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SYNOPSIS

Chap. 1: Brat, a homeless thirteen-year-old girl, awakens on a dung heap. She steals food and works as an itinerant harvest hand. Village boys call her a dung beetle. A sharp-eyed midwife offers food for work and renames her Beetle.

Chap. 2: Beetle hates to see village boys tormenting the orange cat. Jack and another boy toss it in a sack to drown it in a pond. Beetle retrieves it and lays it on the dung heap. After supper, both cat and cheese have disappeared. Two days later on Lady Day (March 25), he comes to share Beetle's cheese.

Chap. 3: Jane is the village's only midwife. The mother of six who died in infancy, she works energetically, but without enthusiasm. She considers her apprentice as cheap labor and no competition. Beetle's tasks include housework and gathering honey and herbs, leeches, and spider webs. On calls, she carries supplies, but remains outside while Jane delivers the baby. Villagers dislike Jane for demanding a fee and take out their hostility on Beetle. In spring, Jack and Wat throw stones at her and the cat. Before Mayday (May 1), Robert Weaver and Thomas the Stutterer summon Jane to attend Kate in the field. For the first time, Beetle watches a delivery. From then on, she watches through the windows to learn the fundamentals of midwifery.

Chap. 4: In summer, Beetle wonders about Jane's secret errands to the miller. On June 22, Beetle goes on a hasty errand to Meg at the manor dairy and returns by the Old North Road. She spies Jane with the baker and incurs their wrath. At noon, the miller demands a midwife. Beetle tries to help until Jane arrives to deliver the baby. She drags Beetle back home and berates her for weeks after.

Chap. 5: In high summer, Jane breaks a leg. In her place Beetle goes to the fair on July 15 at Gobnet-Under-Green. She enjoys puppets, singers, horse races, and soothsayers. Late in the afternoon, she purchases leather flasks and water from a murdered man for Jane and receives a comb in the bargain. After a man mistakes her for Alyce, she adopts the name.

Chap. 6: When Alyce reveals her new name, Jane is grumpy. The cat chooses Purr as its name. Village boys try to kiss Alyce, who climbs a willow. When Will falls into the water, the other boys run away. Alyce pushes a branch within reach to save him.

Chap. 7: One autumn morning, Robert Weaver finds strange footprints. People fear the Devil is nearby. The priest catches the miller stealing grain and finds Grommet Smith in the haymow with the pig boy. The next day, Wat claims to have seen a hairy demon on the manor road. Villagers find Wat eating William Reese's dinner. The next day, Jack and his friends sleep on the job of clearing brush. Two days later, villagers find the baker waiting for Jane. Alyce tosses wood

blocks shaped like hooves into the river.

Chap. 8: In September, Jane and Alyce make soap, cider, and wine. Alyce gathers apples from the abbey gardens. On her way, she hears Will calling for help for Tansy, his cow. Alyce croons to Tansy until near evening, when Will delivers twin calves. Her skill grows in October and November.

Chap. 9: Because the boys tease Purr, Alyce threatens to turn them into women. When Joan the bailiff's wife summons Jane, Alyce remains in the wet until after dawn. Jane sends her for pepper and herbs. Alyce returns and stays with Joan while Jane moves on to Lady Agnes. Joan names her new daughter Alyce.

Chap. 10: Alyce works harder at learning midwifery. Early in November, she finds a six-year-old boy sleeping in the cold. She feeds him, chases away village boys, and learns that his name is Runt. She renames him Edward after the king. Before Jane returns, she sends Edward to the manor to work with threshers.

Chap. 11: One November morning, Matthew Blunt summons Alyce to help Emma, his mother, give birth. Jane flies into a rage. Alyce works at the delivery until noon, then summons Jane, who turns the infant and works until the mother can deliver it. On November 11, Martinmas afternoon, Alyce leaves in despair at her failure.

Chap. 12: Alyce fears she is too stupid to be a midwife. The next morning, she gets a job in the kitchen with innkeeper John Dark and his wife Jennet. At Christmas, she decorates the hall and roasts fowl, but is still low-spirited. Shortly before February, Magister Richard Reese sits writing an encyclopedia. She observes him and learns letters and numbers. He learns that she wants a place in the world.

Chap. 13: In May, Reese decides to stay another season. Will appears and disputes Alyce's story about failing Emma. That same month, Jane dictates to Reese about using sage tea to thwart miscarriage. Jane confides that Alyce gave up.

Chap. 14: Alyce visits Edward, whom she would love to mother.

Chap. 15: Alyce chides him for saying she is his sister. She tells him a story and sleeps on the straw pile beside him. While workers wash sheep, Edward matches ewe with lamb. Alyce begins to help and washes herself and her clothes, then bids Edward goodbye.

Chap. 16: One warm evening, riders bring a merchant's wife in labor. Jennet sends for Jane, who is away. On June 1, Alyce delivers a baby boy.

Chap. 17: The merchant invites Alyce to come with them. Reese tries to hire her to help his widowed sister. Alyce ponders her choices and chooses to return to Jane. The midwife rejects her, but Alyce persists.

TIME LINE

1272-1307 Edward I is king of England.

1290 Margaret, Queen of Scots, dies; Edward I is

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- asked to pick her successor.
Dante Alighieri writes *La Vita Nuova*.
Jews are expelled from England.
Teutonic knights finish a 30-year campaign to conquer and Christianize Prussia.
- 1291** Edward I names John Baliol as King of Scots.
May 8 Muslims capture Acre, the last Crusader city in the Holy Land.
Aug. 1 Swiss cantons form alliance that is the basis of Swiss Confederation.
- 1292** Marco Polo returns to Europe.
1295 Scots depose John Baliol and sign alliance with France.
Edward I summons the Model Parliament.
- 1296** English invade and annex Scotland.
1297 **Sept. 11** Scots, led by William Wallace, defeat English at Stirling Bridge.
- 1298** **July 22** Edward I defeats Scots at Falkirk.
Marco Polo dictates his memoirs.
Spinning wheel is invented in Germany.
- ca. 1300** Decimal system is introduced in Europe.
Maoris begin settling in New Zealand.
- 1305** Pope Clement V moves papacy to Avignon, France.
English capture and kill William Wallace.
- 1306** Robert the Bruce is crowned king of Scots.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A native of Chicago, born October 4, 1941, to Arthur and Loretta Heller Lipski, Cushman spent her preteens in Tarzana, California. She learned to love books in childhood and wrote plays, essays, and short stories. After graduating from Stanford University with degrees in English and Greek, she worked in customer service at Pacific Bell, and married a professor, Philip Cushman, father of their daughter Leah. After completing an M. A. with her husband in counseling and human behavior from the United States International University and an M. A. in museum studies from John F. Kennedy University, she taught part-time and edited *Museum Studies Journal*. At her husband's insistence, she began a career in freelance writing in 1989 and, after considerable primary research from letters, journals, and personal papers for the first novel, quickly produced three award winners.

