

Analysis of vivian lacy
character in "celia
garth" by gwen
bristow



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Vivian Lacy displays strength and the ability to refuse to carry one's weight that earlier generations accepted as inevitable. Celia Garth is a historical fiction novel written by Gwen Bristow who uses scenarios in Vivian Lacy's life to define her position as a mother to her friend.

Vivian is an elderly lady who admires fashion with her whole heart. She takes Celia under her wing when she chooses to have her sew for her to customize her gowns with her high demands. Luke is Vivian's son who is in the Continental Army and is the bravest man in her life, although he is never home due to his war efforts. In her novel Celia Garth, Gwen Bristow destroys the stereotypes surrounding mothers during the Revolutionary War by creating Vivian Lacy, a self-reliant and independent woman who succeeds in life without the presence of a male figure and who uses these qualities to inspire and bring forth confidence within Celia Garth. Despite the societal standards that were in place during the Revolutionary war regarding the role of a mother, Vivian Lacy ignores these rules by remaining a driven and independent woman during this time. A stereotypical mother during the war was expected to take care of everyday life while their husbands were at battle. It was common for a woman to marry one man and care for him as well as the family as husbands were generally considered the alphas, or the ring leaders, during this time. Men took action and fought for what they wanted while the women were to be more submissive and tend to the needs of the family, always putting the family's needs above her own.

Vivian Lacy is quite the opposite of the typical standards of a mother during this time period. While the book tells us little about Vivian Lacy and her life, a lot can be interpreted through the information the reader receives. Marietta
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is informing Celia a little bit about Mrs. Lacy's life. Marietta explains to Celia how Vivian has had a lot of serious marriages over the course of her life to where she has several kids with multiple fathers. Learning that Vivian has had five husbands throughout her life tells the audience that she is not submissive, but more authoritative and takes action for what she wants. Choosing to be deprived from a consistent husband made her more independent as opposed to relying on her husband(s) like most women during this time. Vivian "wore the pants in the relationship" meaning she chose the path for herself instead of her husband(s) choosing for her. The reader is also shown Vivian's authoritativeness and independence when Celia is talking to Luke about his war efforts and him leaving for Charleston. Luke tells Celia about his commitment to the Continental Army, describing his dedication to her in hopes she will understand why he chooses to never miss a battle. Luke leaving is another reason Vivian became self-dependent. Once again, she doesn't have a male figure in her life. She learns to fight for herself to achieve what she desires in life, never settling for less and taking on Bristow's definition of a mother during the Revolutionary war. Simultaneously allowing Vivian to strain the limits of what was expected from a mother during the Revolutionary War allows the reader to be introduced to Bristow's reasoning behind doing so. Bristow chooses to break the barriers that confine women to being slaves to their husbands through the way she portrays Vivian Lacy's behavior throughout the novel. Bristow does this to teach the audience how defying societal normalities can be beneficial to the individual in finding themselves rather than conforming to what others want you to be. This is shown when Celia and Vivian are talking about the massacre she experienced when she was a little girl and its

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significance to Sea Garden, her safe haven. Vivian is telling Celia about her horrific experiences as a child and how, because she experienced these things, she knew when she grew up she would create a house she felt safe in. This not only tells the reader the significance of Sea Garden, but exemplifies her determination to remain independent and self-sufficient. Bristow is having Vivian break the stereotypical assumptions of a mother back then by having her learn to not depend on others, but rather herself. Again, the reader is shown why Bristow portrays these assumptions through Vivian when she shows Celia the secret passage by the fireplace and teaches her simple tasks. Vivian is showing Celia how to keep things running smoothly at Sea Garden and offers to teach her how to repair items in order to do this. This is Bristow again portraying Vivian as “wearing the pants” in not only a relationship, but in her life as well. With Vivian learning to take care of herself also came her learning to repair and maintain her household. She takes on the male role to care for herself and her family in order to protect them. Bristow shows the audience that you do not need to fit within the expectations that everyone else confines you to, but rather you can branch off and be your own person. Vivian breaking these barriers builds her into a self-dependent person and also makes her motivated to achieve her goals in life. Bristow teaches the audience refrain from conforming to societal normalities so that one can become the best version of who they want to be.

Beyond Bristow’s purpose of breaking the stereotypical assumptions of a mother during the Revolutionary war helps allow the reader to reflect Vivian’s contributions not only to her personal life, but applying these same

contributions now to Celia's life. Vivian is not only the definition of a true mother but also a role model, someone Celia could always look up to. Celia did not grow up with a mother or a father. She was deprived of having someone to rely on and learn from for a majority of her life. When Celia accepted the job to sew for Vivian, she was unknowingly accepting a mother-figure as well. Vivian and Celia discuss how Celia has been welcomed into the Lacy family as not only a new member, but as Luke's wife. They are also talking about Vivian guiding Celia to one day be just like her. Vivian is explaining how she's helping transform her into a well-developed woman that doesn't need to rely on her anymore and can begin to take care of herself. By Vivian saying this, she shows how she has guided Celia and is preparing her to become a young woman/mother one day, just like herself. Celia is mirroring Vivian's characteristics by becoming wiser through the lessons she has learned throughout the entire time she's worked for Vivian. She teaches Celia to depend on herself and to not rely on her or any male, just as Vivian is independent despite having a consistent male figure in her life. Vivian also helps teach Celia how to love and how it's okay to express her emotions. Celia and Vivian are talking about how their separate homes are now each other's homes and how they are always welcome. They also are talking about how Vivian is giving up her two most prized possessions to Celia, Sea Garden and her baby boy, Luke. Celia begins to realize how fortunate she really is to have Vivian, but does not fully comprehend this until she faces life on her own with Luke. Celia's long awaited confession of love for Vivian marks a vital point in her character development, signifying the breakthrough of Vivian's teachings and morals. Celia saying this shows the audience her growth over the course of the book because of Vivian. She

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lacked love her entire life until Vivian introduced her to what she was missing, love. This act reflects Vivian's characteristics. She had always loved Sea Garden and Luke, but was willing and able to sacrifice her most prized possessions in order to fill the void in Celia's life. It is because of Vivian that Celia is able to transform into a confident woman for not only Luke and their baby girl, but most importantly for herself.

As a result Bristow taught today's woman to dissolve from intolerable relationships in life to allow your confidence as an independent woman to shine for yourself and others. The author reflects the true power of Lacy's character by demonstrating how her nurturing yet self-sufficient nature was able to raise and inspire Celia Garth, molding her into a confident mother figure despite her upbringing. Vivian's way of neutering Celia over the course of the book allowed Bristow to rewrite the definition of a mother and also create Celia into the young woman she is. She teaches Celia love along the journey which is something Celia will always cherish. Thanks to Vivian, Bristow is able to break the stereotypical assumptions of a mother during the Revolutionary War using multiple scenarios in Vivian's life to achieve her goal allowing women to dissolve a marriage that becomes unsatisfactory through Celia Garth.