

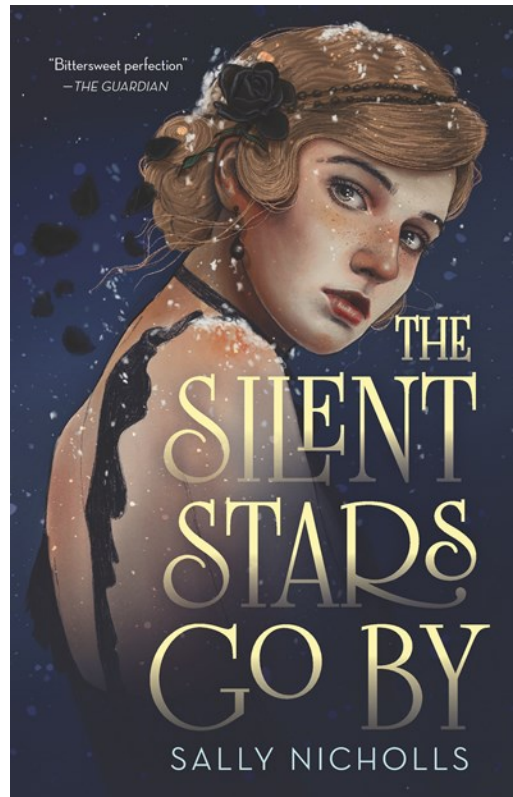
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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Review of *The Silent Stars Go By* Written by Sally Nicholls

Educator Reviewer: Arielle Mouton, high school ELA teacher

Student Reviewer: Andrea Loera



Nicholls, Sally (2022). *Silent stars go by*. Walker Books
US.

Adult Review:

The *Silent Stars Go By*, written by Sally Nicholls, was a very interesting read. Margot, the main character, was a young, sixteen-year-old woman, seemingly in love with Harry, who was nineteen and heading off to war. Margot first hears of his disappearance through a letter; it notes how he has gone missing in action. The novel takes place in post-war Britain and starts off slowly with Margot coming back to the vicarage to see her family three years later for Christmas. As readers soon figure out, she is hiding a big secret that her family has worked very hard to keep from the public eye: she has a child, and the father of the child has no idea. Margot is viewed as an absent mother trying to make ends meet while being away from her son, and her mother and father are raising her son named James. Everything changes when James' father is miraculously found and returns home to heal, be with family, start a new job, and chase after Margot.

The historical fiction novel highlights the struggles of being a single, absent mother and living in a country (and family) that does not support it. Margot experiences the father of her child coming back into their lives when he moves back home from the war front after going missing, and the big secret remains hidden from him, even as he gets to know James and attempts to rekindle his romance with Margot. I really loved reading this story, and I love how real the characters seem regarding their personal issues and how they deal with what life throws at them; it reminds me of how we all view ourselves in our own world today.

The book also shines a light on PTSD for those who went to war and are struggling with returning to daily civilian life. Although the stigma reveals that men are expected to get back on their feet as soon as they come home, Sally Nicholls reveals what returning men truly deal with: no motivation for a fruitful life and unable to keep a steady job. I feel like I got to connect with Harry on very surface-level issues, but getting to see what Margot's brother struggles with was a powerful introduction to what returning soldiers deal with mentally and physically. This novel is beautifully written and does well at reeling in its readers and relating with its characters and issues that life throws at them. Most importantly, it portrays the love a woman has for her child and the true struggles of being an unmarried, single mother in post-war Britain.

Student Review:

At first, I thought that this book might not keep me interested, as I do not regularly pick up historical fiction to read for pleasure. Sally Nichols proved to me that historical fiction could be written in a way that could hook audiences who do not usually read the genre and keep them captivated. Even though the first few chapters were a bit slow, I was enthralled once I got a few chapters. I constantly wanted to know what would happen next to Margot, the main character, and where the roads of Yorkshire England would lead her. I was reading this book twenty-four-seven, excited about the rekindling of old friendships, relationships, and feelings between the characters. I ended up finishing this book in about two days, which is a big difference from a week that it usually takes me to read a book leisurely.

Some of the things that I enjoyed most about this book were the setting and the simple yet invigorating plot. As advertised, this book does have a romantic subplot, but one that doesn't overwhelm the story, as I find some romance aspects in books can. Even though at times I found the story to move along a bit slowly, or have the same topics brought up often.

I would recommend this book to teenagers aged 13-17, but I can imagine anyone who picks it up would be as interested in it as I was. Sometimes, historical fiction can get wordy and a little

hard to understand for me, but this book had great pacing and language that was relevant to the time period but relatively easy to understand which is always a plus for teen readers. I believe that teenagers in particular can connect to Margot and her younger sister Jocelyn. Readers get an inside view of Margot's thoughts and feelings in contrast to those of her sister Jocelyn that makes both characters unique and relatable. Jocelyn's worry about her future and what she will do with it truly resonated with me, as she shows that she found it exciting and interesting to go against the mold cast by her family and the people around her. Margot's emotional distress and turmoil are easy to understand, connect to, and sympathize with. I know that everyone who reads this book will find a connection to it and its characters.