



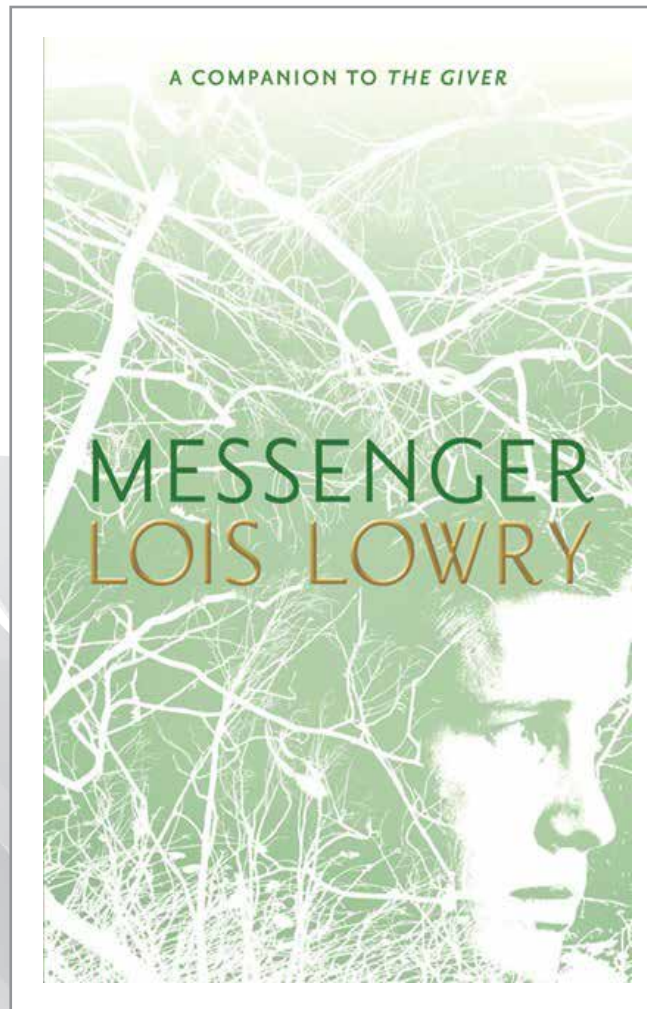
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Messenger

Lois Lowry



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Messenger

Lois Lowry

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, brainstorming,
pros/cons, critical thinking

Comprehension

Prediction, cause/effect,
evaluation

Writing

Poetry, creative writing,
descriptive writing, comic
strip, eulogy, monologue,
journalism

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation,
acting

Vocabulary

Definitions, context clues,
synonyms/antonyms,
parts of speech

Literary Elements

Setting, conflict, theme,
characterization, point of
view, figurative language,
foreshadowing, symbolism,
antagonist/protagonist

Across the Curriculum

Art—painting, drawing,
loom/weaving, sculpture,
comic strip; Literature—
Macbeth; Social Studies—
free trade, democracy;
Science—gardening, living
in nature

Genre: fantasy

Setting: fictional locations named simply “Village” and “Forest”

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Themes: community, compassion, progress, discernment, sacrifice, selfishness, discrimination, fear, hope

Conflict: person vs. self, person vs. person, person vs. nature/society

Tone: conversational, descriptive

Date of First Publication: 2004

Summary

Matty, a young man with a hard past, now lives in Village with Seer, an old blind man who helps Matty learn to live morally. Surrounded by sinister Forest, Village is a seemingly ideal though isolated community of people who have fled from other towns searching for help, mercy, and freedom. Matty alone seems to be able to travel through Forest without consequence until Village decides to close its borders to newcomers. As the people of Village become more selfish, Forest becomes more aggressive, even toward Matty. Matty must move quickly to bring Seer’s daughter, who lives in another town, back to her father. As he journeys, he also realizes the power of his “gift” which he has only just discovered.

About the Author

Lois Lowry was born on March 20, 1937 to a military family in Honolulu, Hawaii. She was the middle child and enjoyed being left to herself, her books, and her imagination. She graduated high school in New York City and began attending Brown University at age 17. At age 19, she married and had four children by the time she was 25. She later attended the University of Southern Maine where she completed her undergraduate degree and earned her M.A. as well. She lost her older sister at a young age, and her oldest son died young while working as an Air Force fighter pilot. These dramatic events have influenced some of her writing significantly.

Throughout her writing career, Lowry has written over 33 books. Her inspirations are varied, but she says stories almost always start with an attempt to explain a scenario that answers the question, “What if...?” Her books often emphasize the importance of the interdependence of people or raise awareness about the needs of people, the world, or even the environment. Lowry’s writing is varied, including humorous nonfiction, such as the Anastasia Krupnik series, to more serious young-adult fiction, such as *A Summer to Die*. Her books *The Giver* and *Number the Stars* were both awarded Newbery Medals. *Messenger* is the third book of a fantasy trilogy that began with *The Giver* and continued with *Gathering Blue*.

