

Lockport Township High School District 205

Garry W. Raymond, Ph.D., Superintendent
815/588-8100

Peter M. Sullivan, Assistant Superintendent
Curriculum and Instruction
815/588-8102



Todd P. Wernet, Assistant Superintendent
Personnel
815/588-8103

19 May 2009

Dear Sophomore Student:

The English Department of Lockport High School has instituted a Required Summer Reading Program for all sophomores (class of 2012). As part of the program, you will be expected to complete the reading requirement listed below:

Students enrolled in World Cultures 10R are to read the following:

Haddon, Mark

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

This book will be available at your local public library, or it may be purchased from the Barnes and Noble or the Borders in Joliet and Orland Park. You may also obtain the novel from various online booksellers such as Amazon.com.

Please see the attached study guide to help focus your reading and increase your understanding of the book. Reviewing the questions and reflecting on the possible answers will enhance your reading experience.

You will be assessed on your summer reading during the beginning of school in August. You will have to write an essay about your book and take a test on it. Consequently, your careful reading of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* will get you off to a good start in the fall. We encourage you to read the summer assignment in manageable sections and hope that you find it enjoyable. We look forward to reading your reactions in August.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Dennis Hicks in black ink.

Dennis Hicks
Central Campus Principal

Handwritten signature of Brett Gould in black ink.

Brett Gould
East Campus Principal

Handwritten signature of Thomas O'Brien in black ink.

Thomas O'Brien
English Dept. Chair

P.S. You can find this information on our school web page.

Freshman Center – Central Campus
1222 South Jefferson Street
Lockport, Illinois 60441-3597
815/588-8200 Fax: 815/588-8209

District Administrative Center
1323 East Seventh Street
Lockport, Illinois 60441-3899
815/588-8000 Fax: 815/588-8109

East Campus
1333 East Seventh Street
Lockport, Illinois 60441-3898
815/588-8300 Fax: 815/588-8309

Summer 2009 Required Reading for all students in English 10R

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

ABOUT THIS GUIDE*

The introduction, discussion questions, suggested reading list, and author biography that follow are designed to enhance your group's reading of Mark Haddon's **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time**. We hope they will provide useful ways of thinking and talking about this extraordinary novel, which won Britain's Whitbread Award.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. Although gifted with a superbly logical brain, Christopher is autistic. Everyday interactions and admonishments have little meaning for him. Routine, order, and predictability shelter him from the messy wider world. Then, at fifteen, Christopher's carefully constructed world falls apart when he finds his neighbor's dog, Wellington, impaled on a garden fork, for which he is initially blamed.

Christopher decides that he will track down the real killer and turns to his favorite fictional character, Sherlock Holmes, for inspiration. But the investigation leads him down some unexpected paths and ultimately brings him face-to-face with the dissolution of his parents' marriage. As he tries to deal with the crisis within his own family, we are drawn into the workings of Christopher's mind.

And herein lies the brilliance of Mark Haddon's choice of narrator: The most wrenching of emotional moments are chronicled by a boy who cannot fathom emotion. **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time** is one of the freshest debuts in years: a comedy, a heartbreaker, a mystery story, a novel of exceptional literary merit that is great fun to read.

Reader's Guide

1. On pages 45–48, Christopher describes his "Behavioral Problems" and the effect they had on his parents and their marriage. What is the effect of the dispassionate style in which he relates this information?
2. Given Christopher's aversion to being touched, can he experience his parents' love for him, or can he only understand it as a fact, because they tell him they love him? Is there any evidence in the novel that he experiences a sense of attachment to other people?
3. One of the unusual aspects of the novel is its inclusion of many maps and diagrams. How effective are these in helping the reader see the world through Christopher's eyes?
4. What challenges does **The Curious Incident** present to the ways we usually think and talk about characters in novels? How does it force us to reexamine our normal ideas about love and desire, which are often the driving forces in fiction? Since Mark Haddon has chosen to make us see the world through Christopher's eyes, what does he help us discover about ourselves?
5. Christopher likes the idea of a world with no people in it [p. 2]; he contemplates the end of the world when the universe collapses [pp. 10–11]; he dreams of being an astronaut, alone in space [pp. 50–51], and that a virus has carried off everyone and the only people left are "special people like me"

[pp. 198–200]. What do these passages say about his relationship to other human beings? What is striking about the way he describes these scenarios?

