

# Lockwood & Co.



Classroom  
Resources by

Michael  
Lockwood

Hauntings  
are our  
business ...

'Stroud is  
a genius'  
Rick Riordan

**THE  
SCREAMING STAIRCASE**  
JONATHAN STROUD

# Introduction

**Lockwood & Co** are a ghost-hunting agency, one of many which have popped up in London in response to the 'Problem', a plague of haunting which has spread throughout Britain over the previous 50 years. The story of *The Screaming Staircase* is narrated with plenty of sharp wit by Lucy Carlyle, a teenage agent with special psychic powers who has just joined the eccentric Anthony Lockwood and his sidekick George as part of an offbeat psychic investigation team with a not very promising track record. When they bungle an important case and the client sues, the future of the agency is in jeopardy unless they can make amends by solving a 'cold' murder case, as well as surviving the night in the country's most haunted house.

The novel has the right mix of genuinely scary ghost story, alternative fantasy world and fast-paced detective thriller, told with plenty of sardonic wit, which will appeal to KS3 and the oldest KS2 readership. Stroud plunges us quickly into the action of the narrative and the novel soon becomes a page-turner with plenty of cliffhanger chapter endings to keep readers interested. Once they're hooked by the world of Lockwood & Co., students will be more than happy to read on independently: the challenge might be to persuade them not to read too far ahead!

*Lockwood & Co: The Screaming Staircase* is the sort of novel which will suggest a whole range of response activities to any English teacher. The activities below are just a small selection of these that try to draw on the strengths of the book and direct students' attention to some of its main features as a novel. The teaching ideas are aimed in the first instance at a Year 7 audience. They cover a broad range of assessment focuses, but particularly the ones listed below:

## Reading

- AF2** Understand, describe, select or retrieve information, events or ideas from texts and use quotation and reference to text
- AF3** Deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas from texts
- AF4** Identify and comment on the structure and organisation of texts, including grammatical and presentational features at text level
- AF5** Explain and comment on writers' uses of language, including grammatical and literary features at word and sentence level
- AF6** Identify and comment on writers' purposes and viewpoints and the overall effect of the text on the reader
- AF7** Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and literary traditions

## Writing

- AF1** Write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts
- AF2** Produce texts which are appropriate to task, reader and purpose
- AF3** Organise and present whole texts effectively, sequencing and structuring information, ideas and events
- AF7** Select appropriate and effective vocabulary

## Speaking & Listening

- AF2** Talking with others
- AF3** Talking within role-play and drama

# Jonathan Stroud

**Jonathan Stroud** was born in Bedford in 1970. After studying English Literature at York University, he moved to London, where he worked as an editor in a publishing firm. *The Bartimaeus* sequence is published in 35 languages and has sold 6 million copies worldwide. As well as four other novels: *Heroes of the Valley*, *The Last Seige*, *The Leap* and *Buried Fire*. Jonathan is now the author of the *Lockwood and Co.* series. He lives in Hertfordshire with his family.

## Praise for *Lockwood and Co:* *The Screaming Staircase*

"Ancient evil, unsolved murders, powerful ghosts and nefarious mortals - this story will keep you reading late into the night, but you'll want to leave the lights on. Stroud is a genius at inventing an utterly believable world which is very much like ours, but so creepily different."

**Rick Riordan, author of the *Percy Jackson* series**

"Stroud is one of the smartest and most talented writers around . . . Be prepared for lots of humour and some very creepy moments. You're going to be hooked."

## Children's Books Ireland

"It's a ripper! . . . With plentiful wit and good humour, more than a few chilling moments and, above all, refreshing creativity, Jonathan Stroud has constructed an energetic, fast paced narrative that trips nimbly back and forth from the present to the past as he first sketches and then deftly paints this fascinating landscape."

## Science Fiction World



[www.jonathanstroud.com](http://www.jonathanstroud.com)

@JonathanAStroud

# ***Lockwood & Co: The Screaming Staircase***

## **Chapter 1**

Of the first few hauntings I investigated with Lockwood & Co. I intend to say little, in part to protect the identity of the victims, in part because of the gruesome nature of the incidents, but mainly because, in a variety of ingenious ways, we succeeded in messing them all up. There, I've admitted it! Not a single one of those early cases ended as neatly as we'd have wished. Yes, the Mortlake Horror was driven out, but only as far as Richmond Park, where even now it stalks by night amongst the silent trees. Yes, both the Grey Spectre of Aldgate and the entity known as the Clattering Bones were destroyed, but not before several further (and, I now think, unnecessary) deaths. And as for the creeping shadow that haunted young Mrs Andrews, to the imperilment of her sanity and her hemline, wherever she may continue to wander in this world, poor thing, there it follows too. So it was not exactly an unblemished record that we took with us, Lockwood and I, when we walked up the path to 62 Sheen Road on that misty autumn afternoon and briskly rang the bell.

We stood on the doorstep with our backs to the muffled traffic, and Lockwood's gloved right hand clasped upon the bell-pull. Deep in the house, the echoes faded. I gazed at the door: at the small sun-blisters on the varnish and the scuffs on the letterbox; at the four diamond panes of frosted glass that showed nothing beyond except for darkness. The porch had a forlorn and unused air, its corners choked with the same sodden beech leaves that littered the path and lawn.

