

# **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time**

## **By Mark Haddon**

### **Study Guide Questions (Part II)**

1. 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? Can you support your claim that he can or cannot understand and experience love?
2. One of the unusual aspects of the novel is the inclusion of many maps, puzzles, signs and diagrams. Find specific examples about the effectiveness of these charts and diagrams in helping the reader see Christopher's point of view. Do you think you can accurately understand how Christopher thinks based on these?
3. According to neurologist Oliver Sacks, Hans Asperger noted 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" [from *An Anthropologist on Mars* 252–53]. Given his gifts, does Christopher's future look promising? Will he achieve an independent, working life?
4. What is the effect of reading the letters Christopher's mother wrote to him and her attempt at justification for her leaving? Does Christopher understand [106–10]? Does he have strong feelings about the loss of his mother? What are his mother's feelings when she discovers that Christopher never got those letters (193).
5. In literature and cultural texts, many characters that at first appear simplistic ultimately prove extraordinarily insightful. William Shakespeare's Fool in *King Lear* is such an example. Perhaps the child in *The Sixth Sense* is another. Is Christopher such a "wise fool" character? Why or why not?
6. Christopher's father lies about the dog, the neighbour, the mother's absence as a way of managing his relationship with Christopher, and Christopher's mother ran away, in part because she could not cope and was involved with another man. Do you find one parent more problematic or less sympathetic than the other or do you find both of them equally sympathetic or not sympathetic?
7. The mystery is, in part, who killed the dog, but that mystery does not occupy the reader for long. Explain or compare the levels of mysteries in this novel, such as the killer of Wellington, the true story of the mother's absence, the outcome of Christopher's dream to get a degree in maths, marry, and live independently, and perhaps others (45).
8. Much of this novel is about what is or is not appropriate to a novel. What elements in this text challenge your ideas of a novel, and what do those elements add to or detract from your enjoyment of the text?
9. Try to identify at what point you knew who killed the dog, and at what point you knew that the mystery of Christopher's mother was. Then consider if there are other ways we read the events and conversations that differ from Christopher's recording and reading. This difference between what the

central character knows, and what the readers know, is sometimes called subtext. Why is subtext critical in this novel?

10. Is Christopher a hero, who is called on a quest or a mystery and through a process that is horrific and difficult, emerges more capable, self aware, and willing to tackle the great problems of life?