hannah. She tells Hannah all about what has happened. She also tells about her doubts and William's courtship.

While Kit is talking to Hannah, Prudence arrives for her lesson. Prudence has changed completely. She is now a happy looking girl, alert and confident. She is a very quick learner. Kit decides to teach the little girl how to write. Kit has brought along a little copybook, a quill and ink. Prudence writes her own name in the copybook. It is late, so they hurry home.

Upon arriving at her aunt's house, Kit receives the disturbing news that John Holbrook has joined the militia to fight the Indians. Judith is very upset and worried about this.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Prudence's personality is going through a complete change. She is more open and self-confident. She is enthusiastic, alert and alive. The main reason for this transformation is the attention and kindness she is receiving both from Hannah and Kit. It is not only the love that is bringing happiness. The intellectual stimulus makes her feel alert and important. Education is an important ingredient to make people feel free and capable.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Just five days after John's departure, Judith comes down with a fever. At first, everyone thinks it is just moping. Soon, the fever begins to affect more of the townspeople. The fever affects mainly children and young people. With Judith sick, Kit takes on a larger burden of work. She, herself, becomes ill, but as she is strong and healthy, she soon recovers. Mercy, though, comes down very ill. Her fever will not let up. Rachel and Kit care for her day and night, to no avail. At first, Matthew does not want to accept Dr. Bulkely's help, because he is a royalist. When Bulkely appears on the doorstep offering to help, Matthew gives in gratefully.

Soon after Dr. Bulkely's departure, an angry group of townspeople come to the door. They are calling Matthew to go with them to get the witch, Hannah. Three children have died, and the people decide that the witch is to blame. Matthew tries to dissuade them from this mad action but is not able to. The crowd is very determined and angry. The townspeople also accuse Kit of having dealings with the witch, however, Matthew stands up for his niece. The angry crowd sets out in search of Hannah, despite Matthew's pleas.

When Kit hears what is going on, she immediately runs down to warn Hannah. At first, Hannah refuses to leave, as Quakers do not run away. She manages to get Hannah to leave her house just in time. They run to the riverbank and hide in the reeds. Hannah is heartbroken as she sees the angry crowd set fire to her home. Just when Kit is about to despair that they have nowhere to go, she sees the Dolphin sailing up the river. Without hesitation, Kit dives in the river and swims to the ship to recruit Nat's help.

Nat rows ashore on a longboat, and together they manage to get Hannah aboard the boat. Nat has the solution. He will take Hannah away from Wethersfield to stay with his grandmother. He asks Kit to go with them, tempting her with trips to Barbados. Kit feels obliged to turn Nat's offer down. She feels she is needed to care for Mercy. As she loved Mercy, she can not leave her when she is so ill. Nat suspects that Kit wants to stay because of William. Kit runs home and is relieved to find that Mercy's fever has broken.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Many times, when people are frightened or don't understand the reasons why things happen, they seek a scapegoat. Somebody has to be blamed. Someone has to be guilty. Most importantly, someone has to pay. When problems arise, emotions can soar and tempers flair. Unfortunately, all too often, tragic situations can bring out the worst in people. Frustrated people are easily roused to vent their anger somewhere. An angry crowd can be very dangerous. A crowd can make people behave in a manner they

wouldn't dream of if they were alone. The mixture of anger, frustration and bigotry is a very dangerous one.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Peace is just settling in the Wood household. Mercy and Judith are recuperating. Kit is very grateful to Matthew for standing up for her. For once, the atmosphere is relaxed. When the townspeople, led by Mrs. Cruff, come knocking on their door, the family is not prepared for what is to come. A group of townspeople is there to arrest Kit. They had not managed to get Hannah. They think she had turned herself into a rat. Mrs. Cruff convinces the townspeople that Hannah has left Kit to carry on her work. They have the proof; they have found Kit's notebook inside Hannah's house. Kit openly admits that she visited Hannah, but once again insisted that the older lady is not a witch.