'OK,' I said. 'Remember our new rules. Don't just blab out anything you see. Don't speculate openly about who killed who, how, or when. And above all don't impersonate the client. Please. It never goes down well.'

'That's an awful lot of don'ts, Lucy,' Lockwood said.

'Too right it is.'

'You know I've got an excellent ear for accents. I copy people without thinking.'

'Fine, copy them quietly after the event. Not loudly, not in front of them, and particularly not when they're a six-foot-six Irish dockworker with a speech impediment, and we're a good half-mile from the public road.'

'Yes, he was really quite nimble for his size,' Lockwood said. 'Still, the chase will have kept us fit. Sense anything?'

'Not yet. But I'm hardly likely to, out here. You?'

He let go of the bell-pull and made some minor adjustment to the collar of his coat. 'Oddly enough, I have. There was a death in the garden sometime in the last few hours. Under that laurel halfway up the path.'

'I assume you're going to tell me it's only a smallish glow.' My head was tilted on one side, my eyes half closed; I was listening to the silence of the house.

'Yes, about mouse-sized,' Lockwood admitted. 'Suppose it might have been a vole. I expect a cat got it or something.'

'So . . . possibly not part of our case, then, if it was a mouse?'

'Probably not.'

Beyond the frosted panes, in the interior of the house, I spied a movement: something shifting in the hall's black depths. 'OK, here we go,' I said. 'She's coming. Remember what I said.'

Lockwood bent his knees and picked up the duffel bag beside his feet. We both moved back a little, preparing pleasant, respectful smiles.

We waited. Nothing happened. The door stayed shut.

There was no one there.

As Lockwood opened his mouth to speak, we heard footsteps behind us on the path.

'I'm so sorry!' The woman emerging from the mists had been walking slowly, but as we turned she

accelerated into a token little trot. 'So sorry!' she repeated. 'I was delayed. I didn't think you'd be so prompt.'

She climbed the steps, a short, well-padded individual with a round face expanding into middle age. Her straight, ash-blond hair was fixed back in a no-nonsense manner by clips above her ears. She wore a long black skirt, a crisp white shirt, and an enormous woollen cardigan with sagging pockets at the sides. She carried a thin folder in one hand.

'Mrs Hope?' I said. 'Good evening, madam. My name is Lucy Carlyle and this is Anthony Lockwood, of Lockwood and Co. We've come about your call.'

The woman halted on the topmost step but one, and regarded us with wide grey eyes in which all the usual emotions featured. Distrust, resentment, uncertainty and dread – they were all there. They come as standard in our profession, so we didn't take it personally.

Her gaze darted back and forth between us, taking in our neat clothes and carefully brushed hair, the polished rapiers glittering at our belts, the heavy bags we carried. It lingered long on our faces. She made no move to go past us to the door of the house. Her free hand was thrust deep into the pocket of her cardigan, forcing the fabric down.

'Just the two of you?' she said at last.

'Just us,' I said.

'You're very young.'

Lockwood ignited his smile; its warmth lit up the evening. 'That's the idea, Mrs Hope. You know that's the way it has to be.'

'Actually, I'm not Mrs Hope.' Her own wan smile, summoned in involuntary response to Lockwood's, flickered across her face and vanished, leaving anxiety behind. 'I'm her daughter, Suzie Martin. I'm afraid Mother isn't coming.'

'But we arranged to meet her,' I said. 'She was going to show us round the house.'

'I know.' The woman looked down at her smart black shoes. 'I'm afraid she's no longer willing to set foot here. The circumstances of Father's death were horrible enough, but recently the nightly . . . disturbances have been too persistent. Last night was very bad, and Mother decided she'd had enough. She's staying with me now. We'll have to sell up, but obviously we can't do that until the house is made safe . . .' Her eyes narrowed slightly. 'Which is why you're here . . . Excuse me, but shouldn't you have a supervisor? I thought an adult always had to be present at an investigation. Exactly how old are you?'

'Old enough and young enough,' Lockwood said, smiling. 'The perfect age.'

'Strictly speaking, madam,' I added, 'the law states that an adult is only required if the operatives are undergoing training. It's true that some of the bigger agencies always use supervisors, but that's their private policy. We're fully qualified and independent, and we don't find it necessary.'

'In our experience,' Lockwood said sweetly, 'adults just get in the way. But of course we do have our licences here, if you'd like to see them.'

The woman ran a hand across the smooth surface of her neat blonde hair. 'No, no . . . That won't be necessary. Since Mother clearly wanted you, I'm sure it will be fine . . .' Her voice was neutral and uncertain. There was a brief silence.

'Thank you, madam.' I glanced back towards the quiet, waiting door. 'There's just one other thing. Is there someone else at home? When we rang the bell, I thought—'

Her eyes rose rapidly, met mine. 'No. That's quite impossible. I have the only key.'

'I see. I must've been mistaken.'

'Well, I won't delay you,' Mrs Martin said. 'Mother's completed the form you sent her.' She held out the buff folder. 'She hopes it will be useful.'



'I'm sure it will.' Lockwood tucked it somewhere inside his coat. 'Thank you very much. Well, we'd better get started. Tell your mother we'll be in touch in the morning.'

