

Messenger Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Young Matty is struggling to understand his strange and mysterious gift of healing powers just as the altruistic society he lives in begins to experience disharmony. A growing group of citizens demands to close its borders. At the same time, the Forest that once welcomed Matty now darkens and thickens to prevent passage. When Matty's caregiver, Seer, enlists Matty's help to travel through the Forest and return with Seer's daughter before the border closure, Matty must call upon all of his courage to journey through increasingly dangerous Forest.

Matty was once a young troublemaker from a broken home and once referred to himself as Fiercest of the Fierce. After arriving at Village, the community cared for Matty. Now a boy on the verge of adulthood, Matty lives with a blind man called Seer. Matty assists Seer with cooking and caring for the house. Seer considers Matty a son.

In a mysterious evening walk to the Forest, Matty seeks out a small frog. For reasons unknown, Matty is confused and fearful of the small animal. On the return trip home, Matty hears mournful singing, or keening. Gatherer was entangled and killed by Forest, which is a dangerous place for most citizens. However, Forest has had a mysterious kinship with Matty, always allowing Matty to pass through unscathed and even providing food by way of fish and berries. Matty, who delivers messages for the community because of his easy passage through Forest, hopes to be named Messenger in the near future.

Matty's friend Ramon brags about his family's new Gaming Machine his family has acquired. Matty pleads with Seer for a Gaming Machine, but Seer does not approve of Trade Mart, which is where Ramon's family bartered for the machine. Matty desires to attend Trade Mart, but Seer disapproves. Matty insists on attending and Seer eventually agrees but asks Matty to promise not to trade anything. Matty is confused because he has nothing to trade. At Trade Mart, Matty is disturbed by what he observes among the villagers. The atmosphere is serious and dark, and Matty notices that villagers he thinks of as kindly now exhibit harsh mannerisms.

Jean, Matty's friend, offers Matty a puppy from her dog's recent litter. When the dogs fall ill and most of the litter dies, Matty places his hands on the dog and puppy. Immediately, the dogs make a recovery, but Matty is exhausted and drained. In a flashback, Matty recalls stepping on a frog in the Forest, injuring its leg. When Matty touched the frog's leg, it was healed. Matty falls asleep.

Later, the growing desire to close the Village borders causes an uncomfortable situation for newcomers who arrive at Village. Mentor leads a group of citizen who protest against allowing newcomers into Village. Leader diffuses the situation temporarily, but the Village eventually votes to close the border. After the decision is finalized, Seer asks Matty to travel through Forest to a neighboring community. Seer's daughter, Kira, will not be able to return to Village once the borders are closed, and Seer asks Matty to retrieve her before the wall is erected. Matty agrees, but Leader warns Matty that Forest



is becoming increasingly dark and dangerous. Matty insists on leaving, thinking of his promise to Seer.

On his way to find Kira, Matty notices small changes in Forest. The paths are denser than before and he smells a foul odor that he never smelled before. When Matty reaches Kira, he offers to heal her twisted leg, but she declines. Matty and Kira depart for Village, but Forest is increasingly hostile. Twigs cut Kira's feet and acidic sap painfully wounds Matty. Leader, who is watching over Kira and Matty by using his gift of seeing beyond, discovers that Forest plans to kill the two travelers. Leader ventures into Forest in a rescue attempt, but becomes trapped by Forest's vines.

Injured and near death, Matty encourages Kira to use her gift of seeing the future to reach out to Leader. Kira and Leader unite their gifts and communicate with one another. Leader tells Kira to ask Matty to use his gift. Confused, Matty instinctively places his hands on the ground. Matty calls forth his gift and heals the earth. The discord and desire to build the Village wall disappear. Kira and Leader's injuries are healed. Forest returns to its original state, no longer a dark and hostile place. With the last of his life force, Matty heals his world. After Matty's death, Leader gives Matty his true name of Healer.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Matty is a young man coming of age in the community of Village. While Matty has overcome a harsh childhood, he now resides with the blind man, called Seer, who nurtures and cares for Matty as he would a son. While Matty is learning to comprehend the changes he is experiencing, such as growing feelings for Mentor's daughter and the discovery of a new power, the community around him suffers a deteriorating change in atmosphere.

Chapter one introduces Matty, the blind man's companion who helps with cooking and cleaning in exchange for a home. While the two cook dinner, Matty is amazed, as always, that the blind man can navigate around the kitchen with such ease. The blind man notices that Matty is impatient, and Matty confesses that he is anxious to check on something in the forest. However, Matty is secretive about his errand, admitting to himself that he is frightened because he does not understand it. After dinner, Matty ventures out toward the Forest. On his way, Matty runs into his friend, Ramon. Ramon brags about how his family has acquired a Gaming Machine. Matty tells Ramon that he is venturing into the Forest and needs privacy. Once in the Forest, Matty finds the small frog he is looking for. After examining the frog and returning it to the vegetation of the Forest, Matty returns to the Village. On his way home, Matty hears keening, the mourning sounds of loss.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Matty is the story's main character, and the book introduces Matty in the transition period between boyhood and manhood. The scene where Matty assists the blind man while cooking dinner emphasizes his youthfulness. In contrast with the blind man, who takes the time to cut ingredients and slowly cook the meal, Matty is impatient and would rather toss the ingredients together at once or forego cooking completely. There is also a sense of foreboding and change in the first chapter. Matty is intent on seeing a frog in the Forest, but the frog's significance is unknown. The Forest itself is foreboding and dangerous to the other villagers, but mysteriously accepts Matty's passage. At the end of the first chapter, the sense of foreboding increases when Matty hears the sounds of keening, which suggests that there has been a death in the Village. The reader is also introduced to the title's relevance. Matty aspires to be named Village Messenger based on his frequent journeys through Forest while delivering messages to neighboring towns.



