About the Book

"I turned to look down at the boy who had appeared suddenly at the roadside. I had seen him only once before: the blurred face in the window the day we had picked up Peggy from the farm a month before. I remembered that he was thirteen, five years older than I. He was thin, I saw now, and tall for his age . . . He was wearing a cap that brimmed his forehead, and he looked up at us from its shadow." — from The Silent Boy

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 already 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 he never spoke to her or even looked at her directly, Katy grew to understand Jacob 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.

A two-time recipient of the prestigious Newbery Medal, acclaimed author Lois Lowry presents a lyrical, sensitive, and moving story of a wide-eyed young girl growing up at the beginning of the twentieth century and the influence of
the farm community around her. Through Katy’s eyes, readers can see the human face so often hidden under modern psychological terminology and experience for themselves the haunting impact of her friendship with the silent boy.

Lois Lowry first captivated young readers in 1977 with her award-winning first novel, *A Summer to Die*. Today, her canon consists of nearly thirty books beloved by both children and adults, including the endearing and ever-popular stories about Anastasia Krupnik and her precocious little brother, Sam. Ms. Lowry was awarded the Newbery Medal for *Number the Stars*, a fictionalized account of the true story of how the Christian population of Denmark saved their entire Jewish population from the Nazis, in 1990, and again in 1994 for *The Giver*. Set in a utopian community where there is no pain, fear, or war, *The Giver* is a gripping story that asks penetrating questions about how we live as a society. It is perhaps Ms. Lowry’s best-known book and has recently been adopted by several community-reading projects. *The Giver* is also one of the most widely banned books in America, appearing as #14 on the American Library Association’s list of Top 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990–2000. In 2000, Houghton Mifflin published the companion book to *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue*, which also garnered much attention and praise.

Ms. Lowry lives and writes in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in a house dominated by a very shaggy Tibetan terrier named Bandit. When she is not writing, she enjoys spending time with her four grandchildren and planning renovations for her newly purchased home in Maine, a 235-year-old hilltop farmhouse surrounded by meadows, apple trees, flower gardens, and wildlife.

**Lois Lowry: A Biographical Essay**

As a child, and later as an adult, Lois Lowry moved with her family all over the world. Strong family ties and the leaving behind of people and places she came to love play a central theme in much of her work. Lois Lowry’s rich life story is best told in her own words:

I’ve always felt that I was fortunate to have been born the child of three. My older sister, Helen, was very much like our mother: gentle, family-oriented, eager to please. Little brother Jon was the only boy and had interests that he shared with our father; together they were always working on electric trains and Erector sets, and later, they always seemed to have their heads under
the raised hood of a car. That left me in between, exactly where I wanted to be: on my own. I was a solitary child who lived in the world of books and my own imagination.

Because my father was a career military officer—an Army dentist—I lived all over the world. I was born in Hawaii, moved from there to New York, spent the years of World War II in my mother’s Pennsylvania hometown, and from there went to Tokyo when I was eleven. High school was back in New York City, but by the time I went to college (Brown University in Rhode Island), my family was living in Washington, D.C.

I married young. Women often did so in those days. I had just had my nineteenth birthday—finished my sophomore year in college—when I married a naval officer and continued the odyssey that military life frequently is. California. Connecticut. Florida. South Carolina. Finally, Cambridge, Massachusetts, when my husband left the service and entered Harvard Law School; and then to Maine—by this time with four children under the age of five in tow.

My children grew up in Maine. So did I. I returned to college at the University of Southern Maine, got my degree, went to graduate school, and finally began to write professionally, the thing I had dreamed of doing since those childhood years when I endlessly scribbled stories and poems in notebooks.

After my marriage ended in 1977, when I was forty, I settled into the life I have led ever since. Today I live and write in Cambridge, in a house dominated by a very shaggy Tibetan terrier named Bandit. Weekends find me in Maine, where we have an early-nineteenth-century farmhouse surrounded by flower gardens, woods, and wildlife.