The woman handed him a ring of keys. Somewhere along the road a car horn blared, to be answered by another. There was plenty of time till curfew, but night was falling and people were growing antsy. They wanted to get home. Soon there'd be nothing moving in the London streets but trails of mist and twisting moonbeams. Or nothing, at least, any adult there could clearly see.

Suzie Martin was conscious of this too. She raised her shoulders, pulled her cardigan tight. 'Well, I'd better be going. I suppose I should wish you luck . . .' She looked away. 'So very young! How terrible that the world should have come to this.'

'Goodnight, Mrs Martin,' Lockwood said.

Without reply, she pattered down the steps. In a few seconds she had vanished among the mists and laurels in the direction of the road.

'She's not happy,' I said. 'I think we'll be off the case tomorrow morning.'

'Better get it solved tonight, then,' Lockwood said. 'Ready?'

I patted the hilt of my rapier. 'Ready.'

He grinned at me, stepped up to the door and, with a magician's flourish, turned the key in the lock.

When entering a house occupied by a Visitor, it's always best to get in quick. That's one of the first rules you learn. Never hesitate, never linger on the threshold. Why? Because, for those few seconds, it's not too late. You stand there in the doorway with the fresh air on your back and the darkness up ahead, and you'd be an idiot if you didn't want to turn and run. And as soon as you acknowledge that, your willpower starts draining away through your boots, and the terror starts building in your chest, and bang, that's it – you're compromised before you begin. Lockwood and I both knew this, so we didn't hang around. We slipped straight through, put down our bags, and shut the door softly behind us. Then we stood quite still with our backs against it, watching and listening side by side.

The hall of the house lately occupied by Mr and Mrs Hope was long and relatively narrow, though the high ceiling made it seem quite large. It was floored with white and black marble tiles, set diagonally, and flanked by palely papered walls. Halfway along, a steep staircase rose into shadows. The hall kinked round this to the left and continued into a void of black. Doorways opened on either side: gaping, choked in darkness.

All of which could have been nicely illuminated if we'd put on the lights, of course. And there was a switch on the wall right there. But we didn't attempt to use it. You see, a second rule you learn is this: electricity interferes. It dulls the senses and makes you weak and stupid. It's much better to watch and listen in the dark. It's good to have that fear.

We stood in silence, doing what we do. I listened. Lockwood watched. It was cold in the house. The air had that musty, slightly sour smell you get in every unloved place.

I leaned in close to Lockwood. 'No heating,' I whispered.

'Mm-hm.'

As my eyes grew used to the dark, I saw more details. Beneath the curl of the banister was a little polished table, on which sat a china bowl of potpourri. There were pictures on the wall, mostly faded posters of old-time musicals, and photographs of rolling hills and gentle seas. All pretty innocuous. In fact it wasn't at all an ugly hallway; in bright sunlight it might have looked quite pleasant. But not so much now, with the last light from the door panes stretching out like skewed coffins on the floor in front of us; with our shadows neatly framed inside them; and with the manner of old Mr Hope's death in this very place hanging heavy in our minds.

I breathed hard to calm myself and shut out morbid thoughts. Then I closed my eyes against the taunting darkness and listened.

Listened . . .

Halls, landings and staircases are the arteries and airways of any building. It's here that everything is channelled. You get echoes of things currently going on in all the connecting rooms. Sometimes you also get other noises that, strictly speaking, ought not to be there at all. Echoes of the past, echoes of hidden things . . .

This was one such time.

I opened my eyes, picked up my bag and walked slowly down the hall towards the stairs. Lockwood was already standing by the little polished table beneath the banister. His face shone dimly in the light from the door. 'Heard something?' he said.

'Yep.'

'What?'

'A little knocking sound. Comes and goes. It's very faint, and I can't tell where it's coming from. But it'll get stronger – it's scarcely dark yet. What about you?'

He pointed at the bottom of the steps. 'You remember what happened to Mr Hope, of course?'

'Fell down the stairs and broke his neck.'

'Exactly. Well, there's a tremendous residual death-glow right here, still lingering three months after he died. I should've brought my sunglasses, it's so bright. So what Mrs Hope told George on the phone stacks up. Her husband tripped and tumbled down and hit the ground hard.' He glanced up the shadowy stairwell. 'Long steep flight . . . Nasty way to go.'

I bent low, squinting at the floor in the half-dark. 'Yeah, look how the tiles have cracked. He must've fallen with tremendous force'

Two sharp crashes sounded on the stairs. Air moved violently against my face. Before I could react, something large, soft and horribly heavy landed precisely where I stood. The impact of it jarred my teeth.

I jumped back, ripping my rapier from my belt. I stood against the wall, weapon raised and shaking, heart clawing at my chest, eyes staring wildly side to side.

Nothing. The stairs were empty. No broken body sprawled lifeless on the floor.

Lockwood leaned casually against the banister. It was too dark to be certain, but I swear he'd raised an eyebrow. He hadn't heard a thing.

'You all right, Lucy?'

I breathed hard. 'No. I just got the echo of Mr Hope's last fall. It was very loud and very real. It was like he'd landed right on top of me. Don't laugh. It's not funny.'

