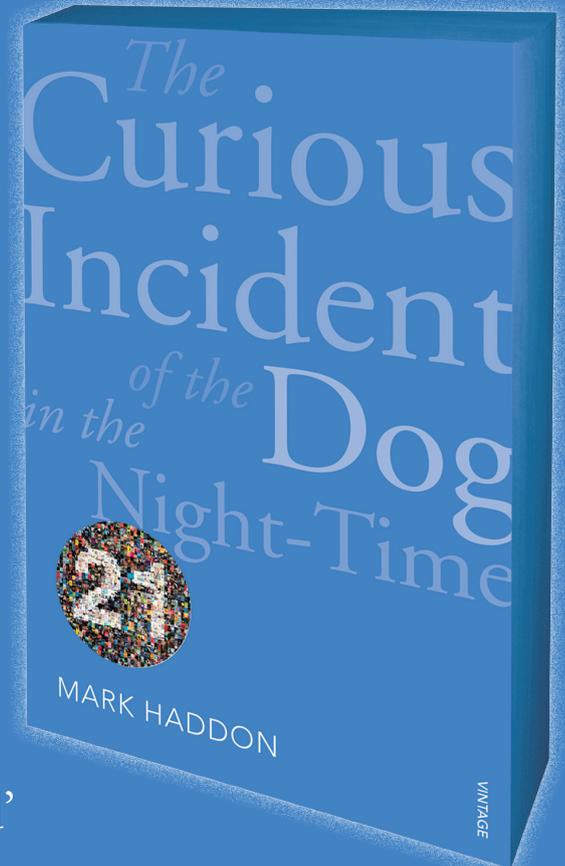


The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

by MARK HADDON

SYNOPSIS

A murder mystery novel like no other. The detective is Christopher Boone. Christopher is fifteen and has Asperger's Syndrome. He knows a great deal about maths and very little about human beings. He loves lists, patterns and the truth. He hates the colours yellow and brown and being touched. He has never gone further than the end of the road on his own, but when he finds a neighbour's dog murdered he begins a terrifying journey which will turn his whole world upside down.



‘Outstanding... A stunningly good read’
Independent

STARTING POINTS FOR YOUR DISCUSSION

Christopher Boone is the most idiosyncratic narrator in modern fiction. Do you agree?

Is the novel primarily about Christopher or about his parents?

Would you agree that Haddon's use of Asperger's syndrome in this novel engenders sympathy and understanding of the condition?

Does this novel bridge the gap between literature for adults and children?

Would you agree that the novel is primarily about the pursuit of happiness through the resolution of familial conflict and tension?

Is *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* a comedy? Do we laugh with Christopher, or do we laugh at him? Christopher explains that he doesn't understand humour; does this add to or detract from the book's comedic value?

Would you agree that the power of this novel is contained in the narrative voice of Christopher Boone? To what do you attribute the originality of Christopher's voice; his age, his advanced logical intelligence, his experience of Asperger's syndrome or his reactions to the upheavals in his life? Can you question the reliability of Christopher's narrative? In what ways does Haddon use Christopher's voice as a conduit for wider themes of modern life?

Christopher has achieved many things by the close of the novel, not least his A-level maths qualification and the resolution of the mysteries surrounding his home life. How are ambition and achievement portrayed in this novel, and how is success measured? In terms of academic and personal achievement, is it at all relevant that Christopher has Asperger's syndrome?

Would you agree that hidden truths are the crux of the Boone family breakdown? Several actions are taken by Ed Boone to deceive Christopher – is this deception justified by his son's medical condition? How are the parental roles of Ed and Judy defined by their son's condition? The plot unveils some shocking revelations and challenges the readers' sympathies with each parent; who do you side with and why? Is it possible for the Boone family to achieve resolution of their problems?

Is this novel fundamentally concerned with how love is communicated? Consider the ways Christopher's parents express their love for their son and how it is reciprocated. Do you think Christopher is capable of understanding loving relationships? Would you agree that Haddon explores the difficulties in expressing love, above and beyond the barriers of Christopher's Asperger's syndrome?

