**About Lydia Syson**

Lydia Syson is an award-winning Young Adult author with a passion for bringing to life neglected areas of history through fiction and encouraging reading for pleasure.  Her novels explore the experiences of ordinary young people caught up in extraordinary events, including the Spanish Civil War, the Battle of Britain and, most recently, the 1871 Paris Commune, France’s last nineteenth-century 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 a National Literacy Trust trained author.

**About Lydia’s books:**

1. *Liberty’s Fire* (published May 2015 and written with the support of Arts Council England)

Paris, 1871: a new revolution. The Franco-Prussian war is over but life through the siege has been tough, and peace proves bitter.  Sixteen-year old Zéphyrine finds inspiration in the hope offered by the city's radical new leadership, the Paris Commune.  And she has unexpectedly fallen in love.  Anatole, a dashing young violinist at the Théâtre Lyrique, opens Zéphyrine's eyes to a glamorous new world, while he in turn is swept away by her passionate beliefs.  Not all their friends are equally convinced.  With a homegrown enemy now at the gate and the barricades rising, can love and friendship both survive?

‘Fascinating and terrifying!’ *Teach Secondary*

2. *That Burning Summer* (published October 2013)

England, 1940. With war raging in the skies above the Channel, Peggy is putting on a brave face, but she knows Germany could invade any day. Though the family farm and her brother’s worries keep her busy, it’s hard to ignore the rumble of guns, the rumours of spies and the malicious gossip in town. Peggy must grow up fast – and when a young Polish pilot crash-lands near her home, she faces a terrible test of loyalty.

‘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’, this novel ‘simmers with tension and intensity’ *Booktrust*

3. *A World Between Us* (published October 2012):

Europe is on the verge of war, and Felix is on the verge of discovering love. But discovery means choice and she has to decide between logic and attraction, good sense and passion. As suburban London becomes a memory, Felix has to fight to survive, not just the battles of the Spanish Civil War, but also the conflicts of her own heart.

‘an outstanding debut novel for teenagers’ *The Guardian.*

*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.

**About Lydia’s events:**

Lydia’s events for schools are suitable for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5, and can be delivered with emphasis on English, History, Spanish or French. Creative writing workshops designed to follow talks offer additional and inspiring insight into how a real writer works, and students use primary source materials of different kinds to fire the imagination.

*Liberty’s Fire*

**Anillustrated, interactive talk** about the challenges of writing a novel about an extraordinarily dramatic event which few people know anything about, and over which historians still argue. The last revolution to rock nineteenth-century Paris left the city in flames and thousands of Communards slaughtered on the streets, in prison or in exile; the Archbishop of Paris was executed. Short-lived though it was, this conflict helped shape the opposing ideologies of the twentieth-century world though its impact on influential thinkers like Marx and Lenin. But what was it like living through it? Why did women play such an important role in supporting the Commune, and how were photography and music used during and after the events to promote the beliefs of those on both sides of the political divide?

**Follow-up creative writing workshop**: *Characters from history.*

How to imagine the past through the individuals who inhabited it. This workshop uses visual historical sources, particularly photography (some faked!) but also selected French impressionist portraits, to develop students’ characterisation skills while expanding their awareness of the variety of sources available to historians and writers and also the reliability of those sources.

*That Burning Summer*

**An illustrated, interactive talk** introducing the inspiration for the book: life on the Home Front in 1940, when Britain believed it was about to be invaded, and the role of Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain. History is revealed through landscape and propaganda. Supports year 9 work on Home Front and GCSE History courses covering Britain at War (1939-45)

**Follow-up creative writing workshop:** *Spyfever!*

This workshop uses the Ministry of Information leaflet, *If the invader comes,* (whose seven rules provide the structure for *That Burning Summer*)to develop a piece of imaginative writing about place inspired by combining students’ own knowledge of familiar locations with a specific historical source.

*A World Between Us*

**An illustrated, interactive talk** introducing 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, journalists and International Brigade volunteers in the war, the use of propaganda and the bombing of Guernica. Supports Spanish Civil War units in Highers and AS level history

**Follow-up creative writing workshop**: *Inspiration from history*.

Students discuss images of Picasso’s *Guernica,* newspaper coverage of the bombing of the Basque town in 1937, andpoems written during the Spanish Civil War, before writing their own poem or descriptive prose piece responding to an event which horrified the world: the first mass civilian bombardment in European history.