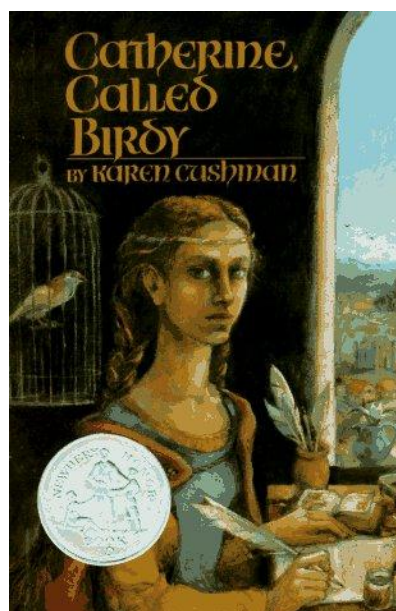
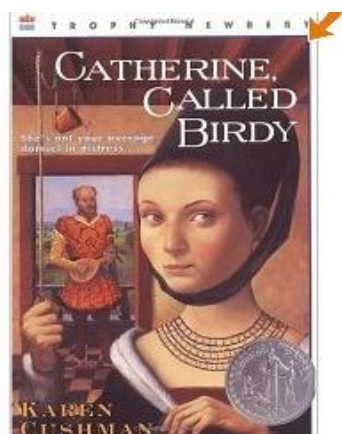


# Catherine, Called Birdy

By Karen Cushman



## Step 1:

Who is Catherine?

Look at the above pictures and collect a few facts about Birdy. Guess what's on her mind and who she is writing to.

## Step 2:

Your teacher is going to read you a short summary of the story. Sit back, put your pens down and fold your arms. Read along and try to “record” the missing words in your brain. When your teacher has finished reading, try to reconstruct the text and fill in the missing words. Work with a partner and ask other classmates for help if you do not manage in your pair.

Catherine is the \_\_\_\_\_ 13 year-old daughter of Sir Rollo and Lady Aislinn. Her \_\_\_\_\_ is Birdy because she loves birds. Birdy has been \_\_\_\_\_ by her brother the \_\_\_\_\_ to keep a \_\_\_\_\_. It \_\_\_\_\_ her daily \_\_\_\_\_ for one important year in her life, the year 1290.

She \_\_\_\_\_ about village and \_\_\_\_\_ life, \_\_\_\_\_ and funerals, medieval \_\_\_\_\_, music and \_\_\_\_\_ and about her father's plans to \_\_\_\_\_ her \_\_\_\_\_ to a rich knight. Her mother wants to \_\_\_\_\_ her into a fine lady now, which makes Catherine \_\_\_\_\_ like a \_\_\_\_\_ bird. She spends a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ sewing and embroidering, but she would rather look after the \_\_\_\_\_, go on a \_\_\_\_\_ or write poems.

\_\_\_\_\_ most of her friends Birdy rebels against women's work and life. She has managed to \_\_\_\_\_ all her unwanted suitors, except one. This one is particularly old and \_\_\_\_\_. There \_\_\_\_\_ to be no way \_\_\_\_\_ this time.

**Step 3: Your teacher will read you some pages from Birdy's diary. Listen carefully and answer the following questions:**

24<sup>th</sup> Day of September:

What does Birdy tell you about herself in this entry?

Birdy should marry a wealthy man soon. How rich is her own family) What do they own?