Chapter 2-4

Chapter 2-4 Summary

In chapter two, Ramon informs Matty that Gatherer was killed while attempting to pass through Forest. Matty decides that Gatherer must have overlooked a Warning from Forest. The blind man, named Seer, received a warning from Forest during the blind man's last trip through Forest in way of a twig puncture. The blind man could not enter Forest again. Ramon continues the conversation by bragging about his family's Gaming Machine. Chapter two also introduces Leader, who came to Village as a young boy via a sled. The Museum displays the sled and other significant town relics. Leader watches the town and sees something unknown in the Forest shadows.

In chapter three, Matty attempt to convince Seer to attend Trade Mart for a Gaming Machine. Seer suggests giving up reading and music for the machine. Matty has second thoughts about the trade, but continues his attempts to convince Seer. Seer asks what Ramon's family traded for the Gaming Machine, but Matty does not know. Then, Seer changes the subject by mentioning Mentor's daughter, whom Matty has feelings for. Matty continues to ask Seer questions about Trade Mart and expresses a desire to attend the next Trade Mart event.

In chapter four, Matty is summoned to Leader's home for a new assignment. Matty is tasked with delivering messages announcing a community meeting. Before leaving Leader's home, Leader asks Matty whether there has been a decline in fish. Leader confesses that he is concerned about the food supply. Matty spends most of the day delivering messages around the Village. When Seer reads the message about the meeting, which involves a vote about whether to close the community borders, Seer says that selfishness is creeping into Village. Matty is shocked because the proponents for the border closure are led by Mentor, who is considered to be kind and unselfish. Seer is puzzled and inquires whether Mentor has traded at Trade Mart. Matty indicates that he has not noticed any changes.

Chapter 2-4 Analysis

Matty's understanding of Forest is exhibited during Matty's conversation with Ramon. Matty understands that Gatherer was killed by Forest because Gatherer did not recognize Forest's Warning. Matty's affinity with Forest is shown, but it is unknown why the kinship exists. Matty only knows that Forest allows Matty safe passage, and Matty has never been given a warning by Forest. However, Matty does not know all of Forest's secrets. For example, Matty does not know why Forest would kill a kind man such as Gatherer. The second chapter expands the story beyond the blind man's home and Forest to the Village. Leader's role as watcher and protector of Village is suggested by his name and actions of closely watching over the community. The sense of foreboding continues at the end of chapter two when Leader sees an unknown change in Forest.



Matty is driven to jealousy by his friend Ramon, and Matty continues to demonstrate his immaturity by coveting the Gaming Machine. When Seer hypothetically suggests trading artistic and educational pastimes of music and books for a mere mechanical device, Matty wavers but does not cease his efforts. Matty resolves to watch at the next Trade Mart, despite Seer's warning that watching the trading session would be painful. Seer is proud of the fact that he has never traded, suggesting that trading is not a wise choice.

Matty is excited and proud of his job as town messenger, and aspires to be named formally in the capacity of Messenger. Chapter four reveals additional information about Leader's background as a well-read, caring person with Village's best interest at heart. The controversy surrounding the vote to close the borders and Mentor's role foreshadows future turmoil in the Village. The Trade Mart issue is broached again, giving an ominous feeling that Mentor has traded, which could explain Mentor's mysterious change in values.



Chapters 5-7

Chapters 5-7 Summary

In chapter five, Matty stops at Mentor's home to speak with Jean about adopting a dog from Mentor's daughter, Jean. Jean's dog gave birth to three puppies, but Jean tells Matty that two puppies already died. Both the mother dog and remaining puppy are ill. Jean leads Matty to the sick dogs, and after ensuring that Mentor is not at home, Matty instructs Jean to fetch herbs for the dogs. However, Matty is only interested in being alone with the dogs. When Jean leaves, Matty places his hands on the dogs to heal them. Later, the dogs are healthy and Matty returns home, exhausted. While Matty rests, he recalls his experience with the frog in the forest. In the forest, Matty stepped on a frog and injured it. When Matty touched the frog with his hand, he was shocked to feel a force pulse through him. The frog was healed.

In chapter six, a group of new people arrive at the Village. Seer and Matty depart for the Village entrance to greet the newcomers. Many of the townspeople also welcome the newcomers, but Mentor arrives with a small group of dissenters that want to close the Village borders. Leader arrives and attempts to quell the dissenters' chanting. Leader welcomes and invites the newcomers to Village. Matty, however, is disturbed by Mentor's actions and notices small changes in Mentor's appearance. After returning home, Matty broaches the subject of Trade Mart with the blind man. Seer warns Matty about trading at Trade Mart, disturbed by the secrecy of recent trades. Matty resolves to attend Trade Mart against the blind man's advice. Seer insists that Matty does not trade, but only observe. Matty agrees, declaring that he has nothing to trade. The blind man disagrees, and Matty remembers his gift. After briefly considering trading away his gift, Matty quickly decides against it.

In chapter seven, Matty attends Trade Mart. Matty is troubled when he senses a change in atmosphere. Instead of a lighthearted and happy ambiance, the villagers are serious and quiet. None of the Trade Mart attendees appear to be holding items to trade, which confuses Matty. Matty stands beside Mentor, who banters with Matty, but Mentor's demeanor changes once Trade Mart begins. After Trade Mart ends, Matty reports back to the blind man. Matty informs Seer that Mentor pushed his way to the stage to be the first trader. Mentor wants the same trade he made at a previous Trade Mart session. Stocktender's widow, who Mentor is courting, blushes and Matty discerns that the trade is related to the widow. While the traders publicly declared what he or she wanted, the public does not hear what the trader offers to trade. Seer is disturbed by Matty's findings and asks Matty whether the traders looked different after the event. Matty recalls that a nice woman he recognized traded for a Gaming Machine. After the event and the woman's trade was approved, the woman scolded and mocked her disabled husband for moving too slowly. Matty also informs Seer that Mentor's facial birthmark has completely disappeared.