My books have varied in content and style. Yet it seems to me that all of them deal, essentially, with the same general theme — the importance of human connections. *A Summer to Die*, my first book, was a highly fictionalized retelling of the early death of my sister, and of the effect of such a loss on a family. *Number the Stars*, set in a different culture and era, tells the same story: that of the role that we humans play in the lives of our fellow beings.

*The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*—more recently published—take place against the background of very different cultures and times. Though both are broader in scope than my earlier books, they nonetheless speak to the same concern:
the vital need of people to be aware of their interdependence, not only with each other, but also with the world and its environment.

My older son was a fighter pilot in the United States Air Force. His death in the cockpit of a warplane tore away a piece of my world. But it left me, too, with a wish to honor him by joining the many others trying to find a way to end conflict on this very fragile earth.

I am a grandmother now. For my own grandchildren, and for all those of their generation, I try, through writing, to convey my passionate awareness that we live intertwined on this planet and that our future depends on our caring more, and doing more, for one another.

An Interview with Lois Lowry

Q) What was your initial inspiration for The Silent Boy?

A) After I had finished the book Looking Back, which uses family photographs, I was left with a lot of photos, of course, that weren’t included because they hadn’t fit the content. Three were of a boy. I don’t know who the boy was, or why my Great-Aunt Mary had photographed him in the early part of the century. But there was something haunting about him. I didn’t put his photographs away with the others. I began, in my mind, to create a story around him.

Q) Did you use the photographs as structure for the story?

A) I did. And everyone knows that’s a completely roundabout way to write fiction. Illustrators always come after the text, to respond to the text and enhance it. But it was a fascinating challenge to do it this way.

Q) Did the photos influence the direction of your story?

A) Yes, they did. Because of the time in which the boy lived—the time of my mother’s early childhood (she was born in 1906)—I began to see the story through the eyes of my mother as a child. Probably that is why I named the narrator Katy, my mother’s name, and set the story in the geography of southern Pennsylvania, where she grew up.

I found myself incorporating stories—anecdotes, really—my own mother had told me of her childhood. It was she who sat on her front porch with her
mother one day and heard an astonishing noise, which turned out to be the first automobile she had ever seen . . . her own father driving it. (In the book, it is the next-door neighbor.)

Then, having committed myself to the photographs I had, and the story that was emerging from them, I had to go out looking for other old photos to fill in the gaps, and when I found them, to reshape the story a bit here and there, to fit what I found.

The mill-turned-house, incidentally, was a real part of my childhood. It was where I spent summers, growing up. My grandmother had taken the remains of the burned mill and created that house as a summer home.

Q) When you see a photograph, do you always imagine the story that goes with it?

A) Some photographs seem to capture the mystery in people. Studio portraits rarely do that, incidentally. It is the photos of people caught somehow in the middle of their day-to-day existence, in a pensive moment, perhaps — as the Silent Boy was — that trigger my imagination.

Q) You are also a photographer. In fact, your photographs grace the jackets of The Giver, Number the Stars, and Gathering Blue. Did you study photography professionally, or was it a hobby that turned into more?

A) I studied photography in graduate school; for a while, when I was writing for magazines, I did the photos that accompanied my articles. At the same time, on the side, I did portraits of children. The photo on the cover of Number the Stars was one of those portraits from years back. That little girl has two daughters of her own now!

Q) Your book The Giver has recently been chosen by several community-reading programs across the country. Why do you think these communities are attracted to The Giver?

A) The Giver is unique as a community read because its appeal crosses generations; it is a book that eighty-year-olds can discuss with twelve-year-olds, and the issues it raises are relevant to them and everyone in between. It is really remarkable to speak to an audience in a town who have all read the same book . . . and to hear adults listen with respect to the questions that children ask, and vice versa.
The nice thing is that it’s not my words or opinions or ideas being inflicted on them. It is that the book provokes thought and discussion; it provides an avenue for communication and for people of all ages to share their own ideas.

Q) Are you working on anything new?

A) Right now I am immersed in writing the book that will complete a trilogy with *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*, linking those two and I hope ending the three-book narrative on an optimistic tone. It’s hard work. But exhilarating.