



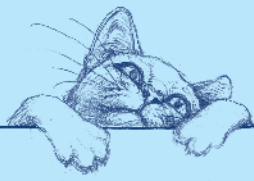
Newbery Honor–Winning Author of *The Book of Boy*  
**CATHERINE GILBERT MURDOCK**

# DAVINCI'S CAT

A  
Novel



**EDUCATORS' GUIDE**



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Federico is lonely. The eleven-year-old lives in the pope's palace in sixteenth-century Rome, eats sumptuous meals, and dresses in luxurious clothes. He knows the famous artists Raphael and Michelangelo. But he has no friends. So when a kitten mysteriously walks out of an empty wardrobe built by Leonardo da Vinci, Federico is overjoyed to have a companion. In an altogether different time and place, a girl named Bee is visiting modern-day New Jersey with her two moms. She, too, meets the same cat and finds the same wardrobe. Through the magic of time travel, Federico and Bee—along with the cat Juno—form an unexpected friendship, overcome obstacles, and change the future in amazing ways.

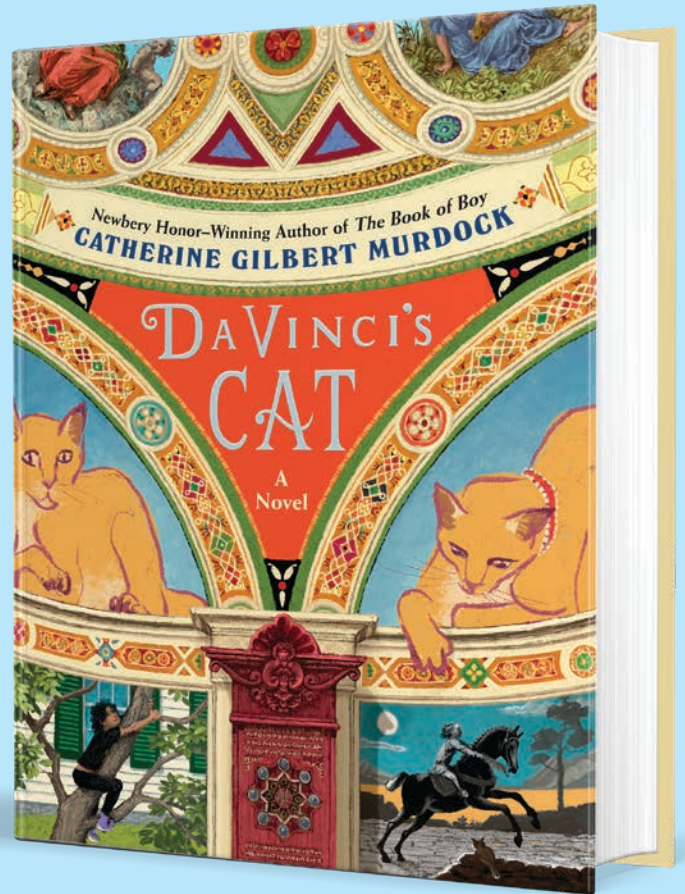


Photo by James Murdock

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Catherine Gilbert Murdock** is the acclaimed author of the Newbery Honor Book *The Book of Boy*, as well as six other novels. She grew up in Connecticut and now lives in Philadelphia with her husband and two children.





## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe Federico's background and living situation when the book opens. Why is he in Rome? What are the good parts of his life? What are the past and present hardships? Why are Juno, Herbert, and Bee so important to him? Why does Bee say of Federico, it's "like he was wearing a mask"? (p. 164)
2. What time and place is Herbert Bother from? What do you learn about his life and work? How does he end up in Rome and what does he want there? Describe his personality and Federico's reactions to him. Why does Herbert rescue the sick child and what does that tell you about him? Why does he never time travel again after taking her home with him?
3. What are some adjectives to describe Bee? When and where does she live? What is her family like? How do Juno and Miss Bother lead Bee to the past and to meeting Federico? What is Bee's quest in the past? How does she go about it? Give examples that show how and why Bee and Federico become friends.
4. When Bee stumbles into Federico's Rome, why does he think she's a boy? Why does she immediately think he's a girl? Contrast Bee's modern life as a girl with Federico's expectations about girls in his time.
5. What is Michelangelo like in terms of personality, physical appearance, and artistic skill? What about Raphael? Why is there so much rivalry among the artists? Why does Michelangelo object to Raphael seeing the Sistine Chapel ceiling? Why does Raphael cry when he sees it?
6. Why does Michelangelo call Federico a "troublemaker" (p. 214) and a "rule breaker"? (p. 215) Describe why and how Federico follows Michelangelo towards Florence. How does the boy persuade the artist to return? Discuss the encyclopedia entry that Bee discovers about "the death of both Federico Gonzaga and Michelangelo in 1511," (p. 201) and how that might have happened.
7. Who is Leonardo da Vinci and what is Juno's relationship to him? How does Juno end up in Rome? How does Herbert first encounter Juno? How does Juno become Miss Bother's cat?
8. Explain what happens in the last chapter. Where are Bee and Federico? What has changed for the better in Federico's life? How does Bee know that Federico lived longer than 1511? What is being auctioned, as the group in Miss Bother's house listens over the phone? At the end, Bee's mom calls the old lady Nana, but she's still Miss Bother to Bee—can you imagine why this happens? Why does Nana thank Bee and say that Bee "made everything good"? (p. 274)
9. Give as many details as you can about how the wardrobe works as a time travel mechanism. Why does Juno return to Rome as a cat instead of a kitten after Federico first meets her? Can the characters control when and where they go? Could someone be stranded in the past or future? How would that happen? What happens to the wardrobe in the end?
10. Consider the author's decision to structure the novel in four parts. Discuss the titles of the sections and how they relate to the content. When in the novel is Bee introduced and when does she meet Federico? Why is the book called *Da Vinci's Cat*?



## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

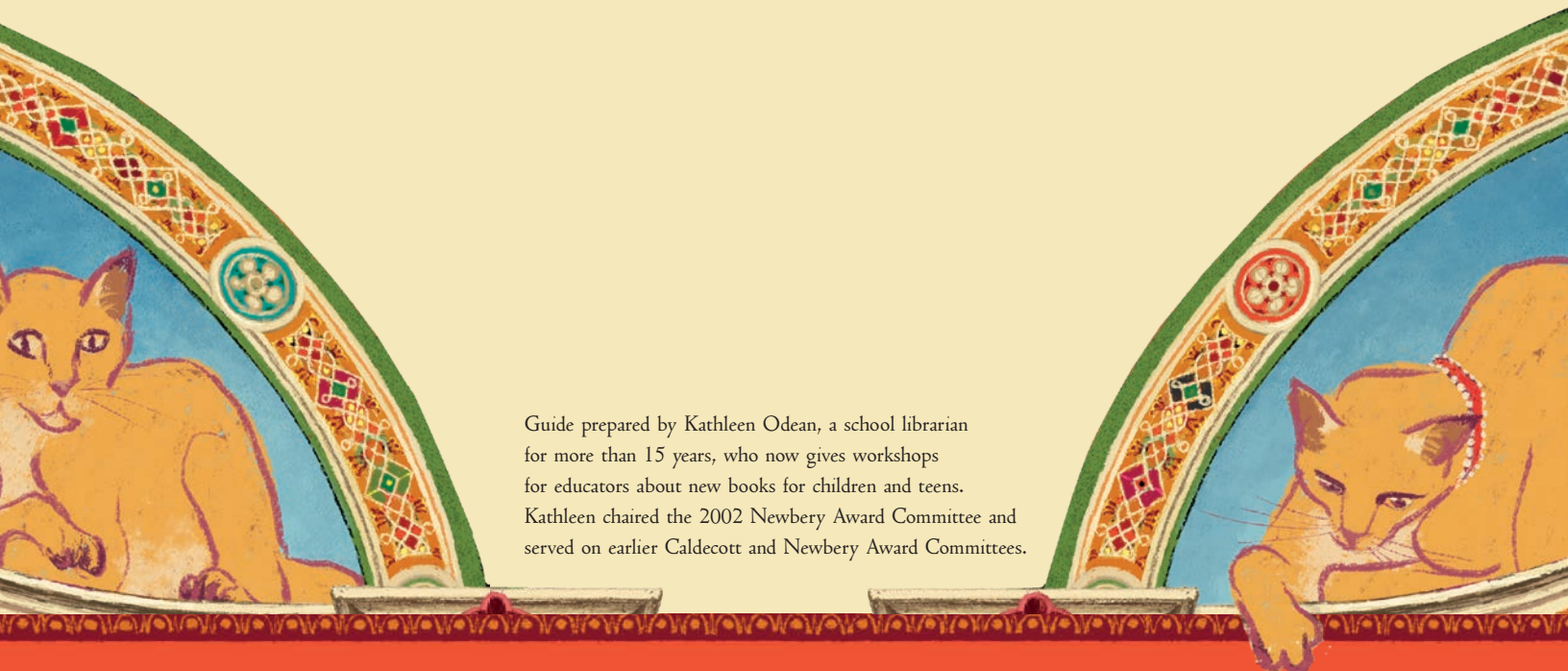
**Portrait of Bee.** In the last chapter, Bee sees an engraving of Titian’s painting of Federico at about age 29. Find the painting online or in a book and study the details, such as the rosary around his neck. Then create a portrait of Bee as you picture her at age 29, including whatever clothing, colors, animals, background, or other details you think would suit her at that age. Write a brief paragraph to explain your choices.

**Benvenuto! Welcome to Rome!** Imagine that time travel becomes easily possible and modern-day tourists can take a trip back to 1511 Rome. Create a brochure to give them advice about the trip. You should include suggestions of what to pack; places and artwork to see (remember that a lot of famous paintings and sculptures were in private palaces or unfinished, so tourists would need permission to see them); food to try; who to meet; what to buy as gifts or mementos; and what to avoid when they are there. Illustrate the brochure and share it with classmates.

**The Jigsaw Puzzle of Time Travel.** Bee calls time travel an “enormous jigsaw puzzle.” Work in groups to construct a story about a kid who travels to the past and about the effects of that travel. What’s the mechanism for traveling? Could it be destroyed and leave the character in the past? Will the character go back and forth, or just travel back once? How might the time travel change the future in general or the future of that particular character?

**Celebrating the Italian Renaissance.** In *Da Vinci’s Cat*, you meet Michelangelo, Raphael, the pope, and Swiss Guards. You hear about Leonardo da Vinci and the painter Titian; the Sistine Chapel and *The School of Athens*; the cities of Rome, Florence, and Mantua; Federico II and his parents. Choose any of these topics or another topic related to the novel and the Italian Renaissance. Research it using several sources and create a multimedia presentation for your class.

Guide prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than 15 years, who now gives workshops for educators about new books for children and teens. Kathleen chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award Committees.



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