

# Story Starters with Lucy Strange



Helping children find inspiration for story writing



# Literacy Teaching Notes

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This pack contains links to five videos in which award-winning children's author Lucy Strange discusses the inspiration behind her books and shares tips and prompts to help children come up with their own imaginative story ideas. Alongside each video are discussion questions and activities. Children will learn about Lucy's creative process and generate a variety of story ideas of their own inspired by place, art, books and history. They will then choose one story idea to develop further by creating a mood board – just as Lucy does when she is writing her brilliant books!

## OBJECTIVES

1. Gain insight into an author's writing process
2. Explore a variety of different ways to find inspiration for writing
3. Come up with imaginative story ideas

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# Books by Lucy Strange

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## BOOK COVER PROMPTS:

1. Have you read any of Lucy's books?
2. Based on the front covers, which one would you most like to read and why?
3. How are the front covers of Lucy's books similar and how are they different?
4. Which cover design do you like best and why?
5. What genres do you think Lucy's books fit into?
6. Where do you think Lucy might get the ideas for her stories from?



# A Spark of Inspiration!

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[Watch Video 1, 'A Spark of Inspiration'](#). In this video, Lucy Strange talks about how she makes mood boards to help her develop new story ideas.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is a mood board?
2. How does Lucy use mood boards to help her when she is planning and writing a story?
3. Pause the video and look carefully at Lucy's mood board for *Sisters of the Lost Marsh*. How would you describe the atmosphere that Lucy has created with these images?
4. Based on this mood board, where and when do you think *Sisters of the Lost Marsh* might be set?
5. Do you think you would find making a mood board useful when planning and writing a story? How might it be useful?



# Activity idea: Explore Lucy's mood boards

You can find the Pinterest mood boards Lucy has created for each of her books [here](#). Choose one of the mood boards and look carefully at the pictures Lucy has selected. Can you make some predictions about the book based on the pictures? Write your thoughts in the box below.

Book name:	
Setting:	Characters:
Atmosphere:	Time period:
Season and weather:	Colours and symbols:
What do you think the first line of this book might be?	

Read the blurb for the book you have chosen. (Information about Lucy's books including book blurbs can be found [here](#).) Does the blurb support your predictions?

**Challenge:** In the next four videos, Lucy will reveal more about the inspiration behind her stories. Plus, she will share some top author tips to help you come up with some brilliant story ideas of your own! Why not start your own story notebook so that you can note down all the amazing story ideas you come up with?



# Inspired by ... Place

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[Watch Video 2, 'Inspired by Place'](#). In this video, Lucy Strange talks about how places can inspire story ideas. As you watch the video, see if you can match each story with the place that inspired it. Draw a line to connect each pair:

**OUR CASTLE BY THE SEA**

**THE ROMNEY MARSH**

**THE GHOST OF GOSSWATER**

**THE GOODWIN SANDS**

**SISTERS OF THE LOST MARSH**

**THE LAKE DISTRICT**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Describing Romney Marsh, Lucy says, 'You can feel the history of the place in the earth'. Have you been anywhere where you could 'feel the history of the place'? Perhaps you've visited a historic building, a castle ruin or an ancient landscape? What was the atmosphere like? How did it make you feel?
2. Lucy mentions she'd had the idea for one of her characters for a while, but she says, 'I couldn't make the idea work'. Does it surprise you that authors sometimes struggle to make ideas work? Have you ever felt the same?
3. How does Lucy describe the moment the idea for the story of *The Ghost of Gosswater* came to her?
4. How do you feel when you have a good idea for a story?
5. Do you know a place that feels like it's 'full of stories just waiting to be told'?



# Activity Ideas

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## Go on a Story Hunt!

Go for a walk around your local area and keep a look out for places that would make a good story setting. Look for places that intrigue you, perhaps places that are a bit unusual. Think about what kind of story might be set in each place. Who might the characters in this story be? Can you imagine what kinds of adventures they might have?