CRITIC'S CORNER

Cushman is one of the many authors who writes as instinct directs her. In 1995, she won a Newbery honor award for *Catherine, Called Birdy* plus a Carl Sandburg Award, Golden Kite Award, Bay Area Book Reviewers' Association award, Cuffie Award, and a best book from *School Library Journal*, *Parent's Choice*, American Booksellers, International Board on Books for Young People, and Young Adult Library Services Association. She quickly produced *The Midwife's Apprentice*, which won a 1996 Newbery Medal for Outstanding Children's Literature, Booklist choice book, New York Public Library recommended book, ALA Best Book, and Best Book for Young Adults. From deft description of young girls in medieval England, she pursued a third book, *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple*, set in a predominantly male California mining camp. She has returned to the Middle Ages for *Matilda Bone*, a work in progress.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss apprenticeship

2. To describe the demands of midwifery
3. To characterize medieval village life
4. To acknowledge the importance of self-esteem
5. To recount dilemmas
6. To explain the influence of superstition
7. To note the value of self-reliance during difficult times
8. To list images of motherhood and nurturing
9. To account for cruelty to animals, homeless people, and girls
10. To determine climactic moments in character action

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To outline the relationship between Edward and Alyce
2. To discuss the work of a Reese, bailiff, and priest
3. To account for Alyce's despair
4. To characterize stages in Alyce's education
5. To contrast birthing difficulties
6. To evaluate the work of an innkeeper
7. To list evidence of bullying and cruelty
8. To evaluate Richard Reese's interest in Alyce
9. To contrast Alyce's two attempts to return to Jane
10. To summarize the importance of herbs
11. To discuss the village economy
12. To chart events that bring Alyce back to midwifery

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

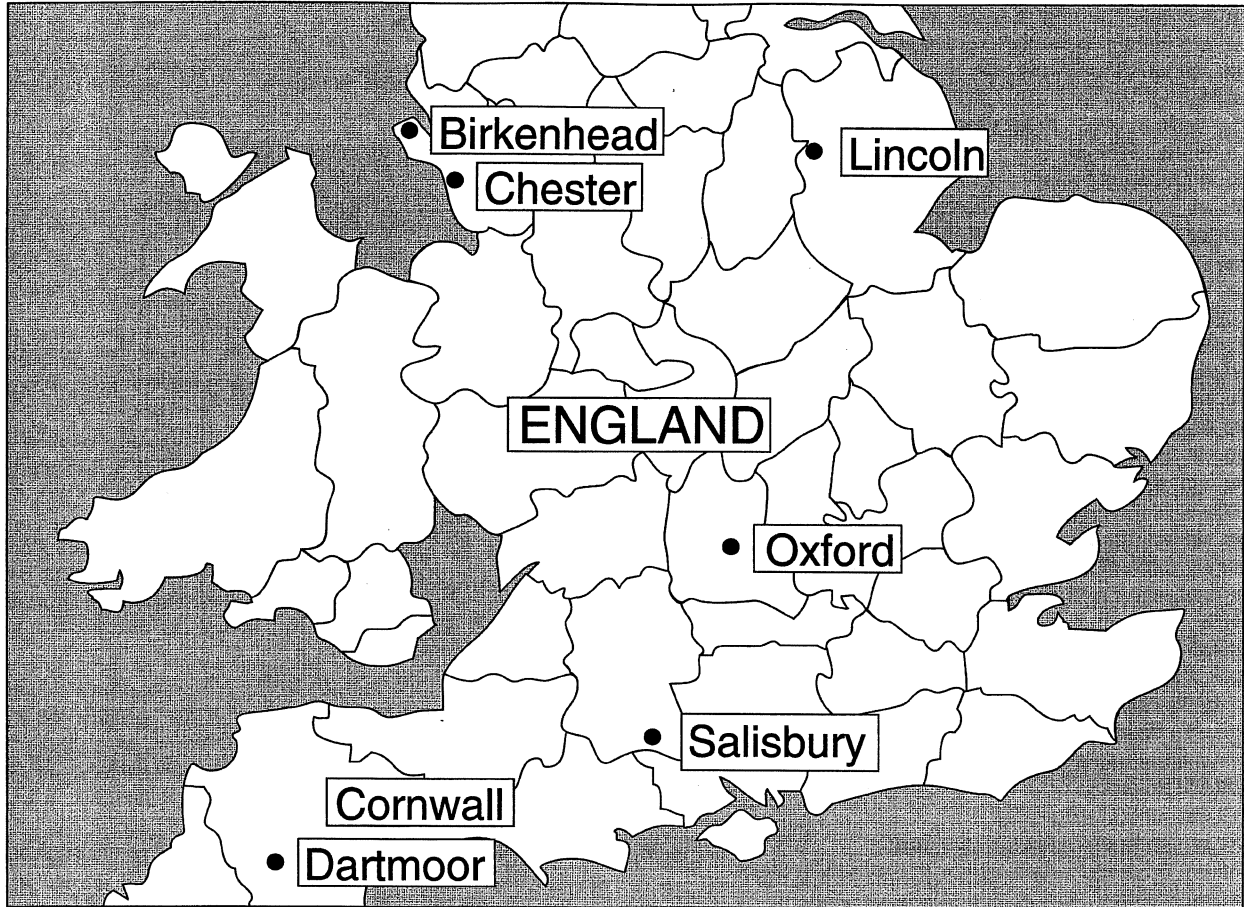
For a better understanding of Karen Cushman's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

