



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Witch of Blackbird Pond

Elizabeth George Speare

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

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NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, classifying
and categorizing, evaluating,
analyzing details, comparing
and contrasting, synthesizing
ideas

Vocabulary

Words in context, prefixes/
suffixes, root words

Writing

Narrative, journal, report
writing

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion,
debate

Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot
development, point of view,
figurative language, fore-
shadowing, conflict

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
cause/effect, inference,
comparing information from
more than one source

Summary:

Orphaned Kit Tyler arrives from Barbados unannounced at the home of her aunt and uncle in the Connecticut Colony. Awaiting her in the new home were suspicions and loneliness. Her uncle did not like anything she said, did, or believed. There was no one who understood her or tried to help her except the strange lady outside the village boundaries. Thus Kit suffered guilt by association with the Witch of Blackbird Pond.

Instructions Prior to Reading:

You may wish to choose one or more of the following prereading discussion questions/activities. Each is designed to help students draw from their store of background knowledge about the events and themes they will meet in the story they are about to read.

Prereading Activities:

1. **Previewing:** Have students examine the title and cover illustration. What can you tell about the time period of the story by the girl's clothes? What does the girl's expression tell you about her feelings? Why do you think she is in the woods? What do you predict the story will be about?
2. **Background on Witchcraft in the American Colonies:** (To be provided to students, or researched by them.) Witchcraft is the use of supposed magic powers. A witch is a person who has received these powers from evil spirits and uses them to harm people or their property.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the fear of witchcraft was widespread in Europe. Thousands of people were tried and executed as witches. Many kinds of tests were used to determine if the person was a witch. American colonists, influenced by European beliefs and practices, persecuted many women. In Salem, Massachusetts, the most famous witch hunt occurred. The Massachusetts colonists executed 20 people and imprisoned 150 others. The courts allowed gossip, rumors, and even the testimony of children against their parents to be used as evidence in court.

Chapter 1 - Pages 1-14

Vocabulary:

pinnacles 2
tedious 4
repulsed 6
vicious 8
defiantly 10
diverted 12
nonchalance 14

retching 2
prow 5
anguish 7
daft 9
warrant 11
curdle 13

disembark 4
hawser 5
impulsively 8
retorted 9
quirked 12
taunted 13

Vocabulary Activities:

1. Select ten words. Write only every other letter and a synonym or definition. Exchange student papers. Example: a_o_a: smell (aroma).
2. One student picks a word from the vocabulary list. Another student has ten (or five) questions to discover the word and give the definition.

Discussion Questions:

1. Locate Connecticut and Barbados on a map. Approximately how many miles did Kit travel?
2. The setting in this novel is important. Why do you think the author contrasts Connecticut's dreary gray harbor with Barbados?
3. The author introduces and describes many characters in the first chapter. Make a list of them and their physical and personality characteristics.
4. Why did Kit jump into the water? (*Page 8, to get a child's doll*) What do we learn about Kit through this incident? (*Pages 8-10, Kit is impulsive.*) How else might Kit have retrieved the doll without diving for it?
5. Begin an attribute web for Kit. What have we learned about her? (See pages 9-11.) (*brave; can swim; sympathized with a child; is from Barbados, West Indies; orphan; lived with grandfather; rich because she had maids*)
6. A story map is an outline that helps you to understand and remember the story better. What do you know about the story after reading only the first chapter? Fill in the story map that follows on page 12. Add to it as you read each chapter.

Using Character Webs

Attribute Webs are simply a visual representation of a character from the novel. They provide a systematic way for the students to organize and recap the information they have about a particular character. Attribute webs may be used after reading the novel to recapitulate information about a particular character or completed gradually as information unfolds, done individually, or finished as a group project.

One type of character attribute web uses these divisions:

- How a character acts and feels. (How does the character feel in this picture? How would you feel if this happened to you? How do you think the character feels?)
- How a character looks. (Close your eyes and picture the character. Describe him to me.)
- Where a character lives. (Where and when does the character live?)
- How others feel about the character. (How does another specific character feel about our character?)

In group discussion about the student attribute webs and specific characters, the teacher can ask for backup proof from the novel. You can also include inferential thinking.

Attribute webs need not be confined to characters. They may also be used to organize information about a concept, object or place.

Attribute Web

The attribute web below is designed to help you gather clues the author provides about what a character is like. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases which tell how the character acts and looks, as well as what the character says and what others say about him or her.

The diagram is an attribute web. It consists of a central circle with a horizontal line through its middle. Four lines radiate from the circle to the corners of a square, dividing it into four quadrants. Each quadrant contains a rectangular box with a title and four numbered lines for writing.

- Acts**
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - 3. _____
 - 4. _____
- Feels**
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - 3. _____
 - 4. _____
- Looks**
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - 3. _____
 - 4. _____
- Says**
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - 3. _____
 - 4. _____

-
7. Why did Goodwife Cruff think Kit was a witch? Why do you think beliefs about witches developed? (Pages 13-14)
 8. Brainstorm the meaning of Puritan. (*People were not happy with rule by the King of England; wanted to "purify" the Church of England; did not welcome people with different ideas; education was important because it was necessary to read the Bible; believed plays and poetry were sinful; believed fancy clothes and pretty colors were wrong.*)
 9. After the class brainstorms the word "Puritan" as a group, students will complete research sheet on Puritans on page 14.
 10. What products was the ship bringing to the Colonies? Why were the products on the ship important to the Colonies? (*Page 3, sugar and molasses; the Colonies had no other source of sugar or molasses; these food stuffs improved their food supplies.*)
 11. What did Nat and John Holbrook warn Kit about and why? (*Pages 12-13, People in Connecticut were different from Barbados. They believed that only witches could swim.*)

Prediction:

What do you think this sentence could mean, "There was something strange about this country of America, something that they all seemed to share and understand and she did not"?

Supplementary Activities:

1. **Writing:** Begin a journal in which you react to each section of the story you read. Reactions might include: Questions you have about the story; memories the story evokes; people or other stories of whom characters remind you; judgments about whether you agree or disagree with what characters have done; your thoughts about topics which come up such as loneliness, courage, heroism, etc. Try some times including vocabulary words from the story in your journal.
2. **Writing:** Assume the role of Kit. After reading each section, jot down an entry about what has happened and how you feel about it in your "diary."
3. **Literary Analysis—Point of View:** Writers can tell their stories from many points of view. Sometimes a central character in the story tells the story. Sometimes the storyteller is a minor character. Sometimes the storyteller is a narrator who can see inside of the characters. And sometimes the writer shifts the point of view from one person to another. Who tells most of the story of *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*? (*an all-seeing narrator*)