



## The Midwife's Apprentice

*Karen Cushman*

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## **The Midwife's Apprentice** Karen Cushman

From the author of Catherine, Called Birdy comes another spellbinding novel set in medieval England. The girl known only as Brat has no family, no home, and no future until she meets Jane the Midwife and becomes her apprentice. As she helps the sharp-tempered Jane deliver babies, Brat--who renames herself Alyce--gains knowledge, confidence, and the courage to want something from life: "A full belly, a contented heart, and a place in this world." Medieval village life makes a lively backdrop for the funny, poignant story of how Alyce gets what she wants. A concluding note discusses midwifery past and present. A Newbery Medal book.

## **The Midwife's Apprentice Details**

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Author : Karen Cushman

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## From Reader Review The Midwife's Apprentice for online ebook

### **Damian says**

I would have given this book a 3.5 star rating if there was one. I felt this had a slow plot to it, but I found that I liked it more as I read on. However, just when I really started to like it, it ended. The ending was not bad, but it definitely just left you there like, "What." Since it was only 117 pages or so, I think this is why. Otherwise it was not bad.

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### **RenéeR says**

The book is alright to read. So the book is about a girl that is a midwife apprentice and she doesn't know her name and she tries to figure it out with a loveable cat she meets. The best part of the book so far is when she figures out her name. I would say that it's for 12 and up for the age.

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### **Madison H. says**

This was a great, quick historical read. It was packed with so much information and details. It was very real and gritty, it wasn't the glamorous side of the middle ages that we usually read about, the stories about the kings and queens and the princesses and princes. This was about the peasants and their lives.

The characters were good. Alys grows a lot through out the book. I love how her name changes with each stage of her life. I thought that was a really nice touch. Though the book doesn't focus a lot on the other characters in the book too much they are still done very well. You get a really good feel for them all even though they may only be around for a few chapters.

The writing was very good. It fit the time frame that it was in. It flowed very smoothly, telling the story with quickness without feeling rushed or choppy.

The plot is interesting. I loved learning about the midwives and what they did as well as peasant life in the middle ages. I'm glad I'm not a peasant.

This is a really great book, I would recommend it to anyone looking for a quick historical read :)

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### **Suzanne Moore says**

Set in medieval days, an orphan girl is taken in by a midwife. She is treated as a common slave; given numerous tasks to do daily for meager bits of food. She has no proper name until one day while running errands is mistaken for someone named Alyce.

Not Alyce herself, but the name stuck. Slowly she gains confidence, but one day when left to attend one mother while Jane, the midwife, cares for another, Alyce feels helpless. She doesn't know what to do the baby won't come. When Jane returns she runs away feeling worthless.

Aylce finds work at an Inn and as an Inn Girl she meets a guest who teaches her letters and words. One day Jane comes to the Inn inquiring about her. Aylce overhears her saying that though she wasn't the smartest girl, she gave up and quit.

Aylce believes that she has no place in the world ... that she doesn't belong ... until one night travelers stop by and the woman in the group is about to give birth. The only person who can help is Aylce, the "Inn Girl." Recalling everything Jane ever did, Aylce successfully delivers the baby. Finally Aylce realizes her place and returns to Jane with a new attitude ... not a quitter. She has become a strong woman, no longer a timid girl.

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## **Kat says**

Basic Plot: A homeless girl in medieval England finds her place in the world and her purpose.

The situation of the poor girl at the beginning of the book about tore my heart out. Homeless children are a particularly hard thing for a parent to bear. This story was simple, but the meaning of it is what is really important. Alyce (the name she chooses for herself, as she had none at the beginning) really has nothing, not even pride, at the beginning of the story. She is abused by everyone around her because of her situation, until the local midwife offers her food in exchange for work. She becomes the midwife's apprentice and endures. Now, as I said, it's the message that's important. The only reason Alyce survives is because she **KEEPS TRYING**. In spite of her terrible situation she never gives up and she always keeps going. The midwife says she needs someone 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." So much in life depends on sheer, stubborn persistence that this is a vital lesson for anyone to learn. That this book teaches it to young people is valuable.