'Sorry. Well, something's stirring early tonight. It's going to get interesting later. What time d'you make it?'

Having a watch with a luminous dial is my third recommended rule. It's best if it can also withstand sudden drops in temperature and strong ectoplasmic shock. 'Not yet five,' I said.

'Fine.' Lockwood's teeth aren't quite as luminous as my watch, but when he grins it's a close-run thing. 'Plenty of time for a cup of tea. Then we find ourselves a ghost.'

# Before Reading

- **Ask the students** if they've read anything else by Jonathan Stroud and if so what the book was like and what they thought of it. Students can research the author and his new book further through: [www.jonathanstroud.co.uk](http://www.jonathanstroud.co.uk)

- From the images, design and text on the cover of *Lockwood & Co.*, what expectations do the students have of the novel? What genre would they place it in at this stage? What are their experiences of the ghost story genre, in books and other media?

- The full title of the book is *Lockwood & Co: The Screaming Staircase*. This suggests it's the first volume in another sequence like *Bartimaeus*. Ask the students what the difference is between a sequence and a series of books and what would be good examples of each.





# Getting into the Book

**Read aloud** the first two chapters of 'Part One: The Ghost', without too much interruption, to get students into the world of the novel.

## • Making Sense

After this introductory read, get the students in groups to try to establish some background to the story from what they have read so far:

Where and when is it set? (e.g. the characters carry rapiers, but ones which have Velcro strapping; there are TV sets and phones)

How old are the main characters? Is their age significant?

What has happened (the 'Problem') to bring about the current situation in the world of the novel? (there is a curfew; 'outbreaks' are mentioned)

How would the students describe the firm Lockwood & Co? What do they do and how successful are they?

What do the apparently technical terms such as 'ghost-lamps', 'Visitor' and 'Type Two' haunting mean? Do the students need the Glossary to find out their meanings or can they work them out from the context?

## • How's It Going

As a whole class, discuss how successfully the students think the novel has introduced readers to its world.

Have they been given enough information to keep them interested but not too much, so that they still have to use their imaginations to fill in the gaps?

What about the narrative style of the book? How would they describe the first person narration by Lucy: ironic, contemporary, teenage? Were they surprised by vocabulary she used, such as 'antsy'?

How would the students describe the relationship between Lucy and Anthony Lockwood? How do they talk to each other? How do they talk about George Cubbins, the third member of Lockwood & Co, who

doesn't actually appear in the first two chapters?

How does the author make the ending of Chapter 2 a 'page-turner'?

## • Independent Reading

The students could next be asked to read the following two chapters, 3 and 4, themselves. This brings them to the end of Part 1. In pairs, they can then list and share with other pairs:

Any additional information they have gathered about the world of the novel: e.g. the rapiers are needed because the metal iron repels ghosts, as do silver and magnesium.

Any further technical terms and what they mean: e.g. 'ghost-lock', 'ghost-touched'.

Any more details about the characters, such as the way they dress: e.g. Lucy wears leggings and a parka.

## • The Verdict So Far

As a whole class, discuss the first section of the novel. How would the students describe it: plunging the reader straight into the world of the novel without any preamble; action-packed narrative; cliffhanger ending (or even over-the-cliff- ending!), etc? How effective do they think Part 1 is

# The Back Story

**Reading the novel** from here onwards will obviously be a mix of whole class reading aloud, including by the students themselves, and independent reading, as teachers see fit.

- **Part 2, 'Before'**, provides much more detail about the back story of the novel to fill in some of the gaps in the readers' knowledge after Part 1:

We learn more about when and where the 'Problem' started: 50 or 60 years ago in the 'middle of the last century', first in London and the south then 'slowly spreading across the country'.

We learn more about the government's response to the 'Problem': for example, setting up DEPRAC, the 'Department of Psychical Research and Control'.

We learn more about the background of the narrator, *Lucy Carlyle*, and how her psychic powers developed. Her interview for the job at *Lockwood & Co.* is described in detail.

We learn more about the *Lockwood & Co.* psychical agency and its HQ in Lockwood's house.

- **Writing activity**

After reading chapter 5, the students could draft and then write Lucy's application to Lockwood & Co., responding to the job advert at the start of chapter 6. This could be in the form of a letter, based on Lucy's autobiography in chapter 5, or a more challenging task might be to design an application form for the job and fill in Lucy's answers. Both tasks should involve 'writing in role', conveying Lucy's character through the way she writes about herself and the job she is applying for.

- **Character Files**

After reading Part 2, ask students to imagine they've been given the task of writing 'official' DEPRAC files on the Lockwood and Co. team. These should be pen portraits of Lockwood, George and Lucy, which give an overview of their background and general personality

as well as an assessment of their main strengths and potential weaknesses as psychical agents. Again, students who need more of a challenge could devise their own 'official' DEPRAC reporting forms.

- **Style Point**

Ask the students for any examples of unusual metaphors and similes they've noticed, e.g. in chapter 6: 'It was one of those moments when a great Don't Care wave hits you, and you float off on it, head back, looking at the sky'; 'he was sitting forward like a vicar on the toilet, gazing at nothing, a pained, contemplative expression on his face'. There are more examples in chapter 9. In pairs, students could imitate this feature of the novel's style by creating their own unconventional metaphors and similes.