historic milieu the setting of fictional events in a real period of history. Anchored to the Middle Ages, the story identifies Edward I as king, which places the action sometime during his reign (1272-1307). The area is southwestern England. Social patterns identify the privileged with comfortable manor houses apart from the farmers, crafters, and merchants of villages and towns. For laboring-class people like Jane and her apprentice, there are few opportunities to travel and less chance of receiving skilled, sanitary medical care or of learning to read and write. In typical style, the inn is named the Cat and Cheese, a pair of concrete nouns that can be drawn on a signboard to identify the building for the illiterate, which includes over 97% of the population. Midwifery and medical practice are mixed with superstition, nature lore, and witchery. Because of the power of the Catholic church over the nation, dates are identified with saint's days and church holidays.

motif a pattern or predictable arrangement of elements to express an abstract theme in a story or other artistic work. Central to Alyce's identification of self is her emerging feeling of motherhood. She enjoys loving the cat and babying Edward, who fibs harmlessly to the manor cook that Alyce is his sister. When given a choice of staying at the inn, serving a merchant's wife, or nursing Richard Reese's widowed sister, she chooses to return to the failed apprenticeship. In her mind are the infants she has helped birth and a desire to know more about midwifery.

symbol a concrete object that stands for a complex or abstract idea or relationship. The dung heap is a strong symbol for a story about a homeless, rejected child. It represents offal or refuse, but it also epitomizes the child's pragmatism in staying warm amid decaying animal droppings. When the cat appears dead from drowning, Alyce buries it in dung to

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retain its body warmth. Her instincts for nursing are sound. The cat repays her with loyalty and affection.

third person narrative a story or a series of actions told from the vantage point of a single observer at the heart of the action. The story is narrated from outside the realm of action by a knowledgeable voice who knows Alyce's inmost qualms and doubts. The narrator unfolds the story in chronological order as though observing the actions as they occur. The author's note parallels the narration, thus identifying the narrator as Cushman.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

Karen Cushman sets her novel in the Middle Ages to illustrate the importance of apprenticing to prepare the young for careers. Whereas children in families might learn their parents' trades through observation and assistance, Alyce has no choice but to fend for herself with strangers in an unknown village. The crude lifestyle, problems with fleas, homeless beggars, and superstitions epitomize the hardships of living in primitive times. Moving from one warm spot to another, whether stable or dung heap, attests to the difficulties faced by the poor, particularly young orphans like Alyce and Edward.

For a fuller representation of time and place, Cushman exemplifies numerous outside tasks, such as tending livestock, mounding hay, taking grain to be ground into flour, and traveling on foot to the local fair. Washing keeps women occupied at the nearby stream, just as plowing requires that

men brave the elements to prepare land for planting. Alyce gets her share of instruction in gathering nuts and making soap and candles.

A contrast in locales occurs when Alyce leaves Jane's employ to work at John Dark's inn. Cushman describes the hostel as a large stone cottage with a stable, a second story kitchen, and a loft. Visitors eat at large tables or sleep under them. Alyce uplifts her spirits at Christmas by hanging holly and ivy from the beams, which are charred from the company's dependence on the fireplace for heat and cooking. The sharing of a commons room puts Alyce close enough to Richard Reese for her to begin learning her letters. When the merchant's wife arrives in labor, there is little privacy as husband and inn staff decide what to do to end her torment by a "stomach worm."

In addition to village and inn, Cushman takes Alyce from commoners to the manor to visit Edward. Functioning on the level of the lowest of staff members, she calls at the barn, passes workers coming in from the fields with their implements and moving bales, and locates Edward at his chores in the hen house. In the kitchen, the two enjoy bread and bacon for supper and sleep on a mound of straw in the corner. Edward adds a dimension to the manor by describing how masons built a new tower out of mortar and brick. The idyll ends the next day at the river, where workers shear sheep and Alyce takes time for a scrub and shampoo.

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CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about the Middle Ages, midwifery, women's history, and other issues and topics arising from the novel, consult these sources:

Books

Carol Adams, et al., *From Workshop to Warfare: The Lives of Medieval Women*

Aliki, *A Medieval Feast*

Norman E. Cantor, *The Medieval Reader*

Jennifer Croft, *Careers in Midwifery*

James Harpur, *Revelations: The Medieval World*

Vicki Leon, *Outrageous Women of the Middle Ages* and *Uppity Women of the Middle Ages*

Tony McAleavy, *Medieval Britain: Conquest, Power, and the People*

Anno Mitsimasa, *Anno's Medieval World*

Colin Platt, *The Atlas of Medieval Man*

Elaine Power, *Medieval Women*

Time-Life Eds., *What Life Was Like in the Age of Chivalry: Medieval Europe, 800-1500*

Computer software

Castle Explorer (Dorling Kindersley)

The Medieval Era Through Art and Music (Knowledge Unlimited)

Internet

"Books About Medieval Life," <funnelweb.utcc.utk.edu/~etsulliv/medieval.htm>

"England's Warrior-King Edward I," <www.thehistorynet.com/MilitaryHistory/articles/12953_text.htm>

"The Medieval Castle Page," <www.radix.net/~mfeinberg/castles>

"Medieval England," <www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/subjects/british_isles/england/england.html>

"Medieval History Home Page," <historymedren.miningco.com/mbody.htm?PID=2765&C OB=home>

"Medieval Life," <www.demon.co.uk/apl385/medieval/index.htm>

"THE MEDIEVAL MIDWIFE: The School of Trotula," <www.millersv.edu/~english/homepage/duncan/medfem/trotual.html>

"The Middle Ages," <pw2.netcom.com/~giardina/medieval.html>

"Middle Ages Internet Links," <mse.byu.edu/mse/InSci/286/>

Rogers, Nicole, "Wimmenspeak on Midwifery Lore," <www.murdoch.edu.au/elaw/issues/v2n3/rogers.txt>

Videos

Castle (PBS)

Life in the Middle Ages (Knowledge Unlimited)

The Middle Ages (Thomas Klise)

The Middle Ages Series (Knowledge Unlimited)

The Prince and the Pauper (MGM/JA)

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Karen Cushman's *The Midwife's Apprentice* should include these aspects:

Themes

- poverty
- survival
- immaturity
- responsibility

- identity
- self-knowledge
- challenge
- accomplishment
- persistence

Motifs

- coping with a difficult employer
- experiencing rejection and self-doubt
- learning through hands-on experience
- comforting suffering people
- going out in the world alone

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Chap. and page numbers allow you to reread the passage from which the item is taken.

