



Mosswood Connections

Catherine, Called Birdy by Karen Cushman: Lessons and Activities

Summary:

The book Catherine Called Birdy by Karen Cushman takes place in medieval England in 1290. Birdy is the 14 year old daughter of an English country knight who is very inventive and humorous. The book is written in journal form because Birdy's brother, who is a monk, taught her to read and write and he suggested to her that writing the account of her days will help her grow "less childish and more learned." Each different passage tells of the adventures of her days and how her parents are trying to make her act like a lady so her father can marry her off. Birdy hates to act like a lady and doesn't want to get married. This journal describes her adventures throughout a year of her daily life and her efforts to get rid of any male suitor that her father wants her to marry.

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Standards

- 6LA.1b. - The student will develop and apply expansive knowledge of words and word meaning to communicate. (DOK 1)
- 6LA.1d. - The student will use context clues to determine the meanings of unfamiliar or multiple meaning words. (DOK 2)

Additional Objectives/Standards

- RL 6.2.1 identifying theme,
- RI 6.2.3 summarize text with common theme
- RI 6.2 providing a summary
- RI 6.7.2 Use different media or formats to combine info.
- W6.6.2 Utilize technology to produce and publish writing.

Writing Prompts

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- 1) *Catherine's mother says to her:* "You are so much already, Little Bird. Why not cease your fearful pounding against the bars of your cage and be content!"
 - Write an essay in which you do each of the following:
 - Explain what point the author makes in the quotation.
 - State the extent to which you agree or disagree with the author.
 - To develop your essay, be sure to include specific examples, reasons, and details.
- 2) *Madame Joanna says to Catherine:* "You are lucky, Little Bird, for you have wings. But you must learn to master them. Look at the baron's hawk there on her perch. Just because she doesn't flap her wings all the time doesn't mean she can't fly."



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- Birds are often used in literature as symbols for freedom. The symbolism of birds is repeated throughout the novel. For example, Catherine is nicknamed Birdy, and she keeps birds as pets, and she decides to set them free at the end of the story.

Write an essay in which you do each of the following:

Explain what point the author makes in the quotation: Why does Madame Joanna compare Catherine to a bird, and what advice is she trying to give her?

State the extent to which you agree or disagree with the author.

To develop your essay, be sure to include specific examples, reasons, and details.

- 3) Write about Catherine's situation regarding being "married off"
- "Now my father, the toad, conspires to sell me like a cheese to some lack-wit seeking a wife."—Catherine (p. 6)
- Catherine, like many girls her age during the medieval time period, is being forced into an arranged marriage. She tries many ways to get out of her situation, including playing tricks on her suitors and attempting to run away. What would you do?
- 4) Pretend that Catherine is your friend and the diary entries that we have read so far have been letters to you. Write a letter back to Catherine using the Personal Letter Format.
- 5) Make research journals: These begin with a Know/Want to Know page about the character. Double pages are set up with the following (basic) headings which come from the "want to know" lists.
- ❖ Know/Want to Know About the Characters
 - ❖ Medieval vocabulary words and phrases
 - ❖ Daily life – jobs, responsibilities, duties, hygiene
 - ❖ Family members – Home
 - ❖ Foods – Clothing
 - ❖ Events: Holiday, fair, journey, war, plague, etc.
 - ❖ Historical references with dates
 - ❖ Sketches: Symbol representing character, home, clothing, etc.
 - ❖ Works Cited/Bibliography (Guideline sheet is provided for reference)
- 6) Write a "final" diary entry for Birdy, dated December 1, 1291. Show what her new her life with Stephen is like and her attitude about their future together.
- 7) Write a Journal from Another Point of View. Choose a character from the novel and write about a specific event from his/her point of view. Include observation and/or thoughts of Birdy.



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Discussion Questions and Activities

September (1st chapter)

Who is telling the story?

What is the setting for this story? Locate the area in an atlas.

Design a title page using a medieval theme.

What is the origin of the expression "corpus bones"?

Why does Catherine have to keep a journal?

List some of the other people in Catherine's life and their relationship to her.

Describe Catherine's first plan to drive away unwanted suitors.

What cure does Catherine mix for Perkin's bound liver?

Describe Catherine's best friend.

Vocabulary: ale head, abominable, war horse, minstrel, impudence, clodpole, Michaelmas, muzzle-witted

Enrichment: Research the subject of heraldry. Design a coat of arms for your family. Choose at least three occupations (i.e. jobs or careers) that you would like to pursue when you are older. Select your favorite and then research it and make a short presentation to the class.

October (2nd chapter)

Tell what Catherine used to believe about Jews and what she believes now.

Why does Catherine throw her mother's ruby ring into the pig yard?

