



## FOCUS: AUTHOR KATHERINE PATERSON

This education resource guide supplements the presentation made by Katherine Paterson at *In Search of Wonder: Common Core and More*, a professional development day presented by The National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance, in conjunction with the Perry Ohio School District. Included on these pages are engaging activities and discussion questions based on Common Core English

Language Standards for Paterson’s book: *The Great Gilly Hopkins*. We invite you to print and share these materials as needed. Education resource guides are available at: [thencbla.org](http://thencbla.org)

*You know the young people in your own classroom. You know their academic prowess, their study habits, and the level of their literacy skills. You know what resources you have on hand and your students’ capabilities using those resources. You know what your students will find exciting and challenging. Consequently, we present these activities and discussion questions for general use in classrooms and libraries, hoping that you will use your own insightful creativity and sound judgment to shape the ideas, activities, and resources we offer, expanding on them to meet the needs of your students. These materials were created by Mary Brigid Barrett, President and Executive Director of The National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance, author, and illustrator.*

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## THE GREAT GILLY HOPKINS

by Katherine Paterson

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**SUMMARY:** In Katherine Paterson’s own words, “I am trying to tell the story of a lost child who is angry with the world that regards her as disposable and who is fighting it with every available weapon—fair or foul.” (from “Ideas” in *The Invisible Child: On Reading and Writing Books for Children* by Katherine Paterson)

**Grade Levels:** Grades 5-8, but can also be used for advanced 4th graders and may be applicable for certain students and topics in high school.

### COMMON CORE ENGLISH LANGUAGE STANDARD:

Explain how the author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in the text. How does the author’s connotative meaning (feelings associated with words) and tone (the author’s attitude toward his or her subject) reflect the personality of each of the main characters in the book?

#### Application:

In Katherine Paterson’s National Book Award acceptance speech for *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, she stated, “I wrote this book because, by chance rather than by design, I was for two months a foster mother. ....I was not serviceable as a foster mother, and this is why: I knew from the beginning that the children were going to be with us only a short time, so when a problem arose, as problems will, I’d say to myself, ‘I can’t really deal with that, they’ll be here only a few weeks.’ Suddenly and too late I heard what I been saying. I was regarding two human beings as Kleenex, disposable. And it forced me to think, what must it be like for those thousands of children in our midst who find themselves rated as disposable? So, I wrote a book, a confession of sin, in which one of those embittered children meets the world’s greatest foster mother.”

Share the excerpt from Katherine’s speech with your students, then conduct a class discussion about Katherine’s statement related to characters in *The Great Gilly Hopkins*. You may want to use some of the following questions:

- ❖ What does the word *disposable* mean? (Depending on the age and experience level of your students you may have to discuss the meaning of other words in Katherine’s speech, such as *serviceable*.) What things, besides Kleenex, are disposable? Do you value things that are disposable?
- ❖ What does Katherine Paterson mean when she used the word *disposable* in regard to children? What words would communicate the opposite of disposable, in regards to feelings about children? Think about the main characters, and the off-page minor characters, in *The Great Gilly Hopkins*—Mr. and Mrs. Nevins, Mrs. Richards, Maime Trotter, William Earnest, Ms. Ellis, Mr. Randolph, Miss Barbara Harris, Courtney Hopkins, Nonnie Hopkins, and Agnes Stokes. What kind of people were they? Did they feel Gilly was disposable? How do you know? Can you find places in the story, in the text and dialog, that support your opinions?

- ❖ In developing the character of Gilly does Katherine Paterson bluntly state what kind of kid Gilly is? Or is that inferred? How does the author convey Gilly’s feelings, beliefs, and opinions? Is Gilly respectful of Maime Trotter, her home, and William Earnest? Is the author’s tone and point of view respectful or disrespectful of Gilly, a girl who does not have much money or many possessions? Is the author’s tone respectful of Maime Trotter’s home? How do you know? Ask students to support their observations and opinions by citing excerpts in the story that support their point of view.
- ❖ Do we—our society at large, or particular individuals—view children living with their biological parents as disposable? Do we view adopted children as disposable? Do we view foster children as disposable? Do we view poor children as disposable? What evidence, proof, or examples can you share that support your opinions. (If your students cannot support their opinions, you may want to assign them research tasks to investigate how our society values children of different socioeconomic backgrounds. One way to do this would be to have your students read and examine your local city newspaper and major online news sources for a week to observe how we, as a society, and the media prioritize issues related to young people. Ask your students—What issues make headlines? What issues are addressed on the front or main page? What issues are addressed in op/ed essays and articles? Are education and social welfare articles related to young people’s needs on the front page or are they buried somewhere in the newspaper or website?)