- **Literary Connections**

In small groups students can brainstorm any echoes of other books they find in the novel. These could include other ghost stories but also different genres, such as fantasy, classic novels and detective fiction. For example, are they reminded of the carefully worked out fantasy world of the Harry Potter books, with DEPRAC instead of a Ministry of Magic? Or do they pick up echoes of 19th C. Literature? For example does the use of child labour by the ghost-busting agencies suggest Dickens' novels, and the relationship between Lockwood and George suggest Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson?

- **Think, Pair, Share**

Give students time to Think individually, then confer in a Pair, and finally Share with the whole class why the world of the novel doesn't include computers, the internet and mobile phones, even though there are lots of other 'mod cons', e.g. TV, dishwasher, etc. Why has Jonathan Stroud decided not to include this area of modern technology? Would it affect the plot at some point? Does the story rely on only print-based sources of information, such as newspapers, being available?

# The Plot Thickens

- **Part 3, 'The Necklace'**, initially resumes the story immediately after the dramatic ending of Part 1. As Part 3 goes on, the 'cold case' of the Annie Ward murder is developed through George's researches in the newspaper archives and then through the discovery of the hidden, coded clue on the necklace Lucy took from the Hope house. Part 3 ends with an apparently unrelated case being presented to the agency: the challenge to stay a night in the seriously haunted Combe Carey Hall and earn a fee to save the

- **Shock Horror**

As this part of the novel features three reproduced 'newspaper articles', it lends itself to further writing opportunities. For example, students could create their own article in a particular journalistic style (tabloid or 'broadsheet'), reporting on Lockwood & Co.'s failed ghost-busting visit to Mrs Hope's house which ends in the place burning down at the end of Part 1, with the aftermath described at the start of Part 3 which threatens the whole future of the agency.

- **Drama**

Discuss the comic dimension of the novel and how this is used to balance the ghost / horror elements of the story, e.g. through the introduction of a comic detective, as in the Sherlock Holmes stories. In small groups, the students could then improvise the scene in chapter 10 where Inspector Barnes of DEPRAC visits Lockwood & Co and is made fun of.

- **Plotting the Plot**

Discuss with the students how the plot has developed through the first three Parts. How has the suspense and tension fluctuated through the dramatic and comic episodes of the narrative so far, including the 'back story' of Part 2? In pairs, ask the students to draw a diagram of the plot structure or a graph of the narrative tension so far, with peaks and troughs at different points (e.g. the page-turner endings). Get together again as a whole group to speculate on how the plot could continue from this point on and how the suspense might be manipulated through further twists and turns (without anyone giving away the ending!).

# Building to a climax

**Before reading Part 4, 'The Hall'**, discuss with the students their expectations for this section of the novel. Remind them to continue to be alert for the way the tension ebbs and flows in the narrative. They should also keep an eye out for the stylistic feature of unusual similes identified earlier.

Once started, though, read through Part 4 without too much interruption. Students will enjoy savouring the suspense as Lockwood & Co. take on the challenge of spending a night in the haunted wing of Combe Carey Hall and the novel moves to its climax through a series of cliffhanger chapters (especially 20, 22 and 23) which lend themselves to reading aloud.

- **How Did It Measure Up?**

At the end of Part 4, the students can talk in small groups and then as a whole class about how much this section of the story met their expectations.

- **The Story Continues**

In pairs, the students can update their diagrams of the plot structure or graphs of narrative tension drafted earlier. They can also make a note of any unconventional similes they noticed: during Part 4, these are often used to describe characters, e.g. the caretaker Starkins has eyes that swivel 'like cartwheels slipping in thick mud', a voice 'like the rustling of willow fronds' and a body 'like a gaunt and twisted gallows-tree' (chapters 18-19). A series of bird similes is also later applied to Lockwood (chapter 23).

- **Media work**

The whole of Part 4 is filmic in the tradition of the climax to ghost, fantasy adventure and horror movies. The last two chapters in particular, 23 and 24, could be adapted by the students for the screen, through drafting, in small groups, either a screenplay or storyboard, as appropriate, with suggestions for film music and special effects. They could introduce echoes of other films through visual or musical references, e.g. during classic film moments such as the sudden appearance of Fairfax at the end of chapter 23, when the worst seemed to be over, the ensuing stand-off, and then the late arrival of Inspector Barnes and his agents at the end of chapter 24.

# And After...

**Part 5, 'And After'**, ties up the loose ends of the plot, presents more comic business featuring Inspector Barnes and DEPRAC, and gives some hints as to how the characters might develop in volume two of the novel sequence.

- **Literary Connections**

Lockwood & Co. celebrate their survival with a party, where they have 'sausage rolls and jellies, pies and cakes, bottles of Coke and ginger ale' (chapter 26). Ask the students if this 'feast' reminds them more of classic children's adventure stories (e.g. Enid Blyton) rather than the ghost / horror genre...