Chapters 5-7 Analysis

Chapter five reveals Matty's mysterious secret about the frog introduced in chapter one. Matty has a supernatural power of healing that he fears and does not fully understand, but Matty is slowly learning to accept and experiment with his gift. For example, Matty understands that the larger the life form, the more energy it requires to provide healing. Matty is physically drained and exhausted after his encounter with the sick dogs, while the frog did not require as much energy. Matty begins to realize that he must learn to control his gift.

In chapter six, the border controversy continues to afflict Village, with Mentor as the primary instigator. Small changes in Mentor's appearance, such as Mentor's height and fading birthmark, suggest that there is a correlation between Mentor's personality change and Trade Mart. Matty does not yet make the connection between Trade Mart and Mentor's behavior, but is curious and attracted to the idea of trading. Despite Seer's reservations about allowing Matty to attend the event, Seer gives Matty permission. The blind man understands that Matty is maturing and should experience the event.

The Trade Mart event is explored in chapter seven. Matty, who was initially excited about attending the event, leaves Trade Mart disconcerted by what occurred. However, Matty cannot figure out the mystery behind the trades, since none of the villagers appear to trade away physical objects. Matty discusses the quandary with Seer who attempts to discern what is occurring. The text suggests that Mentor is asking Trademaster for physical attractiveness to appeal to Stocktender's widow. While the item that Mentor barter away is unknown by Matty and Seer, the serious atmosphere suggests that the trade is ominous. Instead of a physical object, the text suggests that Mentor's ideals and ethics are being traded away for beauty. The trade would explain Mentor's change in character and desire to close the Village borders instead of offering hospitality. The hypothesis that the villagers are trading away ideals is further suggested by a sudden change in demeanor by a woman Matty recognizes as a nice person. The woman acquired a physical object, a Gaming Machine, but Matty witnesses the woman degrading her husband, who has a twisted back.



Chapters 8-10

Chapters 8-10 Summary

In chapter eight, Matty goes to Mentor's home to pick up the puppy that Jean promised him, the same puppy the Matty healed. Matty notices that Jean is downtrodden, and Jean tells Matty that she is distraught about her father. Jean reveals that Mentor has traded away his "deepest self" in order to gain the love of Stocktender's widow. This is the reason behind Mentor's physical changes. Matty realizes that Mentor's lack of patience with the puppy and petition to close the borders is a result of the trade. Matty briefly considers using his gift to restore Mentor's heart and soul, but Matty does not think that he is powerful enough to reverse the trade.

Matty returns home to begin the puppy's training. Seer suggests that Matty take the puppy to Leader for a proper name, since Leader gives the townspeople their true names. Matty tells Leader about Matty's visit to Trade Mart and what he discovered about Mentor. When Matty returns home, he tells Seer that Leader named the puppy Frolic.

In chapter nine, Matty runs into a newcomer on his way to the market. The woman expresses her concern about the possible border closure and her desire to return to her old village to retrieve her children before the closure is finalized. Matty wonders whether the Forest will allow the woman passage. When Matty reaches the market, he speaks with Jean about the meeting to discuss the border closure. Jean expresses anguish about her changing father. Mentor is no longer interested in books and poetry, but would rather talk of the border and Stocktender's wife.

In chapter ten, Matty and Seer attend the meeting to discuss and vote on the petition to close the Village borders. To Matty, the villagers who participated at Trade Mart have changed considerably. Many citizens who were once kind and generous now support the closure proposal, complaining of overcrowding and lack of food for the community. Some citizens who have not traded speak against the border closure, including Seer. Matty's neighbor speaks harshly about Matty, who first came to the Village as a troublemaker. Matty recognized that the woman once made clothes for him, but has since traded for a fancy sewing machine. Ultimately, the villagers vote to enforce the border closing petition. On the walk home, Seer reveals that Leader has the gift of seeing beyond to Matty. Seer also worries about his daughter, Kira, who resides in different village. The blind man asks Matty to retrieve Kira before the border closes.

Chapters 8-10 Analysis

In chapter eight, Matty finally comprehends the mystery behind Trade Mart when Jean reveals what her father has traded away in order to gain attractiveness. Matty's uncertainty about his gift is demonstrated when Matty considers reversing Mentor's

trade with healing power. While the Trade Mart discovery disturbs Matty, his trust in Leader is evident when Matty tells him about the discovery behind Mentor's trade.

In chapter nine, the foreboding border closure gives the Village an unsettled environment. The Village newcomer is fearful that her children will be unable to join her if the vote ends in favor of the closure. Matty also continues to be disturbed by Jean's distress about Mentor. Mentor's barter at Trade Mart reflects and represents the growing change of disposition in the Village.

In chapter ten, the final vote to close the Village borders finalizes the villagers' transition to a new way of thinking. While a minority group maintains the old way of thinking, the group of past traders reflects the majority opinion of the Village and the changing atmosphere from a caring and collective community to an individualistic society. When the blind man reveals that Leader has the gift of seeing beyond, it is a foreshadowing that the Leader's gift will play an important role later in the story. Also, the theme of journey is apparent, as Matty will undoubtedly be dispatched to deliver the news to surrounding communities.