### Activities:

#### ❖ **Creative Writing Activity: Pack a Suitcase Like Gilly**

Ask your students to imagine that, for whatever reason, their parents, guardians, and immediate family can no longer care for them. They are being taken into foster care and a social worker is arriving to transport them to a foster family where they will live in a home and a neighborhood that is unfamiliar. They will be attending a different school. They have only one suitcase. They will need to pick and pack items they think they will need, and all those things have to fit in that one suitcase. Ask them to write an essay showing their packing process, an essay that describes, in detail, the items and objects they will take with them. Then have the students read their pieces aloud to the class; if a child is reluctant to share, perhaps you could read his or her essay aloud. Listen to and discuss the essays with the class. Discuss not only how students use language, but if their packing choices and descriptions reveal feelings and priorities. Do they underline the importance of each item by wordy explanations? Or do they *reveal* the importance and impact of each item by *inference*? Writers often infer meaning, rather than state things bluntly, because inference makes readers’ brains work and draws readers further into the story. After discussing how Katherine Paterson employs the use of inference in writing *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, citing examples, you might want students to rewrite their essays, employing the same technique.

Teaching “Inference” resource links:

<http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/inference>

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/author-study-improving-reading-906.html>

❖ **Creative Writing Activity: Friends Like Family**

We often have strong feelings and emotional ties to people to whom we are not biologically related. Ask students to write an essay about a person who they feel especially close to, someone young or old, who is like an adopted family member. They should share an anecdote or experience they have had with that person, an anecdote that will reveal this person's character and why the student cherishes this person.

❖ **Creative and Critical Thinking Skills Art Activity: Design a Special Bedroom**

This activity can be done by individual students or in small groups. Ask students to imagine that their family is going to host a foster child. In some states, foster children need not have their own bedroom, but must have their own bed. Ask your students to create a drawing or painting of the bedroom in their home that the foster child will have when he or she moves in. Before your students begin their drawing or painting, they may want to do a few rough sketches. Before your students begin their drawing or painting, you may want to ask them to think carefully about the following questions, reminding them that there are no right or wrong answers, but there are choices and possibilities:

- ~ How can they create a room setting for a foster child that sends the message *you are important, you are not disposable*?
- ~ Would they be willing to share their bedroom with a foster child? If yes, how much are they willing to share in the room related to space and objects?
- ~ We often make judgments on objects and spaces valuing some over others. We may think bigger closets are better and more valuable than smaller closets. We may feel bigger rooms are better than smaller rooms. We may think that one dresser in a room is better than another dresser. Are they willing to share the best things with the foster child? Or to let the foster child use the best room, the best bed, the best dresser? Is that fair? Is that a sacrifice? What does the word *sacrifice* mean? What do their family members sacrifice to make them feel wanted and valuable in their families?
- ~ Is it important that a foster child feel that he or she is a member of the family? Is there something that family members could do to make the bedroom the foster child will use feel more welcoming?
- ~ How can the use of color make a foster child feel welcome and wanted?
- ~ Are there objects and items that can be used or placed in the room that would be welcoming?

❖ **Discussion and Drawing Activity: What Makes a Family?**

In the book and movie, *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, Gilly Hopkins is an 11-year-old girl who has been put in more foster homes than she can remember. Her only memory of her mother is an old photograph. When Gilly is brought to the Trotter's home, Maime Trotter does everything she can to make Gilly feel at home. The Trotter family consists of Maime, her other foster child W.E., and the blind African-American neighbor, Mr. Randolph, who lives across the street and spends many of his meals with the family. Families come in all shapes and sizes. There is no typical family. Ask students to think about their own families and other families they know. Have students share their observations with the class.

Download and print copies of the *Gilly Hopkins* picture frame from: <https://wdrv.it/3ffa4a848>. Give each student a copy of the picture frame and have them draw a picture of their own family. This link also features downloadable bookmarks that students can decorate.

## COMMON CORE ENGLISH LANGUAGE STANDARD:

Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.