1. When animal droppings and garbage and spoiled straw are piled up in a great heap, the rotting and moiling give forth heat. (Chap. 1, p. 1)
(*Brat, who has no bed to call her own, relies on heat from the chemical process by which decaying matter breaks down into compost. The generated warmth is enough to protect her from cold wind; the surface is soft enough for sleeping.*)
2. And two days later (a holiday for the village, it being Lady Day, but not for Beetle, for the midwife would not feed those who did not work, even on Lady Day) there was the cat sitting on the fence post, licking his white patch to make it whiter still, waiting for Beetle and a bit of cheese. (Chap. 2, p. 10)
(*Lady Day, which was instituted in 430 A. D., began as a crucial date in Christian theology. It falls on March 25, nine months before Christ's birth on December 25, and represents the Annunciation, an event frequently depicted in art. The scene shows the angel's appearance to the Virgin Mary telling her that she would bear a child.*)
3. One morning not too long before Mayday, Kate the weaver's daughter lay down in the field and declared her baby was coming right there and right then. (Chap. 3, p. 15)
(*Mayday is traditionally a joyful holiday on which children fill May baskets with flowers and hang them on neighbors' doors. More formal celebrations call for the selection of a May queen and court and dancers to frolic and dance around the Maypole while weaving patterns with ribbons raying out from the top of the pole.*)
4. Curious about this unusual behavior, Beetle began to follow the midwife when she went on these errands, creeping behind trees and under fences, careful to keep out of sight, and the cat stalked along behind her, so they looked like a Corpus Christi Day procession on its way to the churchyard—the midwife, the girl, and the cat. (Chap. 4, p. 18)
(*The Thursday after Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi [Body of Christ] Day, honors the Eucharist or communion. Early in Christianity, partakers believed in transubstantiation—a miracle that caused the bread and wine served during the sacrament to change into the flesh and blood of Christ.*)
5. She sang to herself as she worked, a tuneless tune that Beetle supposed a witch's spell until she recognized it as

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"Summer Is A-coming In" sung by someone who lacked the practice and the heart and the sweetness to sing. (Chap. 5, p. 26)

(Written around 1300, the Anglo-Saxon folk song "Sumer Is A-Cumin In" celebrates the end of winter to people who were glad to escape dark, dank huts for pleasurable activities outdoors. Geoffrey Chaucer replicates the seasonal spirit in his "Prologue to The Canterbury Tales.")

6. I did it for else you'd have drowned and gone to Hell, a drunken loudmouth bully like you, and I would have helped send you there and I could not have that, now, could I? (Chap. 6, p. 29)
(According to medieval Christian beliefs, people who died with unforgiven sins on their consciences bore punishment in the afterlife for their wrongdoing. People on the verge of death called for a priest to administer last rights, which included shrift, an opportunity to confess sin.)
7. Robert and Thomas and the priest, whispering paternosters, followed the prints all the way to the mill where, crossing themselves, they unlatched the door. (Chap. 7, p. 43)
(In fearful times during the Middle Ages, superstitious people recited the Lord's Prayer, which in Latin is called a paternoster, literally "Our father." The prayer was reputedly effective against witches and black magic and could ward off night-flying demons on All Hallow's Eve or Walpurgis night, the forerunners of Halloween.)
8. Alyce lighted Jane's way through the gloomy night with a rushlight that hissed and sputtered in the mist. (Chap. 9, pp. 55-56)
(One of the cheapest and least productive forms of lighting was the rushlight, a cheap, fast-burning light composed of a dried reed dipped in fat. Unlike candles, the rushlight produced a faltering blaze and gave off a foul smell and hot drippings.)
9. Early one cold November day, before the pale, watery sun could light up the morning sky, Alyce left the midwife's cottage and hurried to the cowshed to see Tansy's twins, now called Baldred and Billfrith after the saintly local hermits, and give them some parsnip tops to munch. (Chap. 10, p. 62)
(Hermits were religious figures who withdrew from society to pray and meditate and to advise visitors to their cells. They occupied a small space either in a remote cave or within a religious complex, with which the occupants had little communication except for food and necessities. Hagiography links St. Baldred loosely to St. Bilfrith [or Bilfrid], a hermit goldsmith who designed the cover for the Gospels of St. Cuthbert some time between 698 to 740 A. D. The two saints' relics are housed at the shrine of St. Bede.)
10. Be assured I will not be far from here, and I promise to come back for Christmas and Easter and your saint's day. (Chap. 15, p. 103)
(Each Catholic maintains a spiritual connection with the saint on whose feast day they were born.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to

passages in the novel.