Chapters 11-13

Chapters 11-13 Summary

In chapter eleven, Matty collects the messages he is tasked to deliver regarding the imminent Village border closure. Matty is eager to begin his journey, but Leader begins a conversation about Leader's gift of sight. Leader confesses that he is also aware of Matty's gift and advises Matty to save it for a "true need." When Matty attempts to depart, Leader uses his gift of sight and tells Matty he sees Forest thickening. Leader attempts to call off Matty's journey due to Forest's danger, but Matty insists on leaving to retrieve Kira. Leader warns Matty a second time not to spend his gift and eventually allows Matty to depart. As Matty readies for his journey from home, he learns that Ramon is ill. Matty considers healing Ramon before he leaves, but decides against the thought with some remorse, remembering Leader's advice. Matty departs for his journey with Frolic, receiving a kiss of encouragement from Jean before he leaves.

In chapter twelve, few days along his journey in the Forest, Matty has consumed his ration of food. Matty is not worried because he is accustomed to scrounging for food in the forest. However, he begins to notice subtle changes in his surroundings that Matty has not encountered in the Forest before. It is difficult to catch fish, a chipmunk bites him and he sees poison ivy growing along the Forest floor. Matty finds it difficult to sleep and feels the onset of illness. Instead of turning back, Matty continues on his journey.

In chapter thirteen, Matty recalls his youthful indiscretion of crime and mischief due to the harsh environment of his first home village. Matty came to know Kira, who taught Matty manners and hygiene. In present day, Matty reaches his destination and finds the growing inhospitable nature of the Forest. Matty realizes that he must hurry and lead Kira back to Village before the Forest becomes impenetrable. When Matty finds Kira, he is too exhausted to explain the situation. Before falling asleep, Matty has an errant thought that he can heal Kira's disability, a twisted leg that makes it difficult for her to walk.

Chapters 11-13 Analysis

There is an atmosphere of uncertainty and potential danger surrounding Matty's journey through Forest that foreshadows the challenges that Matty will face during his mission to retrieve Kira. Both Leader's vision of the thickening Forest and the darkening tapestry made by Kira suggest that Matty's trek will be an arduous one. Leader's advice to Matty not to spend his gift implies that Matty should save his strength for an ultimate need, foreshadowing a need to use his healing power during his journey.

Forest is no longer hospitable to Matty, as suggested by the inhospitable environment it provides. The signs are clear—Matty is no longer welcome in the thickening woods. Matty's resolve and character are demonstrated by his desire to keep his promise to

Seer and return with Kira. The chapter foreshadows Matty's challenges on his journey home.

Chapter thirteen reveals Matty's past and his relationship with Kira. Matty's home life was lacking as a child, and Kira acted as a mother figure when Matty's biological mother did not nurture him. Kira even teaches Matty to bathe, a metaphor for cleansing Matty of his old life to become a better person. Chapter thirteen reveals Matty's motivation in seeking out Kira, even with the Forest dangers. Kira helped Matty as a child, and Seer has cared for Matty as a father figure since then. Matty is also acutely aware that the Forest is becoming increasingly dangerous. While he understands the timeliness of his mission, the Forest has drained Matty's strength.



Chapters 14-16

Chapters 14-16 Summary

In chapter fourteen, Matty attempts to convince Kira to allow him to heal her leg, but Kira refuses, stating that her leg is a part of her. Matty reveals his gift of healing to Kira, giving her a demonstration by cutting his knee and healing himself. Kira demonstrates her own gift by embroidering tapestry images of the future. Before Matty has an opportunity to ask Kira to return to Village with him, Kira surprises Matty by declaring that she will return with him. Kira has seen her father awaiting her return and the dark changes in the Forest. Kira and Matty agree that the two must venture to Village the following morning. When Matty asks Kira if she has seen Leader, Kira responds that she has felt his presence.

In chapter fifteen, Kira and Matty prepare to enter the Forest the following morning. Kira expresses her fear of the Forest, but tells Matty that she trusts him. Matty is disconcerted because he can sense that the Forest has become even darker and more hostile than before. Matty does not divulge his concerns with Kira, but begins to lead the way. Then, the scene shifts back to the Village, where Leader is using his gift to watch Kira and Matty. Leader informs the blind man that Kira and Matty have begun the journey to Village. The blind man leaves to prepare for Kira's arrival, and Leader does not reveal a significant image to the blind man. Leader sees the Forest preparing to destroy Kira and Matty. At the same time, Mentor leads a group of citizens in building the Village wall.

In chapter sixteen, Matty and Kira rest by the fire after a full day of walking in the Forest. Matty is troubled when he sees Kira's feet, which are bleeding due to cuts from the underbrush. Before falling asleep, Matty notices a foul smell emanating from the Forest. In the morning, Matty and Kira continue their journey, but the Forest continues to hinder them. Vines filled with acidic sap grow across the path and injure Matty. Although in excruciating pain, Matty keeps the truth from Kira and pretends to be in good shape. The smell of decay becomes stronger and Matty urges Kira forward. Back at the Village, Leader continues to watch over Kira and Matty. Leader does not tell the blind man that the Forest has injured Kira and is turning on Matty. Leader sees increased danger as Kira and Matty venture on.

Chapters 14-16 Analysis

Matty's familial love toward Kira is evident when he offers to straighten Kira's leg. However, Kira understands that her leg is a part of who she is. Kira's refusal to accept Matty's healing foreshadows an even greater need for Matty's gift elsewhere. The tone at this point the story is anxious and ominous due to the continued change of the Forest. Matty has already experienced Warnings from the Forest, and the two must prepare for the challenges that await them. Chapter fourteen's final dialogue relates to



Kira's gift and Leader's ability to see beyond, suggesting that the two will be integral later in the story.

Both Matty and Leader are aware of the Forest dangers, but decide to keep the information from Kira and the blind man to protect them against worry. The tone of the story is foreboding, with the realization of the true dangers that the Forest poses for both Kira and Matty. Matty's affinity with the Forest has deteriorated to the point that his life is now in danger. Similar to the negative change in the Village citizens, who are harsh and no longer welcome outsiders into the community, the Forest no longer welcomes Matty.

