

Focus ON READING

Vocabulary

READING
COMPREHENSION

The Midwife's Apprentice

Karen Cushman

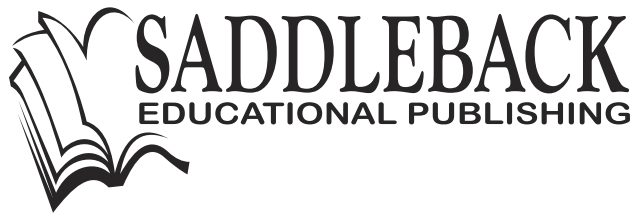
ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Reproducible Activities

Focus **ON READING**

*The Midwife's
Apprentice*

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Introduction/Classroom Management

WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

Focus on Reading is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains before-reading **Focus Your Reading** pages containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

USING *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference section for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

Vocabulary Words to Know lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

Things to Know identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

Questions to Think About helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.
- **Check Your Understanding: Short Answer** contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Focus on Reading is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or

other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives the adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary** and **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** and **Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

Deepen Your Understanding is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

Focus on the Book

Synopsis

On a cold winter morning in a thirteenth-century English village, the local midwife discovers a girl asleep in a dung heap. The girl, who is known only as Brat, is about twelve or thirteen and has no home or family. Jane the Midwife shrewdly decides to take in the girl and make her a midwife's apprentice, thereby obtaining a source of cheap labor for her bustling business. Now renamed Beetle, the girl spends the next year in the village, learning many of the skills and secrets of the midwife's trade. As she gains self-confidence and maturity, Beetle begins to forge her first friendships and makes keen observations about life in her new home. In her growing quest for self-identity, she even decides to choose her own name—Alyce. A major setback occurs, however, when Alyce is unable to deliver a villager's baby alone. She feels that she is an utter failure and does what she has always done in moments of crisis—run. Alyce flees the village, finding shelter and employment in a small inn several miles away. She passes the winter in despair, taking interest only in a kindly teacher who is staying at the inn and who teaches her the rudiments of reading and writing. As winter turns to spring, Alyce's hope and faith in herself are reborn. Realizing that her "place in the world" is back in the village, working as a midwife's apprentice, she decides to accept her own limitations and move beyond them. As summer begins, Alyce returns to the village with a new sense of purpose and joy in what the future holds.

About the Author

Karen Cushman was born into what she calls "an ethnic working-class Chicago family" in 1941. When she was eleven, her family moved to Los Angeles, California, where she spent her adolescence. Cushman attended Stanford University, graduating in 1963 with a joint degree in English and Greek. Although originally she had thought about becoming an archaeologist, Cushman ended up working at a series of jobs in California, then marrying and moving to Oregon with her husband, Philip. The couple later moved back to California with their daughter, Leah. There they both earned master's degrees—Karen in counseling, Philip in human behavior. Philip went on to earn a doctorate in psychology; since that time he has worked as a

psychotherapist. Karen earned a second master's degree in museum studies. She then joined the graduate department at John F. Kennedy University, where she has taught, edited the museum studies journal, and, for more than a decade, has mentored graduate students through their programs.

Cushman's first book was born, in her words, "from my interest in children and history." *Catherine, Called Birdy* was published in 1994, winning a Newbery Honor and numerous other awards. This success was quickly followed by *The Midwife's Apprentice*, published in 1995; it, too, won great acclaim, including the Newbery Medal. These first two books, meticulously researched, were set in the Middle Ages. Cushman chose to set her third book, *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* (1996), during the American Gold Rush. All three books feature strong young female protagonists, vivid descriptive passages, an appreciation for the natural world, and humor and compassion for everyday people.

Cushman now spends considerable time visiting schools and talking with students who have read and enjoyed her work. She derives great pleasure from meeting the many children all over the country for whom reading "is a real passion."

Historical Background

Although there is no specific beginning date for the historic period known as the Middle Ages, this era is generally considered to have lasted from the cataclysmic fall of the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries C.E. until the late fifteenth century, when the Renaissance is officially considered to have begun. During the medieval period, Western Europe slowly moved out of a "dark age" into a period of great economic expansion and cultural rebirth.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries marked the height of the Middle Ages. During this time (largely as a result of the Crusades), trade routes expanded throughout Europe as well as to North Africa and many parts of the Byzantine Empire. This brought about an influx of new trade goods to Europe—for example, silks, spices, sugar, and dyes from Asia. At this same time, villages were evolving into towns, a fledgling middle class was born, the feudal system was in decline, and a new interest in both scientific and scholarly learning was awakened. In England, the growth of

(continued)

Focus on the Book (continued)

towns led to the development of crafts and the creation of the guild system. The rise of a merchant class meant that there were larger concentrations of people with wealth and a desire for more education. This resulted in the foundation of schools and universities, especially in cathedral towns like Salisbury (which is mentioned in *The Midwife's Apprentice*).

The inhabitants of the small village described in *The Midwife's Apprentice* probably lived in simple houses of one or two rooms with mud-plastered log walls, thatched roofs, and hard-pounded dirt floors. Windows were crude openings in the walls; they were either stuffed with straw or covered by wooden shutters in the cold weather. Most houses had a central fireplace for both heating and cooking. Since there were no chimneys, people's homes tended to be very smoky. Furniture was wooden and of the simplest variety: an unadorned table, a bed or two, some benches, and possibly a storage chest.

The typical diet for a medieval villager consisted of coarse brown bread made from rye or barley, root vegetables, cheese, pottage (a kind of thick soup made

from oats), and ale or beer to drink. Villagers sometimes ate meat (such as mutton or poultry) from animals they raised themselves; they were not allowed to hunt for game, since nearly all of the surrounding land belonged to the nobility.

By the twelfth century, some important agricultural inventions had helped to increase food production—the water mill, the windmill, heavier plows, the collar harness, and horseshoes. Nevertheless, when their crops failed, the peasants and poor villagers starved.

The time during which *The Midwife's Apprentice* is set can be fixed quite accurately. There is a reference in the text to the king, who is called Edward Longshanks; this was a nickname of King Edward I, the oldest son of Henry III. Edward Longshanks (so named because of his extremely long legs) ruled England from 1272 until his death in 1307 C.E. Thus the novel must be set near the end of the High Middle Ages—a period of stability and opportunity that preceded Western Europe's downward spiral into such disasters as the bubonic plague, widespread famine, peasant rebellions, and the Hundred Years' War.

Focus Your Knowledge

The **Middle Ages** spanned many centuries, lasting from about 500 to about 1450 C.E. This era in history arose from the chaos following the fall of the Roman Empire. It ended with the “rebirth” of Western European culture known as the Renaissance.

- Look at a map of the world. Find England. Observe the location of England in relation to continental Europe.
- Now consider the limitations of transportation and communication in the Middle Ages. There were poor roads, crude vehicles powered only by horse or oxen, ships powered only by sail or oars, and no established postal system. How do you think all of these factors might have affected life in medieval England? What impact might these factors have had on trade and communication with other parts of Europe?

The **Crusades** were a series of military expeditions conducted by European Christians to capture the Holy Land in the Middle East from its Muslim occupants. The Crusades took place between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, exposing the people of medieval Europe to distant regions and unfamiliar cultures.

- Look again at your world map. How might the Crusades have affected trade and communication routes in Western Europe? What differences could this have made to the lives of everyday people?

Scientific knowledge in the Middle Ages was still very limited. Medieval science was a combination of natural observation, folk wisdom, and superstition. It was still generally believed that all of the other planets revolved around the earth, and that the position of the stars and planets might predict the future. There was no accurate understanding of world geography and most people assumed that the earth was flat. The voyages of discovery made by Columbus, Magellan, and other European explorers had not yet occurred. The existence of the North American continent was still unsuspected. In terms of health, there was no knowledge of germs. People believed that illness was a punishment from God. Treatments for illness tended to consist of herbal remedies, superstitious rituals, and bleeding.

- How do you think the state of scientific knowledge during the Middle Ages would have influenced people of the ruling classes? The newly emerging middle class? The skilled and unskilled laborers? The peasants?

Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

heedless—careless; not paying attention

unnourished—unfed; lacking the right foods for health and growth

rank—having a very strong, unpleasant odor

wimple—a cloth used to cover a woman’s head in the Middle Ages, leaving only the face exposed

midwife—a woman who specializes in helping women in childbirth

apprentice—someone who is learning a particular craft or skill from an experienced practitioner

cockeyed—crooked; tilted to one side

lest—in case; fearing that

embers—the still-hot remains of a fire; glowing pieces of coal or wood

stanching—stopping the flow of a liquid, often blood or tears

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

Midwives were important members of the medieval community. Especially in smaller towns and villages where other medical help was not available, the midwife was in great demand as the local childbirth “expert.” She provided mothers-to-be with advice and herbal treatments during their pregnancies. She gave comfort and professional help during labor and delivery.

Apprentices served an important function in the medieval economy. An apprentice was a trainee who served under a master craftsman or merchant. The training period could last two to seven years. The apprentice then became a journeyman until he or she was accepted into a guild.

Hygiene in the Middle Ages was limited. Many local water supplies were polluted by sewage from nearby towns and villages, making clean water scarce. Bathing was also rare, since many people believed that it could expose them to illness.

Ale (and beer) were commonly drunk by people of all ages in medieval times. Because of their chemical makeup, these beverages were actually safer to drink than untreated water. Ale tended to have a relatively low alcohol content, so it was consumed even by young children.

Fleabane was a powdery substance that came from a wildflower (*Erigeron*). People in the Middle Ages believed that it drove away fleas, which were a serious nuisance in most households.

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “But the girl noticed and, on that frosty night, burrowed deep into the warm, rotting muck, **heedless** of the smell.”
heedless: _____
2. “In any event, the dung heap probably smelled little worse than everything else in her life—the food scraps scavenged from kitchen yards, the stables and sties she slept in when she could, and her own unwashed, **unnourished**, unloved, and unlovely body.”
unnourished: _____
3. “. . .dearly would she have loved to eat a turnip without the mud of the field still on it or sleep in a barn fragrant with new hay and not the **rank** smell of pigs who fart when they eat too much.”
rank: _____
4. “An important-looking woman, with a sharp nose . . . and a **wimple** starched into sharp pleats.”
wimple: _____
5. “And there was more work, . . . washing her linen in the stream and carrying her bundles to those cottages where a new baby was expected, for the sharp lady was a **midwife**.”
midwife: _____
6. “Beetle soon acquired a new name, the midwife’s **apprentice**, and a place to sleep that smelled much better than the dung heap, though it was much less warm.”
apprentice: _____
7. “. . .his whiskers were **cockeyed**, going up on one side and down on the other, giving him a frisky, cheerful look.”
cockeyed: _____
8. “She . . . suffered their pinching and poking and spitting in silence, **lest** her resistance inspire them to greater torments.”
lest: _____
9. “Each morning Beetle started the fire, blowing on the night’s **embers** to encourage them to light the new day’s scraps.”
embers: _____
10. “Beetle carried the basket with the clean linen, ragwort and columbine seeds to speed the birth, cobwebs for **stanching** blood, . . . and mistletoe and elder leaves against witches.”
stanching: _____

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. In the beginning of this story, approximately how old is Brat?
 - a. ten or eleven
 - b. eleven or twelve
 - c. twelve or thirteen
2. What memories does Brat have of her early childhood?
 - a. She has no memories at all.
 - b. She remembers her mother's singing.
 - c. She remembers a warm cottage but no mother.
3. What does Beetle do when she goes with the midwife to a birth?
 - a. She waits outside the house.
 - b. She helps the midwife give herbs and medicines to the laboring woman.
 - c. She discusses the midwife's price.
4. How does Brat think the woman in the starched wimple looks when she first meets her?
 - a. cruel
 - b. important
 - c. kind
5. Why does the midwife change Brat's name to Beetle?
 - a. because Brat reminds her of a burrowing dung beetle
 - b. because Brat scurries across the barn just like a beetle
 - c. because she is as tough as a dung beetle's shell
6. Why doesn't Beetle leave bread and cheese for the cat more often?
 - a. because the cat is not in the neighborhood very often
 - b. because the cat's owner doesn't want other people feeding him
 - c. because Beetle rarely has enough food even for herself
7. What do the village boys do to the cat?
 - a. They make him race across the river with an eel to see who can swim faster.
 - b. They put him into a sack with an eel and throw them into the river.
 - c. They put him into a sack with Beetle and throw them into the river.
8. What does Beetle do on Lady Day?
 - a. She must work as she does every day.
 - b. She is allowed to rest, and she gets extra bread and cheese.
 - c. She goes to the fair with the midwife.
9. What are two reasons for Jane's having chosen to become a midwife?
 - a. She was an apprentice in her youth, and she has given birth to six children.
 - b. She goes to Mass every Sunday, and the village is willing to pay for her training.
 - c. She has strong hands, and she has clean fingernails.
10. What two things "curse her life" and keep Brat moving on?
 - a. hunger and cold
 - b. hunger and the teasing boys
 - c. the need for a job and a good bath

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. How does the dung heap smell to Brat on the frosty night when the story begins?
2. How has Brat existed up to the time the story begins?
3. What kind of boys pick on Brat, and why?
4. What does the midwife first think about Brat when she meets her?
5. What does Brat do with the nest of frozen baby mice she finds?
6. How does Brat rescue the cat after the boys throw him into the river?
7. How does Jane the midwife perform her job?
8. What chores does Beetle have to do each morning?
9. What does Beetle begin to think about why the midwife won't let her stay inside when a baby is born?
10. How do the villagers feel about Jane?

Deepen Your Understanding

Description is how an author creates pictures with words to tell readers about the people, places, and events in a story. Carefully chosen adjectives, nouns, and verbs can help readers form detailed images in their minds about the story.

In the first three chapters of *The Midwife's Apprentice*, how does the author create detailed pictures—sometimes with only one sentence—of key characters like Beetle, the midwife, the village boys, and even the cat? How does she evoke the sights and smells of village life? Give specific examples of description from the book.

*Focus Your Reading**Vocabulary Words to Know*

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

abundance—more than enough; a large supply

luxurious—full of costly comforts

frequency—the number of times something occurs within a given time frame

turmoil—great confusion or commotion

replenish—to get a fresh supply of goods or materials

accompany—to go with

laden—loaded down; burdened

dire—dreadful; terrible

meandered—took a winding, rambling course with many twists and turns

sundry—miscellaneous; having a wide variety

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

European trade in the High Middle Ages was expanding. The Crusades had helped to open up new trade routes and expose even the remoter parts of Western Europe to new materials and foods. Many of the items that Beetle sees at the fair (particularly silks and spices) have come from Asia, while others have originated in distant regions on the European continent.

The **abbey** was a vital institution in medieval Europe. After the fall of the Roman Empire and well into the Middle Ages, it was largely the monks and nuns within the abbeys who kept religion, art, and learning alive.

Soothsayers were the medieval equivalent of fortune tellers. They worked at fairs and other local entertainments, claiming to know what the future held for their clients.

The **blacksmith** was another important member of the medieval community. He could make or fix a wide variety of metal objects that were essential to daily life—from cooking pots to plowshares to horseshoes.

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. What influence do the changing seasons of the year have on the various characters in this book? How does the author use the seasons to structure the story?

