

The Giver



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LOIS LOWRY

Lois Lowry was born Lois Ann Hammersburg, the second of three children. After moving with her family to New York, Pennsylvania, and Japan, she attended high school in Staten Island, New York and in 1954 began college at Brown. At age 19, Lowry left Brown to marry Donald Lowry, a U.S. Navy officer. After having four children, she eventually completed her B.A. in English at the University of Maine in 1972. During her studies she was introduced to photography, which became a life-long hobby and profession. When an editor at Houghton Mifflin read an article Lowry had written for *Redbook* to accompany some of her photos, she encouraged Lowry to write a children's book, and *A Summer to Die* was published in 1977. Lowry and her husband divorced that same year, and she began to write full-time. She has published numerous books, including her most famous, *The Giver*, in 1993.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Lowry wrote *The Giver* during the period of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, when Serbian forces attempted to rid the country of Muslims. At the same time, a debate was raging in the U.S. over the practice of euthanasia by Dr. Jack Kevorkian. Lowry's novel explores each of these developments in its treatment of outsiders, intolerance, societal perfection, and physician-assisted suicide.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In the genre of the Utopian novel, which gets its name from Sir Thomas More's 1516 book *Utopia*, an author describes an ideal society in order to criticize his own society. In a Dystopian novel, an author imagines the *worst* possible society as a way to criticize their current world. *The Giver* is a dystopian novel that imagines a future community whose citizens have sacrificed free choice, individuality, and true emotion for stability. *The Giver* resembles *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, a satirical novel also about a society in which the citizens have given up their freedom for the guarantee of happiness. The loudspeakers that serve as the voice of authority in the community and the surveillance of citizens by the committee of elders in *The Giver* are reminiscent of Big Brother in George Orwell's *1984*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Giver*

- **When Written:** Early 1990s
- **Where Written:** Maine
- **When Published:** April 16, 1993
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Dystopian novel
- **Setting:** A managed community in a futuristic society. The community is cut off from the outside world, which is referred to as "elsewhere."
- **Climax:** Jonas learns that when his father "releases" newchildren, he actually kills them. Jonas decides to leave the community.
- **Antagonist:** Jonas's community and its system of Sameness
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited, through Jonas's eyes

EXTRA CREDIT

Awards: *The Giver* won the 1994 Newbery Medal, considered the most prestigious award for children's literature.

Banned Book: Although *The Giver* tops countless school reading lists, it has also been banned by some schools, which claim that some of the material, like euthanasia and suicide, is inappropriate for children.

One of Three: Lowry has written two more books set in the world of *The Giver* and including some of the characters from *The Giver*. The three books together are often described as a "loose trilogy." The second book in the series is *Gathering Blue* and was published in 2000. The third, *The Messenger*, was published in 2004.



PLOT SUMMARY

Sometime in the future, an 11-year-old boy named Jonas lives in a seemingly perfect community in which there is little pain and little crime. People are polite. Everyone belongs to a supportive family. But this harmony comes at a price. There is also no choice, and real emotions are nonexistent. Life is dictated by strict rules. A committee of elders matches spouses and assigns them children born from women whose only job is to give birth. The committee names all babies and chooses every person's career. Sex and love are prohibited, being different is shameful, and families are dissolved when the children are grown. Everyone looks similar in skin color and dress. Everything serves a purely practical purpose—to serve the common good of the community and minimize conflict. The old and the sick are "released," which the community believes means sent to live "Elsewhere," outside the community.

During family time, Jonas shares his uneasiness about the upcoming ceremony, where he will be assigned his job. Jonas's father, a Nurturer who cares for newborns, shares his concern over a baby to be named Gabriel who is not growing fast enough. When Jonas's father brings the baby home, Jonas notices that Gabriel has pale **eyes** like him, an unusual trait.

The next day Jonas does required volunteer hours with his friends Asher and Fiona at the House of the Old. A woman named Larissa tells him an old man was recently released in a beautiful ceremony. Jonas asks what happens when someone is released, but no one knows. That night, Jonas has a dream about bathing naked with Fiona. When he tells his parents, his mother says they are natural feelings called Stirrings, and that Jonas must take a pill to stifle them.

