

Children's Literature Reviews

Item 29 of 130

Gossamer

Lois Lowry.

[Contributor biographical information](#)

[Publisher description](#)

[Sample text](#)

Boston [Mass.] : Houghton Mifflin, c2006.

140 p. ; 22 cm.

Annotations:

"Walter Lorraine books."

While learning to bestow dreams, a young dream giver tries to save an eight-year-old boy from the effects of both his abusive past and the nightmares inflicted on him by the frightening Sinisteeds.

Best Books:

[Best Children's Books of the Year, 2007](#) ; Bank Street College of Education; United States

[Books for Holiday Gift-Giving, 2006](#) ; Association for Library Service to Children; United States

[Children's Catalog, Nineteenth Edition, 2006](#) ; H.W. Wilson; United States

[Choices, 2007](#) ; Cooperative Children's Book Center; United States

[Kirkus Book Review Stars, March 1, 2006](#) ; United States

[Middle and Junior High School Library Catalog, Supplement to Ninth Edition, 2007](#) ; H.W. Wilson Company; United States

[Notable Children's Books in the English Language Arts, 2007](#) ; Children's Literature Assembly

[Notable Children's Books, 2007](#) ; ALSC American Library Association; United States

[Publishers Weekly Book Review Stars, March 6, 2006](#) ; Cahners; United States

[School Library Journal Book Review Stars, May 2006](#) ; Cahners; United States

Awards, Honors, Prizes:

[Parents' Choice Award](#) Silver 2006 Fiction United States

[Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award](#) Nominee 2009 United States

State and Provincial Reading Lists:

[Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2007-2008](#) ; Nominee; Grades 6-9; Maryland

[Colorado Children's Book Award, 2009](#) ; Nominee; Junior Books; Colorado

[Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, 2007-2008](#) ; Nominee; Vermont

[Georgia Children's Book Award, 2007-2008](#) ; Nominee; Grades 4-8; Georgia

[Golden Sower Award, 2008-2009](#) ; Nominee; Intermediate; Nebraska

[Grand Canyon Reader Award, 2008](#) ; Nominee; Intermediate Book; Arizona

[Great Stone Face Award, 2007-2008](#) ; Nominee; New Hampshire

[Maine Student Book Award, 2007-2008](#) ; Nominee; Maine

[Massachusetts Children's Book Award, 2008-2009](#) ; Master List; Massachusetts

[Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award, 2008-2009](#) ; Nominee; Grades 3-5; Minnesota

[Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award, 2008-2009](#) ; Nominee; Grades 6-8; Minnesota

[Nutmeg Children's Book Award, 2009](#) ; Nominee; Intermediate; Connecticut

[Pennsylvania Young Readers' Choice Award, 2007-2008](#) ; Nominee; Grades 6-8; Pennsylvania

[Sunshine State Young Reader's Award, 2007-2008](#) ; Nominee; Grades 6-8; Florida

Horn Book Guide:

Fall 2006 Intermediate Fiction Rating 4, Recommended, with minor flaws.

Reading Measurement Programs:

Accelerated Reader
Interest Level Middle Grade
Book Level 4.4
Accelerated Reader Points 4
Accelerated Vocabulary

Lexile, MetaMetrics, Inc.
Lexile Measure 660

Reading Counts-Scholastic
Interest Level 6-8
Reading Level 5.3
Title Point Value 8
Lexile Measure 660

Reviews:

Hazel Rochman (Booklist, Feb. 15, 2006 (Vol. 102, No. 12))

Littlest One is a delicate, invisible spirit who is in training to be a dream-giver, learning to blend fragments of happy memories with fragile details of daily life for people as they sleep. She helps a tormented foster child at night, bestowing healing memories in his dreams. He remembers a button, a broken seashell on a shelf, a book left open, images that fight the sinister Hordes that torment him with nightmares of his father's vicious abuse. Lowry's plain, poetic words speak directly to children about the powerful, ordinary things in everyday life, such as the boy's memory of a baseball game ("the curved line of stitches on the ball and then the high thwacking sound of the hit"); the feel of his dog's silky, warm fur; and the thump of the dog's tail against the floor. Pair this fantasy with Valerie Worth's *All the Small Poems* (1995) and with Katherine Paterson's realistic novel, *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (1978), about an abused child in loving foster care. Category: Books for Older Readers--Fiction. 2006, Houghton/Walter Lorraine, \$16. *Gr.* 5-8.

