



TEACHING THE CULTURE OF LIFE:

Gathering Blue

A Culture of Life Studies book review

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lois Lowry is best known for *The Giver* and for *Number the Stars*, both of which won a Newbery Medal. Lowry, who lives in Massachusetts, has written over 30 highly acclaimed books for children. Readers might also enjoy the other books in the *The Giver Quartet*: *The Giver*, *Messenger*, and *Son*. *Gathering Blue* is the second book in the *Giver Quartet*, but it is a companion to *The Giver* rather than a sequel and can be read without first reading *The Giver*.

Gathering Blue
by Lois Lowry (2000)
GENRE: Fantasy
LENGTH: 241 pages
Recommended for
middle school and up

STORY SUMMARY

When Kira's mother dies from a strange illness, the other people in the village want to send Kira to the fields to be eaten by wild beasts because she was born with a twisted foot. The villagers think that Kira does not have a purpose in their society, but when it is discovered she has a special magical talent, the Guardians let her live as long as she works for them as a seamstress and threader. The Guardians provide Kira with all of the tools she will need to work in the Council Edifice, a palatial building in the center of the village.

In her role as threader, Kira must learn how to dye the threads that are woven into a robe worn by the Singer at the annual Gathering ceremony when the village recalls the story of the world. Soon after her arrival at Council Edifice, Kira uncovers the deceitful plan of the village's Guardians to change the course of the future and keep the village under their control. By repairing the Singer's robe, Kira is inadvertently helping the Guardians complete their plan. At the annual Gathering ceremony, Kira is given the chance to leave the community, but instead of abandoning her village to the snares of the Guardians, she knows that she must stay and continue to fight for truth, beauty, and life.

LIFE THEME: ALL LIFE IS WORTH LIVING

In Kira's society, people with disabilities are seen as a burden. Even healthy, yet disabled, children like Kira are discarded because of their deformities. The village community views people with disabilities as a burden rather than a gift. The attitude against life is so prominent that the villagers with disabilities send themselves to the fields to be eaten by the beasts. When Kira is discovered to have a magical talent, her life is suddenly seen as useful to the elders of the community and she is taken to live in



Council Edifice, the palace of the Guardians. But Kira knows that if she fails at her duties, the villagers will try to find a way to feed her to the wild beasts of the fields.

Kira's life, in spite of her disability, is worth living. When Kira was a baby, the villagers wanted to exile her to the fields where she would be eaten by the beasts. But her mother understood that, despite Kira's disability, she was a valuable human being who deserved to live. Because of her experiences, Kira recognizes the need to protect those who are weaker than she. When Kira's friend Matt decides to do something dangerous, Kira risks the outrage of the hunters to bring Matt back to safety. When her willingness to help Matt is questioned, Kira is steadfast in her belief that every child is unique and cannot be replaced. Her small sacrifice to save her friend shows her respect for each person.

At the end of the novel, Kira learns about a place where the weak are protected. In this paradise, the blind are led by their friends, and cripples are carried around by those who can walk. The community is gentle and non-violent and the people care for one another like a family. Kira is offered a chance to live in this wonderful new community, but she chooses to stay behind and help the villagers understand the value of every human person.

HOW CAN I APPLY THIS TO MY LIFE?

Fighting for the right to life is a difficult job. People will make fun of you, be mean to you, or even say nasty things about you. You have to be willing to make sacrifices in order to preserve a culture of life and protect the innocent. All of us have to be willing to lose everything in the fight for the sanctity of human life. What are you willing to give up so that you might save the life of a single child?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Kira's mother not want to give her away to the villagers?

When the villagers came to take Kira away as an infant, Kira squeezed her mother's hand, letting her know that she was strong and that she mattered. Kira's mother knew that she was special. Even though Kira had a disability, she deserved to live.

2. What custom did the villagers perform to crippled infants and why?

The villagers thought that it was more merciful to kill a newborn disabled infant than to let him survive. Kira's mother decided to go against this tradition and fight for her daughter's life. If Kira's mother had not tried to keep Kira alive, the villagers would never have known what a blessing Kira would be to them in the future.

3. How do people in the village treat children?

They beat their children and neglect them. The villagers adopt a utilitarian philosophy of valuing only the citizens who contribute something to society. Kira, as a cripple, seems like she would be more of a burden than a help to her village. At one point, Thomas remarks that there are too many children, so if one was lost, no one would care.

4. How does this attitude toward children show the moral state of the society?

The people of the village completely disrespect human life in all stages—the young, the old, and the weak (or those who become crippled). Society is falling apart, and the Guardians know that they need to create a brighter future before the village loses all hope and finally crumbles. If they only value people for what they bring to society, the villagers miss out on the beauty of each human being.



5. How is the village different from the community of people that Matt finds on his adventures?

The villagers are violent; they enjoy hunting with ferocity. They do not see other people as gifts and evict people with disabilities, leaving them in the fields to be eaten by the wild beasts. The villagers do not even value the lives of the artists (Kira, Thomas, Jo, and the old Singer), as shown by the fact that they keep the artists locked up in Council Edifice and the Singer in chains. Cripples are not thought worthy or beautiful enough to get married. Girls are not permitted to learn how to read.

How does the new community work toward building a culture of life?

Each member of the disabled community loves and cares for each other like family. The blind are led by those who can see, and the lame are carried by people who can walk. They look to the beauty inside each person's heart, and every person is treated with dignity. Many of them get married despite their disabilities.