Kira and Matty's situation continues to worsen as they journey through the Forest, giving the story a bleak undertone. Matty does not wish to alarm Kira and keeps both his apprehension and physical pain a secret. Matty's selflessness is demonstrated by his desire to protect Kira. Leader also continues to keep the blind man unaware of the escalating situation.



Chapters 17-19

Chapters 17-19 Summary

In chapter seventeen, Matty can no longer keep his injuries a secret from Kira, as his pain is too severe. He advises Kira that they should continue forward, as they are near the halfway mark and Matty cannot find the trail back. With no water and the constant smell of rotting decay, they cross a swamp. Matty attempts to remain optimistic, but he struggles with the pain. The Forest continues to attack both Matty and Kira, who stop to rest from the onslaught. Kira uses her gift and realizes that Leader is in the Forest and attempting to reach them. Matty tells Kira that Leader can see beyond with his gift, while Matty can only fix a frog.

In chapter eighteen, Leader tells the blind man that both Kira and Matty are in grave danger. Leader prepares to venture into the Forest to save them. Leader tells the blind man not to alert the villagers about Leader's absence, as the workers may attempt to erect the wall earlier than allowed. When the blind man asks Leader if he needs weaponry, Leader refuses, saying that gifts are their weaponry.

In chapter nineteen, Kira and Matty are alive but on the verge of death. Matty encourages Kira, who wishes to sleep, to use her gift to reach out to Leader. At the same time, Leader is being attacked by the Forest. When Leader reaches the end of the path with no idea where to continue, Leader follows a frog. The Forest continues its attack until Leader is immobilized. In a final effort, Leader uses his gift to reach out to Kira and Matty.

Chapters 17-19 Analysis

Matty attempts to keep his spirits high despite the situation, but when he realizes that the Forest will attempt to kill him first, he loses hope and gives in to his fear. Feeling bitter, Matty even denigrates his own gift, which he thinks is useless in the predicament they are in. Kira, however, uses her gift, suggesting that she has hope of escaping the Forest.

Chapter eighteen is the turning point in Kira and Matty's journey, when Leader decides to make a rescue attempt. Instead of arming himself with traditional weaponry, Leader understands that a person's gifts are stronger than knives and guns. The blind man feels hopeless and fearful, sensing the danger his loved ones are in. The tone remains ominous, even considering Leader's optimism in finding and rescuing Kira and Matty.

The tone of chapter nineteen is a sense of utter hopelessness. Even with their gifts, Leader, Kira and Matty are overcome by the Forest's hostility. Matty regains a last inkling of hope in an effort to join Kira and Leader's gifts.



Chapters 20-21

Chapters 20-21 Summary

In chapter twenty, Matty is beaten down and overcome with sadness by the negative changes in the Village and pain that Kira is experiencing. Both Kira and Matty lie on the Forest floor, dying. Kira is able to reach out to Leader, and Leader tells Kira to ask Matty for help. Kira tells Matty that they need his gift. Matty places his hands on the earth as he awaits death.

In chapter twenty-one, Matty grabs at the earth and feels his gift flowing through him. Kira and Leader begin to heal. In the Village, Ramon's illness begins to fade. The workers stop building the barrier wall. The Forest becomes brighter and friendlier. Outside of his body, Matty finds peace while he witnesses the healing of his gift. Matty's physical body continues to deteriorate. After Matty's death, Leader gives Matty his true name of Healer.

Chapters 20-21 Analysis

In spite of a world that has become selfish and ugly, Matty sacrifices his life in an act of utter selflessness to save the people and Village he loves. Matty's deed heals the Forest, which is a metaphor for the attitudes of the people in his Village. As the hostility grew in the community, so did the danger in the Forest. When Matty healed the Forest, the townspeople were also healed. Because of Matty's contribution, Leader bestows Matty with the name and title of Healer. Leader implies that there will be other Messengers, but only one Healer.



Characters

Matty

Matty is the protagonist and hero of the story. Before arriving at the Village and living with the blind man, Matty grew up in a broken home. He fell into poor behavior, such as petty crime and lying. After befriending Kira, she taught Matty about hygiene and manners. At the beginning of the story, Matty lives with the blind man, or Seer. Matty is no longer the mischievous youth he once was. In transition from childhood to manhood, Matty discovers his mysterious gift when he heals a frog's leg in the Forest. Matty has always felt welcome in the Forest and is often tasked with delivering messages that require taking the Forest paths. Proud of his role in the community, Matty yearns for Leader to name him Messenger.

Matty is fascinated by Trade Mart when Ramon's family acquires a Gaming Machine at Trade Mart. When he attends the event, though, he is disconcerted by the seriousness and secrecy of the trades. After the town votes to close the Village borders, Matty is tasked with delivering the news to local communities. In addition, Seer asks Matty to retrieve Seer's daughter, Kira, before the border closes. Matty soon discovers that the Forest no longer welcomes him, and Matty struggles to pass through in his search for Kira. On the return trip to Village, Forest becomes increasingly menacing toward Matty. Forest attacks Matty. Near death, Matty summons his gift in a final act of selflessness to heal the community, Forest, Kira and Leader.

Seer

Seer is a blind man who was persecuted by the community he lived in before coming to the Village. Left to die by his persecutors, the people of Village assisted the blind man. Seer is Kira's father and a father figure to Matty. The blind man is named Seer because he is knowledgeable and wise. Seer can "see" with his heart and mind rather than his eyes. When Matty asks Seer to trade for a Gaming Machine, Seer wisely asks Matty whether he would trade books and poetry for the machine. Matty does not think it is a good idea because Matty values books and poetry above a game. While Seer does not possess a supernatural gift like Matty and Kira have, the blind man is a good person, kind and giving. Seer represents the good in the community. For example, Seer is against the proposal to close the Village borders, and he finds it important to welcome newcomers to the community. Seer is also against the Trade Mart, which is wrought with secrecy and distasteful trades.

