

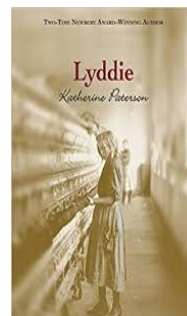
Name _____

Lyddie by Katherine Paterson

Date _____

Chapter 17

Directions: Close read excerpts and a summary of chapter 17 of our new novel, Lyddie by Katherine Paterson.



17

Doffer

Lyddie's fever rages for many days, during which Mrs. Bedlow, Diana, Brigid, and Rachel all tend to her. Lyddie finally recovers her strength and returns to the mill with considerable nervousness at the prospect of seeing Marsden again. But nothing happens when the two meet. Mrs. Bedlow gets little Rachel a job at the mill as a doffer. Rachel softens Lyddie, whom the other girls regard as mean and distant.

How dry her life had been before Rachel came. It was like springs of water in the desert to have her here. She kissed her head that night before she tucked her in. "You don't think your Lyddie is a cheap old spinster, ey?"

Rachel was furious all over again. "You're the best sister in the world!"

Lyddie blew out the candle. She lay listening to Rachel's even breathing and heard in her memory the sounds of birds in the spring woods. If only she could hear from Charlie, Lyddie's happiness would be complete. The money was growing again. She had nearly caught up with the wages lost by her illness, and even though Rachel made only a pittance, it paid her room and board. She had seldom been happier.

She woke in the night, puzzled. She thought she had heard Betsy again—that wretched hacking sound that sawed through her rib cage straight into her heart. And then she was wide awake and knew it to be Rachel.

It was only a cold. Surely it was nothing. She would be over it in a week. See, the child seemed bright-eyed and lively as ever. If she were sick, really sick . . . Lyddie kept the knowledge of the night cough tight inside herself, but the fear grew like a tumor. She began to lie awake listening for the awful sound, until finally, she knew she must send the child away—anywhere, just so she was not breathing this poison air.

It will break my heart to send the child away. Lyddie could not bear the thought.