

BOOKNOTES

EDUCATORS GUIDE

classroom connections

**Family • Community •
Euthanasia • Feelings
Fear • Courage • Friendship •
Truth • Freedom • Secrets •
Power • Hope**

Grades 7 up

pre-reading activity

Define *utopia* and *dystopia*. Ask the class to brainstorm the virtues of each type of society. Then, instruct students to write a short story set either in a utopian or a dystopian society. Encourage them to share their stories in class.

Gathering Blue is set in a diverse society where citizens are allowed thoughts, feelings, and to live freely (if often chaotically), whereas *The Giver* is set in a society that regulates everything from emotions to procreation. The society in *Messenger* is founded on the premise that any persons seeking refuge should be accepted into their community, no matter their shortcomings, but this open-minded attitude is threatened when some citizens decide they would be better off closing their borders. Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to research the basic tenets of a democracy. Ask for volunteers to debate the following topic: "Democracy: A Utopia or a Dystopia."

The Giver

A Newbery Medal Book

Delacorte Press trade paperback

0-385-73255-4

Laurel-Leaf paperback

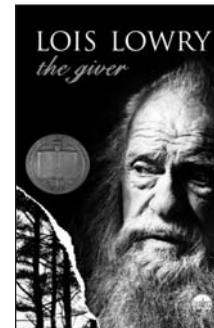
0-440-23768-8

Listening Library compact disc

0-80726203-X

Listening Library cassette

0-553-47359-X



Gathering Blue

**A School Library Journal
Best Book of the Year**

Delacorte Press trade paperback

0-385-73256-2

Laurel-Leaf paperback

0-440-22949-9

Listening Library cassette

0-807-26150-5

Messenger

Laurel-Leaf paperback

0-440-23912-5

Listening Library compact disc

0-307-28421-2

Listening Library cassette

0-807-22372-7

Delacorte Press trade paperback

Coming September 2006!



about the novels of Lois Lowry

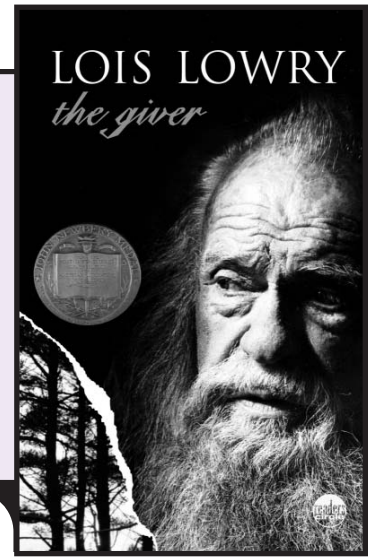
The protagonists in these companion novels deal with fear, power, and secrets, but somehow they gain the courage to defy the evils of their controlling world. Lowry makes a provocative statement about community and freedom.

the giver

about the book

In the utopian community where Jonas lives, there is no war or fear or pain. But when Jonas turns 12, and learns that he will be the new Receiver of Memory, he discovers the dark secrets that surround his community where “sameness” is the rule. Unable to live with these terrible truths, Jonas elects to leave, and embarks on a courageous journey to the unknown world of Elsewhere.

“A powerful and provocative novel!” —*The New York Times*



classroom connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

FAMILY—In *The Giver*, each family has two parents, a son, and a daughter. The relationships are not biological, but are developed through observation and a careful handling of personality. In our own society, the makeup of family is under discussion. How are families defined? Are families the unchanging foundations of a society, or are they continually open for new definitions, and why?

COMMUNITY—*The Giver* pictures a community in which every person and his or her experience is precisely the same. The climate is controlled, and competition has been eliminated in favor of a community in which everyone works only for the common good. What advantages might sameness yield for contemporary communities? In what ways do our differences make us distinctly human? Is the loss of diversity worthwhile, and why?

EUTHANASIA—Underneath the placid calm of Jonas’s society lies a very orderly and inexorable system of euthanasia, practiced on the very young who do not conform, the elderly, and those whose errors threaten the stability of the community. What are the disadvantages and benefits to a community that accepts such a vision of euthanasia?

FEELINGS—Jonas remarks that loving another person must have been a dangerous way to live. Describe the relationships between Jonas and his family, his friends Asher and Fiona, and the Giver. Are any of these relationships dangerous? Perhaps the most dangerous is that between Jonas and the Giver—the one relationship built on love. Why is that relationship dangerous and what does the danger suggest about the nature of love?

connection to the curriculum

PHILOSOPHY—Many utopian communities were established in the U.S., such as the Shakers in the 18th century or Fruitlands, led by Bronson Alcott (father of Louisa May Alcott), in the mid-19th century. Have students choose one of these communities and list the principles and assumptions that guided it. Discuss why such a community may not last.

