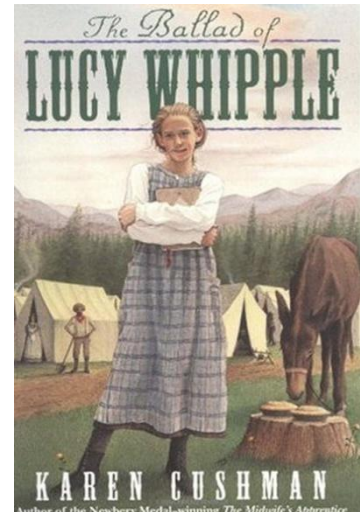


## A Discussion Guide

# The Ballad of Lucy Whipple

by Karen Cushman



**General themes:** *Adapting, Self-discovery*

## Questions for Discussion

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- What do you think of Lucy's mother's decision to move the family to California? Do you agree or disagree with Lucy's reaction? Why?
- How does the author portray the rough-and-tumble atmosphere of 1880s California? Why do you think she included Butte's death?
- What do Lucy's letters tell you about her? Why do you think she sometimes expresses different feelings in her letters from those in her narrative?
- How does Lucy react to instances of prejudice and injustice?
- How do the adults in the story sometimes act like children? How do the children in the story sometimes take on adult roles?
- Compare and contrast Lucy's feelings about California at the beginning of the story and at the end. Why do her feelings change?

## Discussion across the Texts

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- Catherine, Alyce, and Matilda all come from medieval England, but their social circumstances are vastly different. What parts of their experiences are the same? How do they differ? What might they think of one another? What could they learn from one another?
- Lucy and Rodzina both journey across the United States. Are there places where Rodzina follows in Lucy's footsteps? How do the girls feel about their journeys? What do they learn about others? About themselves?
- How is each girl's name important to her sense of self? In what ways is "Birdy" an appropriate nickname for Catherine? Why is it important to Rodzina that people pronounce her Polish name correctly? Why do Lucy and Alyce rename themselves? What must Matilda discover before she can accept the name Matilda Bone?

- What are society's expectations for each young woman? What challenges does she face? What character traits help her to face these challenges?

## **Questions for Adults and Young People to Share**

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- How do adults and young people in the books learn to appreciate and accept one another's strengths and weaknesses?
- What kinds of mothers and mother figures appear in the books? How do they help to shape the young characters' experiences? What can modern readers learn from the mother-daughter relationships in the books?
- In what ways might adult readers and young readers react differently to the characters and themes in the books? What are the reasons for this?

## **Author's Craft**

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- Why do you think the author chooses to tell each story from the perspective of only one character? How does she let her readers know what the other characters in the story are thinking and feeling?
- Do you think the author always agrees with her characters' opinions and actions? How do you know?
- How does the author's inclusion of journals and letters in her books help you to understand the characters?
- What role does the author's use of humor play in her books? How does she use characters' misunderstandings to create humorous situations? How would her books be different without humor?