

The Witches of Pendle

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Introduction

This ungraded summary is for the teacher's use only and should not be given to students.

The story

Jennet Device tells her story from the prison in Lancaster Castle in 1634. Jennet was one of three children in a poor family living in a Lancashire village. In 1612, aged nine, she went out one day with her sister Alizon to look for bread. When the pedlar John Law refused to give Alizon money, she cursed him and he fell ill. The angry villagers, frightened that Alizon was a witch, asked Roger Nowell, a rich and important judge, to question her. Mr Nowell questioned Alizon and sent her to prison. Then suspicion fell on Old Demdike, Jennet's grandmother, and she met the same fate. Jennet liked Mr Nowell, who was kind to her.

Some days later, Jennet's mother and some friends decided to go to Lancaster Castle and set the two women free. Jennet, angry at their mistreatment of her, vowed to tell Mr Nowell about this plan. With her brother James, she went to Mr Nowell's home at Read Hall and told him everything. Jennet's mother and James were both taken to Lancaster Castle.

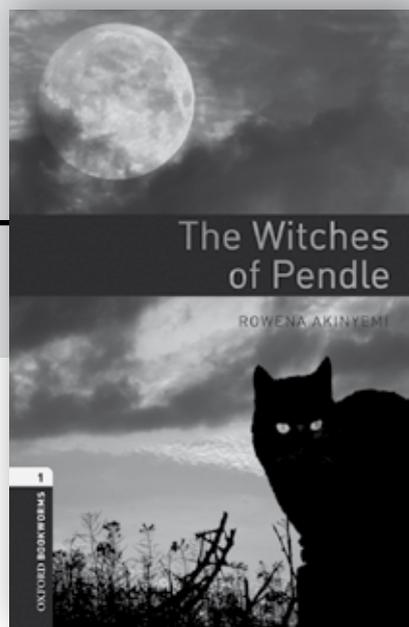
Some months later, the trial of the Lancashire witches began. Old Demdike died before the trial, but Jennet's mother, sister and brother were all hanged as witches, as a result both of Jennet's testimony and of their own statements.

Jennet lived happily for the next twenty-one years at Read Hall as a cook for the Nowell family. Then in 1633 a child called Edmund Robinson accused Jennet of witchcraft. Although he later confessed to lying, Jennet realized that she could never really be free of her family and her history. With Mr Nowell dead, there was no one to protect her. Though the truth killed her family, lies would kill her.

Background to the story

Witchcraft appears in different places at different times, reflecting abrupt change and turbulence within a society. This is especially true at a time when old ideas and values are being rapidly replaced by new ones.

Witchcraft was officially acknowledged in England in 1563, when a law passed under Queen Elizabeth the First made death the penalty for invoking an evil



spirit for any purpose. The first person to be hanged under this law died in 1566. In a celebrated case in 1593, three people were condemned to death on the evidence of five children. Many more cases of children making accusations of witchcraft were to follow; often this was due to spite, hysteria or attention-seeking, and it is curious that the testimony of quite young children was considered seriously, when in other legal situations they were considered too young to give evidence.

The high point of witch mania came in the early 1600s, with a further surge of persecution in the 1640s. After about 1660 the trials died down; the last known death was in 1660.

The story of *The Witches of Pendle* is based on a true case, the trial of the Lancashire witches in 1612. Of the twenty accused, ten were hanged, two jailed, and eight acquitted. It was the second largest mass death from witchcraft in England.

