

## *Gathering Blue*

By Lois Lowry

Walter Lorraine Books (Houghton Mifflin/Random House)

### A Reading and Discussion Guide

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#### **SUMMARY:**

In this companion to *The Giver*, the Newbery Medal—winning favorite among educators, Lois Lowry takes young readers to another futuristic society. Orphaned and physically handicapped, Kira is unsure of her future until she is named weaver of the singer's robe and becomes a ward of the Council of Guardians.

Kira, born with a deformed leg, is frightened and uncertain of her future when her mother dies and the neighbors burn her cot and treat her with great hostility. Her father had long ago succumbed to the beasts, and now Kira is alone except for Matt, a boy from the Fen, who becomes her friend. It is the ways of her community to shun and discard the weak, but Kira's fate appears hopeful when she is called before the Council of Guardians and given the task of repairing the singer's robe, a robe that represents the entire history of Kira's community. Kira goes to live at the Council Edifice and soon meets Thomas, the carver, and little Jo, the future singer. While life appears good for the three-orphaned artists, there is a feeling of menace in the air, and it falls upon Matt to help Kira find the courage to seek the truth.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Discuss what gave Katrina, Kira's mother, the courage to stand up to the people of the village and spare Kira's life, when the custom in Kira's society was to destroy babies born with birth defects. Do you think Katrina was aware of her daughter's gift? Katrina never created the color blue. Do you think she knew that her daughter would someday find the secret of creating blue?

2. At the beginning of the novel, Katrina dies and Kira is left homeless. Kira is fearful, especially when Vandara, a vicious and angry woman, tells her that she is worthless. Discuss the strength Kira displays when she faces the Council of Guardians. How does Kira show strength and courage throughout the novel?
3. Discuss the way children are treated in Kira's society. What is the difference between abuse and neglect? How is Matt both abused and neglected? What is his role in the story? How does Matt contribute to Kira's growth as a person and an artist?
4. Vandara is known throughout the village. "People whispered about her. She was known, and respected. Or feared." (p. 15) How can someone who is feared be respected? Discuss whether the women of the village fear Vandara more than they respect her. How do you know that they don't really agree with Vandara regarding Kira's fate?
5. What qualities determine the difference between skill and art? Debate whether Katrina was a skilled weaver or an artist. At what point in the novel does Kira display the true qualities of an artist?
6. Why is the history of the people called the Ruin Song? The scenes on the Singer's Robe represent Ruin, Rebuilding, Ruin Again, and Regrowth. How does this symbolize the history of our world?
7. Kira has always been told that beasts killed her father. When Kira tells Jamison that Annabella says there are no beasts, he replies, "She's very old. It's dangerous for her to speak that way." (p. 128) Do you think Annabella knows the truth about Kira's father? Discuss whether Jamison is responsible for Annabella's death.
8. Matt is concerned that Kira might be held captive at the Council Edifice. How is it that he has a better understanding of the meaning of captivity than Kira does? Debate whether Kira and Thomas, the young carver, are indeed held captive even though they are allowed to roam. At what point does Kira realize that she isn't really free?
9. What do Kira, Thomas, and Jo have in common? Interpret the following statement: "They were forcing the children to describe the future they wanted, not the one that could be." (p. 212)
10. At the end of the novel, Matt brings Christopher, Kira's blind father, to meet her. How does meeting her father alter Kira's concept of her purpose in life and her contribution to her society's future?

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Lois Lowry first captivated young readers in 1977 with her award-winning first novel *A Summer to Die*. From there she went on to create the popular Anastasia Krupnik series. She was the recipient of the Newbery Medal in 1990 for *Number the Stars* and again in 1994 for *The Giver*. Other honors that she has received are the Boston Globe—Horn Book Award, the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award, the California Young Reader's Medal, and the Mark Twain Award.

## **HELPFUL LINKS:**

Lois Lowry's website: <http://www.loislowry.com/>

Random House [Teacher's Guide](#) for *Gathering Blue*

Random House [Reader's Guide](#) for *Gathering Blue*

### *Internet Resources:*

#### **Dyes**

This site provides information about plants used for dyes.

<http://www.gallica.co.uk/celts/dyes.htm>

#### **Ethnobotanical Leaflets**

This site provides information about native dye plants of the United States.

<http://www.siu.edu/~ebl/leaflets/dyes.htm>

#### **Whiteworks: The Embroidery Pages**

This site gives information about the different types of embroidery.

<http://www.white-works.com/EmbroideryIndex.htm>

*Other Titles of Interest:*

***The Giver***

Lois Lowry

Courage • Fear • Freedom • Friendship

Grades 5 up / 0-440-23768-8 (Dell Laurel-Leaf Readers Circle)

***A Single Shard***

Linda Sue Park

Courage • Friendship

Grades 4—7 / 0-440-41851-8 (Dell Yearling)

***Forgotten Fire***

Adam Bagdasarian

Courage • Fear

Grades 9 up / 0-440-22917-0 (Dell Laurel-Leaf Readers Circle)



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