# THE GREAT GILLY HOPKINS

*The Great Gilly Hopkins* is being produced as a movie and will be in theaters and on demand on October 7, 2016. Watch the trailer at: <https://wdrv.it/4eb94d465>

Below is information from the movie studio, Lionsgate Premiere, about the film:

A feisty foster kid’s outrageous scheme to be reunited with her birth mother has unintended consequences in *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, an entertaining film for the entire family. Gilly Hopkins (Sophie Nélisse) has seen more than her share of foster homes and has outwitted every family she has lived with. In an effort to escape her new foster mother Maime Trotter’s (Kathy Bates) endless loving care, Gilly concocts a plan that she believes will bring her mother running to her rescue. But when the ploy blows up in Gilly’s face it threatens to ruin the only chance she’s ever had to be part of a real family. Based on the award-winning young-adult novel by Katherine Paterson (*Bridge to Terabithia*), *The Great Gilly Hopkins* stars Sophie Nélisse, Kathy Bates, Julia Stiles, Bill Cobbs, Billy Magnussen, with Octavia Spencer and Glenn Close. Directed by Steven Herek; Screenplay by David Paterson. Lionsgate Premiere will release the film in theaters and On Demand October 7.



A film by Stephen Herek, a William Teitler / Brian Kennedy Production, In Association with Arcady Bay Entertainment and Inklings Entertainment.

**To download and print a mini movie poster for each of your students, go to:**

<https://wdrv.it/a7522bf0f>

### **Before You Start Your *Great Gilly Hopkins* Discussion and Activities**

Lionsgate Premiere's wonderful video featuring clips of the movie and interviews with the cast, author Katherine Paterson, and screenwriter David Paterson provides great insight into the book and movie. After your students have read the book and watched the movie, you might want to show this 9-minute video before you begin your discussion about the book and movie.

To view the video, go to: <https://wdrv.it/9d19207d9>

The following discussion questions and activities can be used to compare and contrast any book with the movie inspired by the book. We highly recommend that students read the book before watching the movie because once your students see the movie, that visual imprint will override their own imaginations and their image of the characters, setting, time, and place will be that of the movie and not of their own imaginings.

#### **Activities:**

#### **❖ Critical and Creative Thinking Skills Small Group Activity: Design Your Own Movie**

Before viewing the movie, divide your class into small groups so that each group will have one main director, one casting director, one set designer, one location scout, and one costume designer. Movie making is a collaborative art; they will all have to work together on every step of the project.

- ~ The **main director** is the group leader; he or she needs to have an overall vision of what the movie should look like, and he or she needs to be able to communicate this vision to the rest of the crew.
- ~ The **director** will need to decide how much their movie will adhere to the original book. Will it take place in the same time era of the book? Will it follow the plot of the book exactly? Where will the movie begin—at the book's beginning? Or somewhere in the middle with flashbacks?
- ~ The **casting director**, thinking of the director's vision, needs to offer suggestions as to which actors should be cast as the main characters in the book. The casting director can use online sources to look at possible actors.
- ~ The **location scout** will pick locations where movie scenes will be filmed. Photos of locations all over the world can be researched in books from libraries as well as online.
- ~ **Set designers** can use their own sketches or photographs from websites, magazines, and books to illustrate the rooms the characters will inhabit in the movie world of the book.
- ~ **Costume designers**, too, can sketch out costumes for the characters, or may assemble photos from catalogues, magazines, books, and online resources.

Then the crews will have to organize a presentation to sell their classmates on their vision of the movie. After all the crews have shared their visual concepts for their movie, and only then, watch the commercial movie of the book. Afterward, conduct a class discussion comparing and contrasting each crew's visual concept with the book's movie. You may want to ask them what interpretation best projects the theme and emotional content of the book.

❖ **Critical and Creative Thinking Skills Exercise and Discussion:**  
**Book/Movie Comparisons**

Comparing book and book movie treatments is an excellent way to hone students' critical and creative thinking skills, besides its literacy and literature value, such a comparison also addresses media literacy issues.

Read the book first and then have students watch the movie, comparing and contrasting character and characterization, plot development, conflict, theme, tone, and atmosphere. Do not limit your choice of book and movie to current books and films, or movie treatments that successfully share the meaning and tone of the book. Book lovers assume that the book is always better than the movie, but that may not be true in all cases. Many people feel *The Wizard of Oz* 1939 film is much better than L. Frank Baum's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Conversely, both authors Natalie Babbitt and Susan Cooper feel the more recent movies based on their books, *Tuck Everlasting* and *The Dark is Rising*, were horrendous treatments.