Before Reading

Here are some ways to help your students approach the story:

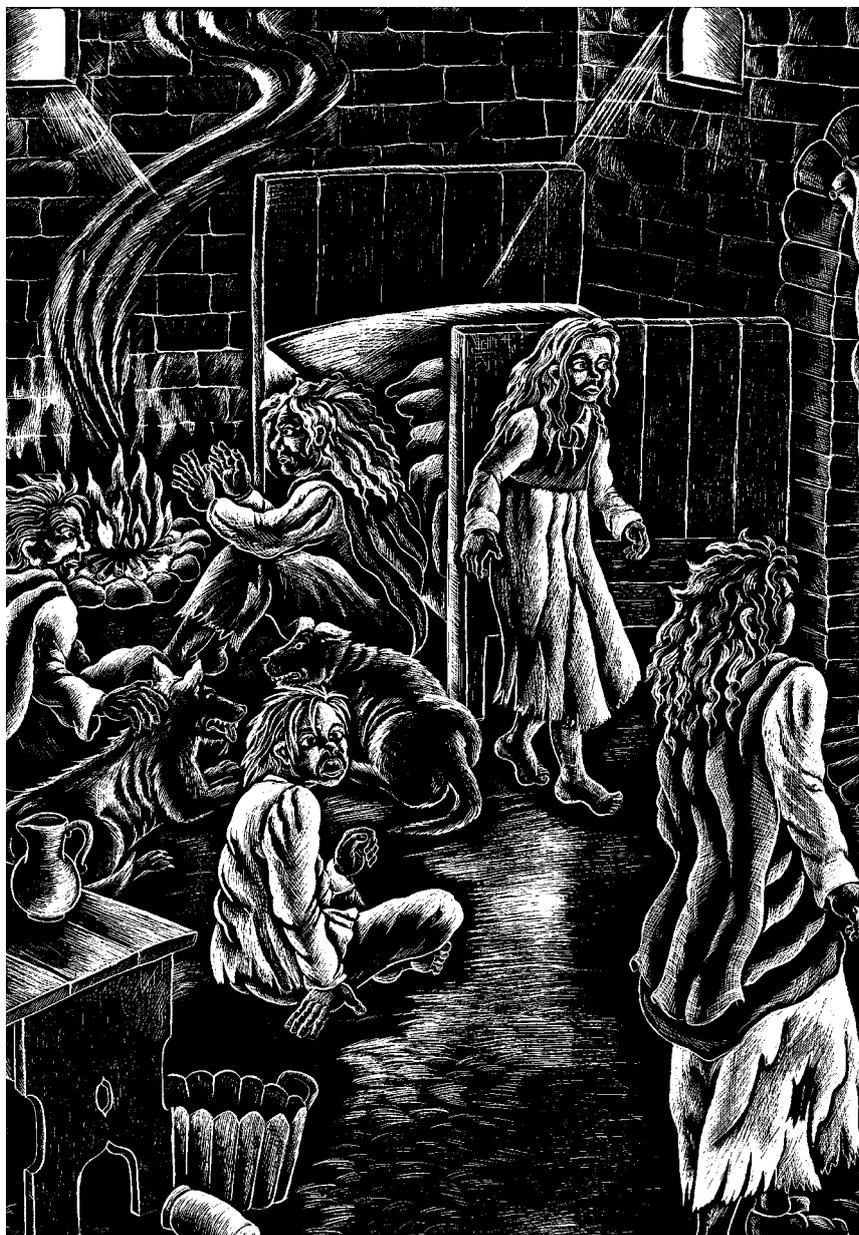
- 1 Give students the title of the book and show them the picture on the cover. Ask them to try and guess what kind of the story it is.
- 2 Give students a copy of the text on the back cover of the book, and of the story introduction on the first page. When they have read the texts, ask them a few questions about the story, or use the Before Reading Activities in the back of each Bookworm.
- 3 Use the pre-reading activity in this worksheet.
- 4 If there is a recording of this title, play the first few pages and stop at an interesting point.

The Witches of Pendle

Pre-reading activity

What do you know about witches?

- 1 Witches are
 - a) usually men
 - b) usually women.
- 2 Witches always have a cat that helps them.
True or false?
- 3 Witches wear
 - a) special clothes
 - b) the same clothes as everybody else.
- 4 Witches are usually old.
True or false?
- 5 A family can have more than one witch.
True or false?
- 6 Witches can only go out at night.
True or false?
- 7 If a judge decided that someone was a witch, what happened to them?