Leader

Leader is a young man who is chosen to guide the Village community. As a child, he escaped his oppressive community on a small sled and discovered Village. Leader's primary responsibility is to watch over the Village. Leader is also responsible for giving



true names to the Village citizens. When a child in Village is bestowed a name, he or she is considered an adult. For example, Matty hopes to be named Messenger, but is ultimately named Healer. Leader has the gift of seeing beyond, and quickly notices that the Forest is thickening at the beginning of the story. Leader often requests Matty for messenger services, and Matty trusts Leader when Matty notices changes in the community due to the Trade Mart.

Leader plays a major role at the story's climax, warning Matty against traveling through the thickening Forest to retrieve Kira. When Matty and Kira enter the Forest on the return trip to Village, Leader uses his gift to watch over them. When Matty and Kira are in grave danger from the Forest, Leader ventures out to save them. Instead of carrying weapons, Leader insists that true weaponry is in the form of one's gift. Using his gift when death appears imminent, Leader reaches out to Kira in the Forest and tells her to ask Matty to use his gift. After doing so, Matty heals the strife in the community and Forest.

Jean

Jean is Mentor's daughter and Matty's love interest. She represents Matty's adolescence and coming-of-age. Jean gives Matty the puppy he healed, which Matty later names Frolic. Jean also reveals to Matty the secret behind Mentor's change in physical appearance and confesses that her father traded his "deepest self" to win over a woman. Jean is distraught over the change, finding her father impatient and worried more about the border closure than poetry and books. When Matty experiences difficulty in the Forest, he thinks fondly of Jean as a source of inspiration and hope.

Mentor

Mentor is a kind and patient man who tutored Matty when Matty was young. He walks with a hunched back and has a large birthmark on his face. Over time, Matty slowly realizes that Mentor's physical appearance is changing, but Matty does not understand why. Later, Matty discovers that Mentor traded his "deepest self" for physical attractiveness. Mentor begins to stand taller and his birthmark fades. Mentor's characteristic attributes also change. No longer kind and patient, Mentor leads the group petitioning for Village's border closure. Mentor quickly becomes impatient with Jean's puppy and is harsh with workers who are helping him to build Village's border wall. After Matty heals the community, Mentor reverts to his original character, attitude and physical condition.

Kira

Kira is the blind man's daughter who lives in a neighboring community. She possesses the gift of seeing the future by embroidering scenes that have not yet occurred. Kira is also the woman who befriended Matty when Matty was young and wild, teaching him



manners and reading to him. Kira has a twisted leg, which hinders her walking, but Kira considers the lame leg a part of her and refuses Matty's offer to heal it.

Ramon

Ramon is Matty's friend in the Village, whose family acquired a Gaming Machine from Trade Mart. Matty is jealous of Ramon, because Matty wants a Gaming Machine of his own. Later, Ramon and his little sister become ill. Matty notices that Ramon's mother is indifferent about the illness. Before Matty begins his journey to retrieve Kira, Matty considers healing Ramon but decides against it due to Leader's advice about saving his gift.

Gatherer

Gatherer is not officially introduced in the text, except through his death early in the novel. Gatherer is killed by Forest while attempting to reach a nearby town to deliver news of the birth of a new child. Gatherer is killed on the same night that Matty ventures into Forest to search for the healed frog. While Gatherer is described as a kind and cheerful man, Matty cannot understand why Forest chooses to kill Gatherer and leave Matty unharmed. Gatherer's death is an example of Forest's power and mysterious connection it has with Matty.

Trademaster

Trademaster is in charge of Trade Mart. His duties include organizing the Trade Mart event, approving and denying trade requests, recording each trade and following up with the traders after a trade is complete. Trademaster is relatively new to the community and was an experienced trade master prior to his arrival at Village. At Trade Mart, he asks each potential trader two questions: "Trade for what?" and "Trade away what?"

Woman at Trade Mart

While describing his Trade Mart experience to Seer, Matty recalls an unnamed woman who completes a trade for a Gaming Machine. The woman is married to a man with a twisted back, and Matty describes her as a gentle and kind person. However, Matty notices a change in her personality after Trade Mart ends. The woman is cruel and demeaning to her husband, who has a difficult time walking due to his disability. She is an example of how the trading activity is negatively affecting individuals in the community.



Objects/Places

Village

Village is the community where Matty lives. Village prides itself on welcoming newcomers and not keeping secrets.

Forest

Forest surrounds Village. In the beginning of the story, Forest welcomes Matty as he travels to neighboring communities. Forest is described by Seer as being an illusion, but it seems to have a life of its own. Forest can be a dangerous place to most people.

Warning

Forest gives Warnings to travelers it does not want passing through. A Warning can come in the form of a jab from a plant or animal bite while in the Forest.

Trade Mart

Trade Mart is a periodic event where community members can trade gifts or traits for worldly desires. For example, Mentor trades his kind spirit for physical attractiveness.

Gaming Machine

The Gaming Machine is an electronic object that Ramon's family trades for. Soon after the family procures the machine, Ramon and his sister become ill and their mother appears unconcerned. This suggests that Ramon's parents traded their children's health or affection for their children for the Gaming Machine.

Gift

A gift is a supernatural power that a character possesses. Leader has the gift of seeing beyond, while Matty has the gift of healing.

Market Day

Market Day is where community members exchange necessities, such as food. In contrast with the Trade Mart, Market Day is a fun, happy event. Trade Mart is a serious affair.



Sled

The sled represents a new beginning in Village. Displayed in the museum, Leader was a boy when he arrived at Village on the small sled.