6. On pages 67–69, Christopher goes into the garden and contemplates the importance of description in the book he is writing. His teacher Siobhan told him “the idea of a book was to describe things using words so that people could read them and make a picture in their own head” [p. 67]. What is the effect of reading Christopher’s extended description, which begins, “I decided to do a description of the garden” and ends “Then I went inside and fed Toby”? How does this passage relate to a quote Christopher likes from **The Hound of the Baskervilles**: “The world is full of obvious things which nobody by chance ever observes” [p. 73]?

7. According to neurologist Oliver Sacks, Hans Asperger, the doctor whose name is associated with the kind of autism that Christopher seems to have, notes that some autistic people have “a sort of intelligence scarcely touched by tradition and culture—unconventional, unorthodox, strangely pure and original, akin to the intelligence of true creativity” [**An Anthropologist on Mars** by Oliver Sacks, NY: Vintage Books, 1995, pp. 252–53]. Does the novel’s intensive look at Christopher’s fascinating and often profound mental life suggest that in certain ways, the pity that well-meaning, “normal” people might feel for him is misdirected? Given his gifts, does his future look promising?

8. Christopher experiences the world quantitatively and logically. His teacher Mr. Jeavons tells him that he likes math because it’s safe. But Christopher’s explanation of the Monty Hall problem gives the reader more insight into why he likes math. Does Mr. Jeavons underestimate the complexity of Christopher’s mind and his responses to intellectual stimulation? Does Siobhan understand Christopher better than Mr. Jeavons?

9. Think about what Christopher says about metaphors and lies and their relationship to novels [pp. 14–20]. Why is lying such an alien concept to him? In his antipathy to lies, Christopher decides not to write a novel, but a book in which “everything I have written . . . is true” [p. 20]. Why do “normal” human beings in the novel, like Christopher’s parents, find lies so indispensable? Why is the idea of truth so central to Christopher’s narration?

10. Which scenes are comical in this novel, and why are they funny? Are these same situations also sad, or exasperating?

11. Christopher’s conversations with Siobhan, his teacher at school, are possibly his most meaningful communications with another person. What are these conversations like, and how do they compare with his conversations with his father and his mother?

12. One of the primary disadvantages of the autistic is that they can’t project or intuit what other people might be feeling or thinking—as illustrated in the scene where Christopher has to guess what his mother might think would be in the Smarties tube [pp. 115–16]. When does this deficit become most clear in the novel? Does Christopher seem to suffer from his mental and emotional isolation, or does he seem to enjoy it?

13. Christopher’s parents, with their affairs, their arguments, and their passionate rages, are clearly in the grip of emotions they themselves can’t fully understand or control. How, in juxtaposition to Christopher’s incomprehension of the passions that drive other people, is his family situation particularly ironic?

14. On pages 83–84, Christopher explains why he doesn’t like yellow and brown, and admits that such decisions are, in part, a way to simplify the world and make choices easier. Why does he need to make the world simpler? Which aspects of life does he find unbearably complicated or stressful?

15. What is the effect of reading the letters Christopher’s mother wrote to him? Was his mother justified in leaving? Does Christopher comprehend her apology and her attempt to explain herself [pp.

106–10]? Does he have strong feelings about the loss of his mother? Which of his parents is better suited to taking care of him?

16. Christopher's father confesses to killing Wellington in a moment of rage at Mrs. Shears [pp. 121–22], and swears to Christopher that he won't lie to him ever again. Christopher thinks, "I had to get out of the house. Father had murdered Wellington. That meant he could murder me, because I couldn't trust him, even though he had said 'Trust me,' because he had told a lie about a big thing" [p. 122]. Why is Christopher's world shattered by this realization? Is it likely that he will ever learn to trust his father again?

17. How much empathy does the reader come to feel for Christopher? How much understanding does he have of his own emotions? What is the effect, for instance, of the scenes in which Christopher's mother doesn't act to make sure he can take his A-levels? Do these scenes show how little his mother understands Christopher's deepest needs?

18. Mark Haddon has said of **The Curious Incident**, "It's not just a book about disability. Obviously, on some level it is, but on another level . . . it's a book about books, about what you can do with words and what it means to communicate with someone in a book. Here's a character whom if you met him in real life you'd never, ever get inside his head. Yet something magical happens when you write a novel about him. You slip inside his head, and it seems like the most natural thing in the world" [<http://www.powells.com/authors/haddon.html>]. Is a large part of the achievement of this novel precisely this—that Haddon has created a door into a kind of mind his readers would not have access to in real life?

