In Own Words: Sampler for Essay #2

Working thesis: Elizabeth George Speare’s *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* suggests that elements of Welter’s cult of True Womanhood are already in place in the Puritan society of the 16th C. In particular, the novel illuminates the naturalization of women’s submissiveness to men. In the heroine’s struggle with this expectation and in the town’s responses to her independent actions, we see how deeply this belief in men’s natural right to dominate seems to have permeated this society.

Possible introduction—start with brief overview of Welter’s article and then deliver thesis as written above.

*By the way, it’s wise to blend in a quoted phrase or two to show just how closely your overview ties to Welter’s article. And in the overview and the in-depth summary, slide in Welter’s name every once in a while to remind us that you’re summarizing her ideas, not your own.*

Another possible introduction—start with literary analysis to lead into the topic:

The tradition of the strong-willed heroine runs through all kinds of texts, from gothic romance (think Jane Eyre) to juvenile mystery fiction (think Nancy Drew). In her historical juvenile novel *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, Elizabeth George Speare tells the story of “strong-willed” Kit Tyler who is newly arrived in the 16th C Puritan town of Wethersfield, and we follow Kit’s efforts to adapt to this rigid environment and its strict gender roles. In fact, the interlocking virtues scholar Barbara Welter sees as defining the “true woman” of the 1800s are already in place for this Puritan society some three hundred years prior. In particular, the novel illuminates the naturalization of women’s submissiveness to men. In the heroine’s struggles with this expectation and in the town’s responses to her independent actions, we see how deeply this belief in men’s natural right to dominate seems to have permeated this society.

Oohhh! Idea for conclusion if I use this intro: Restate thesis in some form...and then: Our attraction to the strong-willed heroine continues in current popular culture, and in some genres she has evolved into a remarkably able-bodied woman, as well (think Ripley in the *Alien* series). Nonetheless, the very fact that these women characters are
still a distinct type indicates that they are still exceptions to the rule; like Kit, they gain centerstage status as well as their edginess by transgressing one or more of the prescribed “feminine” virtues Welter discovers at the heart of the 19th C ideology of true womanhood. Even though I bring the concept of strong-willed woman into the 21st C, I still end whole essay by reminding readers that I’ve been focusing on Kit in novel and on Welter’s cult.)

Development plan of what needs to be covered or “proven”:

A. Depending on intro I use, I need overview of Welter or of Witch before I go much further.

B. Regardless of intro I use, I need a more in-depth summary of Welter on submissiveness. Must also emphasize flip side—men’s “natural” right to dominate.

C. Do I need to show glimmers of all four virtues in the novel’s depiction of life in Wethersfield? Double check thesis? Rephrase so I don’t have to do this? Or do it swiftly....

D. Definitely need at least one paragraph to show some distinct ways in which novel illustrates that expectations of submissiveness/dominance are in place and naturalized.

1. Matthew’s interruption of women playing with Kit’s clothes—men’s “natural” right to govern timing of others’ work and play, and to define appropriateness of play

2. When Prudence’s father tells his wife to shut up, he’s shown to have finally regained his “natural” position of dominance in the family

3. More examples?

E. Need at least one paragraph that demonstrates intensity of Kit’s internal conflicts between doing what she believes is right and feeling guilty for disobeying Matthew. Remember the thesis emphasizes how deeply belief in feminine submissiveness goes.

F. Need more than one paragraph that illustrates the variety and intensity of town responses to her independent and/or disobedient actions:

1. Kit’s losing job as teacher for acting independently with the curriculum and then getting Mercy’s teaching job back through demonstration of submissive contrition to appropriate man in power
2. Charges of witchcraft that gain traction in part through admission of Kit’s disobeying Matthew.

3. The immediate “scandal” of Kit’s swimming adventure

G. Can I conclude now? Wait and see what else comes up as I think, reread, write, tinker with thesis, etc...

Sample paragraph:
• Look for P.I.E and places to tweak it--break this into two paragraphs?
• Look for blended quotation that makes a point in passing.
• Look for clear signposting about whose words and examples are whose.
• Look for opportunities for further unpacking.
• Look for cited paraphrase.
• Look for what paragraph still needs to do as it closes.

Until Kit marries, it is her uncle who most notably acts as her “superior by God’s appointment,” to borrow from *The Ladies’ Repository* (qtd. in Welter, 118). However, we are privy to various moments in which Kit struggles with her uncle’s “inherent” superiority. In this first instance, the struggle is quickly over. After attending an excruciatingly long and dull Sunday morning service, Kit vows that she simply will not return for the afternoon session. She then takes “one look at her uncle’s shoulders, rigid in their Sunday black, and [knows] that she [will]” (59). In another instance, however, we witness Kit’s considerable turmoil in the aftermath of failing to follow her uncle’s command. When he learns that Kit has been helping her friend Hannah, an ostracized Quaker neighbor, his response is unequivocal: “You are never to go to that place again, Katherine. I forbid it” (132). Yet, later in the novel, Kit still sneaks out to help Hannah escape a frenzied mob bent on charging her with witchcraft (185). While she never questions the necessity of her action, she still suffers guilt over disobeying her uncle: “Suddenly Kit wished, with all her heart, that she had never deceived this man. She would like to stand before him with a clear conscience” (196). STOP! TOGETHER WE WILL UNPACK THE QUOTATION AND CLOSE THE PARAGRAPH WITH FULL FOCUS ON SPECIFIC POINT AND HOW IT RELATES TO THESIS.
In Kit’s fervent desire to face her uncle with a conscience free of deception and disobedience, we see how deeply she, too, is enmeshed in the cultural insistence on women’s compliance. To demonstrate her respect for her uncle, it seems nothing less than total submissiveness will suffice. But as Kit must act on her moral imperative to help her dear friend, she must fail to live up to this standard. Given this double bind, Kit is doomed to ongoing self-recrimination.