A few weeks later, at the annual ceremony, Jonas's friends are assigned jobs that seem to fit them perfectly. But the Chief Elder skips Jonas's name. After everyone else has been assigned, the Elder announces that Jonas has been selected for the great honor of being the next Receiver. She says Jonas has the Capacity to See Beyond, which explains the strange changes happening to his vision.

The next day Jonas meets the current Receiver, who is now an old man. He tells Jonas his job is to transmit the memories he holds, which are all the memories in the world, to Jonas. He tells Jonas to call him The Giver. He then lays his hands on Jonas's back and gives him the memory of sledding in the snow. Jonas realizes there are hundreds of wonderful memories no one in the community has ever experienced.

Over the next year, from The Giver's memories, Jonas learns about color, nature, beauty, pleasure, love, and family. (For Jonas, the Capacity to See Beyond means that he can see in color, while everyone else sees in black and white). Jonas is also given painful memories of loss, loneliness, poverty, injury, war, and death. The Giver explains that the community is founded on the principle of Sameness, which requires the stability of a world without deep emotion or memory. But he adds that the memories give the Receiver the true wisdom needed to guide the committee on their decisions.

Meanwhile, in his efforts to help Gabriel avoid being released, Jonas also secretly learns that he has the power to transmit memories to Gabriel. While asking questions about release, Jonas learns from The Giver that ten years earlier, his previous trainee (later revealed to be his daughter) couldn't bear the pain of being The Receiver and asked for release. All her memories were traumatically released to the community. Later, at Jonas's request, The Giver shows Jonas a release ceremony Jonas's father is performing on an identical twin baby. Jonas realizes with horror that to be "released" means to be killed. He convinces The Giver to create a plan in which Jonas will escape from the community and release all his memories to the community members, to stop them from living such numb and ignorant lives. The Giver will stay behind to help the people

cope with their new memories.

When Jonas learns that Gabriel is to be released the next day, he rushes forward with the plan: he takes Gabriel, crosses the **river**, and flees the community by bicycle. On the road he encounters beautiful things from his memories like rain and birds, but he also encounters hunger and cold. As he is growing weak, and despairs about being able to protect Gabriel, he sees a snow-covered **hill** from his first memory from The Giver. At the top of the hill, they find a sled and sled down, where they hear music at the bottom of the hill and see colored lights in the windows of houses in the distance.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jonas – The protagonist of the novel, Jonas is thoughtful, intelligent, sensitive, and compassionate. He feels confused by some of the rules of the community, although he obeys them, and longs for human touch even before he understands it. Set apart from his friends by his pale eyes and his ability to see color, he is selected to be the next Receiver when he turns 12. When he discovers beauty, pain, love and death under the tutelage of The Giver, he becomes frustrated with the community's ignorance and convinces The Giver to help him change it. In order to become truly wise, Jonas must learn completely selfless love for Gabriel and his community and be willing to sacrifice his own life for the sake of another's.

The Giver – Known as the Receiver until Jonas becomes his trainee, The Giver is a kind, elderly man whose breadth of experience through memory makes him look and seem older than he actually is. Although he lives in luxurious quarters and does not have a very active life, he is weighted down by the memories he carries and is often subjected to crippling pain. He is wise and patient with Jonas, and grows to love him as he loved his previous trainee, Rosemary. His grief and sense of hopelessness after Rosemary's death is later transformed into enthusiasm for Jonas's idea for escape. The Giver demonstrates total selflessness by offering to remain behind in order to help the community cope with the influx of memories. He willingly offers Jonas his most precious memories of love and music, and his selflessness inspires Jonas to risk his own life to save Gabriel.

Gabriel – The small fretful newchild whom Jonas's father takes home with him in order to help him sleep at night. Gabriel has pale eyes like Jonas and The Giver, which Jonas later learns are the color blue. Jonas discovers he is able to transmit memories to Gabriel, which means that, like Jonas, Gabriel is also capable of great emotional depth. Jonas's desire to save Gabriel from being released spurs Jonas's rebellion against the community.

Jonas's Father – A kind, caring man, Jonas's father is a Nurturer who looks after newchildren until they are given to

families. He becomes attached to the babies he cares for and breaks small rules for their sakes, such as learning their names and bringing Gabriel home to look after him better. However, Jonas's father likes the way the community is structured, and because he does not understand what death means, he believes it is right to release children if they are too weak to be given to families. Although he claims not to believe in love, Jonas's father comes close to showing loving emotions to his children. Jonas feels love and affection for his father, which is why he feels betrayed when he discovers that his father is responsible for killing the babies. Jonas's father shows the limitations that the community places on those who might otherwise be fully loving individuals.

