Title: Rodzina  
Author: Karen Cushman  
Publisher: Clarion Books, 2003  
Pages: 208

Summary

Rodzina Clara Jadwiga Anastazya Brodski is the new face in Karen Cushman’s gallery of unforgettable heroines. One of a group of orphans, 12-year-old Rodzina boards a train on a cold day in March 1881. She’s reluctant to leave Chicago, the only home she can remember, and she knows there’s no substitute for the family she has lost. She expects to be adopted and turned into a slave, or worse, not to be adopted at all. As the train rattles westward, Rodzina unwittingly begins to develop attachments to her fellow travelers, even the frosty orphan guardian, and to accept the idea that there might be good homes for orphans – maybe even for a big, combative Polish girl. But no placement seems right for the formidable Rodzina, and she cleverly finds a way out of one bad situation after another, until at last she finds the family that is right for her. Once again, Karen Cushman brings us a compelling story that is thoroughly researched, full of memorable characters, and told with wry humor and keen observation by an absolutely captivating narrator. An author’s note with factual information about orphan trains and a bibliography of fiction and nonfiction titles are included.

Awards

Best Children’s Books of the Year, 2004; Bank Street College of Education The Children’s Literature Choice List, 2004  
Editors’ Choice: Books for Youth, 2003; American Library Association-Booklist Top 10 Historical Fiction for Youth, 2003; American Library Association-Booklist

Author’s Biography

Karen Cushman was born in Chicago, Illinois and lives now on Vashon Island near Seattle. She received an M.A. in Human Behavior and one in Museum Studies. Ms. Cushman has had a lifelong interest in history. She says, "I grew tired of hearing about kings, princes, generals, and presidents. I wanted to know what ordinary life was like for ordinary young people in other times." Research
into medieval English history and culture led to the writing of her first two novels, the Newbery Honor book *Catherine, Called Birdy* and the Newbery Medal Book *The Midwife’s Apprentice*. She is also the author of *Matilda Bone*, *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* and, most recently, *Rodzina*.

**Other Books Written/Illustrated by Karen Cushman**

*Catherine, Called Birdy*

*The Midwife’s Apprentice*

*The Ballad of Lucy Whipple*

*Matilda Bone*

**Related Titles**

*A Coal Miner’s Bride: The Diary of Anetka Kaminska* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

*Hank’s Story* by Jane Buchanan

*Journey Home* by Isabelle Holland

*The Midnight Train Home* by Erika Tamar

*Orphan Train Rider: One Boy’s True Story* by Andrea Warren

*The Orphan Train Series* by Joan Lowery Nixon

*Roundup of the Street Rovers: Charles Loring Brace* by Dave & Neta Jackson

*Train to Somewhere* by Eve Bunting

**Classroom Connections**

- Divide students into groups. Assign them various cities that are mentioned in the book: Chicago, Illinois; Grand Island, Nebraska; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Ogden, Utah; Virginia City, Nevada; Reno, Nevada; Oakland, California. Have students research their assigned city and write an essay comparing and contrasting life in the 1800’s and today.

- Have students create a Polish-themed poster, with photographs of people, places or things associated with Poland or Polish-American culture.

- Have students trace on a map the route Rodzina’s train took, starting in Chicago and ending in California.

- Invite someone to your classroom that has either lived in orphanage, rode an Orphan Train or immigrated to the United States. Have each student compose a question and ask the guest.
Web Sites

Nancy Keane’s Booktalks
www.nancykeane.com/booktalks
Two booktalks and an audio excerpt of Rodzina.

Champion of Children: Charles Loring Brace
http://www.childabuse.org/champions2.htm
This web page details Mr. Brace’s plan to help the kids he saw on the New York City streets.

Children’s Aid Society
http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/
New York’s Children’s Aid Society is still operating today. This website details its history as well as its current programs and activities. There is also coverage of the Orphan Train movement included in the website.

Houghton Mifflin - Rodzina
http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/cushman/rodzina.shtml#questions
Publisher site includes discussion questions that correspond to the book.

Orphan Trains of Kansas
http://www.kancoll.org/articles/orphans/
This site, compiled by the Secretary of the Kansas Orphan Train Reunion Group, provides stories, a timeline, newspaper accounts, pictures and train lists for Orphan Train riders in Kansas.

Polish American Association
http://www.polish.org/
This site is sponsored by the PAA. The PAA is the nation's only human services organization providing a comprehensive range of bilingual and bicultural programs and services to the Polish community in the areas of social services, education, employment, immigrant services, outreach and advocacy.

Teacher Views - Rodzina
Includes other activities that can be incorporated into the classroom with the study of this book.