- **Debate**

Students could debate the ethics of Lockwood & Co.'s decision to go along with the cover-up of Fairfax's guilt in the murder of Annie Ward and the suppression of news about Fairfax's new technology. This manipulation of the truth is justified in chapter 26: 'with the Problem worsening daily, that's not something DEPRAC was prepared to consider' (i.e. the exposure of Fairfax, the top man in an important iron company, as a murderer). Is this political realism in a time of emergency or unjustifiable government secrecy? Encourage students to make analogies with the current political arguments surrounding freedom of information relating to the 'war on terrorism'. The debate can be organised in a more formal way, giving students time to prepare and then present arguments for and against.

- **The Next Exciting Instalment**

After reading the end of the novel, where Lucy communicates with the ghost in the jar who tells her she is different from the other two members of the team, the students could work in groups to draft possible plot lines for the second volume of Lockwood & Co. This could lead to writing some pre-publication marketing copy which reprises the qualities of *The Screaming Staircase*, as well as providing a taster and possible title for the sequel.

## After Reading

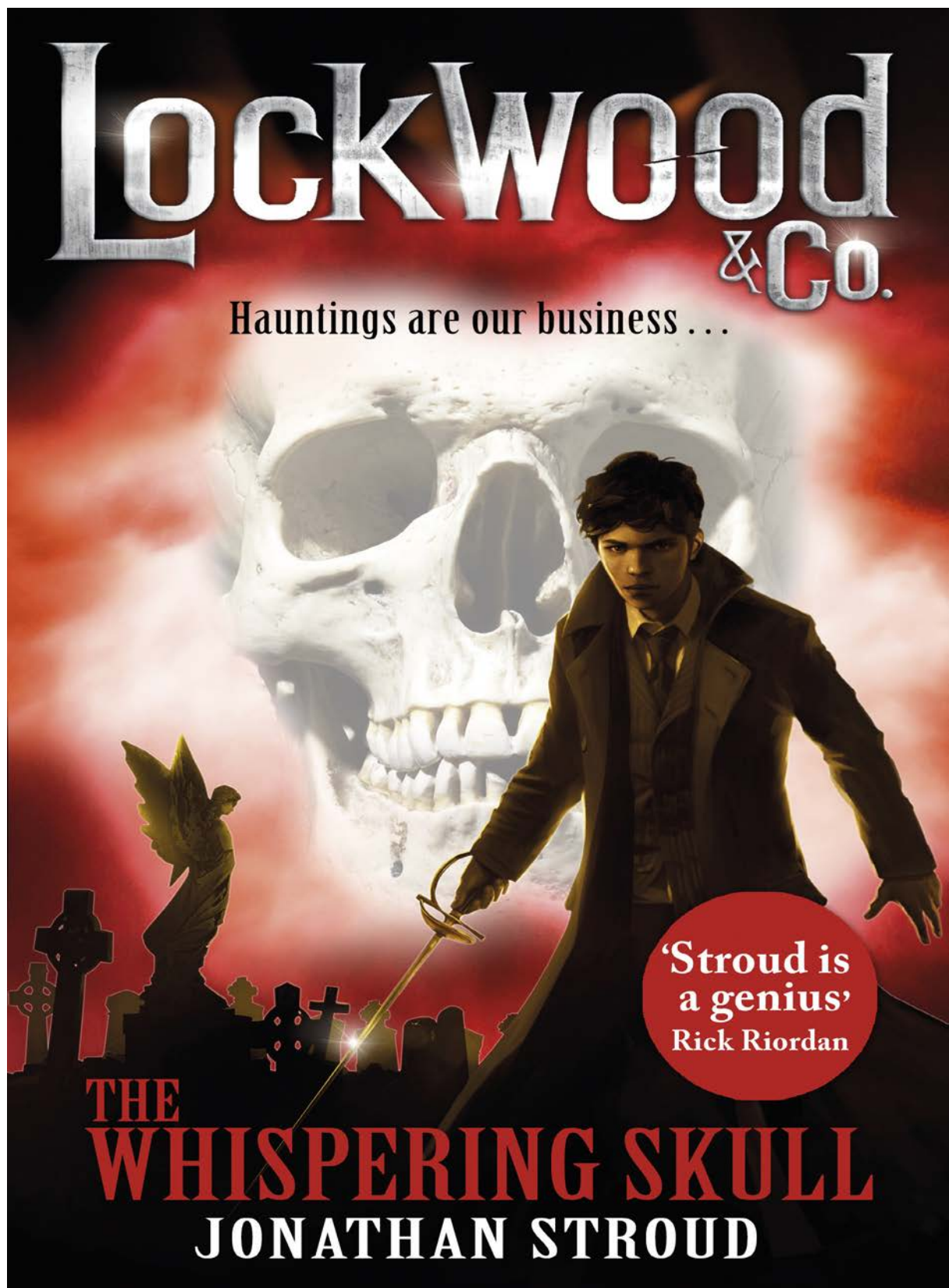
**Ghost-writing:** *Lockwood & Co.* provides the ideal opportunity to involve students in writing their own extended ghost stories, using the novel as both a stimulus and model.

The students could take over the teenage characters and fantasy setting from Lockwood & Co and write 'further adventures' for the trio. Alternatively, if appropriate, they could be given freedom to devise their own characters and fictional world, and to use Lockwood & Co more as a model for effective suspense writing.

Clearly, students will need multiple teaching sessions and independent activities to orally rehearse with others, plan, draft, get feedback from others, and produce a final, polished version of any substantial piece of story writing.