Fiona – One of Jonas's friends, who is assigned to be a Caretaker of the Old. Jonas begins taking a pill when he has an erotic dream about Fiona. Jonas later discovers that Fiona's hair is red. Fiona enjoys having Jonas as a friend but does not know how to love him in return.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jonas's Mother – An intelligent, practical woman who takes her role as a mother and her position at the Department of Justice very seriously. She tries hard to reform criminals to prevent their "release" and fulfills all her duties as a mother.

Lily – Jonas's younger sister who turns eight when Jonas turns 12. She loves telling stories and is the first to suggest that Jonas and Gabriel might be related.

Asher – Jonas's fun-loving friend who is assigned the job of Assistant Director of Recreation. Jonas's greatest concern for Asher is that he speaks without thinking and often confuses words, which is a great shortcoming in the community.

Rosemary – The Giver's trainee before Jonas. She asked to be released when she discovered the pain and loneliness of memory. The Giver later reveals that Rosemary was his daughter.

Larissa – The old woman whom Jonas bathes in the House of the Old. She believes that being released is a joyous occasion.

Chief Elder – The elected leader of the community. She knows each child and gives the Assignments at the ceremony.

Committee of Elders – The group of elders that makes decisions for the community, like Matching Spouses, Assignments, and rules. The Giver advises the Committee.

Caleb – A four-year-old boy who drowned in the river. His parents are later given a newchild with the same name.

Roberto – An old man who is released from the House of the Old. After his death, his name is given to a newchild.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



THE INDIVIDUAL VS. SOCIETY

Jonas's community is founded on the idea of Sameness—the elimination of difference in its members. In order to achieve this Sameness, individualism is discouraged, and rules and discipline matter most. Jonas learns from an early age that both breaking rules and being different is considered shameful. By celebrating group birthdays, allowing only one kind of clothing and haircut, assigning spouses, jobs, children and names, and eliminating sexual relations, Jonas's society stifles the things that allow for individual differences. Without mirrors, there can be no vanity or jealousy. Without sex, vanity loses its importance, and competition and conflict are eliminated. In Sameness, no one knows the meaning of loneliness, but no one knows true happiness either.

Young Jonas, however, is different in ways he cannot change. With his pale eyes and ability to see in color, he stands out in his community. While these traits at first make him uncomfortable, they give him the courage to be different in a more powerful way when he decides to escape from the community. When Jonas comes to recognize the value innate in every individual, he is horrified that his community leaders can so casually "release" their members, ending precious human lives.



FREEDOM AND CHOICE

In Jonas's community, no one makes choices. All choices about the community were made in the distant past when Sameness was created, and any additional changes involve painfully slow bureaucratic procedures. Without choice, no one suffers the consequences that come from making wrong choices, but they also don't experience the joys that come with making right ones. By sacrificing the freedom of choice, community members are guaranteed a stable, painless life. Consequently, the people lead pleasant—but robotic—lives.

When Jonas discovers memory, he realizes that choice is essential to human happiness. Choice, he learns, is power. He makes the first real choice in his life when he decides to escape from the community and take Gabriel with him. In making this significant and dangerous choice, he gives a windfall of pleasure and pain to the people he leaves behind, and gives the freedom of choice back to the community.



FEELING AND EMOTION

The people of Jonas's community don't understand genuine emotion or pain, because their lifestyles allow no opportunity to experience it. Birthmothers are not allowed to raise their own children. Sex is forbidden and sexual urges medicated away. Adults are not allowed to choose their own spouses. Identical twins are not both allowed to survive because they would be too close emotionally. Every decision made in the community serves a purely practical purpose and is based on the rules set down at the time of the community's establishment, promoting Sameness and leaving no room for sentimentality.

Jonas is unique in that he longs for human closeness even before he meets The Giver. When he bathes Larissa at the House of the Old, he realizes the beauty of touch and intimacy. When he begins his training as Receiver, he realizes that true emotion is only accessible to those who have memory and experience. He also realizes that one can only experience joy and love if one understands pain and loneliness. As he experiences the breadth and beauty of human emotion, Jonas comes to believe that it is cruel to allow people to continue living in numbness. His ultimate escape from the community is an act of love toward those who do not know how to love him in return. By leaving, Jonas is able to give them feeling.