Keening

Keening is singing that occurs when there is a death. In the beginning of the book, Matty hears keening when Forest kills Gatherer. At the end of the book, keening occurs due to Matty's death.

Border

The border is a wall that the community members vote to erect. The village people no longer want to invite newcomers into the community, because they feel that there are not enough resources.



Themes

Spirit of Generosity

The importance of generosity and selflessness in the world is the novel's ultimate theme and moral. Forest's sudden changes and hostility toward Matty reflect the negative changes that take place in Village. While the community is described as an open Utopian society that shares resources with outsiders and newcomers, the growing mindset of selfishness in the form of a border closure threatens the fabric of the community. Forest begins to thicken and darken to parallel the darkening hearts of the townspeople who begin to trade their core character values for the superficial. Mentor essentially barter his soul to improve his physical appearance. Mentor's desire is to attract a widow who values good looks instead of selecting a woman who will love his true self and personality. Matty's neighbor, who sewed Matty's clothes as a child, barter her kind heart for a new sewing machine and luxurious fabrics. At the town meeting, she speaks harshly about Matty. As discord spreads about the border closure, which is ultimately voted upon, the Forest reacts in like kind by thickening and darkening to warn against travelers who may seek passage. The connection between the world and the attitudes of its inhabitants is evident in Forest's physical changes that mirror the value changes in Village's citizens.

Matty, on the other hand, exhibits consistently kind nature throughout the text. Matty feels guilty about not using his gift to heal Ramon and revert Mentor's trade to restore Mentor's true self. Matty promises Seer that he will find Kira and does not waver when Leader warns Matty of Forest's danger. Matty also attempts to convince Kira to allow him to heal her disabled leg. When Matty touches the earth in his final act of healing, he demonstrates the ultimate act of selflessness. When he does so, both the community members and Forest return back to a utopian setting. The Village border construction ceases and Mentor's trade is reversed.

Coming of Age

As a teenage genre novel, coming of age is an important theme that allows the audience to relate to the story's protagonist. Matty's age is not specified, but he is described as transitioning between boyhood and manhood. Interpreting his age to signify adolescence, Matty experiences a number of changes both internally and among his community. Early in the novel, Matty exhibits signs of his youthfulness when he becomes jealous of Ramon's Gaming Machine. Matty directs his jealousy at Ramon, unkindly calling his friend Boaster in his mind. Later, Matty pesters Seer about acquiring a Trading Machine. Although Seer denies Matty the Gaming Machine with logical reasoning behind his decision, Matty continues to pester Seer for the unnecessary device to satisfy his youthful desire. Another example of Matty's coming of age is his attachment to Jean. Matty's tender feelings toward Mentor's daughter are revealed through Matty's desire to be around her. Matty walks past Mentor's home in hopes of



seeing Jean. At Trade Mart, Matty stands beside Mentor in the hopes of standing near Jean, as well. When Matty is demoralized by Forest, he thinks of Jean and her smile.

While the story progresses, Matty's growing maturity is demonstrated when he places the welfare of Seer and Kira above his own. Matty enters the Forest despite Leader's warning because Matty promised Seer to retrieve Kira. When Forest attacks Matty, Matty keeps the truth from Kira to protect her from fear. Matty's final act of selflessness exemplifies his maturity into manhood. Leader's act of renaming Matty as Healer is symbolic of the community's recognition of Matty's transition to adulthood.

Gifts as Weapons

Matty, Leader and Kira possess supernatural gifts that they use for the betterment of the community as a whole. Matty's self-discovery of his healing power is central to the story. Leader's gift of seeing beyond symbolizes wisdom and discernment. Kira uses her nimble hands to embroider scenes in the future. When Seer asks Leader whether Leader plans to arm himself before leaving to rescue Matty and Kira, Leader replies, "Our gifts are our weaponry." Rather than a weapon intended to injure and cause destruction, Leader refers to the use of gifts as a means of fighting for a belief system. Forest is, after all, described by Seer as an illusion. Fighting against Forest with a physical weapon such as a knife will not defeat it, or save it. Instead, Matty's gift touches the earth and soul of the world, healing it in its entirety.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, flaws can also be considered gifts. When Kira declines Matty's offer to heal her leg, Matty is bewildered. Eventually, Matty realizes that Kira's twisted leg, although considered a defect by most citizens in the village, is a part of Kira's persona. Changing the leg she was born with would alter Kira completely. Instead, Kira's leg symbolizes her ability to conquer hardship and trials in her life. This gives her strength to help others in the community. Matty is surprised by how quickly Kira moves through the Forest, although she is considered disabled.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of Messenger is third person limited omniscient that focuses primarily on Matty's character. The narrative allows the reader to follow Matty's journey through both thoughts and descriptions of his actions. Since the main theme of the book relates to Matty's journey of self-discovery and growth, the narrative point of view plays an important role in revealing crucial plot elements. The thoughts of other characters are hidden and must be interpreted through Matty's point of view. The narrator tracks Matty's emotional growth as a boy who is jealous of his friend's Gaming Machine to a man who sacrifices himself to heal the world. By not being privy to the thoughts and feelings of surrounding characters, the reader is able to discover the mysteries surrounding Matty's burgeoning gift, Trade Mart and the peculiar changes in the community alongside the story's protagonist.

The story unfolds through Matty's eyes in sequential order with a few memory flashbacks that provide background detail surrounding his character and journey. On rare occasions and for brief periods of time, the point of view changes from Matty to Leader, who watches over Village, giving the reader additional context of the character setting. Dialogue plays an important role in the story, revealing information about the characters Matty interacts with and driving the plot forward.