I highly recommend it for any child of this age struggling with the idea of trying and failing. Failure is how we learn, so it's something we all must experience. It isn't fun, but it's very important. We have to remember that most of the time we can fix our mistakes and keep going, but not if we let ourselves get shut down by our failures.

A vital lesson.

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## **Jennie says**

The midwife finds Brat asleep in a dung heap. She says she will work for food, so the midwife takes her on, having her do the housekeeping and herb-gathering and renames Brat, Beetle. Beetle is not allowed to assist when the midwife delivers a baby, but she watches from the windows and learns the midwife's skills.

One day, she gets to go to the fair to buy things for the midwife. There, she decides that she needs a real name, a proper name, and starts calling herself Alyce. One day, in the middle of a difficult birth, the midwife gets called away and leaves Alyce in charge. No one expected the baby to be delivered alive, but Alyce talks the mother through the process and the baby survives.

After that, people start coming to Alyce more than the midwife, but when Alyce needs to call the midwife for help during a difficult birth, she sees herself as a failure and runs away, leaving the life she had built for herself.

This is a great book for an older child about making your place in the world. It's a Newberry winner and Cushman's attention to historical detail is superb. It's a short, little book, but it's meaty and packs a lot of punch.

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### Chicklet says

A lot of historical research must have gone into this book, very well done. I'm amazed at both how much and how little people of this era knew about pregnancy and childbirth.

While the cover of this book seems to be geared toward children, I would NOT hand this over to a child who does not already know about childbirth and pregnancy in detail. Even then, it would be wise to go over the book when they're done so they don't end up with bizarre and inaccurate ideas about having babies. Cushman is accurate in writing in the perspective of a midwife's apprentice in this time period - and in this time period they got plenty of things wrong.

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### jess says

I picked this up because I was fascinated to read about how midwifery was handled for a juvenile audience. You know how people freak out about kids knowing where babies come from? It was interesting from that perspective, but I ended up really enjoying the book. The protagonist is a homeless, nameless ragamuffin who gets taken in by a village midwife and learns a bit about the work of bringing babies into the world. The confidence that comes from having a place in the world starts to change the girl. She gives herself a name, builds a family of sorts, overcomes some frightening challenges and develops into a capable, independent person. Without being too moralistic, this was a real "can do" story. I enjoyed it so much. I especially loved that the cat was a main character. Sometimes your cat is your only friend! That's real!

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### Beth says

Excellent historical fiction for preteens! Cushman portrays the life of a homeless orphan in medieval England -- a girl so bereft of all background that she doesn't even have a name -- and how she slowly carves out an identity for herself by keeping her eyes and ears open, and by working hard at challenging assignments.

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### Aerin says

I read **Catherine Called Birdy**, a Newbery Honor Book, about ten years ago, and while it was interesting it wasn't quite captivating enough for me to want to read anything else by Karen Cushman. Still, when **The Midwife's Apprentice** showed up on Paperback Swap, I figured I'd give it a try.

A Newbery Medal book, *The Midwife's Apprentice* tells the story of a girl with no home, no parents, and no name. One frosty night, she finds warmth sleeping in a dung heap. The next morning, Jane Sharp, the village midwife, discovers the girl, who becomes the midwife's apprentice. The girl works long, and hard, beyond the point of survival to a place where she thinks and learns and ponders and chooses a name for herself. Her only friend is Purr, a cat she rescues from being drowned by the same boys who torment the girl apprentice.

Eventually, she is challenged to deliver a baby in the midwife's absence, and her future begins to both unroll and unravel.

Karen Cushman has graduate degrees in Human Behavior and Msum Studies. She has a long-standing interest in history. She says, "I grew tired of hearing about kings, princes, generals, and presidents. I wanted to know what life was like for ordinary young people in other times."

This book showed off Cushman's strengths to their full advantage. Her writing is sure-handed, with lots of showing and not too much telling. She fully brings the reader into a medieval village without overusing words and explanations. The story of **The Midwife's Apprentice** incorporates realism without fatalism, spirit without warrior-heroics, and a truly empowered character whom readers will love.

