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# Matilda Bone

*By Karen Cushman*



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Orphaned Matilda is not at all pleased when she arrives at Blood and Bone Alley to become an assistant to Red Peg the Bonesetter. She is a religious, well-educated girl who can't picture herself doing dirty chores or helping sickly patients.

Each day is very different from her former quiet life. Matilda's not used to being around so many people who are coming and going, laughing and eating. Not one of them seems interested in prayer or study.

Self-centered Matilda thinks no one understands her. But Peg does, and gives her time to get used to this new way of life and teaches her through kindness and friendship. Matilda is as surprised as anyone when she begins seeing the world around her in a different way.



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## **Matilda Bone** By Karen Cushman Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Fans of Cushman's previous medieval novels (Catherine, Called Birdy; The Midwife's Apprentice) may be disappointed with this historical adventure set in "Blood and Bone Alley" in the town of Chipping Bagthorpe. Unlike Catherine and Brat, heroines whose combination of rebelliousness and resourcefulness made them instantly likeable, 13-year-old Matilda is less winning than her supporting cast. The daughter of a wealthy lord's clerk and a mother who fled soon after her birth, Matilda finds herself orphaned when her father dies. As the novel opens, her self-appointed guardian, Father Leufredus, has just dropped her off at the meager lodgings of Red Peg the Bonesetter to learn Peg's trade. Fresh from the intolerant Father's tutelage, Matilda, in her zealous piety, snubs Peg and inadvertently thwarts the woman's work: more than once, while lost in prayer, the girl ruins a salve or a simple meal of porridge. Thus readers don't get the same insider's view of the bonesetter's apprenticeship that they saw of midwifery through Brat's eyes. The promise of a potential villain, Master Theobald, "the leading physick" who prizes money over healing, is never realized; the development of Matilda's friendship with another girl takes place mostly offstage; and, strangely, there are two denouements, in which Matilda makes the same realization that she has been wrong about Peg (one involving an ailing stranger whom she is treating, the other the apothecary's apprentice). Fiery Peg, her witty husband and her circle of friends will be the characters readers remember. Ages 10-14. (Oct.)

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From School Library Journal

Grade 4-8-A fascinating glimpse into the colorful life and times of the 14th century. Orphaned Matilda, 13, has lived the good life in a manor where she was well educated by Father Leufredus. Things change drastically, however, when he abandons her, leaving her to serve as an assistant to a bonesetter in return for food and shelter. Matilda is expected to cook the meals, tend the fire, and generally assist Red Peg. And Peg has her hands full dealing with this self-righteous, pious child who snobbishly sprinkles Latin in her everyday speech and continuously brags about her ability to read and write. Peg, however, allows Matilda time to ponder her new role and teaches her, by example, that kindness and friendship go a long way toward lessening the harshness of life in this small English village. Matilda constantly prays for help, guidance, and deliverance. The saints, and this child knows many, respond with humor and sometimes sound advice. The theology espoused by Matilda is consistent with the time period and Father Leufredus has taught her well. She has no thoughts of her own-only the musing and learning of Father Leufredus. She stiffly withholds herself from all attempts at friendship and kindness, and she feels more and more alone. However, when she meets a kitchen maid who joyfully introduces her to the market square, her eyes slowly open to the world around her. Readers witness her spiritual and emotional growth as she blossoms from a self-centered "nincompoop" to a compassionate, competent assistant. Cushman's character descriptions are spare, with each word carefully chosen to paint wonderful pictures. This humorous, frank look at life in the medical quarters in medieval times shows readers that love and compassion, laughter and companionship, are indeed the best medicine.

*Kit Vaughan, Midlothian Middle School, VA*

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From [Booklist](#)

Matilda Bone joins Alyce, the midwife's apprentice, and Catherine called Birdy as Cushman's latest heroine of the Middle Ages. But in this story, setting not character takes precedence. Matilda has lived her 14 years in a manor house where Father Leufredus has taught her Latin and encouraged her fear of going to hell. Now, with the priest off to London, Matilda finds herself in Blood and Bone Alley where, much to her

dismay, she's been apprenticed to Peg the Bonesetter. It's a whole new world for Matilda, who spends her time mentally conversing with saints and thinking herself better than those around her, as she begins to learn about healing. Bloodlettings, bone settings, foul remedies, and scary surgeries abound throughout the book, and it's easy to lose track of Matilda's evolution. It's the illness and the healing (and the death) that's the focal point here, not pious, whiny Matilda, who takes an inordinately long time to learn that the dependable, hardworking people she comes in contact with are worth more than the fools and cheaters whose learning she admires. Readers will find much of interest here, but it probably won't be the evolution of Matilda. *Ilene Cooper*

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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