

THE HAUNTED LAKE

P.J. Lynch

Walker Books

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Suitable for ages 7+

Themes Ghosts, love, family, time

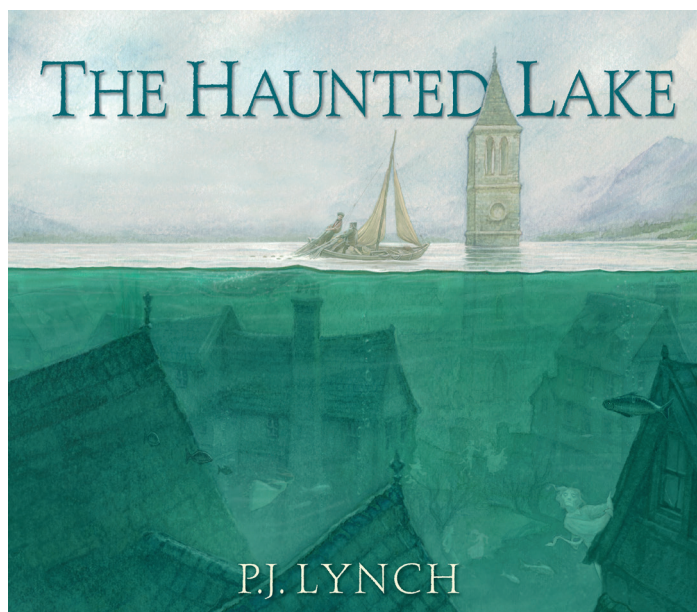
Summary Reuben, his son Jacob and, soon, young Ellen live by the new lake, the one that used to be a village sitting on a river – until the river was dammed and the village submerged. Through the water you can see the old streets and houses, and the church tower stands out above the surface. Some say it's haunted, but Ellen, Jacob and Reuben don't listen ... until Jacob disappears one night and finds himself among the ghosts from the village below.

A spooky story of love and tenacity, where hope and hard work are rewarded, *The Haunted Lake* features P.J. Lynch's masterfully atmospheric illustrations, full of silent drama and big emotions.

Judges' Comments Jacob and his father, Reuben, are the only people brave enough to fish on the mysterious lake created when a dam was built and a town flooded. On land, Jacob falls for a young girl named Ellen, but something keeps drawing him to the lake late into the evening. This tale of love, loss and perseverance told by Lynch through words and masterful illustrations, brings the reader on a ghostly journey from the world of the living to the eerie depths of the town that lies beneath.

About the Author–Illustrator Belfast-born P.J. Lynch has worked as a children's book illustrator since leaving Brighton College of Art in England in 1984 and has illustrated over twenty books, including modern editions of classic books such as Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and *The Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Andersen.

P.J. has been awarded the Mother Goose Award, the Christopher Medal (three times) and the prestigious Kate Greenaway Medal (twice), and he was the fourth Laureate na nÓg, 2016–2018.



QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Looking at the title and illustration on the cover, pick three words to describe the kind of book you expect.
2. What is unusual about the view P.J. Lynch has chosen for the cover?
3. Whose story do you think it is?
4. Can you spot any signs that the lake may be haunted?

AS YOU READ

1. What can you see on the title page? Does it give you any clues at all about the story?
2. What happened to the village of Spetzia?
3. Why do most people refuse to fish in the lake? Why do Reuben and Jacob stick around anyway?
4. Jacob doesn't want to marry Ellen at the beginning. Why?
5. Why do you think Jacob hears the church bell that night for the first time?
6. What are the signs (in the text and illustration) that Jacob is entering a strange world? Keep track of them!
7. '*There was no flood ...*' What do you notice about the text here? Why do you think that is?
8. '*Lilith has made a catch.*' What can it mean?
9. Why does Celia want Jacob to leave? Is it surprising?
10. When Lilith tells Jacob they are to be married, what is strange about his answers?
11. What are the 'strange watery clouds' Jacob can see up the church tower?
12. Who and what eventually saves Jacob? What sound helps him come back to his senses? On what night does Jacob leave the haunted village?
13. What happens to Reuben at the end?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

Ghastly ghosts

1. Who haunts the lake? What do they want? Why do they need Jacob?
2. What do you think of Lilith? Choose three words to describe her. Why does she want Jacob to stay? Is it reasonable or fair?
3. Why doesn't Celia explain to her son what is going on? What do you think of her attitude?

Heroes

1. Who is a hero in this story? Is there more than one?
2. What does Jacob feel when he first meets the ghosts? When he meets his mother? What does the text say? What clues can you find in the pictures?
3. What is Jacob's life like in the village? Make lists of things he can and can't do. Which is the longest? Do you think he is happy there?