Sarah Wanlass (Children's Book and Play Review, November 2006)

Littlest One is a young and delicate dream-giver-in-training. Thin Elderly is her superior and trainer. Together, they battle the evil sensisteads, who work to destroy the happiness of the two humans in their care--a lonely, old woman and a troubled, young boy. The dream-givers gather the happiest memories they can forage and bestow them in the form of pleasant dreams. These efforts strengthen their charges against the nightmares inflicted by the sensisteads. Lowry's unique style is evident in *Gossamer*. Through this enchanting tale, she introduces readers to the mystical world of dream-givers and sensisteads and suggests that the realm of the unconscious is more closely intertwined with the real world than is apparent. Her approach is detailed and gripping as it forces the reader to keep track of the various storylines in the book to make connections between them. Yet, at the same time, readers may feel distanced from the story, by the remote, omniscient narrator tone. Many characters are left without name and Lowry picks and chooses the details she wants to emphasize. This technique is reminiscent of her award-winning novel, *The Giver*. *Gossamer* is a quick read. Fantasy lovers should grab a copy. In addition, this novel broaches important issues about interpersonal relations. It touches on topics such as domestic abuse and divorce and allows readers to contemplate the effects of these travesties on parents and children. The book also illustrates that people can find fulfillment through service and that healing and hope can come, even to those who have been badly hurt. Rating: Outstanding. Reading Level: Intermediate; Young adult. Category: Fantasy fiction. 2006, Houghton Mifflin, 140 p., \$16. © 2002, Brigham Young University.

Susie Wilde (Children's Literature)

Lois Lowry's latest book brings to life two absorbing worlds. There is the sad human world of angry foster child John, who is living with an elderly woman while his mother struggles to create a life for herself and her son. Then there is Lowry's fantasy world which is more vibrant. The protagonist of this imaginative realm is the ever curious dream-giver, Littlest One. Her compassion is as strong as her touch is gentle. She does not even "break the strands of a cobweb." Littlest and her mentor Thin Elder are determined to gather the stuff of pleasant dreams for their "bestowal" to protect John from the Sinisteeds who scorch through walls to overtake sleeping victims with horrible dreams. While the book is rather crowded with characters, plots, and ideas, Lowry has created another story that will please her fans. 2006, Houghton Mifflin, \$16.00. Ages 9 to 11.

Gwynne Spencer (Children's Literature)

One of the best books I have read so far this year is *Gossamer* by Lois Lowry, which solves the mystery of where dreams come from. Lois Lowry, whose books like *The Giver*, *Messenger*, *Gathering Blue* (all related), and *Number the Stars* changed the landscape of children's literature forever, tells stories for all of us. They are true AND real, which is the best thing I can say about any book. This new one, *Gossamer*, is so comforting and enchanting, so full of truth and whimsy, it probably deserves to be on everybody's "must read" list for 2006. Dreams are the stuff the world is made of. I was shocked by someone telling me that dream analysis is a waste of time, self-centered pandering, and not to be encouraged. Wrong. I tell you, dreams DO mean something. And whatever part of the dream you remember is exactly what you need, like the grain of sand at the center of the pearl. Dreams are the way the unseen part of the universe speaks to us. 2006, Houghton Mifflin, \$16.00. Ages 9 to 12.

Anna Fulmer (Children's Literature)

This story gives an imaginative explanation for where dreams originate. The Littlest One, the youngest dream-giver, is shadowing the older and very impatient Fastidious. The story begins with the Littlest One and her teacher, Fastidious, going on an expedition to bestow dreams upon an old lady and her dog, Toby. Soon, the Littlest One gets a new teacher, Thin Elderly, who is more patient and giving, and who teaches her the art of dream-giving. To impart dreams to people and animals, dream-givers touch different objects to pick up "fragments" of memories, and then they bestow these fragments onto the people. When The Littlest One touches, she has a touch like gossamer, "very fragile and delicate." Soon the old woman receives a foster child, John, whose father physically abused him. John's mother, also a victim of his father's abuse, yearns to regain custody of her child. The dream-giver's nemeses are the evil Sinisteeds who inflict their victims with nightmares; a group of them called a Horde attack John, giving him awful dreams. Will the inspiring dreams that Littlest One and Thin Elderly have strengthened him with be enough to overcome these nightmares? By the end of this tale of love, courage, and hope, things change for the Littlest One because she has become an adult. She receives the new name, Gossamer. On the surface, this story only seems to describe the life of the dream-givers; however, it also deals with issues many families struggle with such as abuse and neglect. These topics draw readers into the struggles that John, his mother, and the old woman must overcome. Author Lois Lowry has written many well-known books such as *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*, and she says that the element that unites these books is their common theme of interdependence that we have with not only each other but with our environment as well. This story carries this message well. Although this novel is fantastic, it is truly inspirational and will bring a smile to any reader's face. 2006, Walter Lorraine Books/Houghton Mifflin, \$16.00. Ages 9 to 12.

