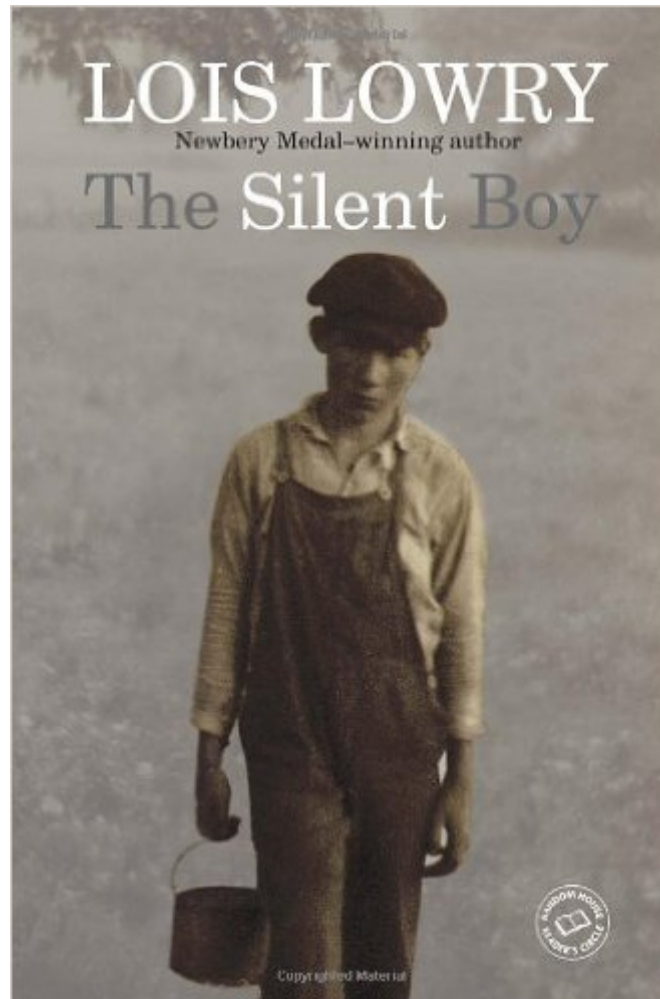


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The Silent Boy (Random House Reader's Circle)



Synopsis

Precocious Katy Thatcher comes to realize what a gentle, silent boy did for his family. He meant to help, not harm. It didn't turn out that way. The author balances humor and generosity with the obstacles and injustice of Katy's world to depict a complete picture of the turn of the 20th century. Publishers Weekly, Starred From the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Series: Random House Reader's Circle

Paperback: 208 pages

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Best Sellers Rank: #91,383 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #50 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > 20th Century #105 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Siblings #158 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1900s

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

I just got this book from today, I read it straight through. Lois Lowry has done it again! I think this book also deserves a Newberry Award. The story is told from the point of view of Katy Thatcher, the curious daughter of a doctor, but it's really about the lives of three families, The Stoltz Family, The Bishop Family, and The Thatcher Family, and especially about Jacob Stoltz. Nowadays, Jacob would have been diagnosed with Autism (neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain), but in the early 1900's people just knew that he was different, but that matters little to Katy, who connects with him and feels an understanding with him. I recommend this book for middle school and up, possibly mature fifth graders, but some of the little nuances aren't really appropriate for kids much younger than that.

can build a whole world of the early 1900's in just 178 pages, create characters you remember long after you've closed the book, and say all kinds of important things while gently telling a story? I loved the relationship eight-year-old Katie had with her father. We never doubt that Katie will become a doctor one day because of his patient and gentle teaching. Of course the new baby will not be found in the garden patch! It is because of his kindness and openness that Katie is able to befriend the silent Jacob. Everything seems innocent through Katie's eyes. Taking the new hired girl from her family, the hard lesson her sister Nell, who wants to be a film star, has to learn, the fire at the mill. Even the tragic misunderstanding that puts Jacob into the asylum. Katie has taken the harsh edge from all, and left us to ponder. But that is how I know it's a great book... How long afterward I am still pondering.

When you start reading about Katy Thatcher, she might remind you a little bit of another long ago American girl, Laura Ingalls. Like Laura, Katy has a nascent kindness and innocence and a particular way of accepting life around her for what it is, neither good nor bad, just life. Like Laura, Katy has a strong, direct and healthy relationship with her father, here a small town doctor instead of the homesteader that Pa Ingalls had to be to fit in with his time and place. But if Ingalls had been a doctor, he might well have been like Dr. Thatcher. Into their lives comes--the silent boy. The silent boy isn't silent because of shyness, though Katy is especially kind to him because of her innate goodness and feeling that he might respond to her overtures and break through his reserve. He has some sort of autism which, as Dr. Thatcher observes, is like nature, neither good nor bad, just a fact to be reckoned with. (Medical science wasn't as developed back then as it is today, as the now grown old Katy realizes from her present day perspective.) It's a touching tale of growing up, and of failure to grow. And it's also sort of brutal and chilling.

An old woman is telling a story; the way your grandmother would. Leafing through the family album, she pulls out a picture and tells a bit about the people, the buildings, when the picture was taken. But it's not a random; there is a bigger story here. A story of childhood long ago, of becoming a "grown up", of the hard decisions and facts that make up a life. The use of photos and words is flawless; it's a surprise to learn in the author's notes that the photos are old, not recent creations for the story. Beautiful, haunting, lyrical.

Is there anything Lois Lowry can't do? Her Anastasia series is light and funny, but she's also won

two Newbery awards - for "Number the Stars," a historical novel set in Denmark during World War II, and "The Giver," one of the finest works of dystopian fiction ever written, and certainly the best for young readers. In "The Silent Boy," Lowry's ability to bring the past vividly to life is again on display, along with her darkly luminous moral vision. "The Silent Boy" is a tragedy - not only in the sense of having an unhappy ending, but in the classical sense, in which that particular course of events rises naturally and inevitably from the personal characteristics of the people involved. True tragedy is unfortunately rare in literature these days, but Lowry gets it perfect in this tense and lovely novel. The tragic figure in this story is the titular "silent boy," Jacob, a teenager who today would most likely be diagnosed as autistic. He has a gentle way with animals, a gift for mimicking sounds, and a sort of kinship with certain inanimate objects (the grindstone at the mill, the hat he always wears, a pair of shiny marbles), but never speaks and spends most of his time alone. His story is told here through the eyes of Katy Thatcher, a bright eight-year-old who aspires to follow in her father's footsteps and become a doctor. Although her father encourages Katy's curiosity, she is still quite sheltered. Blessed with a compassionate heart and a precocious understanding of human nature, Katy forms a sort of quiet, harmonious bond with Jacob, but at first she is only dimly aware of the connections among the people in her life as the events of the tragedy are set in motion. In the end, however, she is the first, and perhaps the only, one to recognize the whole truth. Of course, readers with the maturity to understand and appreciate this novel (although the main character is eight years old, this is definitely a book for young adults, not children) are likely to have at least some idea what's going on long before Katy does. I figured out the ending by the time I was a third of the way through the book - though I was wrong about one of the crucial nuances - but being reasonably certain I knew what was going to happen did nothing to diminish my appreciation of the richly appealing characters, the splendidly recreated early-twentieth-century setting, or Lowry's pitch-perfect prose. In fact, while I was absorbed in the story, the writer in me was watching a master at work, admiring Lowry's use of subtle, unobtrusive foreshadowing. There are some stories you know, the first time you read them, that you will never forget. "The Silent Boy" is one of them. Don't miss it.

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