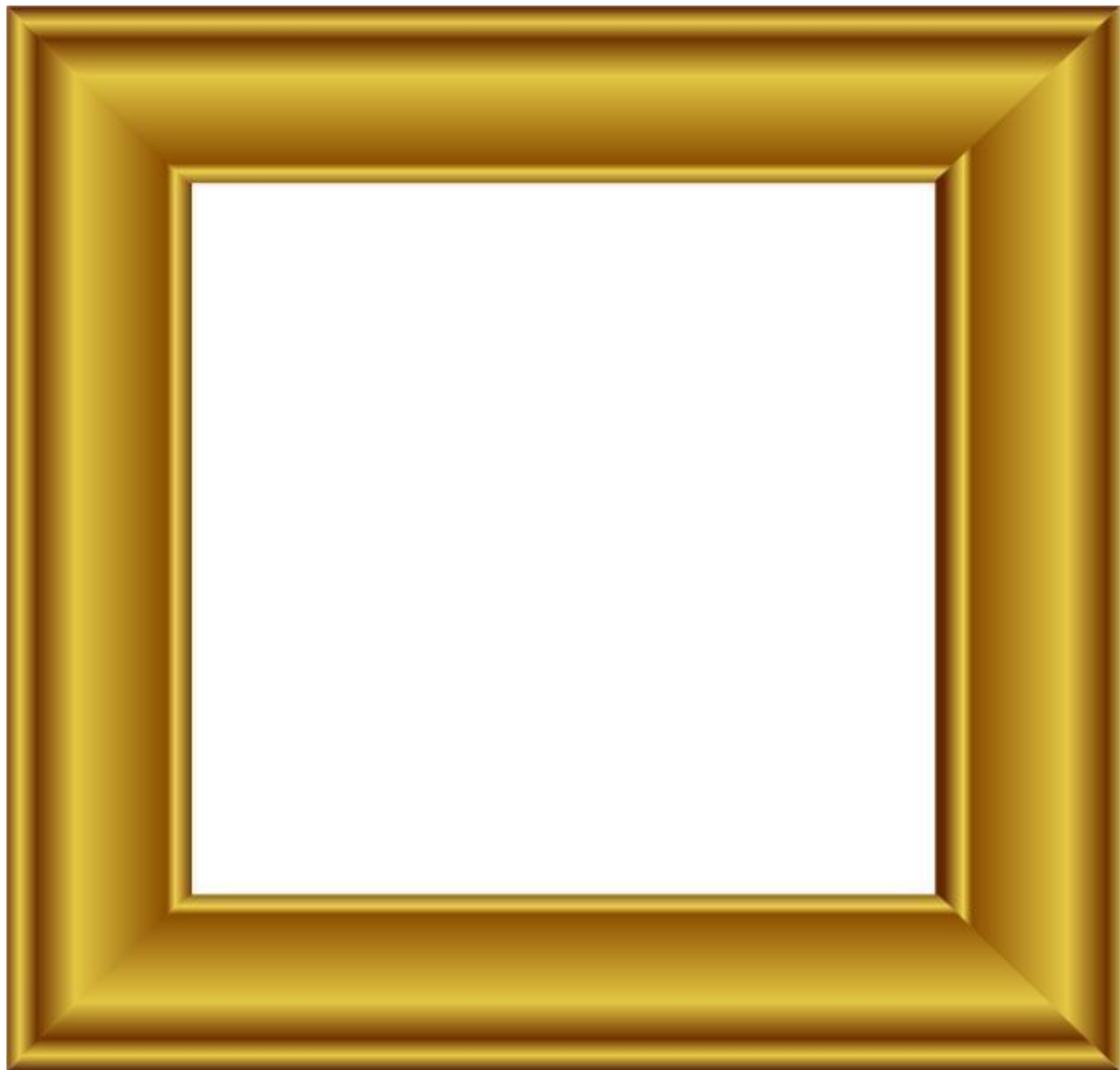
What does Birdy call her father?

How does she feel treated by him?

How will she confront her first suitor? Can you show it to the class?

26<sup>th</sup> Day of September:

Now take a pencil. Listen carefully and make a drawing of "Master Lack-Wit" in the space below. Label your drawing in English.



**Step 4:**

Mr Lack-Wit’s plugged nose makes it impossible for him to speak clearly. Can you imagine what he was saying?

“Good fordoed to you, by lord, and to you, Lady Aislidd. I abhored to bisit your bodest badder and beet the baided.”

This might help you: Underline what you think is correct.

Good morning / fortune to you, my lord/ by the lord, and to you Lady Eileen/Lady Aislinn. I am honored/odored to biscuit/visit your modest /modern bladder/manor and beat up /meet the bride /the maiden.

And what is it in German?

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How does Birdy drive Master Lack-Wit away?

1. What was her original plan? (Do you remember from the 24<sup>th</sup> of September)
2. What did she actually do to get rid of him?

**Step 5:**

**27<sup>th</sup> Day of September**

In this entry Birdy talks about a secret dream. She \_\_\_\_\_

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**Step 6:**

**9<sup>th</sup> Day of October:**

The next suitor is approaching. Birdy is watching the villagers build a simple house. She is covered in mud, grime and sweat when the young man appears in front of her.

Listen carefully and imagine the young man. Imagine his appearance, his clothes, the expression on his face, the way he speaks and how he treats Birdy.

What did Birdy write about him that night?



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Now listen to Birdy’s view of the matter.