Setting

The majority of the story takes place in a fictional world in a town called Village, which is a small community that prides itself on its generosity and kindness. There are few physical descriptions of the town except to name locations, such as the museum or Leader's home. The lack of physical description combined with the generic name of Village suggests that the setting represents every community.

Matty, once a newcomer with a blemished history of petty crime as a child, resides in Village. As the story progresses, teenage Matty notices that Village slowly changes into a community of strife and contention. A growing group of Villagers demand to close the Village borders and deny access to newcomers. Citizens who were once patient and kind become harsh and annoyed. Trade Mart and Market Day take place in Village, and its community members are named based upon his or her contributions to the community as an adult. For example, the community leader is named Leader, while the teacher is called Mentor.

Surrounding Village is Forest, the setting for the protagonist's confrontation and the story's climax. Forest is a dangerous place that is personified with descriptions of how it reacts to people who travel its paths. For example, Forest maintains a mysterious affinity with Matty, providing a welcoming atmosphere and food, such as fish and



berries, on Matty's long trips while delivering messages. For other Villagers, however, Forest may begrudgingly allow passage or even act in a deadly fashion. Forest even gives Warnings, such as jabbing a traveler with a sharp tree root. Early in the story, Forest entangles and kills Gatherer, who attempts to visit a neighboring community. The blind man tells Matty that Forest is merely an illusion, suggesting that Forest is symbolic of the world's state of mind. The connection between Village citizens and Forest is apparent, as the Forest thickens and darkens as turmoil increases in Village.

Language and Meaning

The words used throughout the novel reflect contemporary, everyday language. The text reflects an abundance of adjectives that steer away from superficial appearance. Instead, the language focuses primarily on emotion and inner character, unless the physical attribute enhances the character depiction. For example, there is little physical description of Matty besides his approximate age. Mentor's birthmark and hunched back are described primarily to illustrate the changes he encounters due to his participation at Trade Mart. Leader's blue eyes reflect Leader's gift of seeing beyond. The majority of adjectives and character descriptions focus on each character's inner persona

The language used in the novel is simple and straightforward to avoid confusion and highlight central themes and metaphors. Even the Village's process of naming is direct. The Village leader is named Leader. Matty wishes to be named Messenger because he enjoys the duty of delivering messages. The local teacher is called Mentor. Use of simple language focuses and directs the novel's plot, allowing a gradual reveal to each facet of the story. For example, the mystery behind Matty's strange attention to the Forest frog is slowly discovered over the course of several chapters, with subtle hints and foreshadowing leading to the resolution that Matty has a gift of healing. In addition, the novel's basic and straightforward word choices reflect Matty's age as a maturing young person. Overall, the use of basic language allows the reader to focus on the novel's major themes and morals.

Dialogue in the text is natural and straightforward, providing details without necessitating a direct proclamation through narration. Characters such as Seer and Leader generally have cryptic and succinct dialogue that reflects their wise nature.

Structure

The novel is set within twenty-one chapters of varying length that are numbered, but untitled. Each chapter is short, with as few as three or four pages and not exceeding ten pages. The succinctness of each chapter allows the plot to flow smoothly and quickly, without flowery language that draws away from the story's primary message. Paragraphs are short and accessible. Short sentences offer easy discernment and maximum impact of significant dialogue and narrative description.

The primary plot is unhindered by subplots. The novel's primary focus is Matty and what he discovers about himself and the changing world around him. The mix of narrative



description and character dialogue keeps the simple plot moving forward without setting a monotonous tone. In the novel, time passes in chronological order, except for a few of Matty's flashback memories that relate to his present situation at a particular point in the novel. For example, Matty has a flashback memory of his time with Kira, when Matty was a child. Matty also has a brief flashback about his first encounter with the injured frog after Matty heals Jean's dogs. When the narrative focus shifts briefly from Matty to Leader's thoughts, time continues in simultaneous sequence. The pace of the book moves along quickly, from Matty's desire to control his gift, to Trade Mart's ominous tone, to the border closing petition and eventually to Matty's task of retrieving Kira while surviving the Forest.



Quotes

"But now he knew that there were communities everywhere, sprinkled across the vast landscape of the known world, in which people suffered. Not always from beatings and hunger, the way he had. But from ignorance. From not knowing. From being kept from knowledge."

p. 25

"Ah, Matty, you have more than you know. And people will want what you have."

p. 54

"I called myself the Fiercest of the Fierce."

p. 68

"He has traded his deepest self."

p. 69

"He had not believed anyone would want him, ever, until he came to Village, and even then he had not trusted in its kindness for a long time."

p. 77

"Suddenly he felt that they were all of them doomed. He had forgotten completely about his own power."

p. 82

"Wait for the true need, Matty. Don't spend the gift."

p. 93

"Don't try. If it comes without your summoning it, it is because of need. Because someone needs your gift."

p. 93

"I must tell you this," Marty thought before he slept. "I can fix you."

p. 117

"To become a fast-striding Kira with two straight legs would have been to become a different person. This was not a journey Matty could undertake with a stranger."

p. 129

"Our gifts are our weaponry."

p. 155

"He saw Forest and understood what Seer had meant. It was an illusion."

p. 168



Topics for Discussion

Why does Forest allow Matty to pass while others are given Warnings or killed? What causes Forest to turn against Matty?

What does Leader mean when he states that "our gifts are our weaponry?" How does Leader use his gift as a weapon?

Why does Seer attempt to dissuade Matty from attending Trade Mart? What are the ramifications of Trade Mart on the community as a whole?

What is the symbolism and meaning behind receiving a true name from Leader? Why does Leader name Matty at the end of the book?

Why does Kira refuse Matty's offer to heal her leg?

Describe Matty's character. How does Matty's gift reflect and fit his personality?

Describe the changes that occur in Village after several members of the community trade at Trade Mart.

What is the symbolism behind Forest?