

YHBA NOVEL RESOURCE #1

MESSENGER

By
Lois Lowry

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lois Lowry was born in 1937 to a military family while they were stationed in Hawaii. She says people sometimes tell her that she doesn't **look** Hawaiian. She was the middle child of three. Ms. Lowry has always considered that to be an advantage. She has lived all over the world, and from coast to coast in the United States. She spent WWII in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. After the war, her family moved to Tokyo. She came back to New York City for high school. She attended Brown University in Rhode Island while her family lived in Washington D.C.

Ms. Lowry married at nineteen to a Naval officer so the packing and unpacking continued. The amount of luggage increased as she started a family. Her husband left the service and enrolled in law school at Harvard. The family eventually settled in Maine where her children (by this time there were four children under the age of five!) grew up. She now lives in

Cambridge, Massachusetts, but visits Maine frequently where she gardens, entertains friends, and reads.

She went to college at the University of Southern Maine where she got her degree and did graduate work. She then began to write professionally, a childhood dream come true.

Ms. Lowry was single again at the age of forty, and she has spent the last several years being a very productive writer. The early death of her sister had a profound impact on her. Her book *A Summer to Die* is a highly fictionalized account of the death and its effect on her family. Her oldest son was killed in an Air Force fighter jet. She now spends a great amount of time and effort trying to find ways to end conflict on the earth she treasures so much.

Her books vary in style, but they all have the same theme of human connections. Most of Ms. Lowry's books are either children's books or young adult books. Her trilogy of *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue*, and *Messenger* are science fiction. *Messenger* was not a book she planned to write as a part of the trilogy, but she says it "nudged" at her. Although each book is a stand-alone, some characters appear in all three books. Some of her other series are her Anastasia books: *Anastasia Krupnik*, *Anastasia Again!*, *Anastasia at Your Service*, *Anastasia on her Own*, *Anastasia Has the Answers*, *Anastasia's Chosen Career*, *Anastasia at this Address*, and *Anastasia Absolutely*.

Sam was a character seen in the Anastasia books, but readers liked him so much that Ms. Lowry developed another series about him. That series includes: *All About Sam*, *Attaboy, Sam!*, *See You Around, Sam!*, and *Zooman Sam*

The "Tate" books revolve around a typical, bickering brother and sister. You could find them anywhere. Those titles include : *The One Hundred Things About Caroline*, *Switcharound*, and *Your Move, J.P.!*

Other stand-alone books by Ms. Lowry are: *The Silent Boy*; *Find a Stranger*, *Say Goodbye*; *Autumn Street*; *Taking Care of Terrific*; *Us and Uncle Fraud*; *Rabble Starkey*; *Stay! Keeper's Story*; *Number the Stars*; and *Looking Back*. She also has a "Gooney Bird" series. Ms. Lowry has won

numerous awards for her books. She won the Newbery Medal for *The Giver* and *Number the Stars*.

Messenger was not a book she planned to write. After finishing *The Giver*, Ms. Lowry thought she had put that story down permanently. Reader reaction about dissatisfaction with the ending caused her to “explain” what happened to some of the characters. *Gathering Blue* was written to clear up some of the ambiguities in *The Giver*, but when she finished that book, she had another ambiguous ending. She also had a character she didn’t want to let go. Matty’s story needed to be told, and she wrote *Messenger*. She knew the outcome when she wrote the beginning, but writing the ending was painful. She grieved for another child.

Is there a religious message? Yes, if you want to find one. Ms. Lowry has heard from people of many different religious beliefs, and they all seem to find a message that suits their own needs. She believes that there is a universality to theology, and a story need not be confined to one religion.

Messenger falls into the genre of science fiction.

Ms. Lowry enjoys hearing from her readers. Her email address is:
info@loislowry.com

Her address: Cambridge, MA (no street address listed)

Her web site is:
www.loislowry.com

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Annotation

Revisiting towns and characters from other books can be a risky endeavor. In *Messenger*, Lois Lowry takes us back to Village, but the nature of Village is changing. Forest is becoming menacing, and people who used to be welcoming and neighborly are now fearful of outsiders and eager to close their borders.