COMING OF AGE

The annual December ceremony, when the "birthdays" of all children are celebrated simultaneously, is a ritual full of rites of passage. As children grow older, these rites allow them more responsibility; at eight, for example, they are given pockets and stuffed animals are taken away. At Nine, children are given bicycles. At Twelve, children are assigned jobs and adult status is conferred upon them. After Twelve, age is not counted. Yet these rites of passage are purely external, involving the giving of objects or responsibilities. Rites of passage that involve internal development are stifled. For instance, children do not become adults when they become aware of their own sexuality. Instead, they're given a pill to stifle sexual desires. Adulthood is forced upon them at a predetermined time and is associated with the ability to work instead of with the physical, mental, and emotional changes of puberty or life experience.

The Giver is in many ways Jonas's coming-of-age story. Jonas reaches maturity only when he is given memory, and through memory, experience. In this way, Jonas becomes more mature at Twelve than the "adults" of his community. But The Giver also teaches Jonas the wisdom to recognize his own shortcomings. Jonas truly becomes an adult at the end of the novel, when he learns that true maturity comes through selfless love, when one is willing to sacrifice one's own life for another's.



MEMORY

Sometime in the past, Jonas's community decided to give up their memories in order to eliminate the pain and regret that came with them. They were trying to create a totally peaceful and harmonious society without conflict, war, or hate by eliminating emotion entirely. They succeeded: the community is almost perfectly stable and totally safe. Yet Jonas realizes that without memories, a person can't learn from mistakes, celebrate accomplishments, know love or happiness or any other deep emotion, or grow as an individual.

In *The Giver*, memory doesn't function as it does in the real world. Certain people have the power to transmit memories to others, and this ability is connected to the trait of blue eyes, which Jonas, The Giver, and Gabriel all share. Memory is also not just a mental exercise. Instead, it's an actual experience: Jonas literally feels the cold when he remembers snow. Finally, when a keeper of memories, called a Receiver, dies or leaves the community, all of his or her memories are released to the community. By bestowing upon memory these magical properties, Lowry emphasizes memory's preciousness and its power to influence, guide, and enrich life.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



BLUE EYES

Jonas, The Giver, and Gabriel all stand out in the community because of their blue eyes. This difference shows the impossibility of the community's efforts to control nature completely, no matter how hard it tries. In addition, the fact that only the characters with blue eyes are able to see color (the rest of the community sees only in black and white) and to receive memories and feel true, deep emotion suggests that it is only those who *are* different who are able to notice the differences in others.



THE SNOW-COVERED HILL

The hill, for Jonas, represents a gateway to Elsewhere. Riding a red sled down the hill is his first memory and his first awareness of the color red. It signifies his realization that outside his community there is a world not dominated by Sameness. Later, Jonas dreams of the hill and feels the need "to reach the something that waited in the distance," something "good...welcoming... [and] significant." Yet, through memories of the hill, Jonas learns the precarious relationship between joy and pain; without one, the other cannot exist. Jonas's first experience with real pain is falling off

the same sled that thrilled him only days earlier.



THE RIVER

The river forms a border of the community before continuing on to Elsewhere. As a border, the river comes to symbolize escape—crossing the river means leaving the community. Because it takes the life of the four-year-old Caleb, the river also symbolizes the danger inherent in that escape.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Houghton Mifflin edition of *The Giver* published in 2012.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ After Twelve, age isn't important. Most of us even lose track of how old we are as time passes.

Related Characters: Jonas's Father (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Jonas is decidedly apprehensive about the Ceremony of Twelves, during which time he will be given the Assignment that determines what job he will work in for the rest of his life. Jonas discusses the Ceremony with his parents, and in this quote, Jonas's Father notes that after age Twelve, there are no more age ceremonies, as Twelve marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. After this time, adults often forget what age they are, suggesting an absence of birthdays within the Community.