Questions 1-4 (Literal Level)

1. What does Alyce do to aid Jane?
(In the first stage of her apprenticeship, Alyce is shy and awkward. At Jane's command, she attends to minimal household chores—sweeping, lighting the fire, roasting meat, washing dishes, and dusting. Outdoors, she gathers honey, apples, and nuts, traps birds, and collects herbs, leeches, and spider webs. On calls to parturient women, she carries a basket of supplies and waits outside until the delivery is complete. When Jane needs more supplies, Alyce returns to the cottage and speeds back to the birthing chamber. At the end of a visit, she washes soiled linen and cleans the straw bed. After she learns more about the process of birthing, she begins looking through the window to observe how Jane aids women in labor.)
2. How does Alyce take on Jane's hard ways?
*(To Alyce and other villagers, Jane is hard-handed and sharp of tongue. She settles a price before delivering an infant and rejects cases involving parents who can't pay. To Alyce, she insists on steady work and refuses to feed her when she takes a holiday. She calls Alyce unflattering names, such as clodpole, lackwit fool, and dung beetle. When Alyce inadvertently learns of the affair with the baker, Jane hisses, "I'll turn you out in the cold again and break both your knees before I do."
*In nutting season, when Alyce encounters boys teasing the cat, she fights back with the forthright aggression she has learned from Jane. Flinging a handful of heavy nuts at the boys, she shouts, "Touch that cat again . . . and I will unstop this bottle of rat's blood and viper's flesh and summon the Devil, who will change you into women and henceforth each of you will giggle like a woman and wear dresses like a woman and give birth like a woman." The outburst startles the boys and Alyce with its effectiveness.)**
3. Why is Emma's delivery difficult?
*(When Matthew Blunt comes to Jane's cottage for a midwife for his mother Emma, he startles Jane by asking for Alyce. To the midwife's question, he insists that Emma wants the apprentice, who helped her sister Joan in childbirth. Raving like a mad dog, Jane disdains competition. She thrusts Alyce on her way, squawking "Such treachery! Such thievery! Eating my bread and stealing my mothers! Go!"
*To a hail of cook pots, Alyce hurries along to Adam Blunt's small smoky cottage and finds Emma warm with the effort of birthing. Alyce applies her skills of rubbing, crooning, and fussing over the mother and feeds her herb tea and wine, but the baby does not appear. In the afternoon, Alyce loses her confidence. She sends for Jane, who is able to bring the baby into the world.)**
4. How does Alyce's life change at the inn?
(At John Dark's inn, Alyce works at kitchen chores, sweeping, hauling water, making fires, and waiting tables. She strings ivy and holly greenery about the dining room for Christmas, but the season bears no relief. Her heart heavy with her failure at delivering Adam and Emma Blunt's child, she ignores the music and festivity at the inn while brooding over her self-image of nothingness.

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In February, Alyce begins watching Master Richard Reese at his writing. Demoralized as a failed midwife's apprentice, she keeps her eyes lowered, but observes the learned man at his scholarly task. While Richard pretends to teach the cat, Alyce absorbs the numbers and letters on the vellum page and begins practicing in the frost with a twig. Near the end of winter, Richard grows friendlier toward Alyce and asks what she wants from life. She is able to state her aims in simple terms: "a full belly, a contented heart, and a place in this world.")

Questions 5-7 (Interpretive Level)

5. How does Jane change Alyce's attitude toward failure? (A surprising turn in the story is Jane's arrival at the inn. She talks with Master Reese, who takes notes in his encyclopedic compendium. She summarizes the use of sage tea to avoid miscarriage and black alder bark and smut rye to stop hemorrhaging. She indicates that some cures require ground gemstones, but doesn't know anyone rich enough to have rubies for grinding into medicinal power.

In the exchange, Jane asks about Alyce, whom Will Russet indicated was working at the inn. Without question or prompt, Jane offers a small compliment, that Alyce was not the worst of her apprentices, but that she failed by not trying hard enough. In explanation of the type of apprentice who is best suited to midwifery, Jane states, "I need an apprentice who can do what I tell her, take what I give her, who can try and risk and fail and try again and not give up.")

6. How does Alyce's day with Edward uplift her? (At the manor, Alyce finds Edward at work and enjoys hearing how successful he has been in acquiring Lord Arnulf's attention. After exchanging news and sharing a meal, they perform Edward's job of matching ewes with lambs after the stockmen have sheared them. In the heat of the afternoon, Alyce tucks her skirt into her belt and wades into the river. The effort of working livestock ends with an afternoon wash in strong soap.

For the first time, Alyce realizes the pleasure in having clean nails and shiny skin. In privacy, she undertakes an all-over wash at an isolated spot upriver. She rubs her body with soap and gravel to make the skin tingle, then washes her hair. Staring at her reflection, she admits that she is pink, wrinkled, and maybe even pretty. After laundering her garments, she returns to the kitchen to dry by the fire.)

7. How does Alyce save the merchant's child? (When the prosperous-looking merchant arrives on a stormy night and asks for help with his wife's ailment, Alyce learns that she is "being devoured by a stomach worm." Jennet touches the woman's abdomen and surmises that she is in labor. Although the merchant declares that the woman is barren, Jennet sends for the midwife, who is not available. In her absence, the woman cries louder into the night.

With a retort to her nagging fears, Alyce takes over the birthing. She walks the woman around the room to allow gravity to pull the fetus into place. She doses the woman with ale and rubs and oils her skin. She uses up the strategies of the midwife and devises some of her own. At dawn, Alyce delivers the baby boy on the wooden table and ties off the cord with a torn scrap. With pride in

achievement, she hands the merchant his newborn son. She laughs for the first time, noting that it is June 1, the month named for Juno, goddess of childbirth.)

Questions 8 and 9 (Critical Level)

8. How does Alyce manage choices? (At the book's beginning, Alyce has few choices but to stay warm in a dung heap and to beg for work and food. By the end of the story, she has achieved the status of midwife. She can travel to Salisbury with the merchant and become a nanny to the baby. Richard Reese, who is returning to Oxford, offers to take Alyce with him to care for his widowed sister. Jennet indicates by her scowls that she wants Alyce to remain at the inn.

Seated in the meadow chewing on grass, Alyce ponders the three choices and her wants. Her thoughts turn to the merchant's son and Tansy's calf. To herself, she admits that she is neither an inn girl, nursery maid, or old woman's companion. She concludes that she is "a midwife's apprentice with a newborn hope of being someday a midwife herself. She had much still to learn." Wisely, she returns to Jane, the person who can teach her what she needs to know.)

9. What does this book contribute to women's history? (Karen Cushman presents the hardships and demands on medieval people, especially women, who are relegated many of the low-level tasks. Workers are tied to their jobs for life and have little leisure to enjoy husbands and children. Their living quarters are often substandard and their joys few in a lifetime of hard work and minimal pay. Many die in childbirth, often at the same time that their infants die.