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## **Bobby Simic says**

Summary:

Orphaned since as long as she can remember, Beetle becomes employed by the cold village midwife. And while her payment is meager, Beetle eventually gains confidence in herself and her abilities through her work.

Strengths:

While it uses the language of the time, the book is surprisingly accessible -- no doubt helped by its short length (my edition was barely over 100 pages). Despite being from a different era, Beetle's plight still can be relatable; she's someone who has believed all the nasty and mean things people have said and done to her. And the fact that she eventually overcomes this treatment and finds herself makes her a good heroine and role model for readers.

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## **Emilianna says**

There are few books that I come across, pick up, and just check out of the library on mere whim. There are even fewer books that I start over the minute I finish them.

The Midwife's Apprentice is one of these precious few.

It has no plot twists, mysteries, sexy vampires, gothic mansions, or pomp or circumstance. Its just a simple coming of age story about one of the sweetest, quietest, and purest characters to ever touch your soul.

Its a short simple story, but its simplicity makes it so strong and powerful. Its characters a rich and believable, its setting is described enough to where we get a general picture but can still imagine the rest for ourselves, and the story is so sweet and clear. I highly recommend it. It makes for great light reading and is an escape from all the heavy gothic and vampire romance out today.

its awesome and so wonderful. read it. Read it now!

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## **Aj Sterkel says**

The Newbery committees seem to have a deep love for books set in Medieval Europe. Maybe because you can disguise education as sword fighting? I don't know. There seems to be a lot of Medieval Europe Newbery winners.

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**The Good:** *The Midwife's Apprentice* is skillfully written. The author avoids educational info dumps while seamlessly blending facts with an entertaining story. I learned a few things about the superstitions of Medieval midwives. The main character is an orphan who has been abused for her entire life. When she takes a job as a midwife's apprentice, she learns that she is valuable and capable of accomplishing anything. She also learns not to quit when life gets complicated. It's a good message for preteens. I think a lot of middle-school-aged kids struggle with their self-esteem, so they'd find the character relatable.

“Just because you don't know everything don't mean you know nothing.” – *The Midwife's Apprentice*

**The Bad:** For an adult reader (and maybe for some young readers), it's extremely predictable. Predictability takes some of the fun out of the reading experience.

**The Bottom Line:** For an educational story, it moves quickly and holds the reader's attention. I'd recommend reading it *with* your kids instead of just handing it over. Medieval midwives had some . . . um . . . unusual ideas about pregnancy and childbirth. It could be confusing for younger kids.

Guess what? I have a blog! See more of my reviews here: [Read All The Things!](#)

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## Minh Nhân Nguyễn says

3 sao

Ba?n di?ch tiê?ng viê?t kha? c??ng va? g???ng. N?i dung truyê?n co? phá?n nha?y ca?m, công nh?n không ng? có sách thi?u nhi vi?t v? ngh? bà m? luôn :p. Không biê?t la? t? truyê?n gô?c hay do ba?n di?ch ma? mi?nh thâ?y nhân vâ?t chi?nh kha? la? ngu ?â?n, tí?nh ca?ch cu?ng không hay cho l??m. Thông ?iê?p c?a truy?n thì khá rõ, ??n gi?n, d? hi?u nh?ng mình s? h?i ng?n ng?i ?? gi?i thi?u cu?n này cho m?t ??a con nít ??c. Lùng mua cu?n này vì nó ?o?t gi?i newbery mà r?t cu?c l?i th?y th?t v?ng, nó kém h?n nhi?u so v?i nh?ng cu?n newbery khác mình t?ng ??c và mong ??i.

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## Andrea Cox says

This children's book was in no way kid-friendly. It was crude, abrasive, and creeped me out. It included:

- \* transgenderism
- \* devils and demons
- \* witches
- \* evil
- \* marital affair
- \* a couple of teenagers caught having sex
- \* magic
- \* superstition
- \* child abuse
- \* verbal abuse
- \* profanity

\* breastfeeding

\* expletives

I cannot recommend this book to anyone, let alone the audience for which it was written.

I was not compensated for my honest review.