Encouraged by Mrs. Cruff, the group insists that Kit has to be arrested and sent to trial. They lock her in a shed outside the constable's house. The trial will be the next day. The shed is cold and damp, and Kit is feeling scared and lonely. She is relieved when her Aunt Rachel comes to see her. Kit asks Rachel what happened to witches. Rachel says nothing, but she is obviously lying.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Mrs. Cruff resents Kit from the very beginning. There is an instant antipathy between the woman and the girl. As the townspeople did not manage to get Hannah, they need to find another scapegoat. The young girl, Kit, who is a stranger to the town and whose behavior and way of dressing is not at all Puritan, is the perfect target for the people's hate. The punishment for witchcraft in the colonial community can even be death.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

After a sleepless night, Kit is taken to her trial. The charges against her are read. Kit is accused of dealing with Satan and of being a friend to Hannah Tupper, an alleged witch. These crimes are punishable by death. The first question they ask Kit is whether or not she is a friend of Hannah Tupper. Kit truthfully answers "yes." They then continue with the interrogation. All sorts of accusations are thrown at her. She is apparently responsible for any and everything that has gone wrong in the settlement since her arrival. Matthew tries to defend her, but to no avail. He publicly vouches for her behavior, but the court comes back that she has purposely disobeyed him.

Mr. and Mrs. Cruff present the little copybook Kit has given Prudence as proof that Kit is thinking of doing evil. Suddenly, Nat walks into the courtroom with Prudence. They've come to give testimony in Kit's favor. Prudence takes the stand and tells the court that Kit has taught her to read and write. The court doesn't believe her to begin with, so she proves it to them by reading perfectly from the Bible. Mrs. Cruff is very put out, but Mr. Cruff feels very proud that his daughter can read.

Thanks to Nat and Prudence, Kit is acquitted of all charges, and her life is saved. Nat leaves immediately after the hearing, as he has been banned from town on the All Hallows occasion.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Once the rumor has spread that Kit is a witch, people start imagining all sorts of spells and curses she has cast. Everything and anything that has gone wrong is blamed on Kit. It is very difficult for even the most reasonable men to calm the townspeople's exaltation and make them see reason.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The first snow begins to fall. Kit has never seen snow before and is fascinated by its beauty. As time goes by, she begins to feel depressed and lonely.

When she meets with William after the trial, Kit is very disappointed with his attitude. He tells her that he is ready to forget and forgive her for what has passed. Now that Hannah Tupper has left, maybe she will forget all the nonsense and leave Prudence to her own devices. Kit realizes that she will never be able to depend on him to give her the support she needs. William also realizes that he will never be able to accept her free-spirited behavior. It is for the best that they not carry their relationship any further.

Meanwhile, two militiamen come back to town, and their news is not the best. They report that the Indians have attacked their regiment. All the other members of their group have either been killed or taken prisoner. Everyone is shocked. The militiamen have no news of John Holbrook or his fate. Judith is very upset, and William comes to her support immediately. During the next few months, William is a great comfort to her. Mercy, though, has to keep her sorrow to herself.

The winter months are dragging out, and Kit is getting progressively more depressed. She misses Nat and wonders whether she should have gone with him when he took Hannah to his grandmother's. Kit is homesick, and she is thinking of going back to Barbados.

One evening, when the family is at home, a thin bedraggled man comes to the door. It is John Holbrook, who has actually survived the Indian attack. He goes straight up to Mercy and just holds her.

Chapter 20 Analysis

On turning William down, Kit makes a very courageous decision. Life in that time was very difficult for a woman on her own. Most women married for convenience. The man could make his choice for a bride. Usually, the woman would meekly accept the man's attention and be grateful that she was not be a spinster. To turn down such an eligible catch is not a decision that many women would make. Kit's independence is amazing and very rare in those days.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

In April, two forthcoming weddings are announced at the Meeting House. Judith and William Ashby, Mercy and John Holbrook are the two happy couples. Judith has been making her dowry for years, but Mercy has to start from scratch. Mercy doesn't seem very concerned, though. Everybody is happily making plans. With John to help, a load will be taken off Matthew.

Kit is also preparing to leave; yet she has not told anyone. She knows that they will protest, but she really won't be missed. She is planning on selling her dresses to finance her trip. One day, while she is out in the meadows, she realizes that she loves Nat. She misses him, and wonders if it is too late. Will she ever see him again?

