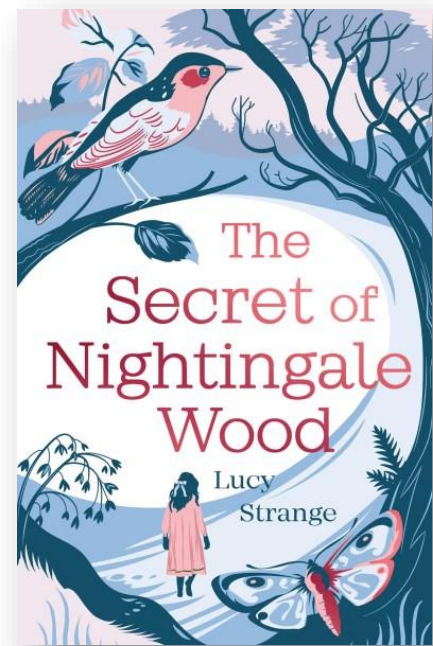


The Secret of Nightingale Wood

By
Lucy Strange



The year is 1919. Twelve-year-old Henrietta (Henry) Abbott has moved to the countryside with her parents and her baby sister Piglet—all still scarred by the death of Henry's older brother Robert. The family sets up home in Hope House, but have hardly settled before Henry's father is called overseas on urgent business. Lost in a stupor of grief, Henry's mother spends night and day locked in her room under the strict and austere care of Dr Hardy. Henry's distress and loneliness are further deepened when baby Piglet is taken away. Henry finds herself compelled by the ghost of her brother to venture into the woods. It is there that she meets Moth, a striking witch-like woman who soon becomes a trusted ally. With Moth's help, Henry manages to steal Piglet back from the Hardys and break her mother out of Helldon, a terrifying asylum.

RECOMMENDED READING LEVEL: Mid to Upper Primary

TEACHER NOTES

- Why do you think Henry's father and Nanny Jane choose to keep the truth from Henry? Do you think adults should keep secrets from children? Do you think adults are more or less likely to keep secrets from children nowadays? Which do you think can be more dangerous: secrets or the truth? Why?

- Henry escapes into books in order to deal with her feelings. In this sense it could be said that books are in themselves a form of medicine. Henry is also extremely attached to books as physical objects—in particular the precious book of fairytales she was gifted by Robert and which miraculously survived the fire that claimed his life. Is there a book that you possess that means a great deal to you—either because of how the story has affected you or because of what the physical book itself means to you?
- Why do you think Henry starts seeing her brother (p 22) and why do you think she stops? Do you think Henry would have found the strength to rescue Piglet and her Mama without Robert's 'help'?
- Do you think you can be too old for fairytales? If so, how old is too old? Why do you think people made up fairytales in the first place? Do you think Henry's father means what he says?
- While Henry seeks refuge in her beloved novels, Moth finds solace in poetry. Do you prefer reading novels or poetry? Why? Which do you prefer to write, stories or poems? Why do you think novelists feel a need to write books? Likewise, why do you feel poets feel driven to write poetry? Do you think you need the same skills or different skills for both types of writing? What do you think makes for a good novel? What do you think makes for a good poem?