19. Christopher's journey to London underscores the difficulties he has being on his own, and the real disadvantages of his condition in terms of being in the world. What is most frightening, disturbing, or moving about this extended section of the novel [pp. 169–98]?

20. In his review of **The Curious Incident**, Jay McInerney suggests that at the novel's end "the gulf between Christopher and his parents, between Christopher and the rest of us, remains immense and mysterious. And that gulf is ultimately the source of this novel's haunting impact. Christopher Boone is an unsolved mystery" [*The New York Times Book Review*, 6/15/03, p. 5]. Is this an accurate assessment? If so, why?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Haddon is a writer and illustrator of numerous award-winning children's books and television screenplays. As a young man, Haddon worked with adults and children with a variety of physical disabilities and learning difficulties. He teaches creative writing for the Arvon Foundation. He lives in Oxford, England

AWARDS

WINNER - YALSA Best Books for Young Adults

WINNER 2003 - Whitbread Book of the Year

WINNER - Booklist Editor's Choice for Young Adults

WINNER - School Library Journal Adult Books for Young Adults

WINNER - ALA Best Books for Young Adults

WINNER - New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age

WINNER - New Jersey Garden State Teen Book Award

WINNER 2004 - Commonwealth Writers' Prize of Europe and South Asia

Author interview

What research did you do into Autism and Behavioural problems before writing this novel, is Christopher's character based on anyone in particular?

After leaving university I spent several years working with adults and children who had a variety of physical and mental handicaps (as they were then known). Ever since that time I've been interested in the subject of disability and mental illness. As a result, hardly a week goes by without me reading an newspaper article or watching a television documentary about schizophrenia or manic depression or Tourette's... And hardly a month goes by without me meeting yet another person who is the parent or grandparent of someone who has been diagnosed as having Asperger's. I also know a number of adults (men, mostly) who would almost certainly be diagnosed with the syndrome if they had been born twenty, thirty, forty years later. And that was the extent of my 'research'. I deliberately didn't consult fat tomes on Asperger's or visit special schools when I was working on the book because I wanted Christopher to work as a human being and not as a clinical case study.

The book has been published for adults and children simultaneously; did you set out to write a book which would appeal to such a wide age range?

No. I wrote it to entertain myself (which is, I think, the motivation behind any half-decent novel) in the hope that there would be people out there who shared my interests and obsessions. So the much-vaunted 'crossover appeal' came as a very pleasant surprise.

Have you received any positive feedback from people with Aspergers Syndrome/ Autism, their families, or people who work with them?

To be scrupulously honest... the book had one very bad review from a young man with Asperger's who thought the book was bad, mainly because Christopher wasn't like him or like any other people he knew with Asperger's. But the review missed the point, I think. People with Asperger's are as diverse a group as Belgians or trumpet players or train drivers. There is no typical or representative person with Asperger's. And to try and create one would have produced a stereotype.

On the other hand I've been genuinely moved and completely taken by surprise by the number of parents and grandparents of young people with Asperger's who have written to tell me that the book rings completely true for them.

I have been even more surprised to receive several invitations to address academic conferences on Asperger's and Autism. Which misses the point in a different way, I think. If Christopher seems real it's because he's well-written not because I'm an expert in the area. We live in an age obsessed with documentaries, with biographies, with investigative journalism. We often forget that you can have all the facts but be no nearer the truth. And this is what novels are good at. A novel can put you inside another person's head and give you an understanding of their life you could only get by moving into their house for six months.

How did you come up with such an original idea for a novel?

It happened piece by piece and without any deliberate seeking after originality or quirkiness. I began with the image of the dog stabbed with the fork simply because I was searching for a vivid and gripping way of starting a novel. I then realised that if you described it in a flat, emotionless, neutral way it was also (with apologies to all dog lovers) very funny. So I had the voice. Only after using that voice for a few pages did I work out who it belonged to. Having done that the difficult thing was to work out a believable way for Christopher to construct a novel given that he is utterly unaware of the reader's emotional responses to what he is writing. Having Christopher simply copy his hero, Sherlock Holmes, by borrowing the format of the murder mystery was the solution to this problem. Finally, because I genuinely believed that very few people would want to read a novel about a teenage boy with a disability living in Swindon with his dad, I arranged the whole plot round the central turning point (where we discover who killed Wellington and what really happened to Christopher's mother) to make it as entertaining as possible, hopefully dragging the reader up to a highest point right in the middle, like a roller coaster, then speeding them down towards the conclusion.

*This Guide was developed by Random House