

*ArtsPower's*  
**THE SILENT BOY**  
(A One Act Play based on the book by Lois Lowry)  
by  
Greg Gunning

**CHARACTERS**

Katy Thatcher - A young girl  
Dr. Thatcher - Katy's father  
Jessie - A friend of Katy's  
Jacob Stoltz - The silent boy  
Peggy Stoltz - Jacob's sister & the Thatcher's hired help  
Nellie Stoltz – Jacob's & Peggy's oldest sister

**PLACE**

A small town in a farming community  
in Pennsylvania

**TIME**

October, 1910 – October, 1911

**PLAY SYNOPSIS**

Katy Thatcher is bright and curious, the young daughter of a small town doctor. She already knows that she, too, wants to follow in her father's footsteps and be a doctor – an unusual choice for a young girl in 1910. Katy's father approves. Maybe that's why, since Katy's mother is expecting a baby, Dr. Thatcher explains to Katy how babies grow inside their mothers – not in the tomato patch like Katy's friend Jessie believes.

Dr. Thatcher even takes Katy out on his daily rounds, carefully avoiding the local insane asylum – a frightening place where Katy can hear screams coming from the poor inmates locked up inside.

With an already busy household and a baby on the way, the Thatcher's decide to hire Peggy Stoltz, a local indigent girl, who lives on a poor farm on the outskirts of town, to help out around the house. Peggy moves in with the Thatchers. Coincidentally, Peggy's older sister, Nellie, works and lives next door, at the Bishop's house.

Peggy and Katy become good friends. But, it is the unusual friendship that Katy forms with Peggy's younger brother, Jacob, that will impact her life in unexpected ways.

Jacob is autistic. Though in 1910, people label him as "touched," a term commonly used for someone with a mental handicap. He never talks and refuses to let people touch him. He

doesn't seem to want to be friends with anyone. Not surprisingly, the whole town considers him an outcast. During that summer, Jacob's love of animals keeps drawing him back to the Thatcher's barn to groom the horses. Katy and Jacob bond to form a special kind of friendship.

On the day that Katy's mother goes into labor, Peggy takes Katy out to her home to teach her the ways of the farm. Jacob proudly shows Katy all the animals that he cares for. Peggy explains that Jacob is so good with animals that once, when a new-born baby lamb was rejected by its mother, Jacob found a different sheep among the flock to mother the lamb. Also, Katy explains that Jacob has been given the difficult job of euthanizing the unwanted kittens born on the farm by drowning them in the river.

Soon, Katy's mother gives birth to a baby girl! Katy tells Jacob how happy they all are because her mother and father really wanted this baby.

A few weeks go by. On a rainy night, Dr. Thatcher gets an emergency phone call. He leaves for Peggy's family's farm immediately. Katy wonders who is sick; maybe it is Peggy's older sister Nellie, who left the Bishop's home quite unexpectedly a couple of months ago.

The next morning, Dr. Thatcher tells Katy that the whole town is out searching for Jacob. It seems Nellie gave birth to an illegitimate child the night before. When she screamed out in despair that she didn't want the baby, Jacob disappeared into the night with the newborn.

Katy knows where she alone can find Jacob.

Katy goes to the barn. She finds a cold, wet and frightened Jacob huddled in the corner. She gently tries to explain to Jacob that Nellie's unhappiness with her baby isn't the same as an unwanted kitten, and it wouldn't be right to drown the baby in the river.

Dr. Thatcher appears. He tells Katy that the police are there to take Jacob away because they found the baby – placed in the nursery inside the Thatcher's house. Unfortunately, the baby was dead.

“Drowned?” Katy asks her father.

“No. It was premature. It would never have survived. But unfortunately, the police are convinced that Jacob is responsible for the baby's death,” replies Dr. Thatcher.

Katy turns back to Jacob. “I'm so sorry, Jacob – forgive me. I was wrong. It wasn't like the kittens, was it? It was like the lamb,” says Katy.

Jacob allows his trusted friend Katy to take his hand – to lead him out safely to the police.

### Epilogue

Katy explains: “Jacob was sent to that horrible insane asylum. He didn't deserve that. And years later, as a doctor, I was there when we closed down that dreadful place. The patients were all sent to better places – with modern medicines and new treatments to better understand people who are “touched”. But on the list of patients, we never found Jacob's name – no record he was ever there – silent to the end.”