**Step 7:**

# Be a writer

Now it is your turn to write. Choose one of the following days and finish Birdy's diary for the day.

Imagine the scene vividly before you start to write. Write about 150 - 200 words.

**A:**

Another suitor has arrived and has been invited to a feast at the manor. Birdy calls him "Shaggy Beard". Can you imagine what he looked like? (dictionary) When she first meets him sitting next to her at her brother's wedding she doesn't know he wants to marry her. Nevertheless, she finds him extremely disgusting and writes about him in her diary.

26<sup>th</sup> Day of February:

I was partnered for the feast with an ugly shaggy-bearded hulk from the north. My father sought to honor him because his manor lies next to my mother's, and my father lusts after it. I fail to see how sitting next to me and sharing my bowl and goblet honored him – and it certainly did me no good. The man was a pig, which dishonors pigs. He...



**Or B:**

Birdy is finally told by her father that she will marry "Shaggy Beard". This is too much for her. She decides to take action and avoid this marriage. What might she do? Think about what happens when the two meet again. Write Birdy's entry after the event.

20<sup>th</sup> Day of March:

Shaggy Beard himself wishes to take me for wife! What a monstrous joke. That dog torturer whose breath smells like the mouth of Hell, who makes wind like others make music, who attacks helpless animals with knives, who is ugly and old!

My father called me into the hall this morning. He was smiling. "My beloved daughter", he said. "Your bridegroom awaits you and none of your tricks will help you this time."...

I must make a plan, for I will not, of course, wed the pig. Deus! Would they really sell me to that horrible old man? I cannot think so. I will do something. Luckily I am experienced at outwitting suitors.

21<sup>st</sup> Day of March:

Last night Shaggy Beard came to our manor to propose officially (Heiratsantrag machen) ...



**Step 8:**  
**Find out more about everyday life in the Middle Ages.**

**May 8th:** Birdy writes about lady-lessons – how to behave as a lady. Read her entry of that day and follow her instructions. Work with a partner and teach her how to behave properly. Show your co/teacher.

8<sup>th</sup> DAY OF MAY, *Feast of Saint Indract, an Irish prince who with his nine traveling companions was set upon and murdered by brigands*  
More lady-lessons. It is impossible to do all and be all a lady must be and not tie oneself in a knot. A lady must walk erect with dignity, looking straight before her with eyelids low, gazing at the ground ahead, neither trotting nor running nor looking about nor laughing nor stopping to chatter. Her hands must be folded below her cloak while at the same time lifting her dress from the floor while at the same time hiding her mouth if her smile is unattractive or her teeth yellow. A lady must have six hands!  
She must not look too proud nor yet too humble, lest (=or) people say she is proud of her humility. She must not talk overmuch yet not be silent, lest people think she does not know how to converse. She must not show anger, nor sulk, nor scold, nor overeat, nor over-drink, nor swear. God's thumbs! I am going out to the barn to jump, fart, and pick my teeth!

Which of these tips also applied for boys? What would a similar lesson for a young knight have looked like? Write 10 instructions for boys.

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## Step 9: *Birdy's Diary...*

### *More about everyday life in the Middle Ages:*

5 TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, *Feast of Saint Bertin, French abbot and farmer*

My mother labored all day and night and day and night again with no result, but this morning we could 'see the top of a tiny head. Nan, fearing for the child's life, baptized it while the rest of it stays stuck in my mother\_ Although I made her a drink of wallflowers in warm wine and untied all the knots and unstopped all the jugs in the manor, no more of the child has come forth yet and I am terribly afraid.

Dear Saint Margaret, who watches over women in childbirth, help my mother. She is gentle and good and does the best that she can with the beast my father and her difficult children.

19<sup>th</sup> DAY OF SEPTEMBER: picked off twenty-nine fleas today.

23<sup>rd</sup> DAY OF SEPTEMBER: There was a hanging in Riverford today. I am being punished for disobedience again, so I was not allowed to go. I am near fourteen and have never yemurdered hanging. My life is barren (no fun).

31<sup>o</sup> DAY OF OCTOBER, *Feast of Saint Erc, British martyr and Allhallows Eve, when ghosts walk*  
We sat up late tonight eating nuts and apples, watching the bonfires lit throughout the country to drive off witches and goblins. Many people are afraid of the dead who come back to visit the earth, but the only dead I know are my tiny brothers and sisters who died before or right after they were born, and how could I be afraid of them? I wish they *would* come visit It might ease my mother's grieving (pain).

