

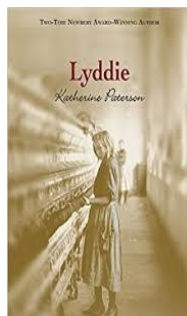
Name _____

Lyddie by Katherine Paterson

Date _____

Chapter 12

Directions: Close read chapter 12 of our new novel, Lyddie by Katherine Paterson.



12

I Will Not Be a Slave

Dear Datter,

I was exceding surpriz to get your letter concern yr mov to Lowell. I do not no to say. if you can send muny it will be help to Judah and Clarissa. They fel a grate burdun. Babby Agnes is gone to God. Rachel is porely. Miny hav died, but Gods will be dun.

Yr. loving mother,
Mattie M. Worthen

She tried to remember Agnes's little face. She strained, squenching her eyes tight to get a picture of her sister, now gone forever. She was a baby. She couldn't have been more than four the winter of the bear, but that was now nearly two years past. She would have changed. Maybe she didn't even remember me, Lyddie thought. Could she have forgotten me and Charlie? Me, Lyddie, who washed and fed her and dear Charlie who made her laugh? She wanted to cry but no tears came, only a hard, dry knot in the place where her heart should have been.

She must work harder. She must earn all the money to pay what they owed, so she could gather her family together back on the farm while she still had family left to gather. The idea of living alone and orphaned and without brother or sister—a life barren of land and family like Diana's . . .

So it was that when the Concord Corporation once again speeded up the machinery, she, almost alone, did not complain. She only had two looms to tend instead of the four she'd tended during the summer. She needed the money. She had to have the money. Some of the girls had no sooner come back from their summer holidays than they went home again. They could not keep up the pace. Lyddie was given another loom and then another, and even at the increased speed of each loom, she could tend all four and felt a satisfying disdain for those who could not do the work.

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"We're all working like black slaves, is what," said Betsy. "I've half a mind to sign the blooming petition."

"Oh Betsy, you wouldn't!" Amelia lifted her nose out of the handkerchief, her eyes wide.

"Wouldn't I just? When I started in the spinning room, I could do a thirteen-hour day and to spare. But in those days I had a hundred thirty spindles to tend. Now I've twice that many at a speed that would make the devil curse. I'm worn out, Amelia. We're all worn out."

"But we'd be paid less." Couldn't Betsy understand that? "If we just work ten hours, we'd be paid much less."

"Time is more precious than money, Lyddie girl. If only I had two more free hours of an evening—what I couldn't do."

"Should you sign the petition, Betsy, they'll dismiss you. I know they will." Amelia folded the handkerchief and handed it back to Lyddie with a nod.

"And would you miss me, Amelia? I thought you'd consider it good riddance. I thought I was the blister on your heel these last four years."

"I'm thinking of you. What will you do with no job? You'd be blacklisted. No other corporation would hire you."

"No!" Lyddie was startled herself that she had spoken so sharply. Both girls looked at her. "I mean, please, don't sign. I can't. I got to have the money. I got to pay the debts before—"

"Oh Lyddie, hasn't your friend Diana explained it all to you? We're working longer hours, tending more machines, all of which have been speeded to demon pace, so the corporation can make a packet of money. Our real wages have gone down more often than they've gone up. Merciful heaven!