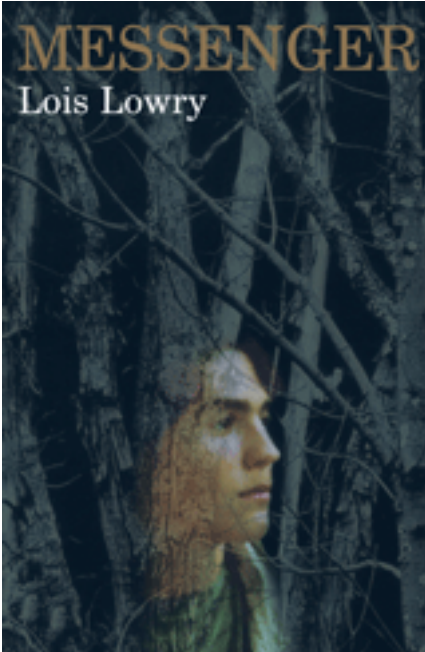


Press Release



Messenger

by Lois Lowry

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About the Book

He carried messages for [the people]. It was his job. He thought that when it came time to be assigned his true name, Messenger would be the choice. But this evening Matty was not carrying or collecting a message . . . He headed to a clearing he knew of, a place that lay just beyond a thick stand of bristly pines . . . He needed privacy for this thing he was discovering about himself: a place to test it in secret, to weigh his own fear for what it meant.

Six years earlier, Matty had come to Village as a scrappy and devious little boy. Back then he liked to call himself The Fiercest of the Fierce. But since that time, Matty had grown almost into a man under the care of Seer, a blind man whose special sight had earned him that name. Now Matty hopes he will soon be given his true name, and he hopes it will be Messenger. But strange changes are taking place in Village. Once a utopian community that prided itself on the welcome it gave to newcomers, Village will soon be closed to all outsiders. As one of the only people able to travel safely through the dangerous Forest, Matty must deliver the message of Village's closing and try to persuade Seer's daughter, Kira, to return with him before it's too late. But Forest has grown hostile to Matty too, and he must risk everything to fight his way through it, armed only with an emerging power he cannot yet explain or understand.

About the Author

Lois Lowry first captivated young readers in 1977 with her award-winning first novel, *Summer to Die*. Today, her canon consists of more than thirty books beloved by both children and adults, including the endearing and ever-popular stories about Anastasia

Krupnik and her precocious little brother, Sam. Lowry was awarded the Newbery Medal in 1990 for *Number the Stars*, a fictionalized account of the true story of how the Christians of Denmark saved the entire Jewish population of the country from the Nazis, and she received it again in 1994 for *The Giver*. Set in a utopian community where there is no pain, fear, or war, *The Giver* is a gripping story that asks penetrating questions about how we live as a society. Perhaps Lowry's best-known book, it has been adopted by several community reading projects. *The Giver* is also one of the most widely banned books in America, appearing as #14 on the American Library Association's list of Top 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990–2000. In 2000, Houghton Mifflin published the companion book to *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue*, which also garnered much attention and praise. Her most recent novel, *The Silent Boy* (2003), received the Chicago Tribune Young Adult Fiction Prize, and she is the 2003 United States nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Medal, the highest international distinction given to any author or illustrator of children's books.

Lowry lives and writes in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in a house dominated by a very shaggy Tibetan terrier named Bandit. When she is not writing, she enjoys spending time with her four grandchildren and planning renovations for her newly purchased home in Maine, a 235-year-old hilltop farmhouse surrounded by meadows, apple trees, flower gardens, and wildlife.

An Interview with Lois Lowry

Q) What inspired you to write *Messenger*?

A) It's a tough decision to pick up something that you thought you had put down permanently. More than that . . . I had said, often and in public, that I was not going to "explain" what had happened to Jonas at the end of *The Giver*.

But the reading audience was dissatisfied with that. People didn't like the ambiguity of *The Giver*'s conclusion. And they let me know it, in hundreds — probably thousands, by now — of letters and e-mails.