How did Catherine get rid of the suitor Rolf?

Why do you think Catherine wants to be a monk?

Explain why Catherine treats herself with wormwood and mint.

Vocabulary: maggot, privy, dovecote, peevish, vellum, scriptorium, abbot, nunnery, crusade

Enrichment: Research castles either from the library or the internet. Design your own castle blueprint and construct a model.



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November (3rd chapter)

What bold advice did Catherine give Father Huw the priest?

What is causing Catherine's rash and will she be able to correct it?

Summarize how Catherine's parents met.

How did Catherine ruin her saint's day party?

Where did Catherine learn the string trick?

Vocabulary: hazel, jest, yester eve, agrimony, betony, feverfew, mirling

Enrichment: Catherine learns many medieval cures for ailments. Keep a list of the cures in the novel. Research modern day remedies for these same ailments.

December (4th chapter)

What effect does the funeral procession have on Catherine?

Research why Jews were expelled from England and be prepared to explain in class.

For three months we hear Catherine use "Corpus Bones" as her cursing words. What curses does she use in December? Which one is her favorite?

How did Catherine get rid of suitor number three?

Describe two Christmas games or traditions you had not heard of before.

Vocabulary: sodden, vex, blasphemy, magpie, profanity, mummer, wassail

Enrichment: Look up Longshanks (King Edward I) and William Wallace (Braveheart). Who do you think should have won their battles?

January (5th chapter)

How did Catherine get her puppy back?

What drove away suitor number four?

Describe how Edward the saddler's apprentice was lost and saved.



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What kind of things does Catherine paint into her mural?

Research the history of ice skating. Does it refer to bones on shoes?

Vocabulary: laundress, putrid, joust, betrothal, friar, martyr

Enrichment: Would you have liked living in 1290? Why or why not?

February (6th chapter)

How does Catherine get rid of Fulk?

What worries Catherine?

Describe the girl's reaction when they see Madame Johanna after imagining great things.

What do you think about Madame Joanna's fortune telling?

What plan does Catherine have for Shaggy Beard?

Vocabulary: penance, flagon, wimple, solar, dilemma, soothsayer

Enrichment: Research clothing of the 13th century. How was fabric made, dyed etc.

March (7th chapter)

Why doesn't Catherine like Agnes?

Describe Catherine's thoughts about Geoffrey.

Why does Catherine panic on March 20th?

Who do you think Catherine wrote her new song about on March 29th?

Vocabulary: odious, disemboweled, lustily, infirmity, frivolity, persecution

Enrichment: Food is constantly described throughout the novel. How was food kept from rotting or decaying in medieval times? Create a menu for a feast using 13th century dishes.



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April (8th chapter)

What changes Catherine's mind about Geoffrey?

Why does Catherine refer to her betrothal as a "sale"?

What do you think really drives Shaggy Beard away?

How does Catherine attempt to ease her mother's headaches?

Vocabulary: brigand, kirtle, rush light, blight, turmoil, breeches, hermit

Enrichment: Jews were made to leave England in 1290. Explain why this happened.

May (9th chapter)

Explain May Day traditions of 1291.

Tell what is happening with Shaggy Beard.

List how a lady must act in Catherine's day.

Why did Catherine have to improvise a remedy for her mother's headache?

Vocabulary: humility, fable, parchment, scroll, corrupt, ulcer, lunatic, duel

Enrichment: Research how people communicated in the middle ages (prior to phones, fax, and emails).

June (10th chapter)

Explain why helping the ant meant so much to Catherine.

What is wrong with Catherine's father's health? List all the steps he takes to deal with the problem.

How does Lincoln differ from Catherine's village?

Describe how Catherine intervenes in Meg's life particularly her marriage plans.

Vocabulary: boiling pitch, shire, demon, poultice, guild, malignant, missionary, relic

Enrichment: List and explain some of the superstitions listed in the novel.



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July (11th chapter)

Describe Meg's wedding and all its traditions.

What was Catherine's father's reaction when she asked why the villagers could choose their husbands and wives?

Explain what Brother Norbert and Brother Behrtwald are doing.

What does Catherine pray for on the 29th of July?

Vocabulary: gittern, plaited, harrowing, warble, rue, sneezewort, pagan, sacrificial

Enrichment: What kind of homes would the villagers around the manor have lived in?

August (12th chapter)

Describe the Bartlemas Fair.

Who is Catherine trying to save now and why?

Explain how Catherine's bear is saved in the end and why is she so surprised by what happens?

Vocabulary: dispirited, dolt, sheaf, reaper, parchment, bearbaiting

Enrichment: Research and explain the feudal system.

