

Teacher Guide

Grades 9–12

# The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

Mark Haddon

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# THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

by  
Mark Haddon

## Teacher Guide

Written by  
Jackie Crnkovich

### Note

The 2004 Vintage Contemporaries edition of the novel, © 2003 by Mark Haddon, was used to prepare this guide. Page references may differ in other editions. Novel ISBN 978-1-4000-3271-6

**Please note:** Parts of this novel deal with sensitive, mature issues and include some profanity. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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## Skills and Strategies

### Critical Thinking

Analysis, compare/contrast, research, critical thinking, evaluation

### Comprehension

Cause/effect, predicting, inference, thematic development, plot development

### Vocabulary

Target words, definitions, applications

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, reports, debate

### Writing

Poetry, essays, prose, descriptions, letters

### Literary Elements

Simile, metaphor, language usage, foreshadowing, characterization, setting, theme, genre, point of view, mood

### Across the Curriculum

Math—computation, formulas; Psychology—savantism, autism; Art—design, advertising; Music—soundtrack, ballad; Drama—movie making, role play; Current Events—magazine, newspaper, and Web articles; Philosophy—Occam’s razor

## Pages 1–34

The narrator, Christopher Boone, describes discovering Mrs. Shears' dog, killed with a garden fork, in her yard. Mrs. Shears, suspicious that Christopher killed the dog, calls the police. While being questioned, Christopher strikes the policeman and is consequently taken into the police station, where his father comes to claim him. Christopher decides he is going to solve the mystery of who killed the dog, although his father objects. Through this narrative, the reader is introduced to some of the idiosyncrasies of Christopher's mind, as well as details about his school and his mother's death.

### Vocabulary

dementia  
slander  
apocryphal  
snooker  
digression  
apocryphal  
embolism  
rehearsing  
singularity

### Discussion Questions

- List the manifestations of Christopher's condition. How might his condition affect his interaction with others? (*inability to read human emotions, dislikes being touched, doesn't like to look people in the face when talking, dislikes shouting or loud noises, difficulty empathizing, inability to process a great quantity of information/stimuli at once, doesn't understand jokes, metaphors, or inexact directions, cannot tell lies; Answers will vary, but it may be difficult to interact with Christopher since much of human communication involves reading between the lines and surmising people's unspoken meanings and intentions. Students can probably relate examples from e-mail or text messaging where their intended meaning is lost. It also would be hard to be affectionate to Christopher since he dislikes being touched.*)
- Christopher says, "This will not be a funny book." Why is the book often quite humorous. What is the source of humor in the book? Do you think the reader is laughing at Christopher? (*Christopher doesn't intend to be funny, but often his literal approach and behavior to people and events in a non-literal world creates humorous situations. Furthermore, his statements catch people off guard. Examples include his enjoyment of the police station and his for a right questions about the death of Wellington. Answers will vary, but readers may find they are not laughing at Christopher as much as the reactions of those around him and his logical observations of a chaotic world.*)
- Discuss some of the ways Christopher strives to keep order in his life. Why is order so important to him? (*He only reads books with clear meanings; he is attracted to people like police officers with uniforms and clear purposes; he keeps precise time, and above all he needs logic to try to make sense of the world around him. Christopher says that order helps him feel safe. Because his mind processes the world differently, and because he can't easily interpret other situations, he is frequently confused and struggles with countering too many new things that overload his mind. He fights against confusion by trying to control his life as much as he can.*)
- What characteristics or qualities equip Christopher to be a good narrator? Which of Christopher's qualities might hinder his storytelling? (*Often Christopher's penchant for exact detail, his narration is accurate in reporting events. Furthermore, he is incapable of lying. On the other hand, because he has a hard time reading people [ability to discern emotions beyond happy and sad], he often misses rhetorical devices like sarcasm, and he may not always be proficient at analyzing or interpreting events.*)

- Discuss your initial impressions of Christopher's father. What insights do you get from the incident at the police station and later when Father brings Christopher home? *(Answers will vary. Christopher's father appears gruff. He shouts a good deal, both at the police station and when he's telling Christopher to stay out of trouble and mind his own business. At the same time, his first action at the police station is to lovingly touch Christopher's hand [their version of a hug], and he advocates for his son. His concern for Christopher's safety and comfort is obvious.)*
- How does Christopher relate the details of his mother's death? Does it strike you as unusual in any way? *(Christopher seems very dispassionate when relating her death. He completely accepts the fact that he can't visit her in the hospital. In fact, when his father comes to tell him she has died, he focuses on the clinical details of an embolism versus an embolism. Likewise, when talking of her cremation and burial, Christopher relates more about the cremation process than about any feelings he experienced at the time. He does think about her though, imagining her ashes raining down in various places in the world. Answers will vary.)*
- Given what you know about Christopher, do you find it surprising that he doesn't believe in heaven? *(Answers will vary. Christopher maneuvers the world using logic. He knows only what he sees and understands only what is literal. A belief in heaven is at odds with his view of the world. Because heaven is not a place that can be located physically or explained scientifically, the idea of heaven is an alternate state defying Christopher's sense of logic, leading to his disbelief in heaven's existence.)*
- Prediction:** Do you think Christopher will solve the mystery of Weir's death?

### Supplementary Activities

- The term "dialect" can refer to language specific to particular people, community, district, or class. While the British and Americans both speak English, they each use particular phrases. For example, Christopher refers to "maths" while the American English word is "math." As you read, keep a list of British idioms you notice and write next to each the wording that would be used in American English. (Examples: "garden fork" [p. 1] compared to "pitchfork," "maths" [p. 4] compared to "math," "had a go at me" [p. 6] compared to "hit me"; "lose my way" [p. 9] compared to "lose control" or "get lost," "take-away chips" [p. 9] compared to "fast food fries")
- Christopher does not understand metaphors but makes use of similes. Christopher's literal interpretation of language makes the metaphors seem like lies. His mind doesn't process figurative language. Begin a list of similes you notice throughout your reading. Evaluate each simile as a metaphor, and share as a class what effect the difference would have on Christopher. (Examples: **Simile**—"The questions were stacking up on my head like loaves in [a] factory" [p. 7]. **Metaphor**—"The questions were loaves of bread stacking up in a factory"; **Simile**—"It looked as if there were two very small mice hiding in his nostrils"; **Metaphor**—"Two small mice were hiding in his nostrils.")

## Using Dialogue

**Directions:** Choose some dialogue from the book. Fill in the chart to evaluate the purpose of the dialogue and whether or not it is effective in moving along the plot.

Extra Credit—extra bits of dialogue I remember from my outside reading

Who is speaking?

How is the plot advanced with these words?

Dialogue on pages \_\_\_\_\_

What is special about the dialogue?

What does the dialogue tell me about the characters speaking?

## Story Map

**Directions:** Complete the story map below.

<b>Characters</b>	<b>Setting</b>	<b>Conflict(s)</b>
	Date: _____ Place: _____ Other: _____	
main _____ main _____ main _____ minor _____ minor _____	_____ <b>Novel Title</b> _____	
<b>Possible Themes</b> (general statements the book makes about _____)	<b>Point of View</b> _____	<b>Author's Style                  and Tone</b>
	<b>Genre</b> _____	