Ms. Lowry weaves a timely conflict through the story. She uses nature and emotion to show the changes in Village. Some people are affected more than others. Trademaster seems to have taken townspeople's good qualities in exchange for material possessions or carnal desires.

While this book is not a political statement, Ms. Lowry voices the concerns of some of the townspeople in language that is familiar today.

The universal theme of good versus evil is addressed through her vivid characters and the gifts of the people. Some gifts are unexpected and unwelcome but necessary. Ms. Lowry may write in different genres, but her "message" remains constant.

While Ms. Lowry seems confident that this is the final book in the trilogy, she admits that the character of Trademaster still intrigues her. Could another book be on the way? Many readers will be disappointed and frustrated by the ending. Most of her readers would welcome a continuance of the story of Seer, Kira and Leader.

Messenger

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Booktalk

The characters in *Messenger* are not given their formal names until their gifts are apparent to all. Seer, a blind man, is given his name because of his insight into people's character. Mentor is more than a teacher, but an educator who guides students through more than the three R's. Leader is named because he can guide Village wisely and see beyond current circumstances. Matty, a fourteen year- old boy with no family in Village is ready for his name. He is sure he will be Messenger, because he can go back and forth through Forest and deliver messages outside Village as well as inside.

Matty has a secret. Strange sensations are happening to his body. He has been able to restore a frog's shredded leg, and later he restores health to a dog and her puppy. He doesn't know why he can do this, and the experiences leave him physically weakened and emotionally troubled.

As Village, once a utopian society, and Forest begin to darken and thicken and become unwelcoming and even dangerous, Matty is sent on a mission to deliver messages and bring Kira, Seer's daughter, back through Forest to her father's home. At the end of this journey, Matty gets his name, but it is not the name he had hoped for.

What name do you think people would give you today? Would you be Student or Slacker; Thinker or Airhead; Philosopher or Giggler? You might be surprised!

Messenger is a stand-alone book, but it is a companion book to *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*.

Messenger

Characters

Matty – A fourteen year-old boy with no family in Village. He is cared for by Seer. Matty has worked hard to change from the deceitful delinquent that Kira brought to her father six years ago. He has earned the privilege of being a messenger. He is sure that is what his name will be.

Seer – An older man with a daughter, Kira, who lives on the other side of Forest. Seer is blind, but he has trained himself to do most household chores and to make his way around Village. Matty often forgets that Seer is blind and calls for him to “look” or references sight in descriptions. Seer is very wise and “sees” into souls rather than outer appearances.

Mentor – The teacher in Village who has begun to change in his physical appearance and his demeanor. He is standing straighter and his bald spot is covered with hair, but he has become unreasonable and uncaring.

Ramon – Matty’s best friend. He is somewhat boastful of his family’s Game Machine. However, when Ramon and his sister become quite ill, their condition is more of an annoyance than a concern to their mother.

Kira – Seer’s daughter who lives on the other side of Forest. She stayed behind when her father was run out of their hometown. She has helped turn a bitter, violent town into a peaceful community. She is crippled and does excellent needlepoint. She and Matty must make the treacherous journey through Forest.

Frolic – Matty’s puppy

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CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

What would cause people living in a utopian society to turn unfriendly, selfish and distrustful? In Lois Lowry's *Messenger*, we get the impression that people are trading pieces of personality, positive character traits, and virtues for immediate physical gratification and/or possessions.

Forest, who has been a lush, green boundary begins to thicken and become threatening and dangerous. Matty, who knows and frequently transverses Forest now meets violence in it.

Newcomers to Village who have journeyed there to escape violence and persecution are not welcome. Some want to build a wall. They have forgotten that they came from the same circumstances.

Those who have not traded with Trademaster are puzzled by the change in their neighbors. Divisions are deep and hurtful. Personal connections are broken when some put their own needs above those of the community.

Who can solve this dilemma? A unsuspecting young man has been chosen to heal the community. He has been given a special gift but is unsure of his responsibility with this gift. Matty does not know he will be chosen to be the sacrifice that will cure the disease that has seeped into Forest and Village. With the sacrifice of his life, he is given the name he has earned – Healer.