2. As the plot unfolds, how many times does Beetle's curiosity lead her to new discoveries about herself and others?

3. How does Beetle meet her first major challenge in her role as midwife's apprentice?

4. What "gifts" does Beetle receive at the fair?

5. How realistic are the characters in this novel? Is anyone "all good" or "all bad"?

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “She hit upon the mystery of the sudden **abundance** of bread.”
abundance: _____
2. “At any other time she would have enjoyed the visit, for never had she been in such a **luxurious** dwelling, . . .”
luxurious: _____
3. “At that the miller’s wife’s cries increased in **frequency** and volume.”
frequency: _____
4. “Half the village, it seemed, then pushed into the chamber to see the cause of the **turmoil**.”
turmoil: _____
5. “The midwife, needing to **replenish** her stores . . . , made plans to attend the Saint Swithin’s Day Fair at Gobnet-Under-Green.”
replenish: _____
6. “She dearly longed to **accompany** the midwife, but still being Brainless Brat, she was afraid to ask.”
accompany: _____
7. “On her way back to the cottage, **laden** with newly washed clothes to spread in the sun, the midwife tripped over Walter the Blacksmith’s second-best pig and fell, . . .”
laden: _____
8. “The joy in Beetle’s heart warmed her insides and lit her face, even through the midwife’s ranting about lack of wit and the **dire** consequences if she were to lose the silver pennies . . .”
dire: _____
9. “. . . Beetle took the road north that followed the river, passed the mill, . . . then **meandered** easterly and northerly until it ended . . . in the market square of Gobnet-Under-Green.”
meandered: _____
10. “The merchant’s booth was also filled with **sundry** other wares for wondering at: . . .”
sundry: _____

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- When summer comes, what does the midwife do that Beetle finds odd?
 - She begins to bake a great deal of bread.
 - Although she says she is going out to run various errands, she seems to be going somewhere else.
 - The midwife makes much more goose grease ointment than usual.
- Where does Beetle follow Jane several times?
 - to the churchyard
 - to the manor
 - to a field near the Old North Road
- What does Beetle see when she climbs the tree in the field?
 - the midwife selling ointment to Meg
 - the miller running to the midwife for help
 - the baker and the midwife kissing
- What happens when Beetle goes to the miller's house?
 - Beetle ends up having to deliver the miller's wife's baby because the midwife doesn't get there in time.
 - Beetle is unable to help the miller's wife and hides in the corner.
 - Beetle slaps the miller's wife to stop her screaming.
- Why is Beetle impressed by the miller's house?
 - It has two downstairs rooms and a loft.
 - It has two upstairs rooms and a loft.
 - It has two rooms and floors made of wood rather than dirt.
- What does the midwife need to buy at the Saint Swithin's Day Fair?
 - goose grease, pepper, murderer's wash water, and copper kettles
 - clean linen, brass needles, pepper, and nutmeg
 - flasks, murderer's wash water, pepper, and nutmeg
- Why does Beetle go to the fair in the midwife's place?
 - because the midwife breaks her ankle
 - because the midwife is secretly planning to meet the baker instead
 - because the midwife hurts her wrist
- What makes Beetle laugh at the fair?
 - the puppets
 - the soothsayers
 - the merchant's compliments
- Why does Beetle want to buy the wooden comb from the merchant?
 - because she finally wants to comb all of the burrs and thistles out of her hair
 - because there is a cat carved on the comb
 - because the wood smells so fragrant and the polished wood feels so smooth
- When Beetle chooses her new name, how does she think "Alyce" sounds?
 - smart, curly-haired, and pretty
 - mysterious, pretty, and smart
 - clean, friendly, and smart

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. The summer after Beetle arrives, “the world bursts into flowers.” What similar situation is happening at the midwife’s cottage?
2. How does Beetle know that the midwife is not really running the errands she pretends to run?
3. How does Beetle get to the field so quickly on the day she is sent to the manor dairy?
4. What does Beetle say when the midwife threatens to turn her out in the cold and break her knees if Beetle tells anyone what she has seen?
5. When the miller comes running for the midwife’s help, why does Beetle say that she doesn’t know where the midwife is?
6. How does the miller’s wife react to Beetle’s attempts to help her?
7. How does the midwife calm the miller’s wife?
8. Why does Beetle think that the midwife is chanting a witch’s spell when she is really singing “Summer Is A-coming In”?
9. Why is Beetle feeling lightheaded when she arrives at the fair?
10. How does Beetle respond when the merchant gives her the comb and tells her to use it on her “long curls”?

Deepen Your Understanding

In every story, the main character has one or more challenges to overcome. Sometimes these challenges are physical, such as Brat's needing to survive outdoors on a cold winter night. Sometimes they are psychological, such as Beetle's needing to overcome her fear of failure as an apprentice. Sometimes the challenges are negative, such as Beetle's constant abuse by the midwife. Sometimes they are positive, such as Beetle's opportunity to go to the fair alone. In meeting each of these challenges, the character learns and grows. This is called *character development*.

Based on your reading so far, write about the character development that Beetle undergoes. She faces both obstacles and opportunities in her life as a midwife's apprentice. What has she learned so far? How has this changed her?

*Focus Your Reading**Vocabulary Words to Know*

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

punctuated—gave emphasis to; stressed forcefully

daft—crazy; foolish

snaggle-toothed—having crooked or broken teeth; having one tooth that sticks out noticeably beyond the others

floundering—struggling or plunging about in confusion

taunting—jeering or mocking

haymow—upper floor of a barn where hay is stored in piles

pockmarked—scarred by a serious skin condition or disease, including smallpox

casks—wooden barrels built to hold liquids

fermenting—changing chemically; breaking down molecules

lout—an oaf; a clumsy, stupid person

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

Paternoster is the Latin name for the English church prayer that begins “Our Father . . .” The official church language in the Middle Ages, as well as the language of higher education and literature, was Latin.

The **pope** was still the greatest authority in Western Europe, even more powerful than the king. Although the Roman Empire had fallen long before, the Roman church still ruled over English religious life.

All Hallows’ Eve (now known as Halloween) is October 31, the night before All Saints Day. On this night, it was believed that the souls of the dead walked the earth. **Walpurgis Night** (of German origin) was April 30, the night before May Day. On this night, it was believed that witches gathered to engage in demonic activities.

Shrovetide is the time in the church calendar just before Lent begins. In medieval England, Shrove Tuesday (known in some places today as Mardi Gras) was a day of confession and preparation for the next day, Ash Wednesday, and the period of fasting and penitence that followed.

The **punishment of crimes** in the Middle Ages was relatively crude. Thieves, for example, often had their hands chopped off; greater crimes were usually punished by death, while lesser crimes resulted in some sort of corporal punishment.

Edward Longshanks, or Edward I, was king of England from 1272 to 1307 C.E. He was the oldest

son of Henry III.

III. CHAPTERS 6–8

BEFORE READING

*Focus Your Reading**Questions to Think About*

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. What importance do names, and the naming process, have in this book?
2. In how many ways does water play a part in the plot development? Does water also play a symbolic role?
3. What do Alyce's dreams show about her?
4. How does the author pit superstition and ignorance against knowledge and reason?
5. In how many ways is the theme of birth revealed in the text?

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “And as she **punctuated** each name with another pot thrown in the girl’s direction, Beetle thought to go out.”
punctuated: _____

2. ““Gone completely **daft**, have you, Beetle?” said the miller as he passed.”
daft: _____

3. ““Gorm, Will, get out of there,” said **snaggle-toothed** Jack.”
snaggle-toothed: _____

4. ““Can’t,” said Will, spitting water and **floundering**.”
floundering: _____

5. “And some were kind, or nearly so, like . . . the redheaded Will, who threw fewer stones at her since her saving of him and sometimes stopped the **taunting** altogether, . . .”
taunting: _____

6. “There, cuddled in the **haymow**, were Grommet, the smith’s lardy daughter, and the **pockmarked** pig boy from the manor.”
haymow: _____
pockmarked: _____

7. “First they cooked parsnips with sugar and spices and yeast and poured this into **casks**, . . .”
casks: _____

8. “. . . the **fermenting** mixture sang loud and sweet as it turned into wine.”
fermenting: _____

9. ““Are you demon or redheaded **lout**?”” she called.
lout: _____

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- How does the midwife respond when Beetle says that her name is now Alyce?
 - She says that Beetle looks more like a Toad or a Weasel or a Mudhen.
 - She says that Beetle looks more like Walter Smith's horse, Toby.
 - She says that Beetle should name herself for a plant.
- What does the miller say when Beetle calls herself Alyce?
 - that Beetle is a nitwit
 - that she might as well call a rock Alyce
 - that she is a whiffle-brained dung beetle
- What happens when Beetle tells her new name to the village boys?
 - The boys tease her for pretending to be a fine lady from the manor.
 - Will laughs and says that she will always be a dung beetle.
 - The boys think that Beetle is calling Will by the name Alyce.
- How do the boys respond when Will falls into the river?
 - They run away as quickly as possible.
 - Since only one of them can swim, he dives in to help Will.
 - They ask Beetle to help.
- What does Will say to Beetle after he pulls himself out of the river?
 - that she nearly made him drown
 - that she should have thrown something for him to hold onto
 - that she was brave not to run off
- How does Grommet Smith act toward Alyce after the incident at the river?
 - She is mean to Alyce.
 - She is a little nicer to Alyce.
 - She helps Alyce rub chicken manure in the boys' hair.
- What first happens to make the villagers think that the Devil is near?
 - Thomas At-the-Bridge sees strange tracks that stop at the church door.
 - Roger Mustard's cow has a two-headed calf.
 - Dick's granny sees a hairy creature with horns and a tail.
- What do the villagers find when they follow the strange hoofprints to the mill?
 - Grommet and the pig boy cuddled together
 - the miller waiting for the midwife with a bouquet of daisies
 - the miller stealing someone else's grain
- What happens to the apples that Alyce picks in the abbey gardens?
 - She drops them on the path.
 - She leaves them by the gravel pit.
 - She leaves them in the abbey gardens when she hears someone calling for help.
- What does Will ask Alyce to do while she helps him with Tansy?
 - to walk her gently around the gravel pit
 - to sing her a song
 - to pull the baby out by the feet