Joan Kindig, Ph.D. (Children's Literature)

Littlest One is an apprentice dream giver whose playful spirit drives her mentor, Fastidious, away. But with the help of Thin Elderly she is fast learning how to touch objects, harvest good associations and memories, and deliver them to humans as they sleep. In chapters alternating between fantasy and reality, we meet young John who is placed in the home of a kind old woman to recover from the abuse he has suffered at the hands of his father. Because he is so vulnerable, the Sinisteed begins to attack his dreams to deliver powerful and unsettling nightmares. Thin Elderly and Littlest One must strengthen John each night to withstand the Sinisteed's attempts--or worse, that of the Horde. The novel is elegantly and sparingly written. The pacing is taut and the characterization surprisingly full given the length of the book (140 pages). 2006, Houghton Mifflin Company, \$16.00. Ages 10 to 14.

Charlee Crews (Children's Literature)

As this story unfolds, the reader learns that the main characters in the story are in charge of gathering fragments to use to distribute dreams. Littlest One, a particularly curious creature, is learning the craft of bestowal (giving

dreams). She and her teacher are assigned the house of an old maid who fosters a young boy, John. From an abusive family, John is being attacked by a Sinisteed, a creature that give nightmares. While making John stronger with dreams, Littlest One develops and matures. At the end of the story, she is wise enough to handle her own house and maybe one day teach a new Littlest One. In recognition of her maturity and because of her gentle touch, she receives a new name, Gossamer. Lowry uses the text to develop Littlest One. Through the story, Littlest One matures by learning to receive and give memories so that she can help others. Character development is similar to that in Lowry's award-winning novel, *The Giver*. In both books, Lowry allows the reader to develop alongside of the main character. 2006, Houghton Mifflin Company, \$16.00. Ages 10 to 18.

CCBC (Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices, 2007)

Memories are literally the stuff of which dreams are made in a captivating new novel from Lois Lowry. They have the power to haunt and, more important, the power to heal. Littlest One is a Dreamgiver who draws upon that healing power as she bestows dreams upon an angry young boy who was abused, and upon the lonely older woman who has agreed to be his foster parent. By day the woman offers the boy patience, understanding, and humor as she slowly builds his trust. At night it is up to Littlest One to strengthen the child's sense of security. Perceptive and tender-hearted, the small being with the gossamer touch is sometimes willing to break the rules of dreamgiving as she looks for memories that will bring happy dreams and strives to keep the dark forces that want to bestow nightmares at bay. Lowry's stirring, richly imagined story suggests parallels—and a profound connection—between the world of the Dreamgivers and the human world. Perhaps most important, in both worlds the power of love and kindness triumphs over cruelty and fear. CCBC Category: Fiction for Children. 2006, Walter Lorraine Books / Houghton Mifflin, 140 pages, \$16.00. Ages 9-12.

Kirkus (Kirkus Reviews, March 1, 2006 (Vol. 74, No. 5))

Thin Elderly and Littlest One are dream-givers. They bestow dreams, using fragments collected from buttons, toys, photographs, shells and other personal objects that collect and hold memories over the years. The collected fragments become stories of the person to whom they belong, and as dreams they transmit restorative feelings of love, pride, happiness, companionship, laughter and courage. However, Sinistees are at work here, too, inflicting nightmares and undoing the careful work of the dream-givers. Readers familiar with *The Giver* will most appreciate Lowry's riff on the value of memories and dreams and the importance of the sad parts of our lives, too. For such a slim work, the characterizations of Thin Elderly and Littlest are strong—she the sprightly little girl learning her trade, he the bemused and patient elder. The prose is light as gossamer; the story as haunting as a dream. 2006, Walter Lorraine/Houghton Mifflin, 144p, \$16.00. Category: Fiction. Ages 10 up. Starred Review. © 2006 Kirkus Reviews/VNU eMedia, Inc. All rights reserved.