1<sup>st</sup> DAY OF NOVEMBER, *which the Saxons call the Month of Blood Feast of All Saints*

We took down the hazel branches from the doors and windows and blessed God for keeping us free of witches for another year. If only it were so easy to keep my horrible brother Robert away. He is coming for Christmas. The first memory I have of this brother is his drowning ants by pissing on the anthill. I hate him.

2<sup>nd</sup> DAY OF NOVEMBER, *Feast of All Souls*  
Joined the village children today as they went from cottage to cottage, singing "Soul, a soul, a soul cake, please, good mistress a soul cake", begging for soul cakes. Our cook makes the largest but Perkin's granny makes the best

10<sup>th</sup> of NOVEMBER,

Last night I tucked a pin into an onion and put it under my pillow so I would dream of my future husband. I dreamed only of onions and in the morning had to wash my hair.

13<sup>th</sup> DAY OF NOVEMBER, ...My father is confined to his bed with severe ale head. I ground some peony root to soothe his pain but he drank the powder in more ale so [ don't know how much good it will do. I wonder why every occasion for mourning or celebrating seems to call for ale: birth ales, church ales, bride ales, funeral ales, harvest ales. Every week our hall is filled with guests who are making some occasion with ale on one day and violently ridding themselves of it the next. Birds and animals and children being smarter, never get drunk like them.

28th DAY OF NOVEMBER, *Feast of Saint Juthwara, who wore cheese on her chest and was beheaded by her stepbrother.*

I said the turn-love-to-hate chant under my breath so no one could hear me, for sure else I would be punished, cast away, locked up, or laughed at, no one of which I like. I do not know how long it will take the spell to work. By supper's end Aelis and George did not yet look like people whose love had turned to hate.

11th DAY OF JANUARY,

The ice on the river has finally frozen hard enough to walk on. Perkin and Gerd the miller's son came to the kitchen for bones that they will polish and fasten to their shoes so they can glide on the ice. I begged my mother to be allowed to go but she would not speak of it [...1 Being angry I made a List of all the things girls are not allowed to do:  
go on a crusade / be horse trainers / be monks / laugh very loud / drink in ale houses / wear breeches (trousers) / cut their hair / piss in the fire to make it hiss / wear nothing / be alone / get sunburned / run / marry whom they will / glide on the ice.

29<sup>th</sup> DAY OF JANUARY,

Peppercorn the dog is possessed of a demon. She howls and moans, digging at her head, running through the hall, rubbing her face on the straw. I have made a charm which [ wet with spit and tied about the dog's head\_ I pray the demon leaves Peppercorn without entering anyone else.

*More about everyday life in the Middle Ages:*

Read the following entries of Birdy’s diary and collect information about life at this time. Collect your facts under the following headings. First highlight the relevant info on your sheet, then transfer it here (note-form).

<b>Religion – fear of damnation</b>	<b>Medicine and home cures</b>
<b>Superstition (Aberglaube)</b>	<b>Upbringing of children</b>
<b>Customs (Bräuche)</b>	<b>Other interesting facts</b>
<b>Gender roles in relationships (men-women)</b>	



**For the teacher:**

**For step 2: Read the following summary:**

Catherine is the stubborn 13-year-old daughter of Sir Rolle and Lady Aislinn. Her nickname is Birdy because she loves birds. Birdy has been asked by her brother the monk to keep a journal. It contains her daily entries for one important year in her life, the year 1290.

She writes about village and manor life, weddings and funerals, medieval clothing, music and food and about her father's plans to marry her off to a rich knight. Her mother wants to turn her into a fine lady now, which makes Catherine feel like a caged bird. She spends a lot of time sewing and embroidering, but she would rather look after the goats, go on a crusade or write poems.

Unlike most of her friends Birdy rebels against women's work and life. She has managed to drive off all her unwanted suitors, except one. This one is particularly old and disgusting. There seems to be no way out this time.

For **steps 3, 4 and 5** read Birdy's entries of  
24<sup>th</sup> of September  
26<sup>th</sup> of September  
27<sup>th</sup> of September  
from the book.

**For step 6** read Birdy's entry of October 9<sup>th</sup>. Stop at "...he replied, taking a piece of scent-drenched linen from his sleeve and holding it to his nose." As students to write Birdy's diary for that night. (give them a few minutes.) Then read rest of entry of that day to the class.

**Step 7** is usually done as homework.