❖ **Theater Arts Activity: *The Great Gilly Hopkins* Musical Play**

Launch a school production of *The Great Gilly Hopkins* in its musical theatrical adaptation. Written by David Paterson with Steve Liebman, it was produced on Broadway to critical acclaim. "A rare piece of children's theatre that doesn't wear a sugar coat... Rewards in abundance await audiences [of this] excellent, bittersweet play." - *The New York Times*

You can obtain script copies and/or licensing by contacting Samuel French, Inc. at:

<http://www.samuel french.com/p/4257/great-gilly-hopkins-the>

If your school does not have the funding to mount a full production of the play, you can obtain script copies and do a reading in class. After your reading, conduct a class discussion that compares and contrasts the play to the movie. One item for specific discussion would be comparing and contrasting the difference in the art forms between books, movies, and plays noting how each deals with the internal and external lives of its characters.

❖ **Creative Writing Activity:**

**Students Create a *Great Gilly Hopkins* Reader's Theater Production**

Using *Gilly Hopkins* as your students' inspiration, have them write a Reader's Theater version of the play. Small groups or individuals can be assigned chapters to turn into Reader's Theater. For information on how to work with students on Reader's Theater, go to: <http://thencbla.org/education/readers-theater/>

❖ **Creative Writing Activity: Write a Student Handbook for Gilly**

Does your school have a student handbook, or a welcoming pamphlet for new students? Is it created by adults or children? Ask your students to think about the difference between a student handbook or welcome pamphlet created by adults for new kids coming to school, and one planned and created by kids. What might kids include that adults might not?

Have your students design and write a new student handbook and/or welcome pamphlet for new kids coming to your school. Ask them to include practical advice to best help the new student navigate through his or her first week at school and make specific recommendations to make new students feel welcome, as well as advice that will help them avoid pitfalls. For example: What are the best and /or most fun activities for the school yard or playground? How should they dress? Are there any foods they should avoid in the cafeteria?

## ONLINE RESOURCES FOR *THE GREAT GILLY HOPKINS*

### Existing Online Educational Materials

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/3330>

<http://www.readworks.org/lessons/grade5/great-gilly-hopkins>

<http://www.ket.org/artstoolkit/drama/lessonplan/122.htm>

<http://thegreatgillyhopkinswebquest.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?tid=2832&a=1>

<https://sites.google.com/site/thesisactivities/activities-for-katherine-paterson-s-books/the-great-gilly-hopkins>

### Wikipedia Summary of *The Great Gilly Hopkins*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Great\\_Gilly\\_Hopkins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Gilly_Hopkins)

### Fun Movie Stuff to Download and Print

- ❖ Bookmarks: <https://wdrv.it/3ffa4a848>
- ❖ Picture Frame: <https://wdrv.it/3ffa4a848>
- ❖ Mini Movie Poster: <https://wdrv.it/a7522bf0f>



## ONLINE AUTHOR RESOURCES

### **Katherine Paterson: General Information**

[KatherinePaterson.com](http://KatherinePaterson.com)  
[thenclub.org/board-member/katherine-paterson](http://thenclub.org/board-member/katherine-paterson)  
<http://www.edupaperback.org/page-864494>

### **Katherine Paterson: Interviews**

[thenclub.org/education/interviews/an-interview-with-katherine-paterson](http://thenclub.org/education/interviews/an-interview-with-katherine-paterson)  
<http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/Author-Katherine-Paterson-After-Bridge-to-Terabithia/4>  
<http://www.learningfirst.org/visionaries/KatherinePaterson>  
<http://www.ipl.org/div/askauthor/paterson.html>  
[http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/booksellers/press\\_release/paterson/question.shtml#questions](http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/booksellers/press_release/paterson/question.shtml#questions)

### **Katherine Paterson: Videos**

Reading Rockets interview in 2011 about reading aloud with families, the joys of writing historical fiction, and the challenge of adapting classic works:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3EAhJEjCSQ>

Reading Rockets interview in 2010 about Paterson's childhood, raising a family, the challenges of writing, and her favorite books for children: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJLaLc\\_kaZc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJLaLc_kaZc)

Laura Ingalls Wilder speech in 2013: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4\\_KJYDwfmMw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_KJYDwfmMw)

“Lyddie and the Power of Historical Fiction” at Lowell National Historical Park in 2013:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmQi-cYLZ-0>

Interview with Kate DiCamillo on becoming a writer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdVtSj2W68w>

Interview with Kate DiCamillo about the writing process:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GprltUiL-YQ>

Video by Lionsgate Premiere featuring clips of the movie and interviews with the cast, author Katherine Paterson, and screenwriter David Paterson:

<https://wdrv.it/9d19207d9>

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