Before starting to draft, they should look again at sections of the novel where Jonathan Stroud provides examples of key features of the genre: getting the reader hooked initially (Pt. 1), filling in the background (Pt.2), introducing some comic relief (Pt. 3); building up suspense towards the climax of the story (Pt. 4); and tying up any loose ends (Pt. 5).

# September 2014



Ghosts and ghouls beware! London's smallest, shabbiest and most talented psychic detection agency is back.



## *Lockwood & Co: The Whispering Skull*

### **Extract from Chapter 1**

'Don't look now,' Lockwood said. 'There's two of them.'

I snatched a glance behind me and saw that he was right. Not far off, on the other side of the glade, a second ghost had risen from the earth. Like the first, it was a pale, man-shaped curtain of mist that hovered above the dark wet grass. Its head too seemed oddly skewed, as if broken at the neck.

I glared at it, not so much terrified as annoyed. Twelve months I'd been working for Lockwood & Co. as a Junior Field Operative, tackling spectral Visitors of every horrific shape and size. Broken necks didn't bother me the way they used to. 'Oh, that's brilliant,' I said. 'Where did he spring from?'

There was a rasp of Velcro as Lockwood pulled his rapier clear of his belt. 'Doesn't matter. I'll keep an eye on him. You keep watching yours.'

I turned back to my position. The original apparition still floated about ten feet from the edge of the iron chain. It had been with us for almost five minutes now, and was growing in clarity all the time. I could see the bones on the arms and legs, and the connecting knots of gristle. The wispy edges of the shape had solidified into flecks of rotten clothing: a loose white shirt, dark tattered breeches ending at the knee.

Waves of cold radiated from the ghost. Despite the warm summer night, the dew below the dangling toe-bones had frozen into glittering shards of frost.

'Makes sense,' Lockwood called over his shoulder. 'If you're going to hang one criminal and bury him near a crossroads, you might as well hang two. We should have anticipated this.'

'Well, how come we didn't, then?' I said.

'Better ask George that one.'

My fingers were slippery with sweat. I adjusted the sword grip in my hand. 'George?'

'What?'

'How come we didn't know there'd be two of them?'

There was the wet crunch of a spade slicing into mud. A shovelful of soil splattered against my boots. From the depths of the earth, a voice spoke grumpily. 'I can only follow the historical records, Lucy. They show that one man was executed and buried here. Who this other fellow is, I haven't a clue. Who else wants to dig?'

'Not me,' Lockwood said. 'You're good at it, George. It suits you. How's the excavation going?'

'I'm tired, I'm filthy and I've found precisely zip. Apart from that, quite well.'

'No bones?'

'Not even a kneecap.'

'Keep going. The Source must be there. You're looking for two corpses now.'

A Source is an object to which a ghost is tied. Locate that, and you soon have your haunting under control. Trouble is, it isn't always easy to find.

Muttering under his breath, George bent to his work again. In the low light of the lanterns we'd set up by the bags, he looked like some giant bespectacled mole. He was chest-deep in the hole now, and the pile of earth he'd created almost filled the space inside the iron chains. The big squared mossy stone, which we were sure marked the burial site, had long

ago been upended and cast aside.

'Lockwood,' I said suddenly, 'my one's moving closer.'

'Don't panic. Just ward it off gently. Simple moves, like we do at home with Floating Joe. It'll sense the iron and keep well clear.'

'You're sure about that?'

'Oh, yes. Nothing to worry about at all.'

That was easy enough for him to say. But it's one thing practising sword-moves on a straw dummy named Joe in your office on a sunny afternoon, and quite another warding off a Wraith in the middle of a haunted wood. I flourished my rapier without conviction. The ghost drifted steadily forwards.

It had come fully into focus now. Long black hair flapped around the skull. Remnants of one eye showed in the left-hand orbit, but the other was a void. Curls of rotting skin clung to spars of bone on the cheeks, and the lower jaw dangled at a rakish angle above the collar. The body was rigid, the arms clamped to the sides as if tied there. A pale haze of other-light hung around the apparition; every now and then the figure quivered, as if it still dangled on the gibbet, buffeted by wind and rain.

'It's getting near the barrier,' I said.

'So's mine.'

'It's really horrible.'

'Well, mine's lost both hands. Beat that.'

Lockwood sounded relaxed, but that was nothing new. Lockwood always sounds relaxed. Or almost always: that time we opened Mrs Barrett's tomb – he was definitely flustered then, though that was mainly due to the claw-marks on his nice new coat. I stole a quick sidelong glance at him. He was standing with his sword held ready: tall, slim, as nonchalant as ever, watching the slow approach of the second Visitor. The lantern-light played on his thin, pale face, catching the elegant outline of his nose and his flop of ruffled hair. He wore that slight half-smile he reserves for dangerous situations; the kind of smile that suggests complete command. His coat flapped slightly in the night breeze. As usual, just looking at him gave me confidence. I gripped my sword tightly and turned back to watch my ghost.

And found it right there beside the chains. Soundless, swift as thinking, it had darted in as soon as I'd looked away.

I swung the rapier up.