Now, I don't generally cater to the reading public's whims and wishes. But readers' reaction affected me, I think, in that it made me want to sort out things for myself. I did it first, in *Gathering Blue*, with a brief reference to Jonas. But then I was left with a second ambiguous ending . . . and another character I loved and didn't want to let go of: Matt. So I simply decided to follow Matt as he moved on in his life, and to portray the others — like Jonas, Gabe, and Kira — in the places they had made for themselves.

That should do it, I think; and "trilogy" has a nice ring to it, a feeling of a boxed set and some finality. (But someone has recently asked me about the mysterious character named Trademaster, and whether maybe I would like to write more about him. Oh, dear.)

Q) Was it especially challenging to write *Messenger* knowing that it was a companion to *The Giver* (1993) and *Gathering Blue* (2000), both of which received much critical acclaim?

A) When I'm working on something, I think of it as a thing unto itself. Of course, I used some characters from previous books in *Messenger*. But the story is new, the setting is

different, and the characters have grown older and changed. So to me it was an individual book.

There will always be readers, critics, and so on, who make comparisons. And those who have loved a book and simply want the same book again — they are bound to be disappointed.

But I don't do that myself when I'm writing.

Q) A number of readers ask you about Christian imagery in *The Giver* and also in *Gathering Blue*. How do you respond to this question?

A) What I like about provocative books in general is that they allow readers to bring their own beliefs — political as well as religious — to the fiction, to fit them in, to find the symbolism. That has happened with *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*, and I'm quite certain it will happen again with *Messenger*, perhaps to a greater degree because there is clearly a sacrificial element to it at the end. Christian? Maybe, maybe not. A lot of Jewish people, I know (because I hear from them), find their own beliefs validated in *The Giver*. And I've heard the same from a number of Mormons, and a few Buddhists. There is a universality to theology, I think, certain primal symbols, so a story need not be exclusive to one faith.

When readers ask me, I tell them that whatever they find in the book is what is there. When they ask me *my* religion, I tell them that it is irrelevant.

Q) One of the main characters in *Messenger* does not survive. Was it difficult for you to make this decision?

A) A long time ago I wrote a book called *Autumn Street*, in which one of the principal characters — a little boy named Charles — is killed near the end. I knew from the beginning pages that Charles was going to die. I knew it when he first appeared, feisty and funny, and it was always looming there ahead of me as I wrote. What I didn't know was how hard it would be, how painful, to write of it.

The same was true with *Messenger*. I knew what the end would be when I wrote the beginning. Growing to love the character, as one does while writing, doesn't change the ending. But the day of writing the ending is tough. You mourn.

Q) *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue*, and *Messenger* are different from your other novels in that they are more fantastical and are considered by some to be science fiction. Do you enjoy writing in this genre, or do you prefer writing more realistic fiction?

A) I like writing different kinds of things. I loved doing the bits of historical research for *Number the Stars* and *The Silent Boy*. I loved speaking in the voice of a dog when I wrote *Stay! Keeper's Story*. And I find it great fun to do fantasy because my imagination gets to go out and play.

What I would find dull would be writing in the same genre again and again.

Q) Your book *The Giver* has been chosen by several community reading programs around the country. Why do you think these communities are attracted to *The Giver*?

A) *The Giver* is unique as a community read because its appeal crosses generations; it is a book that eighty-year-olds can discuss with twelve-year-olds, and the issues it raises are relevant to them and everyone in between. It is really remarkable to speak to an audience in a town that has all read the same book . . . and to hear adults listen with respect to the questions that children ask, and vice versa.

The nice thing is that it's not my words or opinions or ideas being inflicted on them. It is that the book provokes thought and discussion; it provides an avenue for communication and for people of all ages to share their own ideas.

Q) What are you working on now?

A) I never talk a whole lot about something in progress. Not because I am being coy . . . or secretive . . . but because talking about something before it's complete somehow makes it dissipate, and then I have trouble grabbing it back.

But I can tell you that I am doing a lighthearted book, a bit of a romp, with a lot of stock characters, mistaken identities, romance, villains with black underwear and bad breath, and a happy ending all around.

