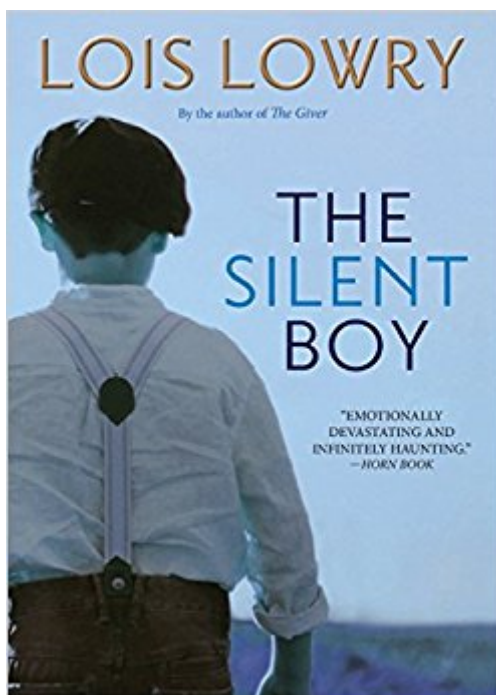


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The Silent Boy



Synopsis

Katy Thatcher was the bright and curious daughter of the town doctor. She was fascinated by her father's work, and even as a child she knew that she too wanted to be a doctor. She wanted to know about people. Perhaps it was this, her insatiable curiosity, or simply the charm of Jacob's gentle intimacy with animals large and small, that fueled their friendship. Although Jacob never spoke to her or even looked at her directly, Katy grew to understand him from the moments they spent together quietly singing to the horses. She knew there was meaning in the sounds he made and purpose behind his movements. So when events took an unexpected and tragic turn, it was Katy alone who could unravel the mystery of what had occurred and why.

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Customer Reviews

Grade 5-8-Katy is a doctor's daughter in the early 20th century, and her curiosity is tolerated, even encouraged. This explains her relationship with the 14-year-old brother of her family's hired girl, Peggy. Jacob is "the silent boy" of the book's title who somehow communicates with animals, but only makes humming and clicking sounds when he is with people. Nevertheless, Katy and Jacob develop an unusual and treasured friendship. As befits a child growing up at this time, Katy is a true innocent and is puzzled by some of the things that happen around her, such as the seemingly sudden appearance of a new baby in her family. The most dramatic incident occurs almost at the end of the book on the night of Katy's 10th birthday, when Jacob disappears along with his sister Nellie's unwanted and unnamed baby. Although Katy intuits that Jacob has brought the child to her

own baby sister's nursery to ensure its proper care, Jacob is nevertheless arrested when the infant is found dead. The courts place him in the town's asylum for the rest of his life. The now-retired Docky (the nickname that Katy's young patients gave her) narrates the story as she looks back from 1987 to these main events. Lowry excels in developing strong and unique characters and in showing Katy's life in a small town that changes around her as the first telephones and automobiles arrive. Family photographs, along with some that the author found in a New Hampshire antique store or borrowed from friends, enliven and encourage a deeper response to this very special historical novel. Ellen Fader, Multnomah County Library, Portland, OR Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gr. 6-10. Antique photographs, printed at the head of each chapter, form the framework of this nostalgic family story set in the early twentieth century. Precocious eight-year-old Katy Thatcher already knows that she wants to be a doctor like her father. She lives in a large, comfortable house in a New England town with her loving, smart parents and Peggy Stoltz, a farm girl who helps with housework. Katy loves Peggy, and she's intrigued by Jacob, Peggy's brother, a gentle, silent 13-year-old with a fondness for animals, who is "touched in the head." During a happy year, Katy plays with her friends, accompanies her father on house calls, welcomes a new baby sister, and visits Peggy's family farm, where she learns some of the harsher realities of country life--including the fact that kittens are drowned to control their numbers. She also develops a fragile companionship with Jacob, who she often finds visiting her family's horses. It's in the Thatcher barn that Katy stumbles across a secret that, when later revealed, shakes several families and ends tragically; a baby dies and Jacob is at fault. The photographs of characters and scenes add an interesting, if sometimes contrived, touch, and Lowry's graceful, lively prose is dense with historical details that, although atmospheric, sometimes focus more on Katy's lifestyle than her story. Katy's first-person voice also occasionally seems too mature. But Lowry still manages to create an appealing character in the curious, unusually compassionate girl, layering her story with questions about how families shape lives and the misunderstandings that can lead to heartbreak. Gillian Engberg Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The Silent Boy by Lois Lowry draws you into the life and mindset of Katy Thatcher, a young girl growing up in the early 1900s. Katy narrates this story as an older woman (in 1987), but she does so completely from the perspective of the young child that she was at the time. Curious,