One day in May, a new ketch comes into dock. Kit joins the crowd to see the novelty. Kit is delighted when she sees Nat come off the ship. Nat is very relieved that she has not married William. He tells her that he has managed to get a boat of his own. He wants her to go with him. He has named the ketch after her. He calls it the *Witch*.

Chapter 21 Analysis

In the end, everyone is destined to be happy. Through all the difficulties, love conquers. Kit, with her free spirit, would never have been happy in Wethersfield. The Puritanical life is not meant for her. She is meant to be free. There is no one better to be with, than someone with her same spirit. There will still be hardship and work, but it won't break her spirit.



Characters

Kit Tyler

Kit is an impetuous, young girl. Orphaned as a baby, she is brought up in wealth and freedom by her grandfather. One can even say she has been a bit spoiled. Kit has never done a day's work in her life. Her grandfather has been a plantation owner and has many slaves. Slavery is something Kit takes for granted. She has grown up with it and never even gives it a second thought. Kit is used to wealth, color and pretty clothes.

Arriving in a Puritan society, so different to what she knows, is a great shock to her. She has a difficult time adapting to the drab life and hard work. Kit finds all the prayer sessions long and boring. She has never had much of a religious education. The young girl loves reading, especially plays and poetry.

Kit is a friendly and kind girl. She takes pity on little Prudence and has time to teach her. Children love Kit and she enjoys them. One of Kit's most important qualities is her truthfulness and honesty. She never lies, not even to protect herself.

Hannah Tupper

Hannah Tupper, after having been expelled from Massachusetts for being Quaker, arrives in Wethersfield with her husband, Tom. They have suffered severely from religious persecution. She and her husband are shunned from the Wethersfield community. When her husband dies, she is totally alone with no one to help her. She is a very courageous, old lady.

Hannah has a very special quality about her. She has a tremendous empathy for other peoples' suffering. She is kind, patient and understanding. Generously, she takes in all who need her. That is how she has become friendly with Nat, Kit and Prudence.

Hannah is getting a bit forgetful. Sometimes, she even forgot that her husband has already passed away,

Nat Eaton

Nat Eaton is the captain of the Dolphin's son. Nat loves the sea and everything about it. He is a hard worker and his father's right hand. He is responsible, but not adverse to a bit of fun here and there. Nat is also ambitious and is working to get a ship of his own.

Nat is a good and loyal friend. This can be seen by the way he treats Hannah. Nat never forgets to bring her a little present. He really puts himself out for people. He is cheerful, easygoing and easy to talk to.



Nat can also be headstrong and stubborn. He is jealous of Kit, which causes him at times to be quick tempered.

Mercy Wood

Mercy is Kit's cousin. She is lame after an illness when she was a child. Mercy has difficulties in getting around. She very rarely leaves her home because of this. Despite her disability, she is very hardworking and does more than her fair share of work in the house.

Mercy, with her calm and sweet ways, is the family's staying force. She is morally very strong. Never does she have a bitter moment. She loves her family profoundly and can not take seeing any of them hurt. Mercy is sweet and understanding.

Judith Wood

Judith, Kit's other cousin, is a haughty and proud, young girl. She likes pretty things and small luxuries. At times, she is self-centered. Still, Judith is not scared of hard work. In fact, she doesn't seem to be scared of much.

Rachel Wood

Kit's aunt is a kind, hardworking woman. She had once been very beautiful.

Matthew Wood

Kit's uncle is a man of character. He is quiet and severe. He works very hard and has weathered difficulties to provide for his family.

Prudence Cruff

Prudence is a lonely child, ignored by all. She is very bright and a quick learner.

John Holbrook

John is a serious and studious young man. He is understanding and kind. He is also courageous.

William Ashby

William is a wealthy young man, the most eligible bachelor in the community. He is down-to-earth, practical and very self-confident.



Objects/Places

The Dolphin

The Dolphin is the ship on which Kit travels from Barbados to Wethersfield. Nat Eaton's father is the owner and captain of this ship.

