



About Lucinda Roy

Lucinda Roy was born in Battersea, South London, on December 19, 1955, to Namba Roy, a Jamaican writer and artist, and Yvonne Roy, an English actor and teacher.

She was raised in England, received her B.A. in English from King's College, London, and her M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Arkansas. She is the author of two novels and two collections of poetry and is working on her third novel, her third poetry collection, and a series of oil paintings depicting the Middle Passage.

Roy is currently director of creative writing at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. She was named an alumni distinguished professor in English, served as associate dean for curriculum, outreach, and diversity for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences from 1993 to 1996, and was cofounder of the service learning program at Virginia Tech.

Roy has been a volunteer teacher in Sierra Leone, Africa, in a program similar to the Peace Corps, and she has taught English in Arkansas, Massachusetts, and Virginia in the United States. She frequently gives presentations about creative writing throughout the country.

Author Web Site

<http://www.lucindaroy.com>

This guide was written and compiled by
Charlotte A. Bruce
Librarian
Fairfax County Public Schools

Suggested Activities for Specific Books

The Humming Birds

1. Begin your study of Roy's books by discussing some of the themes that run through her literature. Begin with poems that contain themes that are repeated in her novels, such as:
Race Fish, water, blood Transformation
Physical imperfection Friendship Love
Redemption Circles Death
2. *The Washington Post* has a column in its Book World section titled "Poet's Choice." The columnist is a poet of distinction, most recently Rita Dove, former U.S. poet laureate. The columnist introduces a different poet each week by printing all or part of two or three poems with accompanying critical and analytical commentary to explain them. Direct students to <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/style/books> and tell them to scroll down the page to the link "Poet's Choice" where they can see a sample column. Ask students to select three poems by Lucinda Roy and write a "Poet's Choice" column about her work.
3. Roy has said that she wrote her poem "For My Son" as she was about to have surgery so that he would have something small to carry on his person to help him remember that "he was greatly loved" and that "she would always be with him." Direct students to read the poem and discover the message Roy left for her son. Then, direct students to put themselves in a similar situation. Ask each student to suppose that he or she is moving away and has a special friend or loved one whom he or she will not see often or ever again. Direct each student to write a poem for that person and to include in that poem something of themselves that they would like the person to remember.

Lady Moses

1. Writers organize their material in different time sequences. Some writers begin at one point in time and tell their stories in chronological order from that point forward. Others employ flashbacks and jump from the present time of the novel backward in time or forward into the future. Direct each student to create a visual plot line or chart of the action in *Lady Moses*, chapter by chapter, according to the time the events in the novel occurred. Discuss: Why did Lucinda Roy choose this time sequence for *Lady Moses*?
2. Divide students into groups. Assign each group one of the three parts of the book. Direct each group to chart the group's assigned part of the book. As a class, discuss the entire book.
3. A Bildungsroman (definition available at <http://www.encyclopedia.com/articles/09392TypesofNovels.html>) is sometimes called a "novel of education" or a "novel of growth," a novel of development from childhood, or a fictional autobiography. Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *The Bluest Eye*, and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* are examples of this genre. Explain how *Lady Moses* is a Bildungsroman.
4. Authors give clues to authentically reflect the time periods and places in which their novels take place by the words they choose and the details they include in their stories. *Lady Moses* takes place in London, West Africa, and Virginia and spans time from 1960 to 1992. Direct students to divide a piece of paper into three columns with the headings Clues (words, phrases, details), Place, and Time

and fill in each column with examples from the novel. Discuss the value of the use of details in fiction writing.

5. Select a description of an event or a human interest story from a newspaper. Direct students to list words and contextual clues and discuss how these words and clues place the event or story in its time period. Discuss whether or not authors always consciously select words, details, and references to describe events of particular time periods and places when writing novels.
6. Effective writers are good observers and recognize story material all the time wherever they are. They turn what they know, have witnessed, or have experienced into powerful scenes in fiction. For example, in *Lady Moses*, Jacinta has vivid memories of several childhood experiences drawn from the author's own personal experiences, such as the death of her father at a young age, the death of a close friend, and memories of her neighborhood. Tell students:

“Think of an incident in your own life that made a lasting impression on you. Perhaps you were home alone and frightened. Perhaps you were thrilled over an accomplishment or an achievement. Maybe you experienced an embarrassing moment or were exceedingly discouraged or frustrated about something that happened or failed to happen. Describe your experience.”

The Hotel Alleluia

1. Roy writes about a variety of social issues in her novels such as civil war in West Africa, racism, and relationships and has a way of describing them so that they are humanized or seem real. The market scene in the chapter called “Salt,” when her friend Theresa is killed, brings home the local consequences of war. The pacing, dialogue, and details of the scene make the reader feel the experience. Direct each student to write a scene in which an incident illustrates the ramifications of a social problem—prejudice, unpopularity, racism, racial profiling, or family interactions.
2. The author sets each of her novels in several locations. In *The Hotel Alleluia*, Joan is first in South Carolina and then travels to West Africa and to Virginia. Tell students that it is important to give the reader impressions of sounds, smells, and textures—things that appeal to the senses. Ask students to create a sketch that reveals the atmosphere of a single place using details, words, phrases, and references that will make the reader feel and understand the atmosphere.
3. Characters are believable if the writer includes enough details and if the characters' speech and actions fit the time and place of the novel. Direct each student to select someone that he or she can observe for two to three days. Each student is to list all the subject's actions and as many verbal expressions as possible. (This person could be a family member or a celebrity observed on television or in the movies.) Students may select to write short scenes using details from their observations and also their imaginations to “improve” the experiences observed.
4. Direct each student to write a description of his or her every movement, distinctive characteristics, and reactions. Read the descriptions to the class and ask the class to guess who the person in the description is.