**Anne Bradstreet:** Laying the foundation for women and American writers

**History:** Anne Bradstreet was born Anne Dudley in 1612 in Northamptonshire, England. She married Simon Bradstreet at the age of 16. Two years later, Bradstreet, along with her husband and parents, emigrated to America with the Winthrop Puritan group, and the family settled in Ipswich, Massachusetts. There Bradstreet and her husband raised eight children, and she became one of the first poets to write English verse in the American colonies. It was during this time that Bradstreet penned many of the poems that would be taken to England by her brother-in-law, and published in 1650 under the title *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America*. Her work was long considered primarily of historical interest but Bradstreet has won critical acceptance in the twentieth century, because of its deeply personal nature.

**Theme:** Bradstreet's body of work is both extensive and varied. Bradstreet wrote on culture and nature, on spirituality and theology, on the tension between faith and doubt, on family, on death, on history.

**Women’s rights:** The remarkable nature of Bradstreet's accomplishment is highlighted by the historical conditions women poets struggled with. Women who wrote stepped outside their appropriate sphere, and those who published their work frequently faced social censure. In addition to this social pressure, many women faced crushing workloads and struggled with lack of leisure for writing. Others suffered from unequal access to education. Bradstreet's personal situation gave her the means to cope with some of these obstacles. Before she came to North America, she received an extensive education; she had access as a child to private tutors and the Earl of Lincoln's large library. She was part of an influential, well-to-do family that encouraged her writing and circulated it in manuscript with pride. Such private support did much to counteract the possibility of public disapproval

**Audience:** The seventeenth-century English and New English audiences varied in education and experience. Bradstreet’s poetry is as much a product of her environment as her faith. The plain, pious lifestyle her family led in New England and her cultural understanding of life and love challenge her readers to view life in New England as a challenge physically as well as spiritually. Her New England literate audiences and the literary culture in this environment was sparsely populated, with only a fledgling publishing and book distribution establishment, without libraries, with books as relatively expensive luxuries.

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period:\_\_\_\_\_

**Anne Bradstreet: Questions on poetry**

**Directions:**

**A.** Bradstreet’s Puritan nature is also evident in her poetry. Highlight examples of **faith** and Puritan beliefs.

**B.** Bradstreet enjoyed vividly describing the life she saw around her. *In a second color*, highlight the descriptive language Bradstreet uses to describe concrete images and abstract ideas.

**Reading Comprehension Questions**: Answer the following questions thoughtfully and completely, using examples from the text.

1. Imagine how Bradstreet's poems might have been received by with her original audience; compare the puritan audience of 1660 to today’s audience. How well do her themes and travel across time? What elements seem to connect to contemporary concerns? What fails to relate? Why?

2. Discuss the extent to which *(how much!)* Bradstreet's poetry reflects Puritan thinking. Analyze in the way Bradstreet reflects her own spiritual fears in the process of describing material possessions.

3. Try to identify the *theme* of each poem. Reminder: theme is the **message** that the reader understands by reading between the lines, it should be a complete sentence and include abstract nouns. Write your theme at the bottom of the poem.

***To My Dear and Loving Husband* by Anne Bradstreet**

*I*F ever two were one, then surely we.

If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee.

If ever wife was happy in a man,

Compare with me, ye women, if you can.

I prize thy love more than whole Mines of gold

Or all the riches that the East doth hold.

My love is such that Rivers cannot quench,

Nor ought but love from thee give recompetence.

Thy love is such I can no way repay.

The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.

Then while we live, in love let's so persever

That when we live no more, we may live ever.

No pleasant tale shall 'ere be told,   
Nor things recounted done of old.   
No Candle 'ere shall shine in Thee,   
Nor bridegroom's voice ere heard shall bee.   
In silence ever shalt thou lye;   
Adieu, Adieu; All's vanity.

Then straight I gin my heart to chide,   
And didst thy wealth on earth abide?   
Didst fix thy hope on smoldering dust,   
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?   
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky   
That dunghill mists away may fly.

Thou hast an house on high erect   
Framed by that mighty Architect,   
With glory richly furnished,   
Stands permanent tho' this be fled.   
It's purchased, and paid for too   
By him who hath enough to do.

A Prize so vast as is unknown,   
Yet, by his Gift, is made thine own.   
There's wealth enough, I need no more;   
Farewell my Pelf, farewell my Store.   
The world no longer let me Love,   
My hope and treasure lies Above.

***Upon the Burning of Our House***

**by Anne Bradstreet**

In silent night when rest I took,   
For sorrow neer I did not look,   
I waken'd was with thundering noise  
And Piteous shreiks of dreadfull voice.   
That fearful sound of fire and fire,   
Let no man know is my Desire.   
I, starting up, the light did spy,   
And to my God my heart did cry   
To strengthen me in my Distress   
And not to leave me succourlesse.   
Then coming out beheld a space,   
The flame consume my dwelling place.

And, when I could no longer look,   
I blest his Name that gave and took,   
That laid my goods now in the dust:   
Yea so it was, and so 'twas just.   
It was his own: it was not mine;   
Far be it that I should repine.

He might of All justly bereft,   
But yet sufficient for us left.   
When by the Ruins oft I past,   
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,   
And here and there the places spy   
Where oft I sate, and long did lye.

Here stood that Trunk, and there that chest;   
There lay that store I counted best:   
My pleasant things in ashes lye,   
And them behold no more shall I.   
Under thy roof no guest shall sit,   
Nor at thy Table eat a bitt.