LANGUAGE ARTS—The ending of *The Giver* may be interpreted in two very different ways. Perhaps Jonas is remembering his Christmas memory as he and Gabriel are freezing to death. Or perhaps Jonas does perceive the warm house where people are waiting to greet him. After dis-

cussing the role of ambiguity in writing, have students craft short stories that end on an ambiguous note. Discuss some in class, noting the writers’ clues for such endings.

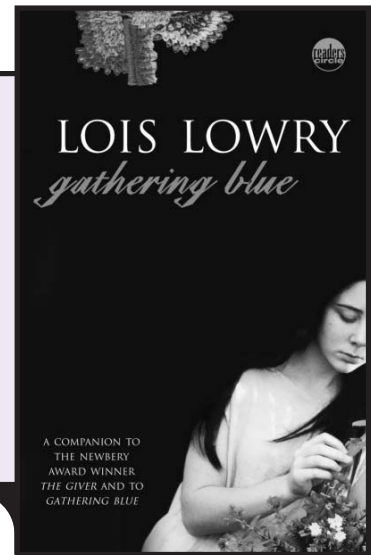
SOCIOLOGY—Choose a group in the U.S. today that actively seeks to maintain an identity outside of the mainstream culture: the Amish or Mennonites, a Native American tribe, the Hasidic Jewish community, or another group. Have students research and report on the benefits and disadvantages these groups can expect from defining themselves as “other”? How does these mainstream culture put pressure on groups?

gathering blue

about the book

When her mother dies, Kira, a lame girl, is named weaver of the Council of Guardians, and joins Thomas, the carver, and Jo, the future singer, at the Council Edifice. While life appears good for the three-orphaned artists, there is a feeling of menace in the air, and it falls upon Matt, a poor boy from the Fen, to help Kira find the courage to seek the truth.

★ “A top writer, in top form.” —Starred, *Kirkus Reviews*



classroom connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

FEAR—Discuss with students how Kira deals with her fears. How do her fears change throughout the novel? Discuss how Kira changes from a fearful young girl to a self-assured young woman and how Kira and Thomas help Jo deal with her fears. Discuss why the women of the village are fearful of Vandara. How does Vandara display the qualities of a bully? Talk about the best way to deal with bullies.

COURAGE—Discuss how Katrina shows courage when she stands up to the people of the community and demands that her handicapped daughter's life be spared. Katrina told Kira, “Take pride in your pain. . . . You are stronger than those who have none.” (p. 22) How is strength related to courage? Discuss how physical pain contributes to Kira's courage. Matt suffers from a different type of pain. Describe his life in the Fen. Discuss the many different ways he shows courage.

FRIENDSHIP—Matt is a devoted friend to Kira though they lead very different lives. Why do you think Matt befriends Kira? Kira admires Matt's curiosity, and she thinks he is kindhearted. Discuss how kindness is an important element in friendship. Discuss the relationship that develops between Kira and Thomas. How is their friendship the key to their survival?

FREEDOM—Discuss how the people of the village are slaves to the Council of Guardians. At what point does Kira realize that she isn't really free, even though she lives in an unlocked room? Ask the class to discuss how “true art” requires freedom of expression. Discuss how Kira, Thomas, and Jo lose the freedom to express themselves in their art form.

connecting to the curriculum

LANGUAGE ARTS—Kira has always yearned to read, but in her society women aren't allowed. Send students to the library to select a book that Kira might enjoy reading if she was given the right. Instruct each student to write a one-page paper explaining his or her book selection.

SOCIOLOGY—Death rituals and customs vary throughout the world. In Kira's world, people are taken to the Field of Leaving, and their loved ones sit there until the spirit has left the deceased. Discuss the different rituals practiced in

your students' own cultures or religions. Send students to the library to find out death rituals from different cultures. They may wish to focus on the cultures they have studied in social studies. Engage the class in a discussion about the results of their research.

ART—Explain to students that tapestries and needlework samplers have been used throughout history to tell stories—to preserve history. Ask students to create a small sampler that details one special memory from their family.