To the teacher

Aim: To stimulate interest in the topic of witchcraft, and to bring out questions and assumptions about witches, that the text will answer, confirm or refute

Time: About 5 minutes each part

Organization: Part 1: Ask the class: What do you know about witches? How do you know this? Accept all contributions without comment, and without indicating whether these statements agree with what happens in the book. This part is simply to arouse interest and establish a basis of ideas.

Part 2: Give each student the worksheet. Ask students to spend two or three minutes choosing the answers that they think are correct and thinking of an answer for the final question. When they have finished, they should compare their answers with two or three people sitting near to them. When everyone has had a chance to do this, tell them that they will be able to find the answers as they read the book. Resist any temptation to answer the questions now.

The Witches of Pendle

While reading activity

Predicting the fate of different characters

What happens to these characters?



Jennet

She is tried, but the judge decides she is not a witch.
She goes to live at Mr Nowell's house.
She runs away from her family because she doesn't want to be a witch.



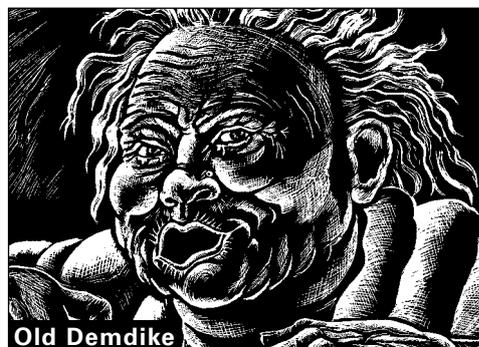
Elizabeth

She curses Mr Nowell and he dies, so she is put in prison.
Mr Nowell falls in love with her, and he decides that Jennet is the witch.
The judge decides she is a witch, and she is hanged.



James

He is hanged as a witch.
Mr Nowell takes him home and looks after him.
The judge decides he is too young and stupid to be a witch.



Old Demdike

She escapes from prison and runs away.
She is hanged as a witch.
She dies in prison before she is tried.

To the teacher

Where: After reaching the end of Chapter 3

Aim: To choose and give reasons for the fate of various characters in the story, based on the development of plot

Time: 10–15 minutes

Organization: Divide students into groups of three

or four. Ask each group to try to agree on the fate of the four characters shown, giving reasons for their answers. Show the possible fates of the four characters on an overhead projector, or distribute a copy to each class member. If there is time, students can discuss across groups. Do not reveal the answers.

The Witches of Pendle

After reading activity

Character grid

Complete the table with the following symbols:

- (✓) Yes
- (X) No
- (S) Sometimes



	RICH	POOR	ANGRY	LUCKY	FRIGHTENED	HUNGRY	KIND
Mr Nowell							
John Law							
Elizabeth Device							
Alizon Device							
James Device							
Jennet Device							

To the teacher

Aim: To confirm answers from pre-reading activity and review characters

Time: 15–35 minutes

Organization: Ask students to look back at the pre-reading task and to decide whether their answers would be different now that they have read the book. Then go through each question and check on the answers that students have arrived at. This could lead on, if wished, to discussion about how witches appear differently in cartoons or in the mythology of other countries.

Key: 1b Witches are usually women, although the witches of Pendle included one man, James Device;
2 False – witches do often have an animal, but it

may be a cat, dog or other animal;

3b Unlike the witches in cartoons, the witches of Pendle wear the same clothes as everybody else;

4 False – James and Alizon are teenagers;

5 True;

6 False – they go out at any time of the day.

7 Witches were hanged.

Now, give all students a copy of the worksheet.

Divide them into groups of three or four and ask them to fill in the grid. When groups have completed their grids, either regroup them for cross-group reporting, or display a copy of each group's grid in the classroom so that students can compare results for themselves.