

Author events for schools 2019: LYDIA SYSON

Lydia Syson is a critically acclaimed author who has converted many young readers to historical fiction since the publication of her award-winning debut, *A World Between Us*. She brings history to life through fiction, exploring overlooked areas of the past with passion and insight. In her novels, ordinary young people are caught up in extraordinary events: the Spanish Civil War, the Battle of Britain and the 1871 Paris Commune, France's last revolutionary uprising. Lydia Syson has worked with words and stories all her life: she started her career as a radio producer for the BBC World Service and then went on to write a PhD on poets, explorers and Timbuktu followed by a biography of the 18th century fertility guru known as 'the Electric Doctor', Dr James Graham. She is on the educational team at The Wallace Collection where she delivers creative writing workshops for schools, primary and secondary, and a Royal Literary Fund Consultant Fellow.

Lydia's events for schools are suitable for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5, and can be delivered with an emphasis on English, History, or Spanish or French cultural history. Immersive and memorable academic writing workshops offer skills for life: they are designed to help students take pleasure in writing stylish, well-structured essays and dissertations, and understand through experience how better readers make better writers. Creative writing workshops focus on using primary source material of different kinds to fire the imagination. Her work lends itself particularly well to sixth-form enrichment, and supports transition to university. Lydia is also available for panel events, discussions and prize-givings.

Email lydiasyson@gmail.com to discuss an author visit to your school or festival.

Find out more about Lydia and the historical background to her books and read reviews on her website: www.lydiasyson.com

Mr Peacock's Possessions (published May 2018, paperback March 2019)

'An intelligent, beautifully written book about a dysfunctional family in a sinister paradise' *The Times*; 'Powerful, intense and beautiful, this novel will stay with me for a long time.' *Historical Novel Review* – editor's pick for May; '*Mr Peacock's Possessions*. . . follows the Peacock family as they enter voluntary exile on a remote Pacific island. Teenage Lizzie watches as her obsessive father attempts to become ruler of his tiny realm, but tragedy beckons when her brother Albert goes missing. Together with a missionary-educated Polynesian workman, she unearths terrible truths about the island's history and her own family. Syson's novel, a modern take on the literary genre known (after Robinson Crusoe) as the robinsonade, is a haunting exploration of Lizzie's disillusion with her father's dreams and their damaging consequences.' *The Sunday Times*

An eye-opening adult novel with huge contemporary relevance which will appeal to advanced YA readers from year 11 upwards - selected by *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* as a historical novel of the year, 2018.

Liberty's Fire (published May 2015)

'a dramatic story filled with tragedy and heroism...While the Tudors and Victorians may hold a continuing fascination, it is novels like this that open the eyes and imagination to a wider history. Highly recommended.[5 stars]' *Books for Keeps*; 'Fascinating and terrifying!' *Teach Secondary*
This novel, set in Paris in 1871 and written with the support of an Arts Council grant has been nominated for the 2016 Carnegie Award and was one of *The Telegraph's* best YA books of 2015.

That Burning Summer (published October 2013)

'a very different sort of World War II story, set on the Home Front and providing an intriguing insight into the rarely-mentioned role of Britain's Polish allies in the war effort', it 'simmer[s] with tension and intensity' *Booktrust*

An Independent book of the year, 2013.

A World Between Us (published October 2012)

'an outstanding debut novel for teenagers' *The Guardian*.

Set among the International Brigaders of the Spanish Civil War, *A World Between Us* received a special Highly Commended Award from the judges of the Branford Boase Award and was also nominated for the Carnegie Medal, shortlisted for the WeRead Award and longlisted for the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, Waterstone's Children's Book Prize and the UKLA Book Award.

LYDIA SYSON event content:

A World Between Us - illustrated, interactive talk

An introduction to the Spanish Civil War, 1936-9 and why it was so important in Britain. This covers the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s, the role of nurses and journalists in the war, the use of propaganda and the bombing of Guernica. Supports Spanish Civil War units in Highers and AS level history

Possible follow-up creative writing workshop: *Inspiration from history*. This workshop uses Picasso's *Guernica*, newspaper coverage of the event, and poems written during the Spanish Civil War to inspire students to write a poem or prose piece about the bombing of the Basque town in 1937, which horrified the world.

That Burning Summer – illustrated, interactive talk

An introduction to life on the Home Front in 1940, the point at which Britain believed it was about to be invaded, and the role of Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain. Discovering history through landscape and propaganda. Supports GCSE History courses covering Britain at War (1939-45)

Possible follow-up creative writing workshop: *Spyfever!* This can be a full workshop or an element in a longer event, and uses the Ministry of Information leaflet, *If the invader comes*, (whose seven rules provide the structure for *That Burning Summer*) to develop writing about place inspired by a combination of familiar locations and historical sources.

OR: Combine *A World Between Us* with *That Burning Summer* in an event looking at how the Spanish Civil War led to World War Two. What's the 'truth' of historical fiction? Why does a novelist need to take a different approach to history? How can we plot a history of emotion and everyday experience?

Liberty's Fire – illustrated, interactive talk

The volatile history of nineteenth-century France. Why did the barricades keep rising on the streets of Paris? From Second Empire excess to Third Republic revolution and repression, a fascinating insight into the events of the Franco-Prussian war, Siege of Paris and the 1871 Paris Commune. Where does *Les Mis* fit in to all this? Why were Parisians eating elephants and rats? Who burned Paris?

Optional creative writing element: propaganda, persuasive writing and romantic ruin photography. Follow-up creative writing workshop: *Characters from history*. This workshop uses historical, visual sources, particularly photography but also paintings, to develop characterisation skills. How to imagine the past through the individuals who inhabited it.

LYDIA SYSON author visits: practical stuff

Age Range

11+

Size of Audience

Students will get most from a session if audience size is kept to 25-60, so that meaningful discussion can take place, but I'm very happy to address much larger groups in the right setting and also to follow up a large group talk with a smaller group workshop. Maximum size for workshops is 20-25 depending on the event.

Areas

I live in London, but am happy to travel anywhere by public transport, including abroad, as long as the time taken to travel is taken into consideration in the fee.

Preparation for schools

I need a projector, a screen, a laptop with a remote control if possible, and a room that is dark enough to show images well, but lit so that I can see the audience. I usually bring my images on a stick or I can send a powerpoint in advance. A glass of water is very welcome!

I'm happy for the school to sell my books, either by contacting my publisher directly (which can raise funds for the school, and even cover the cost of a visit) or through a local bookshop, but I would appreciate it if parents could be informed about this in advance. Please contact me if you'd like a template. It's fantastic if some students have read my books, but not essential.

I'd like a named contact at each school, and a member of staff present at events.

My preparation

I always talk to schools/event organisers beforehand to find out exactly what's needed.

Fees

My school visit fees are well within Society of Author averages, if booked directly with me: £175 for a single session of up to one hour plus signings, £275 for a half day (2 sessions or a 3 hours workshop including breaks, Q & A and book signings) and £400 for a full day (up to 3 separate sessions or 2 half-day workshops including signings etc). I am not VAT-registered.