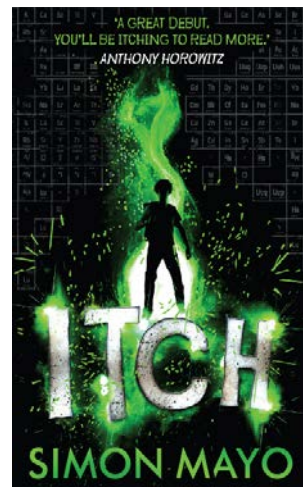
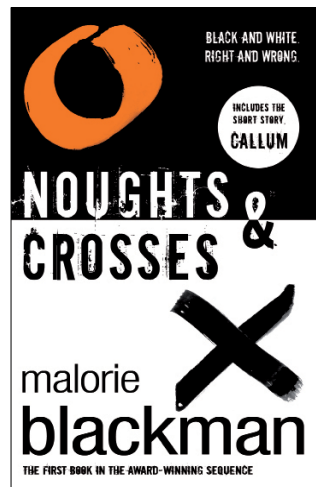
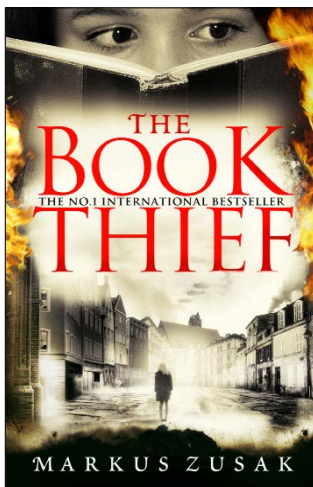
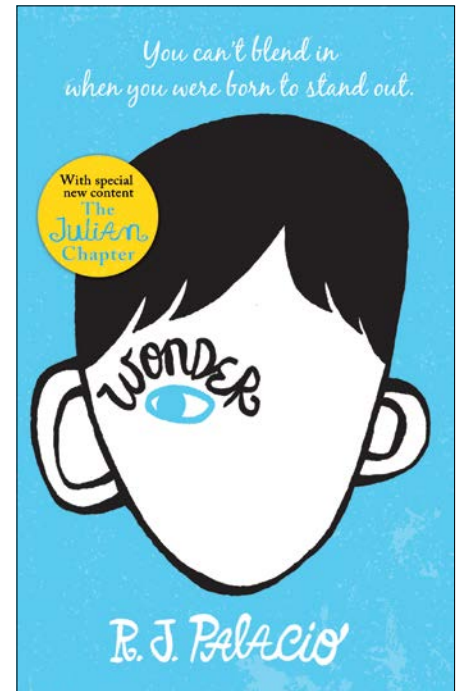
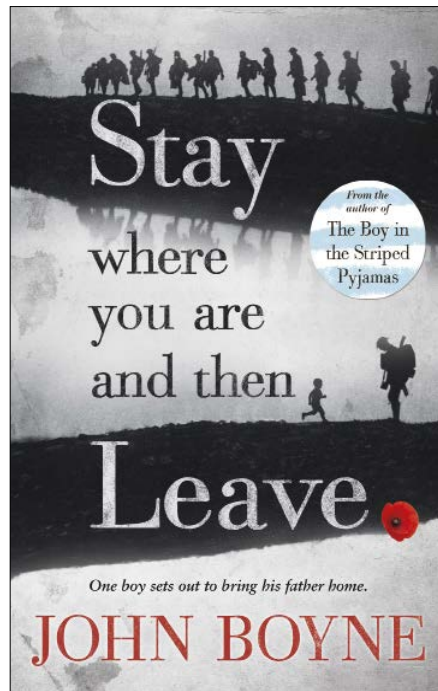
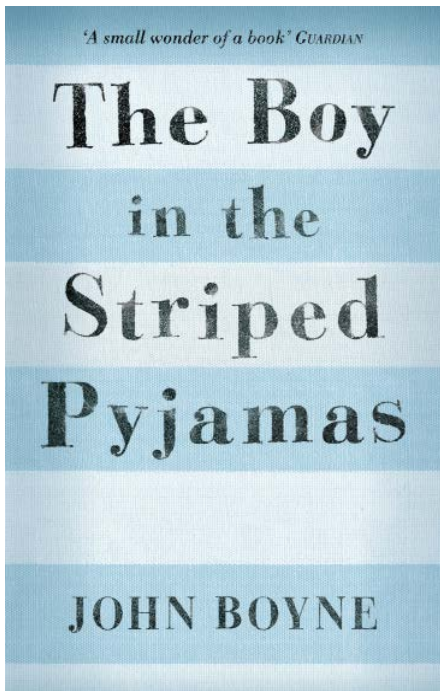
The mouth gaped, the sockets flared with greenish fire. With terrible speed, it flung itself forwards. I screamed, jumped back. The ghost collided with the barrier a few inches from my face. A bang, a splash of ectoplasm. Burning flecks rained down on the muddy grass outside the circle. Now the pale figure was ten feet further back, quivering and steaming.

'Watch it, Lucy,' George said. 'You just trod on my head.'

Lockwood's voice was hard and anxious. 'What happened? What just happened back there?'

'I'm fine,' I said. 'It attacked, but the iron drove it off. Next time, I'll use a flare.'

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