Meeting House

The meeting house is the building where the townspeople meet for prayers or assemble for political or disciplinary meetings.

Great Meadow

The Great Meadow is a large stretch of very fertile soil on the banks of the river, where the settlers have their plots of land for planting or grazing.

Blackbird Pond

Blackbird Pond is a small pond at the edge of the marshlands in Great Meadow.

Selectmen

The Selectmen are members of a board of town officers in the New England States chosen to have executive authority in the town's public matters.

Hornbook

A hornbook is a single page protected by a transparent sheet of horn, used in teaching children to read.

Charter

The Connecticut charter was drawn up in 1662, by England, conferring the rights and privileges for the organization of the colony.

Dame school

The dame school is where small children learned their alphabet in order to be prepared for formal schooling.

Social Sensitivity

There is little in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* that is likely to offend readers, though one reviewer has taken issue with the suggestion at the novel's end that Nat and Kit will marry, calling this conclusion a "sexist compromise." But Speare is writing about an age where even the most independent young women had extremely limited options available to them, and so it would be difficult for her to suggest another future for Kit without sacrificing the novel's historical authenticity. Furthermore, Speare implicitly criticizes the treatment of women in seventeenth-century New England by showing how charges of witchcraft were used to suppress independent women, who were perceived as a threat. The kind Hannah Tupper is persecuted not only because she is an independent woman, but because of her Quaker faith, and in this sense Speare's novel also criticizes intolerance of religious differences.

Literary Qualities

One of Speare's outstanding achievements as a writer is her ability to create a strong sense of place. In *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, the contrast between Barbados and New England highlights the distinct characteristics of the Connecticut setting. Speare sets up this contrast in the novel's opening chapter: "The bleak line of shore surrounding the gray harbor was a disheartening contrast to the shimmering green and white that fringed the turquoise bay of Barbados..." Throughout the novel, Speare associates drab colors, particularly gray and black, with Kit's new home, while she describes Barbados with colorful imagery.

The books valued by residents of each locale further underscore the differences between Barbados and New England. In Barbados Kit was encouraged to read imaginative works of poetry and drama, including works by William Shakespeare, Thomas Otway, and John Dryden. The Wethersfield colonists, on the other hand, shun writing that seems purely imaginative and emphasize books that establish codes of behavior, such as the Bible and John Bunyan's allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*.

The Accidence is also considered worthwhile reading in Wethersfield for the rules of grammar that it sets forth.

Speare uses these differences in reading preferences to create a sense of the social values of the two locales.

Wethersfield and Barbados represent the two sides of Kit's personality. When the novel begins, she has already developed the love of beauty and the appreciation of the imagination that Barbados represents, but she has not developed the capacity for hard work or the sense of individual achievement and well-earned pride that Wethersfield represents. By the end of the novel, she has developed both sides of her personality, and it is only then that she becomes a mature young adult.



Themes

Intolerance and Bigotry

In this novel, Elizabeth George Speare shows the dangers of intolerance and bigotry. In general, it is very necessary for people to feel that they fit in. In this way, they feel secure. They feel in control. Those who are different might disrupt their ordered world. This disruption is frightening. All that is unknown is frightening. Therefore, whoever is different is seen a threat. That is what causes the intolerance.

Bigotry and intolerance are very dangerous within a community or society. When people feel that they are the only ones who are right, they give themselves illegitimate power. They justify the most hideous acts under the ruse of righteousness. Some of the most tragic events have occurred under the name of righteousness.

In this book, one sees how the Quakers are persecuted and treated terribly, because they did not conform to the established religions. Innocent women are denounced as witches and often put to death, simply because they are different.

It is hard to understand why people are persecuted and made to suffer, simply because they have different ideas or ways of life. The world has seen time and time over again horrible injustice being carried out in the name of righteousness. The amazing thing is that the lesson is never learnt. The Puritans and other religious groups that arrived in America in the sixteen hundreds are themselves escaping intolerance and religious persecution. They, in their righteousness, perpetuated this same intolerance to ideas different from their own.