September (13th chapter)

Explain the steps Catherine and Morwenna take to save Catherine's mother.

How does Catherine "escape" before her wedding?

On September 18th the year before we learn that Catherine is commanded to write this account of her days in order to grow more learned and less childish. Explain using examples from the book whether the journal did its job or not.

Vocabulary: barbarian, rowan, rheumatism, apostle, evangelist

Enrichment: We know Catherine participated in feasts and went to the fair. What else did people do for entertainment during Catherine's time?



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Vocabulary

Ale head:	a person who is drunk or hung over
Abominable:	causing moral revulsion; unpleasant
War horse:	a horse used in battle; charger; Informal a person who has been through many battles or struggles;
Minstrel:	A medieval singer or musician, esp. one who sang or recited poetry
Impudence:	The quality of being offensively bold. 2. Offensively bold behavior.
Clodpole:	a stupid person; blockhead
Michaelmas	The feast of St. Michael, September 29
Muzzle-witted	it probably means narrow-minded and stupid
Maggot:	A soft-bodied legless larva, esp. that of a fly found in decaying matter
Privy:	Adjective: Sharing in the knowledge of (something secret or private): "he was not privy to her thoughts". Noun: A toilet located in a small shed outside a house or other building; outhouse
Dovecote:	A shelter with nest holes for domesticated pigeons.
Peevish:	Easily irritated, esp. by unimportant things.
Vellum:	Fine parchment made originally from the skin of a calf
Scriptorium:	A room set apart for writing, esp. one in a monastery where manuscripts were copied.
Abbot:	A man who is the head of an abbey of monks
Nunnery:	A building in which nuns live as a community; a convent
Crusade:	Noun: A medieval military expedition, one of a series made by Europeans to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims in the 11th, 12th, and 13th... Verb: Lead or take part in a campaign concerning a social, political, or religious issue



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Middle English Words and Expressions:

Here are some samples of Anglo-Saxon, from Instant Old English, by Catherine N. Ball
[http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/ballc/oe/old_english.html]:

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Ic grete þe -- I greet you

Wes þu hal; Hal wes þu; Sy þu hal; Wes gesund; Beoð ge gesunde -- Hail! Farewell!

Wilcume -- Welcome!

Wilcuman la, mine hlafordas -- Welcome, my lords!

Leofe broðra -- Dear brothers

Sweostor min -- My sister ...

Leof -- Friend, (or Sir)

Hlaford min -- My lord,

Hlæfdige min -- My lady,

Hwæt eart þu? -- Who are you?

Beowulf is min nama -- My name is Beowulf

Min nama is Michael -- My name is Michael

Wa me -- Woe is me!

Eala -- Alas! Lo!

La -- Lo! Oh! Ah!

Wa la wa -- Woe!

Giese; Gea -- Yes

Nese -- No

Ic þe þancas do -- Thank you [I give you thanks]

Ic sæcge eow þancas -- Thank you [I say you thanks]

Ic þancie þe -- Thank you [I thank you]



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Soð is þæt þu segst! -- What you say is true!

Wel þu writst -- You write well

Ic nat -- I don't know

A number of letters change pronunciation depending on what letters are around them. F and s were pronounced as they are today, unless they were between two vowels or a vowel and a voiced consonant, in which case they were pronounced v and z respectively. The same goes for the distinctly unmodern letters thorn (þ) and eth (ð). Both were pronounced like the “th” in thin, unless between vowels (etc.), in which case they were pronounced like the “th” in then.

C and g had another set of variations: Before back vowels (a, o, and u), they were pronounced like c in cat and g in guess; before front vowels (y, i, e, and æ), they were pronounced like ch in chat and y in yes. The same goes for h: At the beginning of a word, is pronounced like our h; otherwise, next to back vowels, it sounded like the ch in the German name Bach; next to front vowels, it sounded like the ch in the German word ich.

Plus, there were several double consonants: sc was pronounced like sh in ship; cg was pronounced like the j and dg in judge; hl, hr, hn, and hw were pronounced like l, r, n, and w but unvoiced (breathy).

Vowels are actually pretty easy. The short vowels were a as in Bach, e as in bet, i as in bit, o as in cot (pronounced as they do in England today), u as in book, y as in French tu or German ü, and æ (ash) as in bat. The long vowels, often marked with an accent acute (´), were á as in father, é like the French é, í as in beet, ó as in French eau, ú as in boot, and y and æ as longer versions of themselves.

There were also three double vowels, each with short and long versions: ea was eh or ay followed by ah, eo was eh or ay followed by a short o, and ie was ih or ee followed by eh. But you can get a sense of the sound of Old English if you just pronounce the vowels as you might in Italian or Spanish.