## Experiment with titles in the style of Lucy Strange

Lucy's books all have a place in the title. Below are the beginnings of some of Lucy's book titles. Can you add some places of your own to make new titles? You could add places you found on your walk or other locations you've visited or seen pictures of.

The Ghost of.....

Our Castle by .....

The Sisters of.....

The Secret of.....

Do any of your new titles inspire story ideas? Share your ideas with a partner.

Here are some more story title starters to inspire you:

The Lost ... / The Children of ... / The Mystery of ... / The Forgotten .../ The Wizard of ... / The Curse of ...



# Activity Ideas

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## Play a Word Game!

Places can inspire ideas for story characters. In the video, Lucy describes how Romney Marsh inspired her to come up with the character of the Marsh King in *Sisters of the Lost Marsh*. Lucy says: *'The Marsh King came crawling from the mire of my imagination.'*

Use this sentence structure to describe how other characters might arrive in your imagination! Can you come up with some similar sentences? For example:

- The witch came cackling from the darkness of my imagination
- The mermaid came gliding through the ocean of my imagination
- The white horse came galloping across the plains of my imagination
- The soldier came marching from the battlements of my imagination

How many can you think of? You could turn your list into a poem!

## Lucy's challenge

Choose one place that you think would make an inspiring story setting. Lucy recommends: *'Try to think of somewhere odd or different or strange or dramatic. A place that's somehow got under your skin. A place that feels like it's got stories whispering away in the stones just waiting to be told'.*

You could choose somewhere you've visited or somewhere you've seen or heard about. You might like to look at photos or postcards to give you ideas. Draw a picture of your chosen place and write a descriptive sentence or paragraph about it in your story notebook. How does it look? How do you feel when you are there? Lucy describes Romney Marsh as *'a vast, flat salt marsh where the sky is so enormous you feel as if it might just swallow you up.'*

Can you use strong descriptive language such as adjectives, similes, metaphors or personification to describe your chosen place?

When you have written your description, share it with a partner. Discuss ideas for stories that might take place here.





# Inspired by ... Art

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[Watch Video 3, 'Inspired by Art'](#). In this video, Lucy Strange discusses how art can inspire new story ideas.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think Lucy means when she says she is a 'visual' person?
2. What words does Lucy use to describe the atmosphere of *Sisters of the Lost Marsh*?
3. How did Lucy feel when she first saw Eric Ravilious's painting of Beachy Head Lighthouse?

## Activity idea 1: Jump into a Painting

**NOTE TO TEACHERS: PLEASE SHOW THE CLASS AN IMAGE OF THE PAINTING 'BEACHY HEAD LIGHTHOUSE' BY ERIC RAVILIOUS.**

Imagine that you have jumped into this painting. What can you see around you? What time of day do you think it might be, and what season? Write a description of what you can see, hear, touch, smell and taste as you stand in the lantern room of the lighthouse.

## Activity idea 2: Bring a Painting to Life

For this drama activity, you could use Eric Ravilious's lighthouse painting above or another painting of a location or landscape. In a group, improvise a conversation that might happen in this setting. Who might be there and why? What might they each want or need from each other? What might happen next? You could write the script of a conversation that might take place in this location.

## Lucy's challenge

Take your time to look at different pieces of art. You could go to an art gallery, look in an art book or go online (for example, [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)). See if you can find a piece of art that really inspires you. Lucy says: *'Find a piece of art that seems to speak to you [...] something that suggests a feeling or a moment or an idea that you find powerful.'* Write a paragraph about your piece of art, including what you like about it, how it makes you feel and what you wonder about it. As you are exploring your piece of art, do any story ideas emerge?



# Inspired by ... Books

[Watch Video 4, 'Inspired by Books'](#). In this video, Lucy Strange talks about how books and poems can provide inspiration for new story ideas.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What book did Lucy listen to every night when she was your age? Have you read this book?
2. When do you like to read? Do you ever listen to audiobooks?
3. What other books does Lucy refer to in *The Secret of Nightingale Wood*?
4. Lucy uses the term 'intertextuality'. What does this word mean?