Colours

1. Each character and each place in this story has its own special colour. What are they?
2. Is there a link between the colours of the characters and those of the places?
3. Look at what Ellen is wearing when she rescues Jacob. What do you notice?

Looking back

1. 'I didn't say I was going to marry *you*.' 'My old man forever.' How do Jacob and Ellen's jokes feel once you've read the whole book?
2. Is it a happy ending?
3. Did you enjoy this book? How many handbells out of five would you give it?

QUESTIONS FOR OLDER READERS

Age-old question

1. Keep track of Jacob and Ellen's respective ages throughout the book. How old are they both when Ellen rescues Jacob? What's happened to their age difference?
2. 'I'm an old man of nineteen.' What do you think of what Jacob says to Ellen? At what age, in your opinion, is a person 'old'? Do adults around you agree with Jacob? With you?

Love, love, love

1. Love takes many shapes in this book. Can you name them all? How does each character show their love to the others?
2. What is Jacob's reaction when Ellen declares her love? What do you make of it?
3. Is there love between Jacob and Lilith? Where does the name Lilith come from?
4. On the page 'Reuben had been a farmer ...' carefully note the characters' positions and where they're looking. How does this predict part of their individual stories?

ACTIVITIES

- **Fairy-tale hunt:** Jacob jokes Princess Rapunzel is waiting for him in the tower. Can you spot any other fairy tales that make an appearance in *The Haunted Lake*? They could be hidden in the story or in the pictures.
- **Underwater soundscape:** Think of all the sounds you might hear in a normal village: what would they sound like underwater? What other sounds might you hear at the bottom of a lake? Try to recreate those sounds with what you have to hand and record it on a phone. Play it next time you read *The Haunted Lake*. Does it change the book's atmosphere?
- **Ghost Fishy Fishy:** Play a *Haunted Lake* version of Fishy Fishy. Split your group in two: one bigger group of fish, one smaller group of fisherfolk. Each group stands at one end of the 'lake'. When the fisherfolk call the fish, they must try to swim safely to the other shore. If they're tagged, they turn into ghosts: they stay where they are, getting in the way of other fish and making it harder for them to swim to safety (but they can't catch them). The last free fish (or group of fish – pick your own number) is the winner.
- **Life aquatic:** What would your home/school/town look like underwater? Draw a place you know well on a sheet of paper (use blue or green paper if you have it). Think about the buildings, the trees, the traffic lights, the benches and so on. Now tape a sheet of tracing paper over one edge of your picture: you've just added 'the water'! On it, draw anything that would be different under the surface: how would people move and breathe? Would there be fish, mermaids, seaweed, submarines? Would the houses be covered by domes?

ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER READERS

- **Breaking news:** Research real-life villages that were submerged like Spetzia. (You could start with this Lonely Planet article about a medieval Italian village: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/submerged-italian-village-resurfacing>.) Where in the world are they? What happened exactly? Now, check the local mythology: what are the ghosts like? Do they have vampires, monsters, dragons? Finally, put it all together and imagine your own haunting of a submerged village. Present this heady mix of fact and invention to your group as if you were a news reporter.
- **Bookends:** Endpapers are the two double-page spreads right at the beginning, between the front cover and the title page (front endpapers), and right at the back (back endpapers) of a book. Illustrators often use them to tell part of their story or give us extra clues. What do you notice in *The Haunted Lake*? What would you add if you were the author-illustrator of this book?
- **A day in the before-death:** Lilith is pretty terrifying as a ghost, but we know nothing about her actual life. Imagine her when she was alive. You could draw her portrait, write an entry in her diary, imagine a dialogue between her friends or her neighbours gossiping about her. What made her the angry, spooky ghost she is today?
- **Forbidden food:** Like in many fairy stories, food has powerful magic in *The Haunted Lake*. If Jacob eats the soup, he forgets his former life and can never leave. What other magical foods do you know from other stories and legends? Write up a menu based on what you find, explaining in fancy detail either the ingredients of each dish or the effect they can have on the guest who eats them.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Discover other wonderful works illustrated by P.J. Lynch: *The Boy Who Fell off the Mayflower*, *The Dog Who Lost His Bark* (written by Eoin Colfer), and *Mysterious Traveller* (written by Mal Peet and Elspeth Graham). You can find activities for *Mysterious Traveller* on pages 7–9 of this 2014 Junior Juries pack: <https://cbi-junior-juries-archive.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/2014+Shadowing+Pack.pdf>
- Check out *The Dam* by David Almond and Levi Pinfold, a lyrical tale about a village that is just *about* to be submerged.
- Explore more stories about Folklore, Myths and Legends in this themed reading list from Children's Books Ireland: <https://cbi-reading-lists.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/CBI-Book-List-Folklore-Myth-Legend.pdf>