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### **Madeline says**

I really liked Karen Cushman's books as a kid, and I think one of the big reasons for this (aside from the fact that, although two of her books take place in the Middle Ages, *neither* protagonist is a princess! \*gasp\*), is that she never sugar-coats the history. Take *The Midwife's Apprentice*, which is about a homeless, nameless orphan girl who gets a job as...guess. No, go on, guess.

Delivering babies in the Middle Ages was not only life-threatening and painful, it was *gross*. I remember reading this as an impressionable eleven-year-old and deciding that hospitals were pretty much the greatest things ever. And painkillers. And competent doctors who don't rely on the powah of Jesus to help a mother deliver her baby in a time when having a Caesarian guaranteed a slow, painful death. One particularly shocking thing to me was the midwife's method of coaxing a baby out of the womb: she would stick her head between the mother's legs and bellow into the birth canal, "Child, come forth! Christ calls you to the light!"

Did I mention how awesome hospitals are?

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### **Connie Kuntz says**

There will always be a part of me that wishes I was a midwife, so I totally loved this book. The kids did, too, although I am not sure any one of them aspires to midwifery.

The midwife herself is a bully, but Karen Cushman provided just enough detail about her so that the kids and I could not completely despise her. For example, the midwife herself gave birth numerous times, but her babies all died. The midwife also, in spite of being coarse and arrogant, is wise, and she mentions as-a-matter-of-factly that a midwife will never walk out on the job.

I had never thought about a midwife walking out on the job before, probably because it never happens. I have, however, witnessed doctors get so frustrated with patients that they walk out of the room. In fact, when I was giving birth to Fern, the doctor got so fed up with me for not wanting to speed up the labor, he actually walked out in a huff. A few minutes later, a midwife appeared.

Her name was Vicki and she was chewing gum. She took one look at me and said, "Open your doors, Constance." After she checked me, she said, "I think you'll be more comfortable if you get on all fours." I was and five minutes later, Fern was born. Thank you, gum chewing midwife named Vicki!

My point is this: Vicki's coarseness with me combined with her corny "Open your doors, Constance" command was exactly what was needed to get Fern out. No drugs involved. One of the tactics the midwife in Cushman's novel used was shouting the following into the birth canal:

"Child come out! The light of Christ compels you!"

I must admit I kind of like that!

Midwives are a huge asset to the health community and I wonder why there isn't a "midwife" for every field of health.

This book is supposed to be about Alyce, the midwife's apprentice, but I spent more time concentrating on why the midwife and all the adults were so coarse and so ridiculously over-prepared for everything. I am naturally opposed to coarse behavior and over-preparing, so this book helped me understand why others are different. It also motivated me to tighten up a couple of my personal policies.

I was happy when Alyce was recognized for her talent and I loved all of the birth stories (including the animals) as well as the medicinal and folk lore. We all especially loved the message about not quitting. My kids loved it and Jesse did, too, when he was home to listen. In other words, I recommend this book to everyone.

Signed,  
Don't Chew Gum at Work!

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### **lucy black says**

This short fairy tale like story is just the right mix of bitter and sweet. I read it slowly because it is a short book and I didn't want it to end.

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### **Hosanna says**

This is not a good read for children. I did not finish reading it because it did not capture my attention and had too many weird things throughout the book.

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### **Linda Lpp says**

Saw this book listed on the audio list for the public library. Not necessarily a child's book, but closer to a young teen. Or for an old lady like me!

Enjoying it as MY cat is curled up beside me. Interesting perspective of a homeless, poor girl who has never known her roots. She usually goes hungry. Sleeps burrowed into the warmth of a dung heap (if lucky to find one). At this point in the story (Chapter 7) her struggles are continuing, but she has been given some hope-chores for the mid-wife in return for scraps of bread or cheese. Which bless her, she's sharing with a stray cat that is hovering around, and has given her someone to talk to.

Ok. Back to the story...

Good little book. At first I didn't like the way (Alice as she named herself), kept putting herself down by repeatedly saying she was too stupid, but her thinking thankfully changed. By the book's end she had learned so much about herself and was selflessly aiding others. Her strengths and convictions surfaced, and she finally knew what she wanted to do with her life.

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