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. Why does the miller ask Beetle if she has “gone daft”?
2. When Beetle introduces herself as Alyce to various villagers, in what ways do they react?
3. How does Beetle help Will get out of the river?
4. How does most of the village react to Alyce’s rescue of Will?
5. Why is Alyce unafraid of the night, even on All Hallows’ Eve and Walpurgis Night?
6. How does Alyce benefit from delivering most of the nighttime messages in her village?
7. From whom does Alyce seek information while the village thinks the Devil is walking?
8. How does Alyce get revenge on the people who have hurt or embarrassed her?
9. How does Alyce hide the evidence of her prank?
10. In what way does Will end up “rewarding” Alyce after she helps him deliver Tansy’s twin calves?

Deepen Your Understanding

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.

—Anonymous

*What's in a name? that which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet . . .*

—William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

The two well-known quotations above are about names and their lack of power. Do you agree?

In *The Midwife's Apprentice*, names play an important role in the lives of the villagers. A person's name often tells what she or he does for a living (Jane the Midwife, Robert Weaver). A name can also indicate a marked physical feature of its owner (Thomas the Stutterer, Gilbert Gray-Head) or its owner's home (Thomas At-the-Bridge).

The central character—the midwife's apprentice—has many names over the course of the novel. What do all of her names mean? What images do they evoke? What do her various names reveal about how she is judged by the people around her? Finally, when the midwife's apprentice decides to choose her own name, how does she believe this name “sounds”? Write an analysis of the apprentice's many names and how they reflect her own physical and emotional development.

Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

bailiff—an officer of the law

rushlight—a homemade candle that uses the stem of a rush plant as the wick

writhing—twisting and turning one’s body in agony

mewling—whimpering, crying faintly

thrashed—moved violently around, flinging the arms and legs

flailed—beat one’s arms about

revelers—party-goers; merrymakers

contractions—periods of strong muscular tightening, especially during childbirth

threshing—beating grain out of its husk

privies—outhouses; toilets located in small structures outside

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

Medicine in the Middle Ages was still largely undeveloped. At the time when this book takes place, there was no scientific understanding of germs or the spread of disease, so people relied on folk wisdom and superstition for the cure and treatment of health problems. Medicinal approaches usually involved herbal potions, lotions, and ointments, which were mainly derived from local herbs, flowers, weeds, and roots. In fact, many of these herbal treatments were very effective.

Sheep’s blood pudding was a common sausagelike food made from the blood and fat of a sheep, along with other simple ingredients.

Hermits were religious individuals who chose to live isolated lives (often in remote spots like woods or caves). They were considered saintly in medieval times.

Martinmas was a religious festival held on Saint Martin’s Day (November 11).

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. What examples from the text show that Alyce is gaining maturity as well as self-respect?
2. What is the general state of health and medicine at the time in which this book is set? How does this affect individual characters as well as society?
3. How does Alyce meet her second major challenge in her role as midwife's apprentice? How does she meet her third major challenge?
4. In what ways are Runt/Edward and Alyce important to each other?
5. What role does the midwife play in Alyce's successes as well as her defeats?

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “That night Joan the **bailiff**’s wife sent for the midwife.”
bailiff: _____
2. “Alyce lighted Jane’s way through the gloomy night with a **rushlight** that hissed and sputtered in the mist.”
rushlight: _____
3. “She couldn’t see the figure on the bed at first for all the smoke, and then realized that the **writhing** mound was Joan, . . .”
writhing: _____
4. “. . . there she was, a moaning, **mewling** mound on a straw bed.”
mewling: _____
5. “Then, as the hot pains invaded her body, she shouted and **thrashed** and **flailed**, shrieking and kicking.”
thrashed: _____
flailed: _____
6. “. . . in the towns **revelers** were returning home full of beef and wine, . . .”
revelers: _____
7. “She discovered . . . that birthwort roots and flowers can strengthen **contractions** in a reluctant mother, . . .”
contractions: _____
8. ““They are hiring boys to help with the **threshing**.””
threshing: _____
9. “. . . Alnoth the Saxon cleaned the manor **privies** and cursed God for making him a peasant and not a lord, . . .”
privies: _____

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- Why does the midwife send Alyce into the woods with a basket on a November day?
 - to pick blackberries so that she can make blackberry cordial for Old Anna
 - to gather herbs and roots to make medicines to get through the winter
 - to gather nuts and see what kind of a baby year it will be
- What happens when Alyce comes upon the boys teasing the cat?
 - The boys surround Alyce and start teasing her instead.
 - Alyce hits the largest and strongest boy.
 - Alyce throws nuts at the boys and threatens them.
- What happens shortly after dawn as Joan the bailiff's wife is in labor?
 - Joan sneezes, and the baby is born.
 - The midwife sends Alyce for more herbs.
 - Lady Agnes at the manor asks for Alyce's help in delivering her baby.
- What does Joan say to Alyce after the midwife leaves?
 - She tells Alyce that she needs to see a priest because she is dying.
 - She says that she knows the baby is stuck and will never be born.
 - She says that if her baby dies, she will never forgive the midwife.
- How does Joan thank Alyce for her help?
 - She pays Alyce in silver coins.
 - She gives Alyce some of her finest clothing.
 - She names her new baby after Alyce.
- What does Alyce do after her night at Joan the bailiff's wife's house?
 - She starts studying the midwife's work much more carefully.
 - She works more often with Will when he helps animals give birth.
 - She takes charge of making the midwife's herbal medicines and potions.
- Where does Alyce find the boy named Runt?
 - near the cave of the local hermits
 - in the dung heap where she once slept
 - in the cowshed
- Why does Runt choose the new name Edward for himself?
 - because it is the king's name
 - because Alyce says it is her favorite name
 - because the bailiff says that it is a good name for a boy
- When Matthew Blunt comes to the cottage to ask for Alyce's help with his mother, what does the midwife do?
 - She asks who Alyce is.
 - She says Alyce is too busy to help.
 - She slaps Matthew in the face for asking for Alyce's help instead of her own.
- How does Alyce feel after Emma's baby is finally born?
 - that she has been a complete failure
 - that she now knows just as much as the midwife about delivering babies
 - that the midwife still has magical powers which Alyce doesn't understand

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. How does Alyce threaten the boys when she finds them teasing the cat?
2. How does this meeting with the village boys change both their behavior and Alyce's?
3. Why does the midwife go to help Lady Agnes have her baby instead of staying with the bailiff's wife?
4. What does the midwife say about Joan's unborn baby?
5. How does Alyce manage to help Joan during her labor?
6. After delivering Joan's baby, what does Alyce dream about?
7. Whom does Alyce think she would prefer to have during her own labor, someone like Will or someone like Jane Sharp?
8. When Alyce finds the little boy and asks him who he is, how does he respond?
9. What is the first thing Alyce does with Runt when she takes him back to the midwife's cottage?
10. What are the "strange sensations" that Alyce feels after she fails to deliver Emma's baby, and how does she react to them?

Deepen Your Understanding

Authors sometimes create interesting plot situations in which one event is “echoed” later in the story by another similar event. This is called **parallelism**. The two parallel events are alike in many ways, yet they also usually have important differences.

In *The Midwife’s Apprentice*, the midwife discovers Brat in the dung heap and takes the young girl home with her. This is echoed later when Alyce discovers Runt in the cowshed and takes the young boy home with her. These are parallel situations, yet the author has created important differences between them. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Compare and contrast the two events, using examples from the text.

Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

blight—to destroy hope or happiness

compendium—a major summary of important knowledge

tantalizingly—in a tempting manner

vellum—fine parchment, made from the skin of a young animal, on which to write

bodice—a vest, often tied with laces, worn over a blouse or dress

begrudge—to resent; to feel displeasure about something

economies—careful management of resources; methods for avoiding waste

comely—attractive; handsome

incompetence—the lack of ability or skill

suckle—to breast-feed; to nurse

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

The **Antipodes** was a geographic region thought to be at the opposite side of the earth in the Middle Ages.

Scientists in the Middle Ages were still laboring under numerous false assumptions. For example, it was commonly believed that all of the other planets in the solar system revolved around the earth, not the sun.

The **four humours** were the four vital liquids (blood, phlegm, cholera, and melancholy) believed to govern the human body. These fluids supposedly had to be kept in perfect balance in order to maintain good health.

Rebecs, gitterns, and sackbuts were all musical instruments commonly used in the Middle Ages. A rebec was a three-stringed, pear-shaped instrument that predated the violin. A gittern was an early member of the guitar family. A sackbut was a wind instrument that predated the trombone.

Literacy in the Middle Ages was limited to a very small sector of the population—mainly church officials and the budding number of students in universities and cathedral schools.

A **kirtle** could be either a woman's dress skirt *or* a man's tunic or coat.

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. What are the effects of illiteracy on individual characters in this book? What are the effects on society?
2. What role does Magister Reese play in Alyce's life?
3. How important is Will in Alyce's life?
4. How is life at the manor different from life in the village? How is it similar?
5. How does the author use humor in this novel?

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “. . . he had long watched her and wondered what could so **blight** a person so young.”
blight: _____
2. “‘This, . . . is my masterwork, an encyclopaedic **compendium** . . .’”
compendium: _____
3. “The cat listened carefully, although sometimes he lost patience with the tutoring and began to bite at the **tantalizingly** moving pen.”
tantalizingly: _____
4. “When one day he threw away a page he had ruined with an inkblot, Alyce snatched it up and stuffed the stiff **vellum** into her **bodice**.”
vellum: _____
bodice: _____
5. “‘Thundering toads,’ Jennet would say, ‘I am but a poor woman with this wretched inn and a blind man to care for. I am sure God does not **begrudge** me my little **economies**.’”
begrudge: _____
economies: _____
6. “. . . ,there came to the inn a **comely** young man who acted so lordly Alyce thought he must be a knight or a mayor . . .”
comely: _____
7. “. . . she imagined the midwife telling Magister Reese of the girl’s stupidity, her **incompetence**, and her failure.”
incompetence: _____
8. “. . . she watched Girtle nuzzle and **suckle** Rosebud and tuck her against her warm body to give the calf her warmth, . . .”
suckle: _____

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- Where does Alyce sleep on the day she runs away?
 - in a haystack under the stars
 - out in the open in the rain
 - in an old shed near the inn
- Where is the inn located?
 - at the crossroads near the big manor house
 - where the road from the village meets the road to the sea
 - about an hour's walk from the seashore
- Why is the innkeeper called John Dark?
 - because of his moody, negative personality
 - because of his dark-colored clothing
 - because he is nearly blind
- How does Alyce feel during Christmastime at the inn?
 - dead and empty inside
 - happy to eat delicious food and to hear good music
 - fearful that Will may have forgotten her
- What does Magister Reese do for Alyce?
 - He asks Alyce to help him with his writing so that he can finish his book faster.
 - He gives her a yellow ribbon for her hair so that she will find a sweetheart.
 - He pretends to teach the alphabet to the cat but really teaches Alyce.
- What does Alyce learn from Jennet?
 - how to put extra yeast in the bread and weight the mugs to save money
 - how to put the best linens on the bed
 - how to carve a roast goose with one hand and make butter with the other
- What does Will Russet tell Alyce when he comes to the inn?
 - that Alyce Little has three teeth
 - that Grommet has married the lord of the manor
 - that the midwife has hired a new apprentice
- What does Jane Sharp tell Magister Reese that Alyce's problem is?
 - Alyce will never know enough about medicine to be a midwife.
 - Alyce does not like delivering babies.
 - Alyce gives up too easily.
- What does Alyce imagine Edward will do when he sees her?
 - He will ask her to live with him.
 - He will introduce her to one of the workers at the manor so that she can marry.
 - He will beg her to take him away from the manor.
- What does the cook insist to Alyce?
 - that her kitchen is cleaner than it looks
 - that Alyce and Edward must be sister and brother
 - that it is too hot to cook any puddings

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. When Alyce wakes up on the rainy morning after she runs away, what does she whisper to herself?
2. What finally makes Alyce get up and keep moving instead of waiting to die?
3. How do Alyce and Purr make themselves useful at the inn?
4. What does Alyce mostly live on at the inn?
5. Why does Magister Reese talk to Purr instead of to Alyce?
6. How does Alyce respond when Magister Reese asks her what she wants?
7. When Will asks Alyce why she has run away, how does she respond?
8. What qualities does Will tell Alyce she has?
9. How does Alyce feel when she sees Roger Mustard and Thomas the Stutterer in the village fields?
10. At the manor, how many different times, and to whom, does Alyce ask where Edward is?

Deepen Your Understanding

The characters in this novel live closely connected with the natural world. Daily weather conditions, as well as the changing seasons, affect the lives of the villagers. For example, rain during the harvest could mean disaster for the grain crop—and many hungry mouths next winter.

The natural world also sometimes reflects the emotional state of certain characters in *The Midwife's Apprentice*. When “the world burst into flowers” in Chapter 4, for instance, “the midwife’s cottage burst forth into bread” at the same time.

Describe some ways the natural world both *affects* and *reflects* the lives of the main character, Alyce. Give examples from the book.

Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

mortar—a mixture of sand, water, and other substances used as cement

shod—wearing shoes

lathering—covering with soapsuds

prosperous—wealthy; successful

barren—unable to bear children

compassion—deep sympathy for other people's suffering

stupefied—amazed; stunned

berating—scolding loudly or sharply

surfeit—excess; too great an amount

vigorous—strong; full of life

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

Caused by a variety of diseases, **pox** are skin eruptions that often result in scarring. In the Middle Ages, the most feared and most deadly of pox-related diseases was smallpox.

Manor life and the feudal system were a way of life in the early Middle Ages. By the later Middle Ages, as villages and towns grew and attracted residents from the surrounding countryside, the feudal system began to collapse. During the time in which this novel is set (the thirteenth century), many manors were still prospering, however, with strong, nearly self-sufficient economies and clearly defined social hierarchies.

Salisbury is a city in south-central England. It is a famous cathedral city, with its cathedral dating back to the thirteenth century (around the time this novel takes place).

Oxford is a city in south-central England with one of the most famous universities in the world, Oxford University.

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. Is it important that the cook believes Alyce and Edward are sister and brother?
2. How does the author show that Alyce has learned to “give voice” to her thoughts and feelings?
3. What individual events have influenced Alyce to take a better look at herself, both physically and mentally?
4. In what ways is the theme of motherhood presented in this novel?
5. What social and economic roles do the men in this novel play? What about the women?

