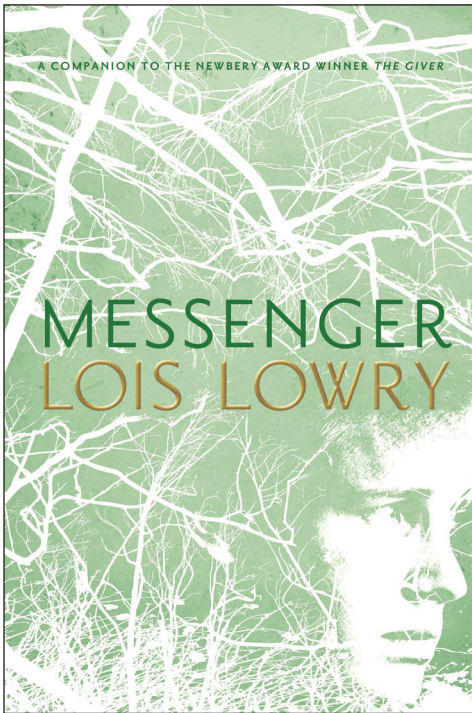


MESSENGER

by LOIS LOWRY



ABOUT THE BOOK

Matty was only six years old when he came to Village, where newcomers were welcome and all children could live comfortably and attend school. In his old community, Matty lived in the Fen, a poor part of town where children were often ignored, abused, and used. In Village, Matty lives with Seer, a blind man who patiently guides Matty away from his previous life of “lying and stealing” and moves him along on his journey toward manhood. Now Matty is almost ready to receive *his* true name, and he is hoping it will be Messenger. But a force of evil disrupts life in Village, and Matty’s fate is about to change. 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. Leader is devastated by the people’s decision, and he sends Matty to post signs of the closing since he is the only person who can navigate the dangerous Forest. Matty vows to return with Seer’s daughter, Kira, a weaver who lives in Matty’s old community. Along the way, Matty discovers that Forest has grown hostile and he must decide whether it is now time to use his power to rescue his community—a power that Leader recognizes but Matty has yet to fully understand.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to choose one of the following spine words and write an acrostic poem that best describes their understanding of the words *utopia* and *dystopia*. The letter on each line is the first letter of the first word on the line. Have groups read their poems aloud. How do these poems relate to *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*, companion novels of *Messenger*? What type of society do you expect in *Messenger*?

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Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Craft & Structure RL. 5-7.4; Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 6-8.4; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 6-8.1, 6-8.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 6-8.4; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 6-8.1; Knowledge of Language: L. 6-8.3.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

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?

How did fear drive the people of Village away from their original homes? Discuss how Seer and Leader depend on each other to deal with their fears.

Explain why books are a symbol of freedom to Leader. Discuss what Leader means when he says “books were a kind of forgiveness.” (p. 29) From what and by whom is he forgiven?



A GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION
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Leader is in charge of giving people their true names. Why does Matty think that Ramon should be called Boaster or Gloater? Discuss why Matty wants the name Messenger. How does Healer best describe Matty? Debate whether Matty would have been proud of his name.

How does the government of Village promote a sense of community? Diversity is very important to the inhabitants of Village. Discuss how a diverse community creates a better understanding of mankind.

Contrast Matty's former community to Village. How does Matty feel safer among the people of Village? What is Blind Man's role in Matty's life? How do they serve one another?

Matty is a boy when he comes to live with Blind Man in Village. At what point does Matty become a man?

Debate whether Matty wants to bring Kira to Village for himself or for Blind Man. Matty likes it when Blind Man calls him son. How might Kira complete Blind Man's family?

Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the community. Which character is the greatest threat to the community spirit of Village?

Village was created out of selflessness. Contrast selflessness and selfishness. How are the efforts to close the border a selfish act? Explain the fear that Leader feels when the citizens of Village vote to close the borders. What are the potential dangers to Village?

Explain the purpose of Trade Mart. How do trades corrupt Village's citizens? Ramon's parents trade for a gaming machine. Why won't Ramon talk about the trade? The most dangerous trades are ones you can't see. At what point does Matty begin to understand what the gaming machine has cost Ramon's family?

How do Leader, Matty, and Blind Man represent hope? At what point are these characters almost stripped of hope?

Discuss the meaning of power. How does power sometimes cause corruption? How does Leader realize this? Explain how Leader's past life enables him to recognize corruption.

Describe Blind Man's power or gift. How do his power and wisdom guide Matty? What does Seer mean when he says, "Our gifts are our weaponry"? (p. 155)

Explain the power in Matty's gift. At what point does Matty first realize his power? How is Matty troubled by his power? What would happen if Matty revealed his secret? Why does Leader warn Matty to be careful how he uses his gift?

Explain the symbolism of Forest. Why does Forest evoke fear in people? Debate whether Blind Man is referring to fear or Forest when he tells Matty, "It's all an illusion." (p. 5) Matty says that Forest likes him. Discuss what Seer means when he tells Matty that Forest may need him.

When does Matty learn that Forest is a "tangled knot of fears and deceptions and dark struggles of power"? (p. 168) Debate whether he now understands that Forest is an illusion.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 6-8.1, 6-8.2, 6-8.3; Craft & Structure RL. 6-8.4, 6-8.5; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 6-8.1, 6-8.3; Presentation of Knowledge SL. 6-8.4, 6-8.6.

REACHING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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. Then write a simile at the end of the novel that best describes Matty's trade to save all that he valued – his people and their world.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 6-8.5.

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 in first person about that character's journey to Village.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 6-8.3.



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People of Village came from places where they were kept ignorant. Ask students to write a paper called "Knowledge Is a Survival Tool." Explain how Leader and Blind Man know this.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text types & Purposes W. 6-8.1.

Discuss the concept of a town meeting. Have students reenact the Village meeting in which a small group, led by Mentor, is trying to close the border of the community. Ask for volunteers to be speakers at the meeting. Make sure that both sides of the issue are represented.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 6-8.4.

Matty is now an able student under the tutelage of Mentor. He reads *Moby-Dick* to Blind Man, but they both feel the book is too long. Select a book that Matty and Blind Man might enjoy. Write a two-page review of the book. Then write a concluding paragraph that states why the book is a good reading choice for Matty and Blind Man. Encourage peer editing for clarity, spelling, and grammar.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 6-8.9; Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 6-8.4, W. 6-8.5

Anthems are written to express the patriotic feelings for a nation, and sometimes for a community. Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to find 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.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 6-8.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 6-8.8.

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them taking clues from the context. Such words may include *concoctions* (p. 2), *malevolently* (p. 9), *benign* (p. 9), *translucent* (p. 11), *conveyor* (p. 12), *populace* (p. 17), *diverted* (p. 24), *hovel* (p.

25), *wary* (p. 30), *despair* (p. 37), *frivolous* (p. 37), *pulsating* (p. 39), *antics* (p. 41), *dissenters* (p. 50), *amulet* (p. 52), *pervaded* (p. 56), *sinister* (p. 81), *embittered* (p. 82), *stalwart* (p. 85), *ominous* (p. 94), *permeated* (p. 138) *delude* (p. 145), and *writhe* (p. 166).

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 6-8.4.

This guide was created by Pat Scales, Children's Literature Consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

