

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Witch of Blackbird Pond

by Elizabeth Speare

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Chapter One

1. Kit is traveling on the *Dolphin* from her home in Barbados to America in 1687. She does not know anyone aboard the ship but has made friends with the captain's wife, Mistress Eaton, and admires the captain's son Nat. Just before the ship reaches shore, Nat decides to talk to Kit. Kit is both "surprised and flattered" by his attention.

As Kit, write a diary entry describing this encounter with Nat.

2. When Kit first goes ashore at the port of Saybrook, three plainly-dressed women stare at her, making her feel self-conscious. Imagine that the three women huddle together and discuss Kit's appearance. Keeping in mind what you know of Puritan society, write a page-long conversation the three might have about Kit's appearance and behavior.
3. Kit thinks to herself that there is "something strange about this country of America," something that Nat at John Holbrook seem "to share and understand" that she does not. Write a detailed, descriptive paragraph about a time when you had just entered an unfamiliar environment and felt that everyone knew something that you did not. How long did the feeling last?

Response Journal

Chapter Two

4. Kit hates watching the terrible way Goodwife Cruff treats her young daughter Prudence, yet feels powerless to help the child. Suppose, in today's world, you witnessed a child being treated as poorly as Prudence. In one or two paragraphs, describe how you would react and note any steps you would take to help the child.

5. Nat becomes angry when Kit complains about the odor on the ship. Kit is confused when his temper flares so quickly, as she never intended to insult him or the ship. As Nat, write a letter to Kit explaining to her why "you" became so angry and what the ship means to you.

6. John Holbrook is shocked when Kit tells him she enjoys reading plays. He says,

"There are no such books in Saybrook. In Boston, perhaps. But the proper use of reading is to improve our sinful nature, and to fill our minds with God's holy word."

Write a letter to John telling him about your favorite books and authors. Try to help him to understand that his view of reading may be narrow-minded and that books can serve other valuable purposes.

7. When Kit confesses to the Captain that her Aunt Rachel does not know that Kit is coming, the Captain scowls. "You know very well that I should never have taken you on board had I known this," he says.

As Captain Eaton, write the ship's log entry describing this incident, your feelings about it, and how it might impact your job.

Chapter Three

8. When Kit arrives unexpectedly at her aunt's house, she is welcomed by the surprised family. Then she reveals the truth: she is not visiting; she has come to live with them. Consider how each member of the Woods family feels about this revelation. In four short but detailed paragraphs, write as each member of the Woods family in turn, describing "your" thoughts so far about Kit, her unexpected arrival, and how it will affect your family.

Chapter Four

9. On Kit's first day in Wethersfield, she finds that her style and way of being clash with the Puritan system of values. Her fine clothes, for example, are considered unacceptably vain. As Kit, write a letter home to a friend in Barbados describing the ways in which Wethersfield's values are different. Be sure to mention how Puritans view gifts, women, slaves, and beauty.
10. Imagine that a Puritan girl is suddenly transported into your home from the Connecticut of 1687. In one or two paragraphs, from her point of view, write a description of the styles, behaviors, and values that "you" find surprising as you look around the house and meet its inhabitants. For example, you might start begin, "There's a girl here whose hair is hanging wild and loose and whose arms and legs are uncovered..."
11. At the end of the chapter, Kit overhears Judith complaining to her mother about Kit. Kit is hurt by Judith's words, but rather than confronting Judith, she climbs into bed and tries to hide her pain. Write about a time when you overheard or found out that someone had been saying negative things about you. Did you confront the person? Why or why not? If you prefer, write about a time when someone overheard *you* saying something hurtful about him or her. How did it feel?

Chapter Five

12. During the two-hour meeting, Kit is desperately bored:

Bother these people! Look at Judith, sitting there with her hands folded in her lap. Didn't her feet ever go to sleep? Nevertheless, if this were a test of endurance, then she could see it through as well as these New Englanders. She tilted her chin so that one plume swept gracefully against her cheek, discreetly curled and uncurled her numb toes inside the kid slippers, and set herself to endure.

Write a similar paragraph describing a time in your life when you were forced by circumstances to sit quietly and endure a long, boring event. Kit curls and uncurls her toes to relieve a bit of the boredom. What did you do?

13. Kit is introduced to William Ashby and it is clear from his reaction that he is dazzled at first sight. Write a short poem about someone who similarly dazzled you the first time you laid eyes on him or her. It needn't be a "romantic" kind of dazzling; it could simply be an eagerness to know the person better. What made the person stand out from others?

Chapter Six

14. After dinner, Matthew and Reverend Bulkeley get into an argument about allegiances and national politics. First, decide if you agree more with Matthew or with Bulkeley. Then pretend that you have the opportunity to write a newspaper opinion piece on the topic that everyone in Wethersfield will see. Write the editorial, being sure to support your argument with reasons that you think will convince the Puritan Wethersfield community that your opinion is the right one.

15. Elizabeth George Speare writes that Mercy is “the pivot about whom the whole household move[s],” going on to explain how Mercy coaxes Matthew out of his bad moods, strengthens her mother, and “gently restrain[s] her rebellious sister.” Think of a person in your life (or consider a character you have seen on television or read about) that seems to serve this sort of function. In one or two paragraphs, describe this individual and the ways he or she is a “pivot” about whom surrounding people move.

16. The rules of courtship in Puritan America require that a young man gain the permission of a young woman’s guardian before he can spend time with her. In today’s America, the rules of courtship are very different. Whether or not you agree with the Puritans’ approach, write a short persuasive argument in favor of adopting their strict courtship rules in our modern world. Use incidents from your own life or ones you have read about to support your points.

17. Write another persuasive argument from the opposite point of view, using incidents from your life experience or ones you have read about to persuade your reader that adopting Puritan courtship rules is a *bad* idea.