Tena Natale Litherland (Library Media Connection, November/December 2006)

With this slender novel, two-time Newbery Award Medal winner Lois Lowry answers the age-old question: Where do dreams come from? Littlest One is training as a dream-giver. With a touch as light as gossamer, she takes seriously her job of gathering memories from people's possessions and returning the pleasant memories as dreams. When she and Thin Elderly, her mentor, get a new assignment, they realize that their new job will be difficult. The woman is old and John is a troubled boy with an abusive father. He has recently been placed in foster care with the old woman. But nightmares visit the boy each night and threaten to undo the good work that Littlest One and Thin Elderly do to bring happiness to their charges. Lowry skillfully crafts three stories into a successful whole in this enchanting novella. With her own gossamer touch Lowry's prose resonates with lyricism and sensitivity. To fully appreciate the prose, teachers and librarians should read this aloud. Strong characterizations and multiple themes (love, trust, work ethic, abuse, growth, and coming of age) lend it to engaging class discussions. Highly Recommended. 2006, Houghton Mifflin, 140pp., \$16 hc. Ages 9 to 13.

F. Todd Goodson (The ALAN Review, Spring/Summer 2006 (Vol. 33, No. 3))

Lois Lowry's newest novel explores a fantasy world where angelic beings visit sleeping humans to bestow dreams. The short novel weaves together the stories of a novice dream giver, a lonely woman, and a troubled foster child. Our dream giver, Littlest One, learns to take bits and fragments of happy memories from the objects in people's homes and turn those morsels into dreams capable of helping the woman and the boy through the challenges they face in their waking lives. *Gossamer* is rich in archetypal characters and imagery, reading something like one of the pleasant dreams bestowed by its central character. Although the book will be of interest to young people who are fans of fantasy and rich narratives, its message of gathering strength for the future from the past is applicable to readers of all ages. Category: Dreams/Dreaming/Healing. YA--Young Adult. 2006, Houghton Mifflin Company, 140 pp., \$16.00. Ages young adult. Manhattan, KS

Horn Book (The Horn Book Guide, Fall 2006)

A lonely old woman fosters an angry, emotionally scarred eight-year-old boy. When a horde of Sinisteens bring the boy terrifying nightmares (graphically described) of his father's abuse, Littlest One, an apprentice dream giver, fights back with healing dream fragments. Lowry's touch here is hardly gossamer, but this allegorical novel doesn't require it: her distilled prose bypasses the particular and goes right to the universal. Category: Intermediate Fiction. 2006, Houghton/Lorraine, 140pp, 16.00. *Ages 9 to 12*. Rating: 4: Recommended, with minor flaws.

Catherine Gilmore-Clough (VOYA, August 2006 (Vol. 29, No. 3))

Dream-givers. In the night, they slip about the house, collecting wisps of memories from cherished objects and mementoes with which to bestow sweet dreams on their home's inhabitant, a tender but lonely older woman. Littlest One is the newest trainee, delighting in her job nearly as much as she is overwhelmed by curiosity and wonder. Her tutor, Fastidious, finds her tiring and fears that she is too much of a chatterbox to work without calling attention to her presence. Under more patient tutelage, Littlest discovers a rare gift, the gossamer touch, an ability to touch a living being without awaking it. Her unusual gift may make all the difference when a troubled young boy comes to live in the home and the dream-givers' nightmare-granting counterparts, the Sinisteeds, sense his vulnerability and prepare an attack. Lowry, author of many award-winning books, charmingly succeeds again with this lyrical and compelling story about the importance of memory and the transforming power of love. The story of a damaged child and his struggling mother-about the healing that a loving presence can provide-is devastatingly authentic, but the events in Lowry's imaginary nighttime world mesh so effortlessly with the story set in the real world, illustrating so meticulously why good things provide strength in dark times, that it is difficult not to believe her fantasy is truth. The gentle blend of wit and pathos will enchant readers as much as the charming Littlest One does. VOYA CODES: 5Q 4P M J (Hard to imagine it being any better written; Broad general YA appeal; Middle School, defined as grades 6 to 8; Junior High, defined as grades 7 to 9). 2006, Walter Lorraine Books/Houghton Mifflin, 144p., \$16. Ages 11 to 15.

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