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “He told her . . . of the masons who slapped **mortar** and bricks together to build a great new tower at the corner of the hall . . .”
mortar: _____
2. “He described . . . , the nervous preparations accompanying the arrival of some velvet-**shod** bishop or priest, . . .”
shod: _____
3. “Alyce, coughing and sputtering, traded jobs with the man who was **lathering** their backs.”
lathering: _____
4. “Just then a party of riders rode into the inn yard—a **prosperous**-looking man wearing too much jewelry, a stout lady in some obvious discomfort, . . .”
prosperous: _____
5. “My wife has been **barren** since the day of our marriage and breeds nothing but discontent.”
barren: _____
6. “She was kept from leaving altogether by her sympathy and **compassion**, and by a certain curiosity . . .”
compassion: _____
7. The **stupefied** father took the baby to his mother, . . .”
stupefied: _____
8. “. . . who commenced scolding and **berating** the little fellow, all the while smoothing his black hair and caressing his little hands, . . .”
berating: _____
9. “From someone who had no place in the world, she had suddenly become someone with a **surfeit** of places.”
surfeit: _____
10. “She felt again the **vigorous**, squirming, wonderful aliveness of the merchant’s son as he wriggled into her hands.”
vigorous: _____

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. What does Edward tell Alyce when she finds him in the hen house?
 - a. that he is very happy living at the manor
 - b. that he wants to go away with her
 - c. that Lord Arnulf wants to adopt him
2. What does Alyce do when he tells her this?
 - a. She sings him to sleep.
 - b. She cries for the first time.
 - c. She says she can help him learn to read.
3. When Edward asks Alyce to tell him a story, what does she say?
 - a. “I don’t know any stories.”
 - b. “Every story should have a hero and brave deeds.”
 - c. “My stories are too sad for you to hear.”
4. What job does Edward do at the river?
 - a. He pulls fleece off the sheep.
 - b. He matches up mother and baby sheep.
 - c. He lathers the sheep with water and yellow soap.
5. What does Alyce discover when she helps the men at the river?
 - a. that she cannot keep up with the men
 - b. that her hands are clean for the first time
 - c. that she would like to do this kind of work forever
6. What does the prosperous-looking man tell Jennet when he and his wife arrive at the inn?
 - a. that a big storm is coming and they need shelter immediately
 - b. that they would like a fine dinner
 - c. that his wife is very ill and needs a priest, a magician, or a doctor
7. What happens when Jennet sends the manservant for the midwife?
 - a. The manservant tells Jennet the midwife must be away delivering another baby.
 - b. The midwife sends a message saying Alyce should deliver this baby herself.
 - c. The manservant refuses to go out in the middle of a thunderstorm.
8. How does Alyce help the woman give birth to her baby?
 - a. Magister Reese stays by her side and gives her the instructions out of his book.
 - b. She uses all of her knowledge from the midwife and tries some of her ideas.
 - c. She puts the woman into bed and gives her blackberry cordial to drink.
9. What is the “true miracle” of that June night at the inn?
 - a. that Alyce has actually delivered a baby on her own
 - b. that the prosperous-looking man’s wife does not have a stomach worm
 - c. that Alyce laughs
10. What happens when the midwife turns Alyce away from her door?
 - a. Alyce stays at the door.
 - b. Alyce starts to leave, but the cat refuses to move.
 - c. The cat starts to walk away.

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. What does Alyce find Edward doing in the hen house?
2. How does Edward cheer up Alyce when she cries?
3. Where does Edward usually sleep?
4. What does Edward complain about to Alyce?
5. What does Alyce do when she is alone at the river after the sheep washing is over?
6. When does Alyce tell Edward she will see him again?
7. Where does the prosperous-looking man have his wife lie down at the inn?
8. Why does the man think that his wife has grown stout?
9. What sorts of job offers does Alyce get after she delivers the baby at the inn?
10. What does Alyce decide she wants to do more than anything?

Deepen Your Understanding

A *theme* is a major topic or idea that runs through a story. In *The Midwife's Apprentice*, birth is a major theme. In fact, birth is referred to in nearly every chapter. It is expressed on a literal level, for example, the midwife helping to deliver babies safely. It is also expressed on a more symbolic level, for example, Alyce having a “newborn hope” of someday being an apprentice. Explain the different ways the birth theme is expressed. Give specific details from the book to support your ideas.

End-of-Book Test

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- When Brat first hears the midwife speak, what does the midwife say the boys are “mucking up”?
 - her freshly starched wimple
 - her flower beds
 - her Spanish leather shoes
- How does Beetle’s first mug of sour ale at the midwife’s house taste?
 - sweet
 - nasty
 - watery
- When Beetle pulls the nearly-drowned cat out of the sack, in what does she wrap him?
 - a piece of her skirt
 - a scrap from an old bedsheet
 - her bodice
- Why does Beetle always think of the midwife as Jane Sharp?
 - because that is the midwife’s maiden name
 - because of her sharp nose and sharp glance
 - because of her sharp scissors and sharp fingernails
- Why are the midwife’s bottles of ointments, powders, and syrups not labeled?
 - Beetle has forgotten to put the labels on.
 - The labels have fallen off in the rain.
 - The midwife cannot write to make labels.
- When Kate the weaver’s daughter has her baby in the field, what does it remind Beetle of?
 - when she saw calves being born
 - when she pulled the cat out of the bag
 - when she watched an operation
- What does Beetle do with the butter and eggs from Meg at the dairy while she climbs the tree to watch the midwife and the miller?
 - She puts them in her bodice.
 - She puts them on a rock near the path.
 - She puts them in a hollow log.
- What was the hangman doing at the fair?
 - preparing to conduct a hanging
 - helping the bailiff look for a criminal
 - selling murderer’s wash water
- A man at the fair mistakes Beetle for another girl named Alyce. Why is this an important moment for Beetle?
 - because it makes her see how important it is to have a family
 - because she realizes that she looks like an Alyce—someone who can read
 - because this man ends up offering her a job at the horse races
- What name does Alyce’s cat “choose” for himself?
 - Purr
 - Puss
 - Purslane

(continued)

End-of-Book Test (continued)

11. What does Alyce think when she first hears a voice calling from the gravel pit?
 - a. that it is a demon calling her
 - b. that Will has gotten himself into a ridiculous situation
 - c. that an animal is in trouble and needs help
12. At what time of day is Alyce Little born?
 - a. at midnight
 - b. at high noon
 - c. at dawn
13. Why does Alyce send Edward up to the manor after she first meets him?
 - a. because she needs him to fetch the midwife
 - b. because she thinks they will hire him
 - c. because she wants him to buy some eggs and butter
14. How does the midwife enter Emma Blunt's cottage after Alyce gives up trying to deliver Emma's baby?
 - a. She roars in, like wind before rain.
 - b. She sweeps in majestically, like a queen.
 - c. She steps in merrily, pleased that she has finally been called in.
15. Why does Magister Reese have so many spots on his skin when Alyce first notices him?
 - a. He has splattered himself with ink.
 - b. He has had smallpox.
 - c. He has fallen down the stairs and is bruised.
16. What does Alyce think about the comely young man who acts so lordly at the inn?
 - a. She thinks that she would love to marry a man that handsome.
 - b. She finds his airs unpleasant and wishes that he would leave immediately.
 - c. She thinks that he must be a knight or a mayor.
17. What does the cook at the manor tell Alyce she "cannot abide"?
 - a. turnips
 - b. teasing
 - c. twins
18. Why are the sheep from the manor farm being washed at the river?
 - a. They need to look their best for the Saint Swithin's Day Fair.
 - b. They will be sheared on the following day.
 - c. They have been infested with fleas.
19. How many people are in the room assisting the merchant's wife when she gives birth at the inn?
 - a. one
 - b. two
 - c. three
20. What does the name of John Dark's inn become after Alyce returns to the midwife's house to live?
 - a. The Apprentice's Cat
 - b. The Merchant's Wife
 - c. The Cat and Cheese

Answer Key

I. CHAPTERS 1–3

Build Your Vocabulary

Wording and definitions may vary. Students may remember the definitions given in the Vocabulary Words to Know section of Focus Your Reading, or they may refine the definitions based on the context and the reading overall. Students' new sentences will vary.

Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. c |
| 2. a | 7. b |
| 3. a | 8. a |
| 4. b | 9. c |
| 5. a | 10. a |

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer

1. Although it smells bad, it probably doesn't smell much worse than the other places where she sleeps, the rotten food she eats, or her own dirty body.
2. She has been stealing food, camping wherever she can, moving from village to village, and helping sometimes with a harvest in return for food or shelter.
3. The ugliest, stupidest boys pick on her, probably because the homeless Brat is the only person with whom they can get away with such cruelty.
4. She thinks that Brat is smart, because she has figured out that the dung heap is warm; she also thinks that Brat is hungry enough to work hard for her.
5. First she leaves them for the cat to eat, but then she feels sorry for the mice and buries them in the dung heap.
6. First she walks in a circular pattern to find the bag; then she cuts the bag open with a sharp stone to release the eel; finally she lifts the cat out of the bag and puts him in the warm dung heap.
7. She is skilled and very energetic, but she does not show any sympathy for her clients or seem to take pleasure in her work.
8. She starts the fire, sweeps and waters the floor, roasts the bacon, washes up, sprinkles fleabane

around the house, and dusts the shelves.

