

Book Presentation by Katherine Eleogo

is a Young Adult Literature writer whose works are most recognized for introducing difficult and complex topics to children. Growing up in a military family, Lowry has lived in Hawaii, New York, and Tokyo, ultimately growing up in her mother’s hometown of Carlisle, Pennsylvania when her father deployed for World War II. At nineteen, she married young to a Naval officer and had four children: 2 sons and 2 daughters. Lowry attended Brown University in 1954. Years after birthing her four children, she returned to college, received her degree from the University of Maine and began writing professionally after graduate school.

**Lois Lowry**

Lowry is the receiver of many renowned awards. In 1994, she received the Newbery Medal for popular YA Literature novel, *The Giver*, despite the controversial reputation it developed since publication. *The Giver* ranked number 11 on the American Library Association’s list of the “Most Challenged Books of the 1990s,” but still continues to be a staple for American Literature curriculum. Lowry has also received the 1987 and 1993 Boston Globe-Horn Book Awards as well as many others. Lowry’s personal website provides a full list of awards she has been given throughout her career as well as a blog where she provides readers with her life updates: <http://www.loislowry.com/>

Currently, Lowry resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts where she lives alone, but is kept company by her two furry friends, Alfie, a Tibetan terrier, and a funny little cat named Lulu.

**Book Summary:**

Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* is about a young boy named Jonas living in a seemingly utopian, futuristic society who long ago converted to “Sameness.” The purpose of Sameness is to live in a world without any pain or conflict by eliminating everything from existence that encourages individualism such as freedom of choice, memories, emotions, music and books. In this highly controlled community, all memories of the past before Sameness have been completely eradicated from society and is all weighted by one sole placeholder named “The Receiver,” a position deemed with great honor given the amount of burden the Receiver collects from all of history’s memories. However, when Jonas is selected to be the new Receiver, he struggles with concepts of emotion and human suffering, and realizes the world he once knew and felt safe in is a disparagingly bleak portrayal of life.

**Quotes of Significance:**

**1. “Pedaling rapidly down the path, Jonas felt oddly proud to have joined those who took pills. For a moment, though, he remembered the dream again, the dream had felt pleasurable. Though the feelings were confused, he thought that he had liked the feelings that his mother had called Stirrings. He remembered that upon waking, he had wanted to feel the Stirrings again...But the feelings had disappeared. The Stirrings were gone” (36).**

Stirrings, the novel’s equivalent of a young boy’s first “wet dream,” are Jonas’ first true, uninterrupted and uncontrolled experience with emotion, however, he is forced to suppress these new feelings by taking a pill every single day for the rest of his life. This scene is very significant because while Stirrings are seen as a minor transgression in the book, the immediate administering of treatment given by his mother reveals how desensitized the community is to the control of Sameness and its invasion in every aspect of the inhabitant’s life. Jonas having his first Stirrings and revealing it to his parents is the book’s first direct indication of how quickly “Sameness” works to censor individual emotion.

**2. “He found that he was often angry, now: irrationally angry at his groupmates, that they were satisfied with their lives which had none of the vibrance his own was taking on. And he was angry at himself, that he could not change that for them” (95).**

After Jonas gradually receives memories of past time from The Giver, his perspective towards his friends and family is disrupted. Jonas finds that he is more often isolated in his thoughts, realizing how the rest of the world is being forced to live in naivety and ignorance. This passage is important to the story because it shows how it becomes difficult for Jonas to assimilate back into the society of Sameness after experiencing memories that make him appreciate life. Jonas’ awakening is frustrating for him as well as he watches his friends and family living passively, blindly following the structure Sameness lays out for them for the rest of their lives.

**3. “He had seen a birthday party, with one child singled out and celebrated on his day; so that now he understood the joy of being an individual, special and unique and proud...Although he had through the memories learned about the pain of loss and loneliness, now he gained, too, an understanding of solitude and its joy” (116-117).**

This passage is significant to a major theme of the story itself, which is the importance of memory. Through the memories that Jonas receives, he ultimately learns how pain and suffering function as a means for one to know true happiness. Jonas is privileged to experience memories because it allows him to feel what it’s like to be an individual. Through the physical pain that Jonas endures when receiving memories of suffering, Lowry highlights how life in itself is full of ups and down, but those roller-coaster of emotions are what makes one appreciate living and free will.

**Teaching the book:**

In the spirit of interacting with others, I would teach parts of this book by breaking the students up into groups and doing collaborative group discussions.

<https://www.outcrytheatre.com/the-giver.html>

***Concentrating on the precision of language in the story:***

Give the students a list of some words or phrases throughout the book that are italicized or notably contemplated on by any character in the story. Discuss the points below for at least two words or phrases:

* + Why do you think the author emphasizes certain words in the story?
  + Knowing that words must be precise in order to eliminate lies, discuss why or why not the word is used appropriately in adhering to the rules for “Sameness.” Write any alternative words you would use in order to make the meaning more precise.

***Why should teens read this book?***

1. Teens should read this book because it challenges societal norms and the ways it enables us to live passively.
2. The story of *The Giver* is grounding, and encourages the reader to stop and think about how important free-will is to our individuality.
3. Lowry exemplifies the significance of creating memories through human interaction and how exploring our emotions is vital to honing in on what it means to truly be alive and feel happiness.

***For what age level is the book most appropriate?***

After reading this book, I believe this book is most appropriate for grades 7-12. The language of the novel makes it easy to comprehend the events in the storyline, however, its thematic complexities make the book more suitable for middle-to-high schoolers. During this time of adolescence, middle to high school readers are in a time of transition where they are free to make their own choices, and experience the importance of what they learn from those same decisions.

**Analyzing Text Complexity:**

**Quantitative:**

Lexile Results:

LEXILE RANGE 810L - 1000L (Grade 6)

Dale-Chall Results:

Raw score 2.5216

Adjusted Score: (3.6365 + 2.5216)

Final Score: 6.2

New Dale-Chall Readability Index:

Grade level: Grades 7 - 8

**Qualitative:**

This book mirrors **Exeter Quality Number 5**: the use of lively, varied and imaginative language. In order to understand “Sameness,” Lowry relies heavily on descriptive language to, first, separate the reader from what they already understand about the world itself. Lowry then emphasizes the dull, colorless setting depicted in the novel when Jonas begins to receive memories from the Giver. When dealing with his experience in the past memory, he is forced to associate what he feels with the event, resulting in the understanding of a certain emotion. When reading about Jonas’ gradual learning of something like colors, the reader, too, is able to slowly imagine colors taking life in those same objects Jonas is.

This book also mirrors **Exeter Quality Number 6**: themes that inform truth about the wider world. In this clear dystopia, the reader can view that happens to society as a whole when humans are stripped of their rights by observation of the people who are living in Sameness, lacking individuality and free-will. Through the “bad” memories that Jonas endures, the reader will also come to terms with the psychological process and suffering that comes from things that occur to people in the world every day, such as war, hunger and death.

**Adolescents in the Search for Meaning:**

***The Giver* would best be categorized with Chapter 8 in *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*: Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth and Parable.**

The book begins by creating this idea that the society of Sameness is a type of utopia -- seemingly perfect, equal and happy. However, through Jonas’ perspective we see that this “perfect world” is a dystopia founded on lies and deceit, and everyone is essentially stripped of human rights used only as a means to an end. Everyone is assigned a job or function by the government and is expected to act in accordance to their designated roles or else they are “released,” a term that is used by the Elders to sugarcoat death. But by experiencing memories of the past, Jonas begins to challenge his culture norms and authority, encouraging the search for individualism.