Truth

Kit has a great quality. She can not tell a lie. Even when it will apparently seem that she will be safer telling a lie, she insists on the truth. The fact is that by telling only the truth, she gains respect. By telling the truth, she is able to live with herself and shamelessly follow her ideals. When Kit tells the truth, she takes responsibility of her own acts and faces up to the consequences. This is what enables her to have a free spirit.

The truth has a liberating effect. This is exemplified the first time Kit is in trouble. When the schoolmaster is about to close Mercy's dame school, Kit is initially hurt and afraid. She realizes that the only solution is to be as honest and truthful as possible. The fact that she is being totally honest gives her the courage to face the schoolmaster as an equal.

Nat and Prudence also have full confidence in the power of the truth. When they defend Kit in the courtroom, they know that they are at risk. Little Prudence could also have been accused of practicing witchcraft. Nat runs the risk of receiving a public whipping by



being in town. It is the fact that they are telling the truth that gives them the courage to face these risks. In the end, the truth is victorious.

Colonial Lifestyle

During the whole novel, the author makes a point of describing life in the colonial times. The author describes the habits and dress code of the Puritan society. Mrs. Speare shows the hardships that the colonists face. She very adeptly points out how the colonists have to fend for themselves in everything. With the descriptions of the work of these brave people, the reader receives an insight into how arduous life was in those days.

The reader is made aware of the importance of religion in the life and politics of the colonies. The colonists' behavior, festivities and social interaction are all dictated by the faith. Different colonies have different religions.

Another very important aspect of life in the colonies is the political side. Already in the late 1600's, there is antagonism between the Royalists and those who are in favor of self-rule. The taxes paid to England are a heavy load on the colonists, and to many totally unacceptable. When King James decides to revoke King Charles' charters, the colonists are very angry.

The author very efficiently demonstrates all the factors that influenced the lives of the colonists.



Themes/Characters

The granddaughter of Sir Francis Tyler, sixteen-year-old Katherine (Kit) Tyler is the novel's protagonist. Her encounter with Hannah Tupper, the title character, helps Kit to understand her own outcast position in this Puritan society, where she is torn between rebellion and conformity. Through her meetings with Hannah, Kit becomes more understanding, partly because Hannah functions as a surrogate mother. As a Quaker, Hannah is an outcast in the Wethersfield community. She appears different from others because she lives in the meadows near Blackbird Pond and practices a religion the others do not understand. Unlike the rigid Puritans of the town, she is genuinely kind and demonstrates a capacity for love, but the townspeople consider her a witch because she keeps cats. In the past, Hannah was branded on the forehead when she and her now-deceased husband were banished from Massachusetts and forced to seek religious freedom in Connecticut.

Upon Kit's arrival in Wethersfield, she meets for the first time her uncle, Matthew Wood, a dour New Englander and the stern master of Kit's new home.

Despite his forbidding nature, he and Kit finally gain a mutual respect, and he shows great courage during the witchcraft trial by defending his niece.

Matthew's wife, Rachel, is the thin, gray-haired sister of Kit's mother, Margaret. Rachel and Matthew have two daughters, Judith and Mercy. A blue-eyed beauty, sixteen-year-old Judith is eager to get married, although Kit causes her to change her initial plans.

Judith's younger sister, Mercy, is the most important member of the Wood family, the "pivot about whom the whole family moves." Mercy, whose extraordinary gray eyes are "filled with light," is crippled and must use crutches. It is from Mercy that Kit learns patience and endurance.

The Cruff family also plays an important role in the novel. Kit first encounters the family on the ship from Saybrook to Wethersfield, earning Goodwife Cruff's enmity by saving young Prudence Cruff's doll. Goodwife Cruff considers Kit an upstart and ends up accusing her of being a witch. Yet Kit is able to teach the neglected Prudence to read and write, something that neither of the girl's parents can do.

Three other significant characters are Nathaniel (Nat) Eaton, William Ashby, and John Holbrook. Nat is a friend of Hannah's and one of the first Yankees that Kit meets. The son of the captain of the *Dolphin*, the ship that brought Kit to Connecticut from Barbados, Nat is also an outsider in Wethersfield. On the other hand, Ashby at age nineteen seems to be an up-and-coming member of the Wethersfield community. He builds a new house and is appointed viewer of fences, a position similar to a town surveyor. The quiet Ashby has a romantic interest in Kit. Holbrook, a character who matures in the course of the novel, has come to Wethersfield to study theology with the Reverend Dr.



