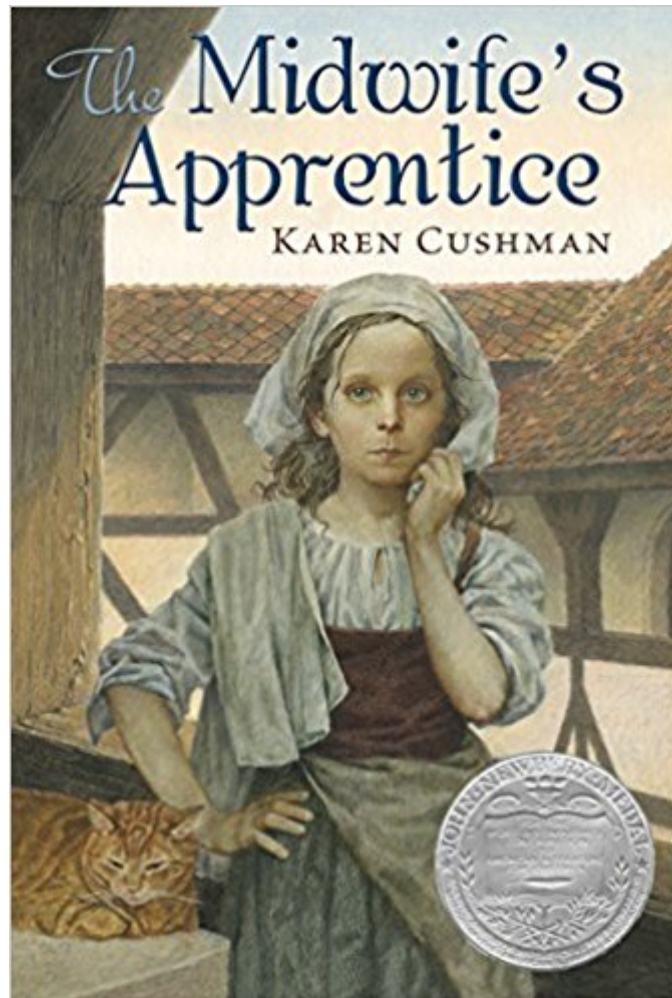




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# The Midwife's Apprentice



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Karen Cushman likes to write with her tongue firmly planted in her cheek, and her feisty female characters firmly planted in history. In *The Midwife's Apprentice*, which earned the 1996 Newbery Medal, this makes a winning combination for children and adult readers alike. Like her award-winning book *Catherine, Called Birdy*, the story takes place in medieval England. This time our protagonist is Alyce, who rises from the dung heap (literally) of homelessness and namelessness to find a station in life--apprentice to the crotchety, snaggletoothed midwife Jane Sharp. On Alyce's first solo outing as a midwife, she fails to deliver. Instead of facing her ignorance, Alyce chooses to run from failure--never a good choice. Disappointingly, Cushman does not offer

any hardships or internal wrestling to warrant Alyce's final epiphanies, and one of the book's climactic insights is when Alyce discovers that lo and behold she is actually pretty! Still, Cushman redeems her writing, as always, with historical accuracy, saucy dialogue, fast-paced action, and plucky, original characters that older readers will eagerly devour. (Ages 12 and older) --Gail Hudson  
--This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Having focused on a well-born young heroine in her Newbery Honor debut novel, *Catherine, Called Birdy*, Cushman returns to a similar medieval English setting, this time to imagine how the other half lived. The strengths of this new, relatively brief novel match those of its predecessor: Cushman has an almost unrivaled ability to build atmosphere, and her evocation of a medieval village, if not scholarly in its authenticity, is supremely colorful and pungent. The protagonist here first appears asleep in a heap of dung; the "rotting and moiling" of the refuse give forth heat enough to compensate for the stench. Homeless and nameless, she can remember no time when she did not wander from village to village. She is rescued from the dung heap by a sharp-tongued local midwife, who feeds her in exchange for work. Gradually the girl forges an identity for herself and learns some timeless truths. Some of the characterizations lack consistency (particularly that of the midwife), the plot depends on a few too many conveniences and the development of the themes seems hurried?but no matter. The force of the ambience produces more than enough momentum to propel the reader from start to finish in a single happy sitting. Ages 12-up. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

I often read the books my children are assigned to read in school. This book was so amazing! I am currently reading a book series set in seventeenth century Scotland who's main character is a female doctor who utilizes the availability of herbs and flora for medicinal purposes. The *Midwife's Apprentice* is extremely factual as a historical fiction! I am thankful to my daughter's teacher for selecting such an insightful book. Many life lessons woven so beautifully between visual detail and knowledge of past and present! We will be downloading many more of Karen Cushman's stories to be read for pleasure!

For young readers, the ragtag main character Alyce's life may seem shocking. She has no home, almost no food or clothing, and no one to care whether she lives or dies. Her daily existence includes verbal abuse and physical neglect. In her fourteenth-century world most people, including her, just don't matter much. But Alyce has spunk and heart and goals. Her struggle to find a place

for herself in an unwelcoming society makes her appealing and real. In the end, her willingness to keep trying is what offers her a future.

I loved this story and became immersed in the Medieval setting from the very first page. Cushman is not only a great researcher, she's a great writer, conveying much with few words. The story of a homeless girl taken in by Midwife Jane as her apprentice is gripping. As the girl, called Beetle (for Dung Beetle) by Jane, grows and learns, she chooses her own name: Alyce. She also thinks she can do as much as the midwife can, but when she fails, she doesn't know what to do but run away. In the running, though, she fends for herself and comes to realize that Yes, she wants to be a midwife, and so she returns to Jane. The returning is not a defeat, but a victory: a choice about the direction Alyce wants her life to go in. A very rewarding story.

I was a little disappointed. Thought there would be more about her using her skills and learning about midwifery. Does not happen. Just a difficult life of a child.

I wish I could read more of her life. It is well written and an addictive read. I would definitely recommend this book.

My daughter was assigned in class to read a Newberry medal book and present a report to the class. When I began to look at these award winning books, I noticed that most of them were tragic. My daughter doesn't do well when she reads about tragedy and death. Then I found The Midwife's Apprentice. It was perfect for her. The beginning was a little tough as she had to get used to reading old English literature. However, she overcame this difficulty and loved the book.

I really liked this book. It is the story of a orphan girl that has no home of her own, sleeps in a manure pile for the warmth, and how she conquers her fears and makes a place for herself in life. The story line keeps ones interest all the way through the book, not a dull moment. The book encourages one to work hard at your opportunities and one will prosper. A person does not have to accept stereo type or class if they do not want to. I strongly recommend this book!

I liked the book a lot, but it could have been much longer and maybe an explanation of the orphans background. A romance would have been nice and brought more depth to the book

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