9. She begins to think that the midwife doesn't want Beetle to learn too much about her job. Beetle is being kept out not because she is stupid, but because she is smart.
10. They think she is greedy. They resent her haggling over money and taking advantage of them, but they need her services.

Deepen Your Understanding

Answers will vary. Students should mention some or all of the following descriptive passages (using specific wording from the text): Chapter 1—the smelly dung heap, the first appearance of Brat, the reference to the village boys, the first appearance of the midwife; Chapter 2—the first appearance of the cat, the reference to Beetle as she moves like a beetle away from the boys, the eel, the nearly-drowned cat; Chapter 3—more about the Midwife Jane Sharp, the appearance of springtime, the midwife's herbs and other medicinal substances.

II. CHAPTERS 4–5

Build Your Vocabulary

Wording and definitions may vary. Students may remember the definitions given in the Vocabulary Words to Know section of Focus Your Reading, or they may refine the definitions based on the context and the reading overall. Students' new sentences will vary.

Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. c |
| 2. c | 7. a |
| 3. c | 8. a |
| 4. b | 9. b |
| 5. a | 10. c |

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer

1. The cottage “burst forth into bread”; there is bread to eat morning, noon, and night.
2. The midwife says that she is going to the miller's to have the oats ground, but she goes off without the oats; she says she is going to deliver comfrey tonic, but she leaves the tonic behind; she says that she is going to feed the

hens, but the last hen has already been slaughtered.

3. She runs as fast as she can to the dairy, then runs by a hidden pathway to the field with the butter and eggs tied in her skirt.
4. Beetle says that she only talks to the cat, and the cat doesn't care whom the midwife kisses.
5. She has promised the midwife not to tell anyone about her affair with the baker, so she must pretend that she does not know where the midwife is.
6. She finds Beetle useless; she calls Beetle names like "nitwit" and throws things at her.
7. She slaps her numerous times, gives her tea to drink, and puts her into bed.
8. Beetle has never heard the midwife sing before; now, when she hears it, the midwife's song sounds tuneless, joyless, and rather harsh.
9. She may be hungry, because she has given her food to a hungry goat, or she may just be very excited about being there.
10. She has never realized before that her tangled hair might be curly; the comment prompts her to comb her hair, look at her reflection, and view herself in a new light.

Deepen Your Understanding

Answers will vary. By the end of Chapter 5, students should be able to articulate some or all of the following details about Beetle's character development:

- She has become a reliable, hardworking employee for the midwife and is no longer wandering from place to place (this shows maturity and stability).
- She has made friends with the cat and has dared to rescue him from the water. (She is now more capable of loving, taking risks, and caring for others.)
- She has patiently endured hunger, cold, and abuse at the midwife's house. (She can summon patience and inner strength to achieve her ends.)
- Although the midwife repeatedly shuts her out, both literally and figuratively, Beetle manages to "work her way in" and discover many of the midwife's secrets. (Beetle now uses her intelligence and curiosity to learn more and control more in her environment.)
- She collapses in panic and avoidance during the

millers' wife's labor. (She still needs to develop self-confidence; she accepts failure too easily.)

- She accepts all of the gifts she receives at the fair (both the comb and the compliments) and uses them to study herself more closely; she decides to better herself by changing her name and learning more. (Beetle is gaining self-awareness and self-confidence).

III. CHAPTERS 6–8

Build Your Vocabulary

Wording and definitions may vary. Students may remember the definitions given in the Vocabulary Words to Know section of Focus Your Reading, or they may refine the definitions based on the context and the reading overall. Students' new sentences will vary.

Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. a |
| 2. b | 7. b |
| 3. c | 8. c |
| 4. a | 9. b |
| 5. c | 10. b |

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer

1. The miller hears Beetle thinking of new names for the cat out loud; he thinks that she is talking nonsense words to herself.
2. The miller tells her that she might as well name a rock or a sheep Alyce; Grommet calls her a nitwit; the village boys think that she is calling the redhaired boy Alyce and tease him; only Will, whom she rescues, is willing to call her by her new name.
3. She crawls out on a tree branch, making the branch dip down toward the water until Will can catch hold.
4. Most people have paid no attention to Alyce at all; nothing much changes, except Will's behavior.
5. Since she has slept outside for most of her life, she does not find the dark at all threatening.
6. She gets a chance to observe her neighbors without them knowing; she can observe what everyone in the village is up to.
7. She talks to old Gilbert Gray-Head about woodcarving, and she talks to the priest about sin and evil.

8. She exposes their own sins by carving wooden hoofs and making “devil’s” footprints in the damp ground to lead the villagers to the “crime scenes.”
9. She throws the wooden hooves into the deepest, swiftest part of the river; they are retrieved by someone downstream who burns them as firewood.
10. He starts telling the villagers about the wonderful luck and help that Alyce has brought him, so her reputation (and her self-confidence) grows.

Deepen Your Understanding

Answers will vary. Students should be able to see the critical distinction between the apprentice’s earlier names (Brat, Beetle, Dung Beetle, Clodpole, Toad, Weasel, Mudhen, and so forth, all of which are derogatory) and her final, self-selected name (Alyce, which she thinks sounds “clean and friendly and smart”). Students should also recognize that many of the apprentice’s earlier names are animal names; moreover, they are the names of animals generally considered unclean, unintelligent, or otherwise unpleasant and unattractive. The real transformation of the main character from a dirty, unloved girl who survives by her animal intelligence to a clean, self-respected adolescent with an avocation is reflected in the transformation of her name from Brat to Alyce.

IV. CHAPTERS 9–11

Build Your Vocabulary

Wording and definitions may vary. Students may remember the definitions given in the Vocabulary Words to Know section of Focus Your Reading, or they may refine the definitions based on the context and the reading overall. Students’ new sentences will vary.

Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. a |
| 2. c | 7. c |
| 3. b | 8. a |
| 4. b | 9. a |
| 5. c | 10. a |

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer

1. She threatens to uncork her bottle of rat’s blood and viper’s flesh, summon the Devil, and change them all into women.

2. Alyce is no longer afraid of the boys; she can hold her own. The boys, however, are a little afraid of Alyce; they no longer want to tease her.
3. She is greedy, and Lady Agnes will pay her in silver instead of with farm produce.
4. She says that Joan’s baby is dead; she plans to come back in time to take the baby and collect her fee.
5. Alyce asks herself what the midwife would do, and she remembers what Will has done in the gravel pit to help Tansy; she gives Joan care and attention.
6. She dreams about her mother, although she cannot remember it when she wakes up.
7. She would prefer someone like Will; he doesn’t know as much about herbs and potions, but he is kinder than the midwife and just as skilled at delivering babies.
8. He says that he is nobody and that he will go.
9. She cleans him up, tells him that she will help him find work and shelter, and that she will help him choose a better name.
10. She feels like crying but doesn’t know how; she runs away because that is what she has always done when she has run into trouble.

Deepen Your Understanding

Answers will vary. Responses might include some or all of the following: **Similarities**—both children are young, scrawny, and dirty; both are homeless vagabonds sleeping in stables; both are found by older females who are potential “mother figures”; both need food, shelter, and steady employment; both are taken to the midwife’s house and fed; both are helped to find their “places in life” by the women who discover them. **Differences**—Brat/Beetle cannot express emotion when she is first found; Runt has tears on his cheeks, so he is capable of crying and showing emotion. The midwife is not at all motherly—she withholds food, warmth, and affection; Alyce is motherly and nurturing—she feeds the boy, cleans him up, and tells him he is “likely looking.” The midwife rejects Beetle’s new name, refusing to call her Alyce; Alyce rejects the name Runt for the boy and helps him choose his own name (Edward). The midwife keeps Beetle, hoping to get cheap labor out of her; Alyce sends Edward away to the manor, where she hopes he’ll have a better life.

V. CHAPTERS 12–14

Build Your Vocabulary

Wording and definitions may vary. Students may remember the definitions given in the Vocabulary Words to Know section of Focus Your Reading, or they may refine the definitions based on the context and the reading overall. Students' new sentences will vary.

Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. a |
| 2. b | 7. a |
| 3. c | 8. c |
| 4. a | 9. c |
| 5. c | 10. b |

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer

1. She whispers that she is nothing, has nothing, and can do nothing. She has no place to go and can't learn anything, so she may as well die.
2. Her body, which has grown accustomed to shelter, food, and warmth, is too uncomfortable just to lie there.
3. Alyce works in the kitchen; Purr keeps mice away from the barley.
4. She is fed mostly beans, bread, and Jennet's bad beer.
5. Alyce is too sad and empty to talk to anyone; Magister Reese knows that if he "teaches" the cat, Alyce will listen to every word and will learn.
6. She says that she wants a full belly, a contented heart, and a place in the world.
7. She considers making excuses, but she finally tells Will the truth about her failure with Emma Blunt; she says she is "too stupid" to be a midwife's apprentice.
8. He says that she has guts and common sense; he says that no one can know everything and that she knows more than she thinks.
9. Her throat and her chest feel odd; she feels homesick, but she turns away and tries not to think about it.
10. She asks six times; she asks the tall, red-nosed man; the blacksmith and his apprentices; the kitchen maid; the laundress; the carpenters; and, finally, the cook.

Deepen Your Understanding

Answers will vary. Possible responses might include the following:

- In Chapter 1, Brat/Beetle is affected by winter; she is always cold, hungry, and in search of shelter. At the same time, she is in a poor psychological state: "It was as cold and dark inside her as out in the frosty night."
- In Chapter 3, spring arrives, the world warms up, planting begins, the world is green, and Alyce herself begins to show "new life"—taking more interest in her apprenticeship.
- The "blazing sun" of summer in Chapter 5 "dried the hay, gladdened the villagers," and gives Beetle "a cheerful heart."
- In the fall, when night comes earlier, the villagers are spooked; Alyce takes advantage of the damp autumn earth to make "Devil's" footprints.
- Autumn also means that apples and berries are ripe, so in Chapter 8 Alyce and the midwife brew cider and wine.
- Later in Chapter 8, Alyce is happy about helping Will deliver the calves—"Her song brightened the cold gray day so that a cowbird thought it was spring and began to sing . . ."
- This natural cycle repeats itself, so that Alyce is once again cold and "lifeless" inside during her winter of "exile" at the inn, comes to life as the spring returns, and (with the help of a cathartic thunderstorm) arrives back in the village in the full bloom of summer, feeling equally sunny and full of bloom herself.

VI. CHAPTERS 15–17

Build Your Vocabulary

Wording and definitions may vary. Students may remember the definitions given in the Vocabulary Words to Know section of Focus Your Reading, or they may refine the definitions based on the context and the reading overall. Students' new sentences will vary.

Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice

- | | |
|------|------|
| 1. a | 6. c |
| 2. b | 7. a |
| 3. a | 8. b |
| 4. b | 9. c |

5. b

10. b

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer

1. He is playing with the chickens; he pretends that they are a royal family, with knights preparing to go into battle against the Scots.
2. He wiggles his loose front tooth.
3. He usually sleeps in a corner of the kitchen on a mound of straw.
4. He complains about being too small to help with larger jobs like threshing and ploughing, and being made to do small tasks like gathering eggs; he complains about getting teased for being Cook's pet.
5. She bathes in the river and washes her hair and clothes.
6. She says she'll come to visit at Christmas, Easter, and his saint's day; she also says she'll come to see when his new tooth grows in.
7. He sweeps the dishes off the top of the big table and lays her down there.
8. He says that she has been eating too much herring pie and almond pudding.
9. The merchant and his wife ask her to come with them to Salisbury to care for their baby; Magister Reese asks her to come with him to Oxford to care for his sister; Jennet offers her a penny now and then if she will continue to work at the inn.
10. She wants to return to the village and continue her apprenticeship so that she can one day be a midwife herself.

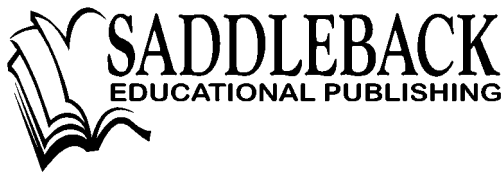
Deepen Your Understanding

Answers will vary. Possible responses might include the following:

- **Literal:** The midwife delivers babies; Alyce delivers babies; Will delivers baby animals; they all help to bring new life into the world and keep society alive and well. In addition, the natural cycle of the seasons can be seen as culminating each year in the renewal and rebirth of spring.
- **Figurative:** With each change of her name, the main character (Brat/Beetle/Alyce) can be seen as reborn into a more highly evolved, civilized human being. There are also two symbolic "births" at the river, when Alyce first "delivers" the cat from the sunken sack, and again when she pulls Will from the water with the help of the tree branch. Moreover, Alyce's hope and faith are also reborn after the long, dreary winter at the inn, when Alyce's successful delivery of a newborn baby produces a new sense of self-confidence and reaffirms her identity as a midwife's apprentice.

END-OF-BOOK TEST

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. c | 11. a |
| 2. a | 12. a |
| 3. a | 13. b |
| 4. b | 14. a |
| 5. c | 15. a |
| 6. b | 16. c |
| 7. c | 17. c |
| 8. c | 18. b |
| 9. b | 19. a |
| 10. a | 20. c |



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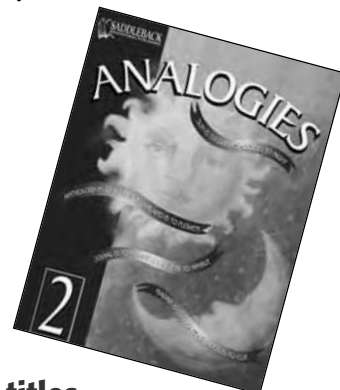
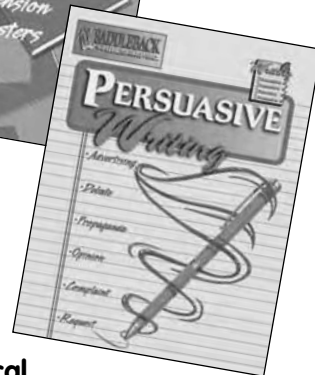
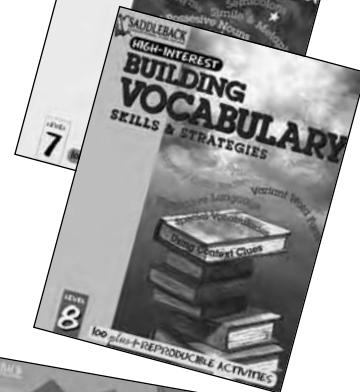
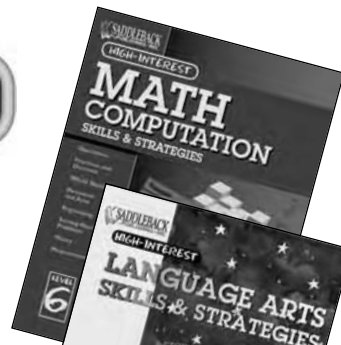
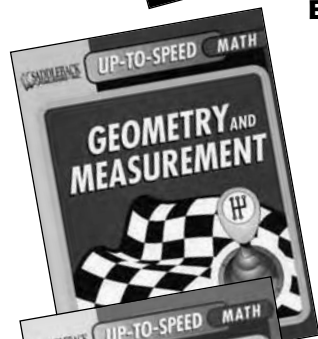
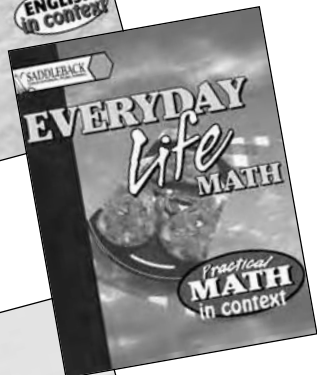
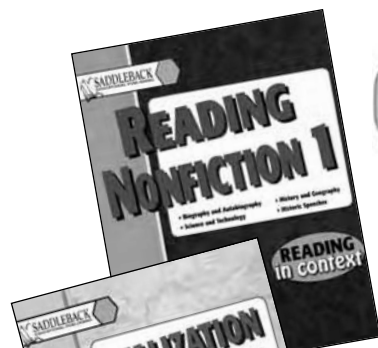
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