To offer realistic examples, Cushman describes the difficulties of the farm girl and the merchant's wife, who need medical care, and of Jennet, a hard-working drudge at the inn kitchen. Similarly deprived, Alyce, the novel's focus, bears the burden of homelessness, hunger, and illiteracy. When she takes on the task of apprentice to Jane, she realizes that Jane and her patients suffer in their own way. Jane acquires the reputation for competency in midwifery after losing all six of her own children. Alyce is awed by the demands on the village birthing expert and retreats from failure without realizing how much experience is necessary before the midwife becomes an expert.)

Questions 10 and 11 (Creative Level)

10. Using Joan-at-the-Bridge and Alyce Little as models, rename your friends and relatives with landmarks and other concepts to identify them. Explain why the use of surnames or patronyms made identification easier.
11. Outline the history of midwifery from ancient times to the present. Note the importance of midwives to humble people and those living outside metropolitan areas, where hospitals and doctors are readily available. Name important midwives, particularly Mary Breckinridge, creator of the Kentucky Frontier Nursing Service.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Art

Design contrasting murals or posters to demonstrate these pairs: Tansy's twins and Alyce Little, Jane with a broken ankle and the Baker in a tree, Will and Edward, the abbey orchard and Richard Reese's table, Jane's

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herbs and the miller's grain, the manor cook and Grommet, the fair and ewes being matched with lambs, sleeping in dung and sleeping in straw, and the manor kitchen and Jennet's kitchen.

Drama

1. Pantomime models of aphorisms or folk wisdom. For example, demonstrate "A good nut year means a good baby year." Using a book of quotations such as Rosalie Maggio's *Quotations by Women* (Beacon Press, 1997), compile a list of folk wisdom concerning birth and motherhood.
2. Draw stage settings to dramatize a crucial scene. Include a list of characters, props, music, make-up, costumes, and lighting necessary to the scene.
3. Select a story you would like to tell Edward at bedtime. Use gestures and voices to make the plot real during a performance for classmates.

Economics and Business

1. Describe aloud the interdependence of a medieval village. Discuss why the miller and baker are valuable citizens, as are the smith, priest, Reese, and midwife.
2. Explain to a small group how Alyce learns by doing. Characterize apprenticeships as opportunities to observe experts and to develop personal competency, such as Jane's physical pressure on the mother's abdomen and Alyce's gentle songs, warm oils, and massage.

Education

1. Compose an extended definition of education. Select different examples from the book, particularly Alyce's observations, her study of herbs and simples, hands-on assistance to laboring women, inn work under Jennet's supervision, Richard Reese's kindness, and copying letters, words, and numbers on scrap paper.
2. Write a scene in which Alyce fails to deliver a child. Demonstrate how she learns from Jane what she did wrong or how she might improve her performance, for example, by changing the mother's position, applying pressure on the abdomen, or offering a soothing tea. Show ways that Jane encourages rather than degrades or blames Alyce or the mother and child.
3. Write a theme in which you explain how overconfidence sets up the apprentice for failure and despair. Comment on the proper amount of guidance and evaluation of success as well as failure as a means of evening out progress.

Geography

Create a web site or bulletin board contrasting settings described or mentioned in the text. Include Salisbury, Oxford, Edenwick, Antipodes, Cornwall, Wimble, Dartmoor, and Birkonhead. Contrast the Cornwall inn yard with the cosmopolitan air of Oxford.

History and Social Studies

1. Study the layout of a medieval village. Include necessities such as clean water, drainage, land for cultivation, orchards, woods, roads, and residences. Contrast the self-containment of a manor with the interdependence of a small community.
2. Lead a discussion of King Edward I, "Summer Is A-Coming In," the Devil, hangman, witchery, saints' days, fairs, and other historical and literary symbols in the novel.

Explain why people know more about religious superstition than about the name of the king, writing and counting, sanitation, nutrition, child welfare, or causes of disease.

3. Provide a Christian calendar to accompany the book. Include dates that are identifiable in current terms. Separate dates such as Corpus Christi Day, which is a movable feast depending on the placement of Easter. Locate your own saint's day.
3. Explain in a paragraph how you would assist abandoned children such as Alyce and Edward. Add information about monasteries and convents that accepted waifs and about workshops that kept young helpers in exchange for bed and board.
4. Summarize the reasons for the canonization of these saints: Saint Cuthbert, Saint Dinged, Saint Vigor, Saint Margaret, Saint Guiles, Saint Felicitous, Saint Mildred, Saint Lo, Saint Anthony, and Saint Polycarp.

Language Arts

1. Compile a glossary for the novel of important words and phrases such as market square, blackberry cordial, thatch, Saint Swithin's Day, and apprentice.
2. Compose a short speech in which you describe trades that became last names, for example, Fletcher, Smith, Weaver, Baker, Miller, Bailey (from bailiff), and Reese. Using the telephone directory as a source, add others, such as Cooper, Wright, Tanner, Fuller, Fisher, Hunter, Thatcher, Mason, Singer, Wright, Reese, Bishop, Priestly, and Cook.
3. Explain briefly these images: dung beetle, brat, runt, corpus bones, stomach worm, encyclopedic compendium, Lady Day, His Ampleness the Bishop, and Juno, Roman goddess of the moon, women, and childbirth.
4. Describe in a short speech the significance of one of these quotations: "Your helper has taken care of us with her two strong hands and her good common sense," "She had delivered that baby with work and skill, not magic spells," "I need an apprentice who can do what I tell her, take what I give her, who can try and risk and fail and try again and not give up," and "I know what I want. A full belly, a contented heart, and a place in this world."
5. Draw a cause-and-effect diagram illustrating how outsiders demean Alyce and Edward. Show patterns of bullying in which the strong overpower the weak and how they weary of Alyce when she is no longer weak or susceptible to teasing and victimizing.
6. In a descriptive theme, contrast the hardships of the midwife's apprentice with the easier life of the merchant's family, Lord Arnulf, the priest, or Lady Agnes.
7. Explain in a short speech the possibility that Jane's loss of six children may have soured her attitude, particularly toward bearing healthy infants and sparing mothers pain and fear.