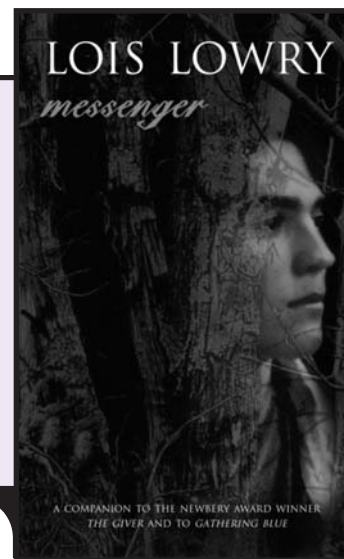
messenger

about the book

A group petitions Village to close its borders to outsiders and the once-open society, guided by Leader, who has the Power to See Beyond, is threatened by the evils of exclusion. When Matty, a boy with Healing Power, is sent to post signs at the borders, he faces the evil forces of the Forest, and must decide whether it is now time to use his power to rescue his community.

★ “Lowry [writes] with a beautiful simplicity rooted in political fable, in warm domestic detail, and in a wild natural world, just on the edge of realism.”

—Starred, *Booklist*



classroom connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

COMMUNITY—How does the government of Village promote a sense of community? Diversity is very important to the inhabitants of Village. Discuss with students how a diverse community creates a better understanding of mankind. What is Matty’s role in the community? Debate the strengths and weaknesses of the community. Which character is the greatest threat to the community spirit of Village?

SECRETS—Many of the people from Village came from communities that were built around secrets. Why does Leader believe that secrets cause sadness? How does he promote an open society? Discuss the relationship between secrets and ignorance. How is Matty bothered by the fact that he has a secret? Why is it important that he keep his secret?

POWER—Have students discuss the meaning of power. What is the power in Matty’s gift? How is Matty troubled by his power? Why does Leader warn Matty to be careful how he uses his gift? Describe the Blind Man’s power. How does his power and wisdom guide Matty? What does Seer mean when he says, “Our gifts are our weaponry?” (p. 155)

FEAR—Discuss with students the significance of the Forest that surrounds the community. Why does Forest evoke fear in the people? Debate whether the Blind Man is referring to fear or Forest when he tells Matty, “It’s all an illusion.” (p. 5) How did fear drive the people of Village away from their original homes? Discuss how Seer and Leader depend upon one another to deal with their fears.

connecting to the curriculum

LANGUAGE ARTS—Lowry uses figurative language to create specific images. For example, “In the place called Beyond, Leader’s consciousness met Kira’s, and they curled around each other like wisps of smoke, in greeting.” (p. 163) Locate other similes in the novel.

The people who weren’t born in Village had their own story of coming there. Select a character from the novel and write a short story about that character’s journey to Village.

SOCIAL STUDIES—Discuss the concept of a town meeting. Have students reenact the Village meeting where a small group, led by Mentor, is trying to close the border of the com-

munity. Ask for volunteers to be speakers at the meeting. Make sure that both sides of the issue are represented. Matty isn’t allowed to speak because he hasn’t acquired his real name. Suppose there is an exception to the rule, and Matty is allowed to speak. Ask someone in the class to speak as Matty.

PERFORMING ARTS—Anthems are written to express the patriotic feelings for a nation, and sometimes for a community. Look at several anthems, and study the thoughts and feelings that shape the lyrics. Write the lyrics for an anthem for Village, and set it to the tune of an appropriate piece of music.

novel connections

Using the companion novels together

The Giver, *Gathering Blue*, and *Messenger* are companion novels. Discuss the difference between a companion novel and a sequel. Talk about the similarities and differences in the three novels. Debate whether *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* are companion novels, and *Messenger* a sequel to the other two books. Ask students to write a letter that Kira, the main character in *Gathering Blue*, might write to Jonas, the main character in *The Giver*, where she tells him the frightening truths that she discovers about her community. Likewise, write a letter that Leader in *Messenger* might write to Kira explaining why she needs to return to Village with Matty. Share the letters in class.

classroom connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

COMMUNITY—Have students describe how the communities in *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* are similar. What are their primary differences? Discuss why Jonas, the Blind Man, and Matty feel forced to leave their communities. Village in *Messenger* was created out of selflessness. Contrast selflessness and selfishness. How are the efforts to close the border a selfish act? Discuss the potential dangers to the community.

FEAR—Jonas understands fear in *The Giver* and, in *Messenger*, establishes Village as a place where others can come to escape their fears. Explain the fear that Leader is feeling when the citizens of Village vote to close the borders. In *Messenger*, Matty learns that Forest is a “tangled knot of fears and deceptions and dark struggles of power.” (p. 168) Ask student how might Forest be symbolic of the communities in *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*?