innocent, and compassionate, Katy grows up as the only daughter of the town's doctor (later in the story her younger sister is born). In addition to playing with her friends and talking with Peggy, a farm-girl who lives with them and helps her mother with housework, Katy loves to spend time with her father, making house calls to his patients. Katy knows that one day, she too will be a doctor. Like her father, she wants to help people. While it was common during that time period to shelter children from reality (for example telling children that their younger siblings just showed up in the garden), Katy's father does not suppress Katy's natural curiosity and interest. He answers her questions gently, but with honesty. The relationship between Katy and her father is quite beautiful. The story gets its title, *The Silent Boy*, from Katy's relationship with Jacob Stolz, a farm-boy who is deaf in the head, according to his sister Peggy (who works at Katy's home). Jacob is 14, yet does not speak. However, he loves animals, loves to roam around, and loves to imitate sounds. Though Jacob never once even looks at Katy, and she does all the talking, they develop a friendship. Jacob often travels miles to come to Katy's father's stable to pet the horses. Katy goes out and sits and talks to him. Though the story is focused on Jacob, it does so very gently. His story interlaces smoothly along with every other smaller story being told. The narrator, looking back at her life, wants his story to be told but at the time, his story was just one of many in her life. So his story is not forced, but simply flows naturally along the pages of Katy Thatcher's life. The story is organized by timeline, each chapter being a new month. The story has a delightful combination of overall story and diary-like-ness. Each chapter begins with a photograph, which Katy then proceeds to explain. She will explain the day the picture was taken. Not always does the story really seem to fit into the greater story involving Jacob. However, as long as you are able to accept a little bit of rabbit chasing, these stories just serve to bring greater insight into the life of Katy Thatcher, her family, friends, and neighbors, as well as a greater understanding of the time period in which she grew up. I find it very fascinating that this fictional character (made very real by Lois Lowry's portrayal of her) was born only one month before my own great grandmother. My great-grandmother lived to be 104 (1902-2006). Hers was a lifetime of change. Imagine going from the days when automobiles were new and foreign and the extravagant foolishness of men, to the turn of the following century, where automobiles and cell phones and laptops and the Internet are everyday accessories in most households. So much has changed in every area of life. It is hard to even fathom what life was like a little over a century ago. Lois Lowry brings that time period to life, however, through the narration of her childhood by Katy Thatcher. I loved reading this book. From references to the insane asylum to kittens to birthday parties, fires, death, birth, mental illness,

childhood, automobiles, poverty, success, horses, friendships, and so much more, this book was filled with details. Though this book is focused on Katy Thatcher's childhood and on Jacob Stolz, there are many references to historical events tied throughout. Katy mentions the World War going on in Europe. She talks about the earthquake in San Francisco and the factory fire in New York. These are mentioned not as historical events but as current events, as they were to her. History is strung throughout the pages of *The Silent Boy*, but in such a natural way that the reader hardly notices. Sometimes the stories narrated did seem a bit forced (and based on the pictures chosen), but, I would imagine that if I were to sit down and look at pictures with a grandparent, their stories would be focused around the pictures which jog memories. *The Silent Boy* addresses many complex, challenging issues. Some of these are addressed directly, and some very indirectly. All are addressed from a child's point of view. At times, as an adult reader, this can be a bit frustrating, as I just wish she would say already what happened. Several times she will say something along the lines of: I peeked in and I saw what was happening. It was troubling. But she will not say what she saw. I think in some ways this serves as a peek into the mind of a child. I kept thinking: Tell me already. However, I wonder if a child would have noticed or would have just kept reading. At several points, I could guess what was happening but Katy did not necessarily understand what she had seen. So she didn't explain. Most of the time she would explain more later in the book although a few times the reader is just left to gather what they can. The book is written in a very unique style. But that style draws you into the life of Katy Thatcher. Even more than it draws you into the story she is telling. There is a strong connection to the people in *The Silent Boy*. The plot is not as strong, not as compelling. But the characterization is thorough. I would recommend this book to anyone. However, I think that it is probably most appropriate for grades 5-9. When tragedy strikes the Stolz family and Jacob is to blame, Katy alone seems to understand. So how does it end? You will have to read it to find out! I will say, though, that the ending leaves one to ponder. It is a bit sad but in a way that emphasizes that life keeps going on. Enjoy!

The author skips around from one unimportant character to the next for about 160 pages. Jacob, the autistic boy, who is supposed to be one of the two main characters, is barely mentioned in the story. The author also forgot to add a plot to this story as it is just a series of flashbacks from an old woman describing her childhood. You can get all important parts of this story by reading the first and last chapter. This cannot be the author of *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*.

This is a very engaging book for adults, too (I'm 70!) though be prepared for the very sad ending.

However, it is truthful: the understanding and even education of children with autism and similar challenges used to be non-existent &/or terrible. Fortunately the kindness of the young narrator and others is highlighted, but the overall treatment of such individuals by local and state authorities was frequently inhumane and shameful. Though this takes place in the early 1900's, much of it was still true many decades later. Highly recommended.

What a wonderful telling of life in a small community and how it dealt with a special needs young man in the early 1900's. From the point of view of an adult recalling a few difficult years in the community's existence, her story shows her compassion, intellectual curiosity, and logical assessment that enabled her to befriend the silent boy! Half expecting the ending, yet not wanting it to end in such a way, I cried for the silent boy and the lack of understanding of what we now call autism! AN EXCELLENT BOOK AND A MUST READ especially for those blessed with special needs family members!

I am perhaps a young person at heart. I enjoyed Harry Potter , Hunger Games , and I was totally loved every minute of this book. Ms. Lowery can combine joy and pathos evenly. I felt very badly at the end of this book. At the same time I enjoyed the pleasant moments of a happy family as centre of the story. I totally recommend The Giver series also. She writes cleanly without a lot " filler " to increase the length of the novels.

It was a nice little read, but not what I was expecting from the info on the front cover.. Lois Lowry is a great author though and I love many of her books.

This story is so well told and in only 175 pages, one is transformed to the day-to-day, month-by-month 1911. The ending is so poignant and had me in tears. We struggle in today's world to understand those with autism; imagine the family and general people of a young man/child in 1911 dealing with it. Incredible read!

An evocative and thought provoking story told with warmth and compassion.

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