As age is something that differentiates people, and a birthday is a day in which one is singled out, age is all but erased after twelve in this society that values sameness. After this time, growth is not as dramatic as it is during childhood (a time in which it would be difficult to ignore the fact that children are at varying stages of development due to age) and secondary sex characteristics are ignored by Community members thanks to a pill that suppresses sexual arousal. When Community members are assigned their jobs, very little about their lives changes from year to year, beyond being assigned a Mate and children, so it becomes difficult to differentiate the personal passage of time. This quote shows that Sameness seeps not just into the rules and design of Community life, but even into personal thoughts and perception of one's life. Life becomes about

being a productive member of the community, not an individual with a unique existence—and not even a being experiencing time as a marked phenomenon.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ The apple had *changed*. Just for an instant. It had changed in mid-air.

Related Characters: Jonas

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Jonas notes that sometimes, the Speaker will announce general reminders of the rules to anonymously shame someone who has committed an infraction. Jonas remembers the one time he has been the target of such shame: when he took home an apple from snack time at school. In this quote, Jonas recalls that he had been drawn to the apple because he noticed something strange about it during a game of catch with Asher. Though everything in the Community is, it's suggested, in black-and-white, something about the apple seemed to become distinctive in mid-air. To further inspect the apple, and to see if the change happened again, Jonas brought it home with him.

This quote and anecdote mark the first time that Jonas expresses the qualities of a Receiver. The Giver later explains that the change he saw was a brief flash of red, the true color of the apple before the Sameness removed it. Since virtually nothing about life in the Community is a surprise or unexpected, Jonas is shocked when he sees something happen to the apple that he has never seen before. He does not tell anyone about the change because differences are considered rude, and even dangerous, to discuss or point out. Thus, even though the flash of color Jonas sees in the apple happened for just an instant, it sticks with him as one of the only surprises and unexpected things that has occurred for as long as he can remember.

☞ No one mentioned such things; it was not a rule, but was considered rude to call attention to things that were unsettling or different about individuals.

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Lily teases Jonas for the light color of his eyes, which are unusual in a Community where most individuals have dark eyes. Jonas forgives Lily for this social transgression since she is young, but as this quote notes, pointing out another's differences is considered very rude in the Community.

Characters often refer to some ambiguous past event when "the Sameness" was imposed upon the Community. This "Sameness" ensured that differences were completely erased from human existence in the Community to the best of its collective ability. Though this complete (or at least massive effort) at unification reduced conflicts between people, uniqueness and diversity were sacrificed in the process. The taboo on referring to differences is not a rule, as Jonas notes here, but it is a heavily imposed social norm. This suggests that whatever conflict occurred before the Sameness was largely fueled by inherent differences between people, ones that are now suppressed to preserve the peace.

Besides strife, however, differences can also create bonds in people—they rejoice in their similarities, or celebrate each other's differences, creating diverse networks. The Sameness discourages these bonds between people by constantly removing any possibility for continued association between people—by assigning children jobs by age 12, by dispersing family units after the children are grown up, by separating mates into "Childless Adults" and finally into the House of Old before "release." Associations by their very nature thus exclude others, and potentially cause strife. Thus, individuals are essentially kept emotionally isolated and sterile beyond the artificial rules of sharing feelings and dreams. This ensures that the peace is kept, though it removes much of the humanity that comes with intense feelings between people and understanding each other's differences.

●● He just bowed to all of us and then walked, like they all do, through the special door in the Releasing Room. But you should have seen his look. Pure happiness, I'd call it.

Related Characters: Larissa (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Jonas goes to his regular volunteer hours at the House of Old, where he helps bathe an old woman named Larissa. She tells him about the events of her day, in which she and the rest of the House celebrated the release of a man named Roberto.

In this quote, Larissa recalls the joy that Roberto seemed to exude when he was led away for release. "Release" is a nebulous word for systematic removal from the Community to "Elsewhere." The word is frequently used by the book's characters, most of whom seem to be ignorant to the fact that it is really Community-imposed killing of those deemed unfit for society. The look of joy on Roberto's face likely comes from the fact that he does not know he is being led away to die—perhaps he is happy because he has been celebrated for his individuality, likely for only the second time in his life (the first comes during the Assignment of Twelves, when children received jobs tailored to their abilities and personalities). As the Sameness removes all differences and even birthdays, people are rarely celebrated for their unique lives—that is, until they are about to be "released" to make room for a new, more productive member of society (a newchild is soon named Roberto). This celebration of life right before death makes Community members actually excited for their own release dates, and reduces any discomfort surrounding the notion of being led "Elsewhere" or inquiry into what this morbid practice might be. Release therefore functions as both a form of population and social control.