Psychology

1. Explain to a small group the need for a dignified name. Discuss how Brat, Beetle, and Runt demean Alyce and Edward. Express Alyce's purpose in naming Edward for the king. Discuss how the naming of Alyce Little honors Alyce's professional skill and dedication to service.
2. Lead a debate about the nature of superstition. Explain how Alyce tricks her tormentors and the whole village,

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including the priest, by turning blocks of wood into sources of hoof prints. Discuss why the search for witches usually turned on old or solitary women.

3. Make an oral report on the theme of self-esteem. Explain why Edward proudly boasts, "Lord Arnulf knows my name." Give reasons why Alyce must learn to value herself. Discuss her surprise that Will admires her for helping with the animal births and that Jane regrets that she quit the apprenticeship. Comment on the nature of failure as self-condemnation.

Science and Medicine

1. Analyze the problems of childbirth. Explain why long labor or faulty position of the fetus endangers mother and child. Describe modern methods of monitoring and preventing labor difficulties, including prenatal care, genetic profiles of the parents, fetal heart monitor, amniocentesis, sonography, blood samples, and avoidance of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.
2. Compose a short report on medieval nutrition. Name the foods that dominate the diet of poor people, particularly bread, cheese, onions, apples, bacon, berries, herbs, and ale. Explain why skill at cider and wine making and roasting nuts relieves the boredom of a limited diet.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Dramatize in a short skit a conversation: the baker's wooing of Jane, Wat's harassment of young girls, John Dark's admiration of Alyce's responsibility and hard work, Richard Reese's encouragement of Alyce's letters, Edward's arrival at the manor, the priest's sermons on the devil, Will's thanks for saving him from drowning, and the bailiff's wife's joy in motherhood.
2. With a web design or flow chart, explain why apprenticeships were useful before there were vocational schools or other training centers. List some subjects that would help Alyce with midwifery, particularly botany, chemistry, nutrition, child care, anatomy, and first aid.
3. Role-play the part of a bailiff, merchant, innkeeper, king, lord, shepherd, baker, miller, manservant, Reese, smith, thresher, groom, teacher, scholar, or priest. Explain why so many jobs in the Middle Ages were limited to men. Act out the role of Anna Comnena, Clara of Assisi, Saint Bridget, Queen Margaret of Scotland, Marie de France, Eleanor of Aquitaine, or Hildegard of Bingen, all influential women of Middle Ages. Discuss how the job of midwife and healer was better suited to a woman.
4. Discuss how Alyce's life would be different today. If she had been found in a dung heap in your area, what organizations would have given aid? How would social workers, ministers, teachers, nurses, and counselors have helped her cope with homelessness? How would children have responded to her plight?
5. Compose an informal dialogue illustrating the gradual maturity of Alyce and Edward. Indicate bad habits that Alyce gives up, especially degrading herself and her skills, accepting defeat, and running away from failure.
6. Make an oral report on superstition. Explain how Alyce becomes stronger after she learns to threaten to turn boys into women and make them undergo childbirth. Separate from Jane's simples, oils, herbs, and salves the charms and potions that have no worth, such as water from a hanged man. Discuss the belief that Jane

can curdle milk with a muttered spell.

7. Explain how childbirth and medical care changed after people learned more about disease, sanitation, genetics, nutrition, conception, and human anatomy.
8. Illustrate methods by which children choose a career and lifestyle. Contrast Alyce's midwifery with Jennet's cooking, John Dark's innkeeping, the shepherd's pairing of ewes and lambs, Richard Reese's composition and interviewing, the priest's investigation of evil, soothsayers, puppeteers, singers, and Will's skill with cattle.
9. Discuss the effects of love and acceptance on children like Edward and Alyce. Express Alyce's understanding of wayfaring children and the need to nurture, encourage, and advise. Discuss why she begins with an appropriate name for Edward.
10. Draw a cause-and-effect diagram showing how teasing can lead to physical abuse, sexual torment, assault, and rape. Explain why women avoid the secret path by the dark woods and why they shun gangs of men or flirtatious individuals who try to isolate them to touch and fondle or to take advantage of their separation from other villagers.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Compose entries for a handbook to introduce the midwife's apprentice to the job. Include first aid advice and instructions on supplies to carry to each birthing.
2. Explain what Richard Reese is compiling in his book.
3. Name events in Alyce's life that require maturity and shrewdness, such as making the devil's feet and attending the merchant's wife.
4. Make a calendar of times when villagers can get together for fun, feasting, music, and fellowship.

CUSHMAN'S OTHER WORKS

Catherine, Called Birdy (1994)

The Ballad of Lucy Whipple (1996)

RELATED READING

Marguerite de Angeli, *The Door in the Wall*

Avi, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*

Lois McMaster Bujold, *Memory and Mirror Dance*

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

Marchette Chute, *Innocent Wayfaring*

Donna Cross, *Pope Joan*

Robert Heinlein, *Citizen of the Galaxy* and *Friday*

Monica Furlong, *The Wise Child, Juniper, and Robin's Country*

Elizabeth Janet Gray, *Adam of the Road*

Mary Frances Hendry, *Quest for a Maid*

Elizabeth Curtis Klause, *Alien Secrets*

E. L. Konigsburg, *A Proud Taste for Scarlet and Miniver*

Elizabeth Moon, *Once a Hero*

Larry Segrist, *Spacer Dreams*

Charles Sheffield and Jerry Pournelle, *Higher Education*

Elizabeth George Speare, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*

Mary Stewart, *The Crystal Cave, The Hollow Hills, and The*

Prince and the Pilgrim

Mary Stolz, *Pangur Ban*

Rosemary Sutcliff, *Knight's Fee* and *The Witch's Brat*

Frances Temple, *Ramsey Scallop*

Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *The Prince and the Pauper*

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T.H. White, *The Sword in the Stone*

TEACHER'S NOTES

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VOCABULARY TEST

Using the words in parentheses, compose a sentence about each name, item, event, or place listed below.