Gersholm Bulkeley, a real historical personage. During the story Speare shows Bulkeley acting in his capacity as a physician as well as a theologian.

Other "real people [who] walk through the imaginary story" include Eleazer Kimberley, the schoolmaster who oversees the Bible class that Mercy teaches; Sir Edmond Andros, the Royalist governor; and Captain Samuel Talcott, the magistrate at Kit's trial.

Kit matures through her interactions with the novel's various characters. At first she is impatient and impulsive.

When Prudence's doll falls overboard, Kit jumps into the water to retrieve it.

On Kit's first meeting her Uncle Matthew, he asks if "just on an impulse" she left her "rightful home and sailed halfway across the world." For the easygoing Kit of the West Indies, patience seems to be an unattainable virtue. Because she must stifle her natural reactions, she is frequently angry. With the quiet influence of Mercy, she does learn to be more patient, although she is not entirely tamed by her year in a new country.

Interlaced with Kit's lack of patience is her pride in being the granddaughter of Sir Francis Tyler. Her family's prominence gives Kit an undue sense of superiority. Kit has done nothing to earn respect from others; she believes it is owed to her. But during the long New England winter, she learns a different sense of pride: self-respect and dignity for a job she herself has done well. After Kit has kept the household together during sickness, and after it is proved in court that she has taught Prudence to read, her achievements are evident.

She has earned the right to feel an honest sense of accomplishment. When it comes time for her cousins to be married, she can offer gifts of her dresses "with love instead of pride." This change shows how much Kit has matured in the course of a year.

An important theme in the novel is Kit's painful lesson regarding loyalties.

At first she cares little for the Woods; she thinks of Uncle Matthew as a tyrant who bullies her Aunt Rachel, and she notices that her cousin Judith is as proud as she herself is. Yet Mercy, the linchpin of the family, teaches Kit patience, then endurance, and finally loyalty. Furthermore, Uncle Matthew and Aunt Rachel demonstrate loyalty to Kit when they support her during her imprisonment and trial.

Upon first meeting Hannah, Kit gives unquestioning loyalty to the Quaker woman because Hannah demands nothing of her. But Kit proves that she has the capacity for true loyalty when she protects Hannah from the threat of mob violence. Learning the importance of mutual trust from her relatives and from Hannah encourages Kit to consider staying in New England. In the course of the book, she has discovered that people can be loyal whether or not they agree with one another.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in a very straightforward, narrative style. It is written in third person. It concentrates on the main character, Kit. She is present in all the scenes, so the reader's knowledge is restricted to Kit's experiences and point of view.

Setting

The novel is set in Wethersfield, Connecticut in 1687. The author gives a very good description of what the living conditions and habits are in colonial New England. Mrs. Speare also provides the reader with the political and religious scenarios of the time. The book's setting is a very essential part of the story.

This is essentially a historical novel. The story and the main characters are fictional, but based on the behavioral, religious and political reality of the time. The story has a background of true historical facts and characters. The political and religious climates are true reflections of the period.

Mrs. Spear writes with the authority of knowledge of her subject matter. The author very carefully researched the historical events surrounding the romance. She loved New England and its history. The novel is set in Mrs. Spear's hometown. The colonial era is of special interest to the author.

The author's descriptions of lifestyle and habits at the time give the reader a wonderful insight into conditions of the time. A historical view is very important to be able to understand the context in which the story and characters are inserted.

Language and Meaning

Mrs. Speare makes very correct use of the language. One must recall that the original book was written in 1957. The author uses the language used and accepted at this time. She writes for a young audience, so her style and language are adequate and fitting to her public. She uses no slang. Her language use is very proper.

The one character in the book that uses colloquial speech is Hannah Tupper. She makes use of the "these" and "thous." The author makes use of formal but modern English for the other characters' dialogues.

The author writes in a straightforward fashion. Her descriptions are concise, not over-elaborated. This makes for pleasant and easy reading.