Chapter 6 Quotes

●● If you don't fit in, you can apply for Elsewhere and be released. My mother says that once, about ten years ago, someone applied and was gone the next day.

Related Characters: Asher (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Asher and Jonas discuss how nervous they are about their upcoming Ceremony of Twelves, during which time they will receive their work Assignments. Asher jokes that if he receives an Assignment he hates, such as Sanitation, he'll jump in the river and swim to "Elsewhere," like someone was rumored to have done before. In this quote, Asher notes that if a person does not feel as if they fit into the

Community, they can apply for release--like someone did ten years ago.

This quote is illuminating to the fact that neither Jonas nor Asher has any idea what "Elsewhere" is. They assume that it is another Community where people are placed when they are no longer suited to their own. It is also evidence of just how institutionalized the Sameness is in the Community, to the point that its governing bodies agree to release individuals who cannot conform to their rules, rather than the individuals simply leaving or escaping. Though much of the Community's safety and harmony appear to be the hallmarks of an idyllic society, the ritualized killing of nonconforming individuals reveal it to ultimately be a dystopia, likely borne out of some cataclysmic past event. The rules of the Community are so rigid that once a person has been assigned a job, it is very unlikely that it will ever change--the only option is personal removal from the Community. Unity is so heavily valued that outliers even know that they do not fit in, and essentially request suicide rather than live in discord until their government-sanctioned release during old age.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ I have a great honor. So will you. But you will find that that is not the same as power.

Related Characters: The Giver (speaker), Jonas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

During their first training session, the Giver gives Jonas a memory of sliding down a snow-covered hill, something that does not exist in the Community. Jonas wishes aloud that the Giver could bring back such a delightful activity using his power. In this quote, the Giver points out that while his Assignment brings great honor--as does Jonas's--this is very different than having power.

The Receiver's job is to contain all the memories--good and bad--that exist from before the Sameness. This is to ensure that they are not present in the Community for anyone else to access. This functions as a form of control for the governing Elders, who impose the Sameness without any discord due to the fact that no one has any memory or concept of what came before their present structured lives. This completely removes any possibility of hindsight for anyone but the Receiver, who is occasionally called upon to

advise the Elders. Though he can draw on years and years of memories, he is rarely listened to, leaving him with an unbearable amount of wisdom that he alone knows how to use, and no one else can (or wants to) understand.

☝ Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness. Before my time, before the previous time, back and back and back. We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with difference. We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others. >

Related Characters: The Giver (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

When Jonas tells the Giver about seeing a change in Fiona's hair, similar to what he saw in the apple, the Giver tells Jonas that he is beginning to see the color red. He explains that before the Sameness, everything was different colors. The fact that Jonas can see "beyond" the colorlessness of the Sameness proves his worth as a Receiver. The Community, explains the Giver, gave up certain choices in order to impose harmony and peace.

The lack of differences that the Sameness imposed upon the Community extends not just to visual blandness, but to emotional sterility as well. By sacrificing almost everything that makes things and people different--the seasons, colors, bonds, biological children, etc.--the Community is largely devoid of strong emotions and feelings. There is rarely such a thing as having a strong affinity or aversion to someone or something since everything is more or less the same, or is at least an understood event or rule that is necessary for the good of the Community.

The Giver and Jonas alone understand the importance of having choice in one's life--it leads to a personal identity created by a series of unique choices that one makes, and leads to a vast amount of self-discovery in the process. A complete lack of choices makes life utterly predictable and indistinguishable from the life of virtually any other member of the Community, give or take a few instances. Despite this overwhelming revelation, the burden of wisdom does not immediately translate into acquisition of power, and the Giver has been unable to bring about any real change to the Community.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☞ [Jonas] watched them hack the tusks from a motionless elephant on the ground and then haul them away, spattered with blood. He felt himself overwhelmed with a new perception of the color he knew as red.

Related Characters: Jonas

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

While many of the memories that the Giver bequeaths to Jonas are pleasurable, such as ones of sailing and sledding, many of them bring pain and suffering. During one training session, the Giver gives Jonas the memory of an elephant being killed by poachers for the ivory of its tusks. Though Jonas has thus far associated colors with pleasurable memories, seeing the blood of the elephant gives him the sinking realization that colors can represent just as much pain as they do pleasure.