Chapters 1–4

A young man named Matty lives in Village with Seer, a blind man who has raised Matty for the past six years. Village is a place full of people who have left their original communities in order to survive. As such, Village is a community of compassionate people who have been mistreated, persecuted, and abused themselves before. However, on the outskirts of Village is ominous Forest, which occasionally “entangles” unwanted travelers, killing them. Matty seems able to continuously travel through Forest peacefully. Additionally, a seemingly dangerous trading system has begun. People are changing, including the once kind, compassionate, and welcoming Mentor, who now wants Village to close its border to outsiders.

Vocabulary
concoctions
subtlety
deftly
illusion
benign
translucent
fronds
conveyor
ambling
populace
protruding
diverted
transgression
ascended
assess
substantial

Discussion Questions

1. Seer tells Matty that he is not afraid of Forest because “it’s all an illusion” (p. 5). Does Seer mean that Forest is an illusion or that fear is an illusion? *(Answers will vary but could include justification for either. Seer could mean that Forest represents people’s fear of exiting the community or that fear is simply a product of a person’s imagination.)*
2. Village is described as a place where people with marks, scars, shortcomings, and failures are valued and respected. Can you imagine such a community? Is it possible to have a perfect community? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary. Students may realize that a perfect society is an unrealistic ideal. However, the way people choose to treat others—flawed or not—can determine the “goodness” of a society. A perfect community may be defined as a place where people accept each other and emphasize each other’s individuality and abilities as opposed to ridiculing others’ differences or limitations.)*
3. Matty feels that sometimes lying makes things more convenient, comfortable, and easy. Do you agree or disagree? Do you think that these are good justifications for lying? *(Answers will vary, but most students will probably agree that Matty is simply rationalizing the lies he tells. Although it may be the harder choice, he should tell the truth.)*
4. Predict why the “marked” frog will be significant to Matty. What do you think Matty’s encounter with the frog represents? *(Predictions will vary, but students should recognize that Matty’s encounter with the frog is the beginning of something big, perhaps a discovery about himself, and that the frog will be important later in the novel.)*
5. Why do you think the author chose to personify Forest? In what ways does Forest function as a character in the book? Why do you think Forest leaves Matty alone but attacks other travelers? *(Answers will vary. The author probably personifies Forest to provide the novel with an antagonist. Forest is an aggressive and powerful “character” in the novel and is portrayed as a ruthless killer by the second chapter. Its only redeeming quality seems to be the Warnings it dispenses to travelers who may not pass safely. No reason is given for Matty’s immunity to Forest’s danger, although Matty seems very aware of Forest’s tendencies and attuned to Warnings. Perhaps his great respect for Forest’s power grants him favor.)*

6. Why is the blind man opposed to obtaining a Gaming Machine, even though Matty truly wants one? (*The blind man reminds Matty that Ramon's machine came at a price and that Ramon's parents have not acknowledged that cost. He also puts Matty's idea of fun—watching a machine spin about and spit out a candy—into perspective by asking Matty if he is willing to trade music and reading for such foolish amusement.*)
7. After becoming a resident of Village, Matty learns that everyone suffers in different ways. Do you agree or disagree that everyone suffers in one way or another? Do you think that ignorance is something from which people suffer? (*Answers will vary, but students will probably agree that all people have hardships to overcome, whether they are physical, mental, or emotional. Being kept in ignorance, or being kept from knowledge, could be a source of suffering as well, as is the case with Matty when Seer punishes him by not allowing him to attend school.*)
8. How does Leader describe the place from which he came? (*He describes it as a place where learning was restricted and, as a result, people's knowledge was very limited. Leader was the first to successfully escape from his community. Leader believes the town is changing for the better now. Note: Students who have read The Giver may offer more detail about Leader's [or Jonas'] home.*)
9. To what does Seer attribute Village's petition to close? Why do you think some people want to close Village? Why does it seem strange that Mentor is leading this movement? (*Seer attributes the petition to selfishness. Answers will vary as to why people want to close Village, but it is probably because current citizens have become fearful that the community will run out of food, water, and natural resources. However, it may be that citizens would rather not let people into the community who come with nothing worthy of trading at Trade Mart. Matty and Seer are surprised at Mentor's role in the petition because they know Mentor to be a patient, sympathetic, compassionate, unselfish person.*)
10. **Prediction:** What will become of Matty's frog in Forest?
11. **Prediction:** Will Village close its borders?

Supplementary Activities

1. Writing/Poetry: Write a poem about the effects of selfishness. The effects can be related to emotions or actions.
2. Creative Writing: In *Messenger*, Forest is personified as an antagonistic character. Develop a fictional antagonistic character for a novel or short story of your own. (Your character should be something other than a person or an animal.)