## Activity idea: Explore the poem that inspired Lucy

Read the poem 'Overheard on a Saltmarsh' by Harold Monro (right), which helped inspire Lucy's book, *Sisters of the Lost Marsh*. What images come to mind when you read the poem? With a partner, practise reading the poem out loud. What atmosphere does the poem evoke? Can you think of a story based around this poem? Perhaps you could explore some other poems and see what story ideas they might inspire?

*Overheard On a Saltmarsh (1917)*

*By Harold Monro*

*Nymph, nymph, what are your beads?  
Green glass, goblin. Why do you stare at them?  
Give them me.  
No.  
Give them me. Give them me.  
No.*

*Then I will howl all night in the reeds,  
Lie in the mud and howl for them.  
Goblin, why do you love them so?  
They are better than stars or water,  
Better than voices of winds that sing,  
Better than any man's fair daughter,  
Your green glass beads on a silver ring.  
Hush I stole them out of the moon.  
Give me your beads. I desire them.  
No.*

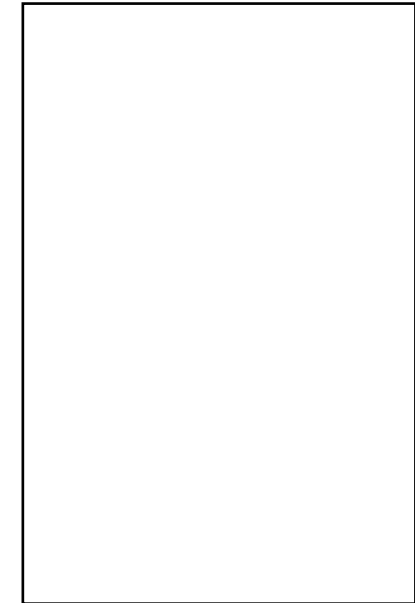
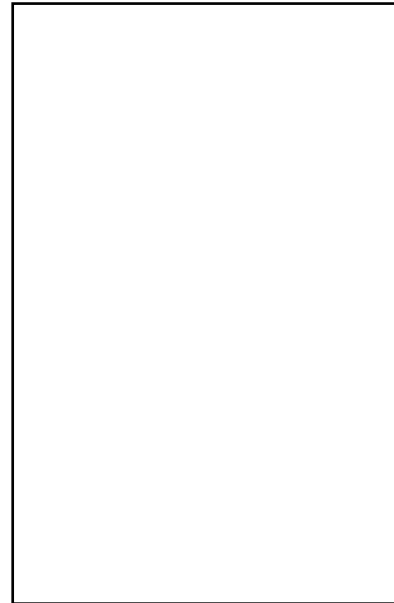
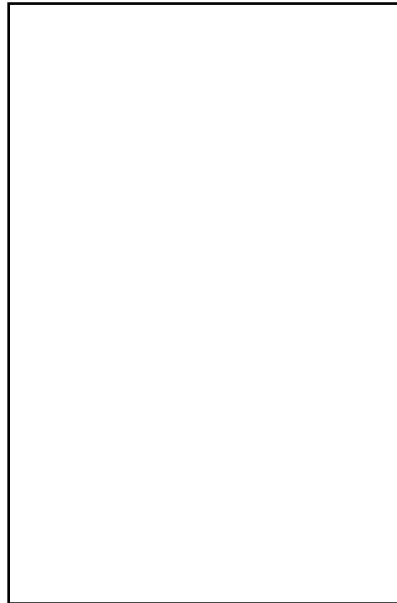
*I will howl in a deep lagoon  
For your green glass beads, I love them so.  
Give them me. Give them.  
No.*



# Lucy's Challenge



What are your favourite stories? Write the titles and draw the front covers of your favourite stories in the spaces below.



