

Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time Discussion Questions

by Mark Haddon

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Wikipedia)

Mark Haddon is an author, illustrator, and screenwriter who has written fifteen books for children and won two BAFTAs. He lives in Oxford.



In 2003, Haddon won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award and in 2004, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize Overall Best First Book for his novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*.

Characters:

- **Christopher John Francis Boone** – Christopher is the fifteen-year-old narrator of the novel, which he is writing for school. Although it's not mentioned in the book, it's likely that Christopher is on the autism spectrum.
- **Mrs. Alexander** – An elderly resident of Randolph Street. A kind lady, Mrs. Alexander lives a quiet existence filled by caring for her garden and pet dachshund, Ivor. She exhibits grandmotherly tendencies toward Christopher. She reveals to Christopher important information about the affairs of Christopher's father and mother.
- **Ed (Father) Boone** – Christopher's father. Single father of Christopher. Father prepares meals for Christopher and sees to his daily needs. Father owns a heating maintenance and boiler repair business.
- **Judy (Mother) Boone** – Christopher's mother. Christopher believes she died of a heart attack prior to the time when the novel begins. Remembered as a loving but impatient and volatile woman, she was at times overwhelmed by the difficulty of caring for her troubled son.
- **Mrs. Gascoyne** – Christopher's school principal. Although skeptical of Christopher's abilities, she agrees to let Christopher take his A-level math exam.
- **Mr. Jeavons** – A middle-aged man and the psychologist at Christopher's school.
- **Julie** – One of Christopher's teachers.
- **Reverend Peters** – A vicar. He agrees to be the invigilator (proctor) for Christopher's A-level math exam and so plays a key role in determining Christopher's future.
- **Mrs. Eileen Shears** – A neighbor of the Boones's. Eileen Shears is the ex-wife of Roger Shears. Christopher remembers that she would often visit to cook meals and play scrabble in the wake of his mother's death. The murder of her dog, Wellington, provides the major dramatic impetus for the novel.

- **Mr. Roger Shears** – Estranged husband of Eileen Shears. Roger Shears worked at a bank in town, but moved to London a couple of years ago, leaving Mrs. Shears behind. His mysterious nature leads Christopher to investigate him as a possible suspect in Wellington's murder.
- **Rhodri** – Father's co-worker. Rhodri is a smelly and obnoxious man who often prods Christopher with difficult math questions for his own amusement, but he also happens to be one of Father's only social outlets.
- **Siobhan** – Christopher's primary teacher at school. An even-handed mentor, she works to expand Christopher's horizons socially as well as academically. As a result, she is one of the few people whom Christopher trusts.
- **Uncle Terry** – The brother of Ed Boone. He works at a factory in Sunderland.
- **Toby** – Christopher's pet rat. Christopher adores Toby and treats him as a friend and family member. He later becomes Christopher's sole companion on his journey to London.
- **Wellington** – Mrs. Shears's large black poodle. He is found dead in the opening scene of the novel with a pitchfork through his side.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This story is told solely from Christopher's point of view. Did it work? Why or why not?
3. Were you confused by Christopher's odd way of telling a story when you first began the book? Did that frustrate you or draw you into the novel?
4. Although seemingly ill equipped as the narrator of a book, Christopher's character succeeds in eliciting a wide range of emotions in the reader. How do you think Haddon uses his protagonist's voice to touch his audience in such a way?
5. Did you enjoy Christopher's math and science tangents?
6. How do you think this novel bridges the gap between literature for adults and children?
7. Discuss the relationship between father and son in the novel. How well do you think Christopher's father copes with his son's condition?
8. Do you sympathize with his father's actions or do you think they were unforgivable?
9. Talk about Christopher's relationship with his mother. How do the letters he finds help explain her actions?
10. Is it easier for you to forgive his father or his mother? Why do you think it is so much easier for Christopher to trust his mother than his father? How does that reveal the way Christopher's mind is different?
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. The author has used his extensive knowledge of Asperger's syndrome to allow us to see the world through Christopher's eyes, how do you think the story further enhances our attachment to the character and our enjoyment of the book in general?
13. How far do you think the author has used Christopher's alienating condition to expose intricate truths about our modern lives? Do you think this was his intention in Christopher's exposure of his parent's secret?
14. Did the story help you understand people with autism any better?
15. 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?
16. How does *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* 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?
17. Did you know who killed Wellington before it was revealed in the novel?
18. Was the novel believable? Were you satisfied with the ending?
19. What genre would you place this book in?
20. *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* is often assigned as a Summer Reading book for high school students. Why do you think teachers might find this book a valuable teaching resource?
21. Mark Haddon primarily has written books for children, but he does have a few books geared toward adults. Will you read one?

References:

- Colorado Virtual Library – <https://www.coloradovirtuallibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/Curious-Incident-of-the-Dog-in-the-Night-Discussion-Questions-Branded.pdf>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/h/mark-haddon/>
- Lit Lovers -- <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-reading-guides/fiction/238-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-haddon?start=3>
- Novelist – <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=28f30b95-e562-4973-bb55-4138e2097217%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#U=072322&db=neh>
- Reading Group Guides – <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time/guide>
- Sparknotes – <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time/characters/>
- Wikipedia – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Curious_Incident_of_the_Dog_in_the_Night-Time

Mark Haddon's Books

Stand Alone Novels (For Adults)

- The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2002)
 - A Spot of Bother (2006)
 - The Red House (2012)
 - The Porpoise (2019)

If you liked Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, try...

- Pigeon English – Stephen Kelman
- Boo – Neil Smith
- Wasp Factory – Iain Banks
- Picture Me Gone – Meg Rosoff
- Lottery – Patricia Wood

Autism

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autism>)

The autism spectrum is an umbrella term covering a range of neurodevelopmental conditions referred to as autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The word spectrum is defined to cover a wider group of conditions and differences in the type and perceived severity of symptoms.

In general, Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by challenges with social communication and by restricted and repetitive behaviors.

Autism affects information processing in the brain and how nerve cells and their synapses connect and organize. Autistic people may be severely impaired in some respects but average, or even superior, in others. It is distinguished by a characteristic triad of symptoms: impairments in social interaction, impairments in communication, and repetitive behavior.

Globally, autism is estimated to affect 24.8 million people as of 2015. In the 2000s, the number of autistic people worldwide was estimated at 1–2 per 1,000 people. In developed countries, about 1.5% of children are diagnosed with ASD as of 2017. The number of people diagnosed has increased considerably since the 1990s, which may be partly due to increased recognition of the condition. Autism is diagnosed four to five times more often in males than females.