

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Poetry Quilt

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Deirdre Mundy has written for Highlights Magazine for Kids. In this short story, a Puritan girl is discouraged from writing poetry by her sister. As you read, take notes on how Charity feels about poetry.

- [1] Charity stood by the house. Across the road, Andover’s weathervane¹ spun in the wind.

Charity whispered, “The vane on the meeting house is turning to and fro. The first breeze of April whips across the melting snow.”

That may be a fine addition to my poetry quilt, she thought. In fact, that poem will finish it. She repeated her rhyme aloud and smiled.

Her older sister, Prudence, overheard. “Charity, when are you going to grow up? Making rhymes is for babies. No one marries a girl for her poems. You should practice tending the house instead.”

- [5] Charity’s throat tightened. “I know, Prudence. I’ll work harder.”

Prudence smiled and handed her the broom. “You can start by sweeping the walk. I’m going inside to help Mother with the baking.”



“I’m not a baby, and I write poems.” by Craig Orback is used with permission.

Charity kept her head down as she swept. She tried to ignore the warm breeze. Prudence was right. Only babies made rhymes.

That evening, Charity embroidered² her last poem, the one about the weathervane. Then she finished the quilt and put it in her dowry³ chest. She was done with poems.

Weeks passed. Charity worked hard. She cooked and cleaned, and she didn’t make any rhymes.

- [10] One night, she took out her poetry quilt and looked at it. She’d embroidered 35 poems. It had been a lot of work, but she’d loved it. She sighed. “Prudence is right. I need to grow up. Only babies make rhymes about everything they see.”

1. a turning pointer to show the direction of the wind
 2. to decorate cloth by sewing on it with thread
 3. a box filled with blankets and other items that a wife brings to her husband when they marry

She was so tired that she didn't put the quilt back. Instead, she left it folded on her bed.

That night, Charity tossed and turned. When she woke up in the morning, the air was hazy.⁴

She glanced at the foot of her bed.

The poetry quilt was missing!

- [15] Charity dressed and hurried to the kitchen, where she found her father sitting at the table. Soot⁵ coated his face.

Charity gasped. "What happened? And where are Prudence and Mother?"

"The Bradstreets' house burned down last night," her father replied. "They lost everything. Prudence and your mother took them food and blankets."

"Blankets? Oh no!" Charity dashed⁶ out the door. The Bradstreets were among the most respected people in the colony.⁷ She couldn't let them see her poetry quilt. It was too embarrassing.

She met her mother and sister in the street. They'd already delivered the blankets.

- [20] "I have to get my quilt back," Charity cried.

"The Bradstreets have nothing left! You can't begrudge⁸ them a blanket," her mother scolded⁹ her.

"Yes, Mother," Charity said forlornly.¹⁰

Later that afternoon, Charity knelt in the garden to weed. She glanced up and saw Mistress Bradstreet talking to her mother. She was holding the poetry quilt.

Charity blushed. Mistress Bradstreet probably didn't like the quilt. Prudence was right. She shouldn't have made those rhymes.

- [25] Charity stood quickly when she noticed Mistress Bradstreet walking over to the garden. She brushed dirt from her apron. Her legs shook as she curtsied. "Good day, Mistress Bradstreet. I'm sorry for the fire at your house."

"I'm thankful no one was hurt," Mistress Bradstreet said softly. "But I fear that your mother may have accidentally given me this." She held out the quilt.

"It's all right," Charity replied. "It's just a silly old quilt. Some of my baby work. I'm sorry for the poems."

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4. covered by fog or smoke
 5. a black powder that is created by burning something
 6. **Dash (verb):** to run somewhere quickly
 7. an early type of state in the United States
 8. to give unwillingly
 9. **Scold (verb):** to point out someone's fault or wrongdoing
 10. to do something in a sad manner

"Why are you sorry? I enjoyed the poems. Your work shows great promise."

"But Prudence says poems are for babies."

[30] Mistress Bradstreet smiled. "I'm not a baby, and I write poems. I've even published a book."

Charity's jaw dropped.

"In fact," the woman continued, "I make poems all the time. I'm working on one now about the fire. It's how I remind myself to be grateful for what I have. Otherwise I might waste my days bemoaning¹¹ what I've lost."

"I'm thankful for warm breezes in springtime," Charity said.

Mistress Bradstreet nodded.

[35] "I could tell from your poems."

Charity took a deep breath. "Mistress Bradstreet, may I show you more poems someday? And would you let me hear your poems?"

"I'd love that, Charity." Mistress Bradstreet handed her the quilt. "Your poems helped me smile after the fire. But you should keep this. It's a beautiful addition to your dowry chest."

"Thank you, Mistress Bradstreet!" Charity curtsied, then ran to put the quilt inside the house before returning to the garden. After all, she had an idea for a poem about radishes.

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11. to express sadness

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which sentence describes the theme of the short story?
 - A. Poetry is useful and important.
 - B. Poetry is easy to read and often considered to be for babies.
 - C. Not everyone can understand the beauty of poetry.
 - D. Smart girls have a harder time finding a husband.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Making rhymes is for babies. No one marries a girl for her poems. You should practice tending the house instead." (Paragraph 4)
 - B. "The Bradstreets were among the most respected people in the colony. She couldn't let them see her poetry quilt. It was too embarrassing." (Paragraph 17)
 - C. "I make poems all the time. I'm working on one now about the fire. It's how I remind myself to be grateful for what I have." (Paragraph 31)
 - D. "Charity curtsied, then ran to put the quilt inside the house before returning to the garden. After all, she had an idea for a poem about radishes." (Paragraph 37)

3. Which of the following describes what it means when "Charity's jaw dropped" in paragraph 30?
 - A. She is surprised by what Mistress Bradstreet tells her.
 - B. She is jealous that Mistress Bradstreet is a published poet.
 - C. She is embarrassed that Mistress Bradstreet read her poems.
 - D. She is excited to be talking to a fellow poet.

4. How is Charity affected when Mistress Bradstreet reveals that she also writes poetry?

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. In the story, Charity's sister believes poetry is for babies. Why do you think this is? Why is poetry valuable for anyone of any age?

2. Miss Bradstreet thinks that poetry is important. Do you think poetry is still important and valuable today? Consider the poetry that you hear in songs and music.