What are your favourite things about each of these books? Around the outside of each book cover, write down the things about this book that you really love. You could think about particular characters, places, objects, moments or ideas. How might you use some of these elements in your own stories? Perhaps you could imagine a character from one story entering the setting of another story – what story might unfold? Write down any ideas in your story notebook!



# Inspired by ... History

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[Watch Video 5, 'Inspired by History'](#). In this video, Lucy talks about how history can spark ideas for stories.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What inspiration did Lucy take from history when she was writing *Sisters of the Lost Marsh*?
2. When is *The Secret of Nightingale Wood* set?
3. Which book is Lucy's 'most historical book' so far and when is it set?
4. Why does Lucy love using historical settings in her writing?
5. Lucy explains that you can use a historical setting as 'the backdrop for your very own mystery or adventure or thriller'. Can you describe each of these three genres? What is your favourite genre to read and which is your favourite genre to write?

## Activity idea 1: Research local history

Discover more about the history of your local area. You could look at old pictures online or visit the local history area of your library. You could go on a history walk and look at old buildings or landmarks. Think about who might have lived in your local area in years gone by. What might their life have been like? What challenges might they have faced? Create a character profile for this imaginary historical character. Can you think of any story ideas based around this character?

## Activity idea 2: Pick an object

Visit a museum or have a look at some exhibitions online. Choose one historical object and create a story around it. Who did it belong to? Was it involved in any adventures? Could there be any magic or mystery associated with this object, or maybe even a curse? Perhaps you could make a 3D model of this object and create a short piece of drama around it?



# Lucy's Challenge

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Choose a historical setting that interests and intrigues you. This might be a period that you've learnt about at school or that you've read about. What comes to mind when you think of this historical setting? In the space below, draw pictures and write down any words that you associate with this time and place. You can also research this time period in books or online to find out more about it. Can you make up a character who lives in this historical period? What adventures they might get up to?



# Create your own mood board!

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You have come up with lots of wonderful story ideas so far! Now it's time to create your very own mood board based on one of your story ideas ...

- To begin, look back through your story notebook. Which of your story ideas would you like to develop further? You might choose an idea that was inspired by a place, a piece of art, a book or a period in history (or a combination of these).
- Now it's time to start collecting images for your mood board! The images you choose will help to build the world of your story. Your mood board will help you to visualise your story in your imagination.
- You can make a physical mood board by cutting out pictures and sticking them onto a large piece of card. (You can cut out pictures from magazines, newspapers, travel brochures, postcards, photos, patterned paper or greetings cards.) Or, you can create a mood board on a computer and ask an adult to help you find images online.
- Search for pictures of things that are important to your story. Choose pictures that inspire you and make you feel excited about your story! You could include pictures of:

**characters   places   objects   buildings**

**plants   animals   weather   maps**

- Think about the atmosphere different pictures create and how you want your story world to look and feel. Are there any colours you associate with your story? What season is your story set in? What are the feelings and emotions you want to evoke?
- As you build up your collection of images, the world of your story will slowly come to life! When you feel you've got enough images, arrange them to make a collage.
- How do feel as you look at your mood board? Can you imagine jumping into the world of your story? What would you see, hear, smell, taste and touch? How would you describe the atmosphere?



- Lucy says that having a mood board can really help when you begin writing because: *'You've got every detail at your fingertips ready to pin it down with the perfect words.'* Can you think of any good descriptive words or phrases to describe the world you have created on your mood board? What might the first line of your story be?
  - Share your mood board and ideas with a partner. Describe the different pictures and how they relate to your story. Can you bring your story to life with your pictures and descriptions?
  - Discuss the process of making a mood board. In what way is making a mood board helpful when you are planning and writing a story?
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We hope you have enjoyed learning more about Lucy Strange's story writing process and coming up with your very own story ideas!

You can find out more about Lucy Strange's books [here](#).

Chapter-by-chapter teaching resources for each book can be found [here](#).



# Step into a Strange world ...



[chickenhousebooks.com/schools](http://chickenhousebooks.com/schools)