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## *THE NIGHT GARDENER*

## by Jonathan Auxier

Illustrations by Patrick Arrasmith

## Louisiana Young Readers’ Choice Nominee 2017

**Grades 6-8**

Submitted by Elisa Huber, Student,

School of Library and Information Science, LSU, Baton Rouge

**Title:** *The Night Gardener*

**Author:** Jonathan Auxier

**Illustrator:** Patrick Arrasmith

**Publisher:** Amulet Books

**Pages:** 350

**SUMMARY**

Author Jonathan Auxier offers readers a spine-tingling tale in *The Night Gardener*. Orphaned Irish siblings escaping famine in their homeland embark on a courageous journey in 1840s England. In this middle-schooler’s *Turn of the Screw*, Molly and her younger brother, Kip, find themselves in desperate need of housing and employment. Unfortunately, their dire straits lead them to the isolated and observably-withering Windsor family in rural England. Molly as would-be housekeeper and governess, and Kip as groundskeeper serve Master Bertrand and Mistress Constance Windsor. There are also two Windsor children- the elder self-interested bully Alistair and his sister, romantic, playful Penny. Together Molly and Kip discover that the source of the family’s slow physical decline appears to lie in the dark, unearthly tree that grows beside and within the Windsor manor - the tree tended to by the shadowy, ominous Night Gardener.

The spartan black & white scratchboard illustrations by Arrasmith add to the air of creepiness; they are mostly silhouettes of windblown leaves, with only three scenes depicted in white against black backgrounds. Auxier is a clever storyteller here, better even than his Molly or the “manikin woman,” Hester Kettle. He wends his dark mystery about stories versus lies, feelings of abandonment, and greed, much as the tree’s roots wend themselves “round the Windsor estate’s inhabitants” souls. Auxier boldly dubs this “A Scary Story” on the title page, and he is not just telling tales.

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

A Canadian native, Jonathan Auxier earned an MFA from Carnegie Mellon University. On his website, he proclaims that he writes “strange stories for strange children.” He is the author of the *The Night Gardener*, published in 2014 and recently been optioned by Disney to be made into a movie, and *Sophie Quire and the Last Storyguard: A Peter Nimble Adventure*, to be published in 2016. Auxier lives in Pittsburgh with his family and teaches creative writing and children’s literature.

**ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHY**

Patrick Arrasmith, born in 1971, earned a degree in illustration from California College of the Arts before receiving a scholarship from the Society of Illustrators and moving to New York. He has worked in several mediums including digital, engraving, and (mostly) scratchboard and used many techniques such as conceptual, stylized, and technical art. His subject matter ranges from action/adventure to historical to sci fi/fantasy to feminine. His work can be seen in newspapers, books, and even on beer labels.

**AWARDS**

2014 Governor Generals Literary Award nominee

2014 Junior Library Guild selection

2015 ALA Notable Book for Children

2015 Silver Birch Award winner

2015 Maryland Children’s Book Award nominee

2015 Sunburst Award nominee

2015 Bluebonnet Award nominee

2015 Beehive Children’s Fictional Book Award nominee

2016 Volunteer State Book Award nominee

2016 North Carolina Children’s Book Award nominee

2016 Manitoba Literary Award: Young Readers nominee

2016 Nene Award nominee

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Author website [www.thescop.com](http://www.thescop.com)

Illustrator website <http://www.patrickarrasmith.com>

**OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR**

*Peter Nimble and His Fantastic Eyes* (2011)

*Sophie Quire and the Last Storyguard: A Peter Nimble Adventure* (2016)

**OTHER TITLES BY ILLUSTRATOR**

The Last Apprentice Series(2006-2014)

*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls* (2010)

*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dreadfully Ever After* (2011)

Dark Eden Series (2011-2012)

# RELATED TITLES

*A Snicker of Magic* by Natalie Lloyd

*The Incorrigible Children of Ashton Place: The Mysterious Howling* (Book 2) by Maryrose Wood

*Dappled Annie and Tigrish* by Mary McCallum

*Knightley & Son* by Rohan Gavin

**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

**Language Arts:**

* Molly and Hester Kettle are storytellers. However, the distinction between telling stories and lying can be blurry, as Kip notes. Ultimately, Molly realizes that telling stories is about facing uncertain reality, while telling lies is about hiding from reality. Make a table with examples of storytelling and lying from *The Night Gardener*; make a Venn diagram of the characteristics of the two.
* Ask students to write a story making it easier for the listener to face a harsh reality. An example scenario might be convincing a younger sibling of the benefit of getting a flu shot. Conversely, ask students to write a story/lie that assists the listener and/or the teller in hiding from reality. An example scenario might be the classic “the dog ate my homework.”