Praise for *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*

THE GIVER (1993)

Winner of the 1994 Newbery Medal
Boston Globe–Horn Book Honor Award
School Library Journal Best Books of the Year
ALA Notable Book
Booklist Editors' Choice

"The story is skillfully written; the air of disquiet is delicately insinuated. And the theme of balancing the values of freedom and security is beautifully presented." — *Horn Book*, starred review

"Wrought with admirable skill — the emptiness and menace underlying this Utopia emerge step by inexorable step: a richly provocative novel." — *Kirkus Reviews*

"*The Giver* is a powerful story. It should take its place with Orwell's 1984." — VOYA

"Lowry is once again in top form raising many questions while answering few, and unwinding a tale fit for the most adventurous readers." — *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"This tightly plotted story . . . will stay with readers for a long time." — *School Library Journal*, starred review

"*The Giver* is a powerful and provocative novel." — *New York Times*

GATHERING BLUE (2000)

Booklist Editors' Choice

A *New York Times* bestseller

A Massachusetts Book Award Finalist

New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing

"Lowry is a master at creating worlds, both real and imagined, and this incarnation of our civilization some time in the future is one of her strongest creations." — *Booklist*, starred review

"A fully realized world of drama, suspense, and even humor. Reader's won't forget these memorable characters or their struggles in an inhospitable world." — *School Library Journal*, starred review

"A top writer, in top form." — *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"A wonderful tale of deceit, loyalty, community, strength of character, and Kira's search for truth. A thought-provoking novel . . . highly recommended." — *Book Report*, starred review

"This book is simply amazing." — *Five Owls*, starred review

Lois Lowry: A Biographical Essay

As a child, and later as an adult, Lois Lowry moved with her family all over the world. Strong family ties and the leaving behind of people and places she came to love play a central theme in much of her work. Lois Lowry's rich life story is best told in her own words:

I've always felt that I was fortunate to have been born the middle child of three. My older sister, Helen, was very much like our mother: gentle, family-oriented, eager to please. Little brother Jon was the only boy and had interests that he shared with our father; together they were always working on electric trains and Erector Sets, and later, they always seemed to have their heads under the raised hood of a car. That left me in between, exactly where I wanted to be: on my own. I was a solitary child who lived in the world of books and my own imagination.

Because my father was a career military officer — an army dentist — I lived all over the world. I was born in Hawaii, moved from there to New York, spent the years of World War II in my mother's Pennsylvania hometown, and from there went to Tokyo when I was eleven. High school was back in New York City, but by the time I went to college (Brown University in Rhode Island), my family was living in Washington, D.C.

I married young. Women often did so in those days. I had just had my nineteenth birthday — finished my sophomore year in college — when I married a naval officer and continued the odyssey that military life frequently is. California. Connecticut. Florida. South Carolina. Finally, Cambridge, Massachusetts, when my husband left the service and entered Harvard Law School; and then to Maine — by this time with four children under the age of five in tow.

My children grew up in Maine. So did I. I returned to college at the University of Southern Maine, got my degree, went to graduate school, and finally began to write professionally, the thing I had dreamed of doing since those childhood years when I endlessly scribbled stories and poems in notebooks. After my marriage ended in 1977, when I was forty, I settled into the life I have led ever since. Today I live and write in Cambridge, in a house dominated by a very shaggy Tibetan terrier named Bandit. Weekends find me in Maine, where we have an early-nineteenth-century farmhouse surrounded by flower gardens, woods, and wildlife.

My books have varied in content and style. Yet it seems to me that all of them deal, essentially, with the same general theme: the importance of human connections. *A Summer to Die*, my first book, was a highly fictionalized retelling of the early death of my sister, and of the effect of such a loss on a family. *Number the Stars*, set in a different culture and era, tells the same story: that of the role that we humans play in the lives of our fellow beings.

The Giver, *Gathering Blue*, and *Messenger* take place against the background of yet another very different culture and time. Though broader in scope than my earlier books, they nonetheless speak to the same concern: the vital need of people to be aware of their interdependence, not only with each other, but also with the world and its environment.

My older son was a fighter pilot in the United States Air Force. His death in the cockpit of a warplane tore away a piece of my world. But it left me, too, with a wish to honor him by joining the many others trying to find a way to end conflict on this very fragile earth.

I am a grandmother now. For my own grandchildren — and for all those of their generation — I try, through writing, to convey my passionate awareness that we live intertwined on this planet and that our future depends on our caring more, and doing more, for one another.