In the Community, a total lack of colors and differentiation maintains the peace and ensures that no one is uncomfortable or discontent with their circumstances. But the consequence of such a stable existence is a total lack of strong emotions: despair and passion are things that only the Giver and Jonas can understand through memories of war and of love. Without understanding what true pain is, one cannot understand what true happiness is, and vice versa. A total lack of comparison to anything beyond what they currently experience results in a very tepid existence for every member of the Community, from birth to release. While it is true that the rules of the Community reduce senseless suffering (like that which Jonas here witnesses), they also completely deprive people of the joyous emotions that can balance out, or even help overcome, the pain of life. Jonas and the Giver alone understand what they are missing out on in life in the Community, and it is literally their job to bear the burden of humanity's collective memories in order to preserve perfect order in their rigid society.

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Jonas

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

Jonas asks the Giver about what the Chief Elder said when she assigned him the role of Receiver: that ten years ago, another Twelve had earned the position, which ended in disaster. The Giver consents to telling him the story of the previous Receiver who requested for release, resulting in all of her memories being free for the Community to access. The fallout was a disaster, and no Receiver had been chosen until Jonas, ten years later.

Jonas realizes that his life has become much richer and more nuanced since he began to receive memories from the Giver. His ability to see colors makes life more exciting and vibrant, and his new understanding of pain and joy make him appreciate and understand what the people in his life, such as Asher, Fiona, and his parents mean to him. However, the story of the panic that ensued when the memories were released into the Community proves that the sudden influx of such powerful feelings and ideas was too much for citizens of the Community to handle, due to their previously sterile existence. Jonas badly wants to share these emotions and memories with the people he comes to realize that he "loves," an emotion he has never been taught to express before, but realizes that he has no power to share these feelings with Community members. They are completely satisfied with their current existences, he now understands, because they have no comprehension of what any other life could ever look or feel like.

☞ Sometimes I wish they'd ask for my wisdom more often—there are so many things I could tell them; things I wish they would change. But they don't want change. Life here is so orderly, so predictable—so painless. It's what they've chosen.

Related Characters: The Giver (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

The Giver warns Jonas that the secrecy of his position means that he cannot tell anyone, even a future spouse, about the nature of his memories. No one in the Community, not even Instructors, know as much as he does.

Yet, the Elders rarely come to him for advice on issues such as changing the rules, though the Giver knows he has much wisdom to impart upon life in the Community.

In this quote, the Giver reasons that the Elders don't want to hear his suggestions because they like life the way it is: orderly, neat, and utterly devoid of pain. The Community functions on the philosophy that a lack of pain means the presence of happiness; the Giver and Jonas know this is utterly untrue. True humanity results from both suffering and joy, and the two emotions are simply a fact of life. By depriving Community members of physical and mental strife, happiness doesn't automatically fill the void: they are also deprived of understanding what real love, individuality, friendship, and passion are as human emotions. Mistakes are also an intrinsic part of the human experience, and the rigid rules of the Community remove all choice from one's personal life to the point that everything--from one's parents, to one's spouse, to one's death date--is determined by a counsel of Elders. To remove choice is to completely remove individuality, rendering each member another flesh-and-bone unit of a well-oiled machine. Yet it does function, and the counsel is not interested in hearing the Giver's suggestions as to how to make it more vibrant and closer to the natural human experience.

●● He wondered what lay in the far distance where he had never gone. The land didn't end beyond those nearby community. Were there hills Elsewhere? Were there vast wind-torn areas like the place he had seen in memory, the place where the elephants died?

Related Characters: Jonas

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

After speaking with the Giver about what happened when the previous Receiver was released, Jonas begins to wonder about what else he has been deprived of as a member of the Community. Though he has never wondered about what existed beyond or before the Community prior to his training, he now starts to long to experience and know more about the world. At this time in the novel, Jonas does not yet know that "Elsewhere" is a euphemism for death, one that Community members use to refer to the place where

people go after release. Jonas and his friends assume it is another Community, one different than their own. Jonas begins to long to experience for himself the feelings--both pleasure and pain--that he sees in the Giver's memories, because they are so much more vibrant and rich than anything he has experienced inside the Community.