HOPE—Debate whether the people in *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* understand the meaning of hope. How do Jonas, Matty, and the Blind Man represent hope in *Messenger*? At what point are these three characters almost stripped of hope?

COURAGE—Jonas in *The Giver* and Matty in *Gathering Blue* live in communities that thrive on control, and “sameness.” What gives Jonas and Matty the courage to leave their communities? Debate with students whether the courage of the “new people” in *Messenger* is driven by hope or fear.

FEELINGS—Jonas wasn’t allowed feelings in *The Giver*. Now as Leader of Village, he encourages people to express their feelings. Describe his feelings for Matty. How does Seer get inside the feelings of Leader? Have students compare Matty’s feelings for Jean in *Messenger* to his feelings for Kira in *Gathering Blue*. Contrast Leader’s feelings as he looks over Village in *Messenger* to his feelings when he left his community in *The Giver*.

FAMILY—Ask students to define family from the point of view of the following characters: Jonas in *The Giver*, Kira, Matt, and Thomas in *Gathering Blue*, Matty, Jean, and Seer in *Messenger*. How might Matty describe his newly acquired family in *Messenger* to Kira?

on the web

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q & a with the author

the giver

Q. When did you know you wanted to become a writer?

A. I cannot remember ever not wanting to be a writer.

Q. What inspired you to write *The Giver*?

A. I will say that the whole concept of memory is one that interests me a great deal. I'm not sure why that is, but I've always been fascinated by the thought of what memory is and what it does and how it works and what we learn from it. And so I think probably that interest of my own and that particular subject was the origin, one of many, of *The Giver*.

Q. When you wrote the ending, were you afraid some readers would want more details or did you want to leave the ending open to individual interpretation?

A. Many kids want a more specific ending to *The Giver*. Some write, or ask me when they see me, to spell it out exactly. And I don't do that. And the reason is because *The Giver* is many things to many different people. People bring to it their own complicated beliefs and hopes and dreams and fears and all of that. So I don't want to put my own feelings into it, my own beliefs, and ruin that for people who create their own endings in their minds.

gathering blue

Q. What was your inspiration for writing *Gathering Blue*? Did you have any strong influences?

A. I simply hadn't stopped thinking about the future after I wrote *The Giver*. There were a lot of unanswered "what ifs," and for a writer, that means a book begins taking shape.

Q. What is the significance of the title?

A. Originally I had planned to call it *The Gathering*, which seemed a perfect title (given the fact that there is actually a ceremony called the Gathering in the book) and would make a good companion title to *The Giver*. But then I discovered that Virginia Hamilton had written a book called *The Gathering*. It seemed discourteous . . . though it wouldn't have been illegal . . . to use the same title. So *Gathering Blue* was a second choice, but I like this title.

messenger

Q. The practice of Trading in the book has an ominous, shadowy feeling. Is the dark side of Trading a comment on today's commercial society?

A. Of course it is. All of us, even the best of us, make terrible choices because of our yearning for things. Not too long ago I bought a second home. Does anyone really need more than one home? Of course not. What could I have done with that (rather large) amount of money? Plenty of good things for deserving, even for suffering, people. But instead I bought a second home. And all of us do that to some degree or another.

Q. Does *Messenger* close the sequence of companion books beginning with *The Giver* and followed by *Gathering Blue*? What do you hope these books, taken as a collection, communicate?

A. I intended *Messenger* to be the concluding book in the trilogy, connecting the people, ending things for them, with Matty's death and an implied future joining Jonas/Leader and Kira. But already I am getting lots of letters asking me to follow Gabriel next. He's only eight in *Messenger* and appears only on one page. I suppose I could take up with him, eventually, but at the moment I am working on other projects.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lois Lowry has written over 20 novels spanning several genres. Her Anastasia Krupnik series, set in contemporary Boston, follow with poignant humor the exploits of Anastasia (a precocious adolescent), her younger brother Sam, and their artistic parents. Books like *Rabble Starkey* and *A Summer to Die* focus on families and crisis, and examine the strength and love that bind them together. *Number the Stars*, Lowry's first work of historical fiction and a Newbery Medal winner, is set during the Holocaust. *The Giver*, Lowry's first work of fantasy, is now joined by its companion novels, *Gathering Blue* and *The Messenger*.



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