Christopher celebrates logical methods to control and organise his life. How crucial is this concept in understanding Christopher's personality? Do you identify with the idea of using order and organisation to control life's uncertainties? Does Christopher's reliance on fact preclude him from using his imagination? Are Christopher's intuitive qualities masked by his logical way of expressing his dreams or desires?

Christopher uses equations to explain mathematical problems and to illustrate his logical point of view. As the novel progresses some of Christopher's equations become less focused on explaining mathematical games and more illustrative of his need to make mathematical rules apply to his personal problems. What is your response to this? At the close of the novel Christopher's parents have had to equate their roles as parents with their individual needs - is there a larger issue explored in this novel of how decisions are made?

Christopher's hero, and model for his investigation and adventure, is Sherlock Holmes. The title of the novel and Christopher's mission suggest that this is a murder mystery novel, but in what ways would you consider it to fit, or deviate from, the murder mystery genre? What is the appeal of Sherlock Holmes as a fictional detective? How is the plot enhanced by the fact that Christopher makes important discoveries simultaneously with the reader?

Christopher's idiosyncratic character is established on every page, in ways other than the main text of the novel. For example, the chapters follow the prime-number sequence; the book is full of illustrations; the novel closes with an appendix. Do these additions enhance your reading of the novel? Does the originality of the novel depend upon these additions?

RECEPTION AND REVIEWS

'Mark Haddon's portrayal of an emotionally dissociated mind is a superb achievement. He is a wise and bleakly funny writer with rare gifts of empathy' Ian McEwan

'Exceptional by any standards. Both funny and deeply moving' *Sunday Telegraph*

'To get an idea of what *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is like, think of *The Sound and the Fury* crossed with *The Catcher in the Rye* and one of Oliver Sacks's real-life stories' *New York Times*

'A beautifully written book. Haddon is to be congratulated for imagining a new kind of hero, for the humbling instruction this warm and often funny novel offers and for showing that the best lives are lived where difference is cherished' *Daily Telegraph*

'Superbly realised. A funny as well as a sad book. Brilliant' *Guardian*

'Outstanding. Heartening as well as richly entertaining. A stunningly good read' *Independent*

BIOGRAPHY

Mark Haddon was born in Northampton in 1962. He studied English at Oxford University and, some years later, took an MSc in English Literature at Edinburgh University. Following his education Haddon worked for Mencap and other voluntary-sector organisations, looking after children and adults with mental and physical disabilities. At this time he also worked as an illustrator and became a cartoonist for the *New Statesman* and, among other publications, his work has featured in the *Spectator*, *Private Eye*, the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Guardian*. For the last decade Haddon has been involved with various television projects and has won two BAFTAs and a Royal Television Society Best Children's Drama award for *Micrasoap*, which he created and wrote. He also wrote a BBC screenplay adaptation of Raymond Briggs's *Fungus and the Bogeyman*.

From the publication of his first children's book, *Gilbert Gobstopper*, published in 1987 by Hamish Hamilton, Haddon has gone on to write and illustrate numerous children's books, including the popular Agent Z series, one of which was dramatised for BBC1 in 1996. In 1994 Haddon was shortlisted for the Smarties Prize for *The Real Porky Philips*. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* was published simultaneously as a children's book by David Fickling and as an adult novel by Jonathan Cape in 2003. Widely acclaimed, it became an instant best-seller and won the Whitbread Book of the Year 2004, the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize and the Booktrust Teenage Fiction Award. Film rights have been bought by Warner Brothers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time
A Spot of Bother



SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The Fire-Eaters by David Almond
The Complete Sherlock Holmes by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
Vernon God Little by DBC Pierre
Northern Lights by Philip Pullman
Pobby and Dingan by Ben Rice
Take a Good Look by Jacqueline Wilson

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