

# The witch of blackbird pond: a puritan style of teaching



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The book, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, is about a young girl named Katherine who is forced to leave her elegant home in Barbados to live with relatives in puritan New England after her grandfather's death. Katherine has a hard time accepting the dramatic difference between the two cultures. For instance, in the beginning of the book Katherine dives into the river to retrieve a toy for a child on the boat. The New Englanders aboard the ship stare at her with disapproval because they were not accustomed to women that knew how to swim.

By the end of the book Katherine is charged as a witch because she chose to befriend a Quaker woman and refused to totally reform to the puritan way of life. Education plays a big role in this book in two ways. This novel shows the puritan style of teaching. It also describes the Puritan view of who and what education was meant for. One of Katherine's jobs during her time in New England was to teach in a dame school. In her class she was supposed to teach the children their alphabet and basic reading skills.

The proper way to teach the children was through memorization and repetition. Katherine found this teaching style boring and less effective than her own teaching style which used poetry and acting to keep children's attention. One of Katherine's lesson plans got out of hand. She had the children act out a part of the Bible and it created a fight between a few of the students. As the disruption occurred the head master of the school walked in to the room.

He was mortified not only at the misbehavior of the children but also at the activity Katherine had created. Katherine was fired as a result of this

incident. This part of the book showed that puritans taught through repetition and memorization and frowned on creativity in the classroom. It is also apparent how much influence their religion had on education. In another part of the book Katherine decides to teach a child, who is unable to go to school, to read. Katherine used a hornbook and later the Bible to teach the child.

This part of the story shows the two main materials used to teach children at this time. It also points out that not all children were allowed to go to school. This book gives a good example of how children were taught during the 17th century in the New England colonies. You can also see that religion had a great influence on education during this time period. By reading this book I have realized how much the education system has changed, and in my opinion improved, since this country's beginning.