**Social Studies:**

* As Victorian-era Irish immigrants escaping famine to England, Molly and Kip live in a time and place different from the present. Though they are young, Molly, fourteen, and Kip, ten, travel great distances without any guardians and are even hired as employees. Ask students to research other young people who have overcome obstacles or reached great achievements.
* Have students read and learn about the Irish Potato Famine and children at work in Victorian Britain. Here are some example websites they can use:
	+ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/victorian_britain/famine_and_emigration/>
	+ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/victorian_britain/victorian_children_at_work/>.

**Science/Health:**

* Jonathan Auxier calls his book, “A Scary Story.” Ask students to read about being afraid on the following website: [http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/afraid.html#](http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/afraid.html). Invite the class to discuss some of their fears. Then discuss what makes reading scary stories so exciting and appealing.
* Page 8 of “Goose Bumps: The Science of Fear” teacher’s guide (<http://www.fearexhibit.org/sites/fearexhibit.org/files/art/about_exhibit/Goose_Bumps_teacher_guide.pdf>) gives a detailed lesson plan for learning about increased heart rate due to fear. It recommends pairing up students, giving them a difficult fake pop quiz, and then recording their partner’s heart rate immediately after the quiz and again fifteen minutes after being told the quiz was not real.

**Art:**

* Illustrator Patrick Arrasmith employs the use of silhouettes in *The Night Gardener.* Show other examples of silhouette artwork on a projector or SMART board, ranging from simple drawn outlines to detailed laser-cut silhouettes.
* On a sunny day, take the class outdoors and have them take turns outlining one another’s shadow in a variety of poses with chalk, creating simple silhouettes.
* Have the students print pictures of themselves in profile, captured with a web camera. Ask students to cut out their outline with black paper, creating a silhouette of themselves.

**Vocabulary:**

Arrears

Blight

Bramble

Conciliatory

Corpulent

Dire straits

Enigma

Hurdy-gurdy

Ichor

Malady

Manikin woman

Monocle

Petiole

Sonorous

Victual

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The author, Jonathan Auxier, quotes Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Aesop of fable-fame at the beginning of the book. How do these quotes foreshadow the events to come within the story? Give two examples.
2. Give some examples from the text that show Molly helping another character face reality using a story. Find an example in which she has helped a character to hide from reality with a lie.
3. Why do Molly and Kip continue to stay at the Windsor estate after they see the Night Gardener? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.
4. It is obvious that the wishes the tree grants are poisonous and come with a price; why do Molly and the Windsor family continue to make wishes? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

The paperback edition (ISBN 978-1-4197-1531-0) contains a Bonus Feature at the end which includes a reader’s guide consisting of 11 discussion questions and 3 suggested activities.

**RELATED WEB SITES**

**About Kids Health**

<http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/HealthAZ/SafetyandtheEnvironment/Poisoning/Pages/Plant-safety.aspx>

Discusses and lists poisonous and non-poisonous plants.

**The Traveling Teachers**

<http://thetravellingteachers.blogspot.com/2014/10/the-victorian-era.html>

This blog from October 7, 2014 highlights the Victorian Era and offers other related websites with a variety of student tasks.

**Irish Central**

<http://www.irishcentral.com/roots/an-irish-odyssey-the-great-famine-shipwreck-death-and-heroic-survival-video-188821601-237561481.html>

This webpage discusses the documentary film “Famine and Shipwreck: An Irish Odyssey.” It highlights the shipwreck of the *Hannah*, an example of a coffin ship, the name given to crowded boats carrying Irish escaping from famine to America and Canada.

**The Morton Arboretum**

<http://www.mortonarb.org/trees-plants/tree-and-plant-advice/horticulture-care>

Advice for caring for plants and trees. Includes common plant problems.

**Reader’s Theater Script**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/174C4KpvpdWg4je2Z9bJj3HmB62BfbXKkY9aeRB6qgoI/edit?pref=2&pli=1>

An adaptation from Bound to Stay Bound Books and the Texas-Bluebonnet Award Committee. Suitable for classroom performance.