

Introduction

This study guide is meant to support students in England and Wales preparing for GCSE exams in English and English literature. It may also be helpful to the general reader who is interested in the stories of Penelope Lively. If the guide is used as preparation for a written exam, then all the activities suggested here may be done in writing or orally, as students and teachers wish. Some of the activities here can be used also for assessment in speaking and listening, in original writing and in wider reading.

The guide is too long to read from start to finish, and I hope no one would ever want to. Use the headings to find the bits you need, **as** and **when** you need them. If you are a teacher, look for the many prompts for activities. Most can be done in speech or writing or using Internet technologies. If you are using this guide on a computer system, then you ought to open the application software you think most helpful for various tasks, as you see the need for it.

What happens in *The Darkness Out There*?

The Darkness Out There is a short story from Penelope Lively's collection *Pack of Cards*, published in 1984. If you have not yet read the story, then do so before you read this summary! It is the sort of story to which you can return several times. On a first reading the power of the story may make you miss some details.

The plot can be reduced to a few sentences:

- Two young people go to help an old lady with her housework.
- She tells them a story about something she did in the war.
- The young people are shocked by her story and leave.

This is a slightly more detailed account:

Sandra and Kerry (a boy) are in a club, at school, run by Miss Hammond. The club members help people in the community. One Saturday Sandra and Kerry go to the house of an old lady, Mrs. Rutter. When they have done the errands, they ask her about a local wood, which is meant to be haunted. Mrs. Rutter knows the true story behind the popular version.

During the Second World War a German aeroplane was shot down and crashed in the wood. Mrs. Rutter and her sister were the first people on the scene. They saw that one of the crew was still alive, but trapped in the aircraft. They left him and returned the next night, knowing that he was dying in agony. Mrs. Rutter is not ashamed of what she did, and explains it in terms of strict revenge, for the death of her husband, who was killed in Belgium at the start of the war.

Sandra is shocked but it is Kerry who takes the initiative. As directly as he can he insists that he must leave. As soon as he is out of the house, he speaks of his horror at Mrs. Rutter and his sympathy for the German.