

THE
WINDEBY
PUZZLE

HISTORY AND STORY



LOIS LOWRY

CLARION BOOKS

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The Windeby Puzzle

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www.harpercollinschildrens.com

ISBN 978-0-35-867250-0

Typography by Alison Donalty and Corina Lupp

ScoutAutomatedPrintCode

First Edition

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THE WANDSWORTH SHIELD BOSS

This image shows a bronze “shield boss”—the central piece of a shield meant to deflect blows to the middle of circular shields and provide a location for a grip to be mounted. Originally found in the River Thames at Wandsworth around 1849, the boss is thought to have been created during the Iron Age, circa the second century BC. The shield features a Celtic style of decoration known as “La Tène,” comprised of an intricate pattern of two birds with stylized outstretched wings.



THE WINDEBY CHILD

The Windeby Child was discovered in 1952 by peat cutters in Germany. Bog bodies are well preserved due to the unusual combination of highly acidic water, low temperature, and lack of oxygen that exists in the turf fields.

Research now suggests that the body was that of a sixteen-year-old boy, and that the manner of death was likely natural causes. Lack of trauma is the main evidence for this theory. The half-shaven appearance is thought to be the result of half the scalp being exposed to oxygen longer than the rest of the body, or to damage during discovery.



THE OSTERBY MAN

This human head, thought to be from a male decapitated between 70 and 220 AD, was found in the state of Schleswig-Holstein in Germany. He is known as the “Osterby Man” and was found under a peat bog, wrapped in a buckskin cape. His hair is well preserved, unusual for a bog body, and features the distinctive Swabian/Suebian knot frequently tied by men from the Germanic tribe of Suebi. The reddish-brown color is the result of acids from the bog, and it is thought that the hair would have been dark blond and white in life—a potential indication of the man’s older age. Although his cause of death is unknown, the decapitation and fractured skull suggest it was a deliberate execution.



EUROPEAN EAGLE=OWL

The European eagle-owl is one of the most widespread species of its kind, inhabiting a range of almost twelve million square miles across Europe and Asia. One of the largest species of owl, it can be identified by its distinctive ear “tufts,” with darker colorings, a pattern of dark stripes across the body, and orange eyes. These owls can often be found in rocky or mountainous regions near woodlands, or in wetlands, where they hunt. The European eagle-owl’s large size and weight allow them to hunt a wide range of animals. Their primary prey is rodents, but they have also been recorded hunting young rabbits, hedgehogs, and red foxes. They have one of the longest life spans among owls, living for up to twenty years in the wild.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Inspired by the discovery of an ancient bog body in northern Germany, Lois Lowry engaged her powerful curiosity with the mysterious history of the body, only to have the sparse facts that archaeologists thought they knew upended by further investigation. How did this unexpected revelation further spark Lowry's imaginative powers?
2. Inherent in the discovery of the Windeby Child is the knowledge that a life has been cut short. What are some ways that the author handled the challenges of telling a story with an established, and troubling, ending?
3. Lowry provides vivid details about the daily tasks and expectations of the villagers. How did the author

balance the historical details of people's lives with creating an engaging story that modern readers can relate to?

4. Lowry's two lead characters have different goals: Estrild is focused on breaking out of the roles expected of her, and Varick is focused on the idea of doing one brave thing. What might have led the author to make these choices for her characters?
5. Memory is a potent theme in several of Lowry's works, including *The Giver* and *On the Horizon*. *The Windeby Puzzle* could be read as an argument for how memory and imagination are defenses against the passage of time. What other qualities or contributions could be thought to withstand the passage of time?

SELECTION OF QUOTES

The below quotes were selected as they capture, in Lowry's potent, direct language, meaningful themes from the book. What does each quote mean to you? Do you agree with the position of the speaker? Are there other quotes that you would call out for further thought?

But she liked the idea of the little skeleton, the remains of a creature taking on a new role, reminding one that it had existed. Usually dead things—even people!—crumbled and rotted away and were forgotten. (p. 25)

Watching them, Estrild had begun to feel a passion to become more than just another wife, one more woman made gaunt from chores and childbearing, old before her time. Women deserved more. (p. 33)

She rehearsed and rehearsed it all in her mind. . . . Estrild smoothed her hair, breathed deeply, and counted to herself the number of nights left until her life, and perhaps the lives of all the girls in her village, including her younger sisters and females yet to be born, would change. (p. 87)

Just a murmur, at first: hushed and tentative. It was a whispered chorus made up of the voices of women and girls. They were asking questions of each other: questions about the future. The soft sound of it cushioned her with hope for them all. (p. 107)

“That it is not time to die until you have done one brave, good thing. My uncle had done that, they told her: had helped his friend on the battlefield. After that, you are ready and people should not be sad because they will always remember you and your one brave, good thing.” (pp. 128–29)

About the Author

LOIS LOWRY is known for her versatility and invention as a writer. She is the author of more than forty books. She was born in Hawaii and grew up in New York, Pennsylvania, and Japan. She received Newbery Medals for two of her novels, *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*. She has received countless other honors, among them the *Boston Globe–Horn Book* Award, the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award, the California Young Reader Medal, and the Mark Twain Award. Ms. Lowry lives in Maine. Visit her at loislowry.com.