1. Jane (bellowed) _____
2. September (brewing) _____
3. pack (boneset) _____
4. flask (nettle tea) _____
5. thorns (dogberry roses) _____
6. miracles (mayhap) _____
7. manor (privies) _____
8. blood (stanching) _____
9. tonic (comfrey) _____
10. calendar (Shrovetide) _____
11. whisper (paternoster) _____
12. Joan (bailiff) _____
13. labor (mallows) _____
14. four (humors) _____
15. letters (vellum) _____
16. aldon (understeward) _____
17. sauce (wood sorrel) _____
18. bleeding (smut rye) _____
19. lace (kirtle) _____
20. hammering (smithy) _____

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COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows.

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| ___ 1. gives birth to twins. | A. Joan |
| ___ 2. names her child Alyce Little. | B. Grommet |
| ___ 3. sits on Alyce. | C. cook |
| ___ 4. searches for the devil. | D. Jennet |
| ___ 5. helps put the cat in a sack. | E. baker's wife |
| ___ 6. changes the inn's name to The Cat and Cheese. | F. Emma |
| ___ 7. thinks Alyce is a saint or an angel. | G. baker |
| ___ 8. asks only for Alyce. | H. Kate |
| ___ 9. believes Edward is too small to handle a flail. | I. John Dark |
| ___ 10. offers Alyce a raise. | J. Tansy |
| ___ 11. lives in an impressive house. | K. Jack |
| ___ 12. does not respond to Alyce's midwifery. | L. priest |
| ___ 13. tries to change Alyce's negative self-image. | M. Matthew Blunt |
| ___ 14. romances Jane. | N. Will |
| ___ 15. lies in a mount of clean straw and waits for Jane. | O. merchant |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- ___ 1. Alyce keeps secret the fact that Grommet has been caught with the baker.
- ___ 2. The priest realizes that Alyce has a good reputation as an apprentice.
- ___ 3. Will admires Alyce for staying to help when the others run away.
- ___ 4. The bailiff gives Alyce a wooden comb as her reward.
- ___ 5. Because Jane breaks a leg, Alyce must attend the fair.
- ___ 6. Lady Agnes rewards Jane with silver coins.
- ___ 7. Despairing that she is a failure, Alyce leaves town.
- ___ 8. Jennet is sorry to lose Alyce.
- ___ 9. The men tease Edward for trying to pair ewes with lambs.
- ___ 10. Alyce forgets her basket of nuts at the abbey.

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Part III: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Supply a term to complete each of the following statements.

1. Jane tries to keep Beetle outside during a _____.
2. Will is fond of _____, his cow.
3. The _____ looks after Edward and calls him a duckling.
4. Beetle opens the sack and removes a nearly drowned _____.
5. The man at the fair believes that _____ can read.
6. The men give _____ a job pairing ewes and lambs.
7. Brat seeks the warmth of a _____ heap.
8. The _____ limb bends down to Will.
9. Kate gives birth in a _____.
10. Edward is pleased that _____ knows his name.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how Jane turns a babe in the womb.
2. Describe how Alyce renames Runt.
3. Discuss the type of work that Alyce performs at the inn.
4. Explain the importance of learning letters and numbers.
5. Compare Alyce and Jane as midwives.

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COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (20 points)

Identify the speaker (a) and the person who is being addressed (b) in each of the following quotations.

- _____ 1a. You must find the bulb of a white lily.
_____ 1b.
_____ 2a. I took nothing. I hurt nothing. I be going.
_____ 2b.
_____ 3a. Push, you cow. If an animal can do it, you can do it.
_____ 3b.
_____ 4a. Babies don't stop their borning because the midwife gives up.
_____ 4b.
_____ 5a. I be telling your granny who drank that ale she hid for herself.
_____ 5b.

Part II: Cause and Effect (20 points)

Finish each statement below by stating a reason:

1. Alyce makes a worthy apprentice because _____

2. Loving Edward rewards Alyce because _____

3. Will has reason to admire Alyce because _____

4. Alyce outsmarts the whole village because _____

5. Richard admires Alyce's good qualities because _____

6. Alyce turns down easier jobs because _____

7. Jane dislikes Beetle because _____

8. Brian Tailor considers the king the "Devil Hissel" because _____

9. The merchant's admiration encourages Beetle because _____

10. Homeless children must live by their wits because _____

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Part III: Plot Assessment (30 points)

Place an X by any statement below that is true of Jane:

- 1. breaks her ankle.
- 2. threatens Beetle to keep quiet.
- 3. gives Beetle enough to eat.
- 4. assists Girtle in giving birth.
- 5. roasts fowl on skewers.
- 6. finds wood blocks washed up on the river banks.
- 7. croons to Joan.
- 8. demands that all observers leave the birthing chamber.
- 9. pretends to be away on errands.
- 10. is interviewed at the inn.
- 11. has lost six babies.
- 12. asks Joan to name her child Alyce Little.
- 13. promises to pay Alyce an occasional penny.
- 14. uses oil and corn meal at birthings.
- 15. attends a birth on the inn table.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Discuss why Alyce returns a second time.
2. Analyze medieval superstition.
3. Account for the midwife's bad reputation for greed.
4. Describe how Alyce gains self-esteem.

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ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. deliveries | 6. Edward |
| 2. Tansy | 7. dung |
| 3. cook | 8. willow |
| 4. cat | 9. field |
| 5. Alyce | 10. Lord Arnulf |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. J | 6. I | 11. E |
| 2. A | 7. O | 12. F |
| 3. B | 8. M | 13. N |
| 4. L | 9. C | 14. G |
| 5. K | 10. D | 15. H |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. T |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. F | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. F |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1a. Richard | 4a. Jane |
| 1b. Jennet | 4b. Richard |
| 2a. Runt | 5a. Alyce |
| 2b. Alyce | 5b. Dick |
| 3a. Jane | |
| 3b. Kate | |

Part II: Cause and Effect (20 points)

Answers will vary.

Part III: Plot Assessment (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. X | 6. | 11. X |
| 2. X | 7. | 12. |
| 3. | 8. X | 13. |
| 4. | 9. X | 14. X |
| 5. | 10. X | 15. |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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