Structure

The book is divided into 21 chapters. These chapters have no names. Each chapter refers to a specific scene or set of relating scenes. The structure is in keeping with the readers' profile. The author is a very good storyteller. She structured the book in a simple and efficient manner, so that the reader does not lose track of what is going on. The chapters and scenes therein are in chronological order. There is no back tracking. When past events are being narrated for better understanding, this is done in form of dialogue. The reader is informed of Kit's past through her conversations with different characters.

Quotes

"But the proper use of reading is to improve our sinful nature and fill our minds with God's holy words." Chapter 2, page 25

"The charter guarantees every right and privilege we have earned, the very ground we stand on and the laws we have made for ourselves." Chapter 7, page 70

"The only rights worth all that toil and sacrifice are the rights of free men free and equal under God to decide their own justice." Chapter 7, page 71

"The answer is in thy heart, thee can always hear it if thee listens for it." Chapter 9, page 97.

"Here I've been working like a slave, ...but I feel as though nothing mattered except just to be alive right at this moment." Chapter 12, page 126

"Better for the young people to remember idleness breeds mischief." Chapter 16, page 164

'Under a cloudless blue sky stretched a breath-taking glittering universe, carved of dazzling white coral, unreal and silent." Chapter 20, page 226



Topics for Discussion

1. Why does Speare load the first chapter with so many important characters?
Are all the principal characters well drawn?
2. Does Kit react to situations the same way that a sixteen-year-old today would?
3. What might readers conclude about outcasts in this Puritan society? About the society's tolerance? How significant is group pressure in Puritan society?
4. What moral questions arise from the book?
5. What significance do you find in the characters' names?
6. What tension exists between Kit and Nat? Cite examples of increasing and diminishing tension.



Essay Topics

What influence do different climatic conditions have on cultural habits?

Does bigotry and religious intolerance still exist today? How does it affect our lives?

Who are the Quakers, and why are they considered troublemakers?

Would modern day people be able to survive without all the conveniences of ready-made products, machines and communication systems the way the early settlers did?

Would Kit have been able to adapt to the Puritan way of life, or would her spirit have been broken in the process?

Does society still try to place blame given groups or persons in order to find scapegoats for frustrations?

Are citizens' rights and freedom in danger in today's world?

Do all peoples have the right to rule themselves or is there still foreign interference?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Explain Kit's process of maturation in the novel.
2. Is Speare's description of the Puritan society in New England historically accurate? What evidence can you find to support or refute its accuracy?
3. Hannah Tupper is a Quaker. Research and report on the Society of Friends, its beliefs, and its establishment in America. Does Hannah live up to Quaker ideals?
4. What was the political situation of the colonies in relation to England in 1687? Discover what the major political issues were and how each side viewed them.
5. "People are afraid of things they don't understand" is one of the themes of the book. Cite situations in the novel where this idea appears.

Further Study

Buskin, Barbara H., and Karen H. Harris. *Notes from a Different Drummer: A Guide to Juvenile Fiction Portraying the Handicapped*. New York: Bowker, 1977. Briefly treats the character of Mercy and her handicap.

Commire, Anne, ed. *Something about the Author*. Vol. 5. Detroit: Gale Research, 1973. Contains a brief sketch of Speare's life followed by her own remarks about her work.

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Library Journal Supplement 17 (January 1971): 19-24. Charges that the novel is a "cop out" because a "sexist compromise is made" by setting up the marriage between Kit and Nat at the end of the novel.

Kingman, Lee, ed. *Newbery and Caldecott Medal Books, 1956-1965*. Boston: Horn Book, 1965. Reprints Speare's Newbery Medal acceptance speech for *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* as well as biographical commentary on Speare by Helen Reeder Cross.

Kirkpatrick, D. L., ed. *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*. 2d ed. New York: St. Martin's, 1983. Includes a bibliography of Speare's writings and brief critical commentary.

Peterson, Linda Kauffman, and Marilyn Leathers Solt. *Newbery and Caldecott Medal and Honor Books: An Annotated Bibliography*. Boston: Hall, 1982. Brief plot summary with some critical commentary.

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