It is for this very reason that the Community has a Receiver of Memories. If everyone had access to what life was like before the Sameness, when humans still had choice and passion and love, but also suffering and fear, then it would be much more difficult to impose utter structure and control over everyone inside. Jonas's Assignment is therefore a crucial part of the Elders control of society, and he can wield dangerous power to the sanctity of its rules if his memories are exposed to the public.

Chapter 14 Quotes

●● The sled hit a bump in the hill and Jonas was jarred loose and thrown violently into the air. He fell with his leg twisted under him, and could hear the crack of bone. His face scraped along jagged edges of ice... In his agony he perceived the world "fire" and felt flames licking at the torn bone and flesh.

Related Characters: Jonas

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

When Jonas arrives at the Giver's room for training each day after school, he often finds the old man in excruciating pain. The Giver usually shoos him away, and tells him to come back tomorrow. One day, Jonas insists that the Giver give him some of the painful memories so that he can relieve the burden. In this quote, the Giver gives Jonas another memory of sledding on a hill, though with an unhappy ending in the form of an excruciatingly painful broken leg.

Since the major goal of life in the Community is to eradicate all suffering by reducing differences and strong emotions with a highly regimented way of life, Jonas has never known true mental or physical pain. He can recall once or twice when he crushed a finger or scraped a knee, but these minor aches and pains were always immediately relieved with a pill that acts as a pain panacea. Jonas has never known an unexpected pain that was not quickly cured. It is this first

painful memory that shows Jonas why humankind, long ago, worked to create the Sameness that governs his present Community. Though Jonas still wishes his life were made richer by many of the things he has thus experienced in his training, he understands that the reasons behind the Sameness are more complicated than he realized. It also helps him to empathize with the pain of the Giver, a strong emotion predicated on care and understanding of another human being that sterile life in the Community suppresses. By beginning to comprehend what it truly means to experience pain, Jonas is also able to better understand the gravity and importance of pleasurable feelings like friendship or love as counterbalances in the human experience--or at least the human experience as it existed before the Sameness.

●● He was not aware of giving the memory; but suddenly he realized that it was becoming dimmer, that it was sliding through his hand into the being of the newchild.

Related Characters: Jonas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

Since Gabriel sleeps most soundly in Jonas's room at night, Jonas's father consents to letting the baby sleep there when he comes home with him at the end of each day. One night, while trying to calm the crying newchild, Jonas absentmindedly thinks of a happy memory the Giver gave him, and realizes that he feels it slip away as the child's cries die down. Jonas then realizes that, like himself, Gabe is a receiver, and that Jonas has just passed on his first memory.

Jonas and Gabe both have light eyes, as does the Giver, whereas most members of the Community have dark eyes. This is one noticeable physical difference that separates them from the rest of society and suggests that they are more permeable to seeing "beyond" than the rest of the members of the Community. Jonas often feels very alone after his training sessions, since he cannot discuss the memories or the nature of his work with anyone other than the Giver. He finds kinship in Gabe, a baby who also looks different like he does, and who is also on the fringes of society, as he is in constant danger of being released. Though this new power to Give startles Jonas at first, it inspires within him a bond with Gabe that he does not feel with anyone other than the Giver. This shows that the memories, rather than only frightening members of the

Community as they did when the previous Receiver passed away, have the power to heal and bring comfort and wisdom far beyond any rule or counsel can.

●● "I couldn't quite get the word for the whole feeling of it, the feeling that was so strong in the room."
"Love," The Giver told him.

Related Characters: Jonas, The Giver (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

Jonas asks what the Giver's favorite memory is, and he offers to give it to Jonas. It is a memory of several generations of people sitting around a green tree with colored lights, and a pleasurable feeling that Jonas does not have a name for. The Giver tells Jonas that the people are grandparents--the parents of parents of children--and that the feeling he experienced was love.

As a member of a society where strong feelings are repressed, Jonas has no idea that he has not felt the full range of human emotions due to the rules of the Community. Though ritual stipulates that he shares his feelings with his family each evening, and they do the same, this new feeling of love makes Jonas come to realize that everything he has supposedly "felt" his entire life have just been words assigned to the shadows of emotions. By experiencing this feeling of love, Jonas finally has a concept of what it means to feel true bonds between people, unlike anything the strictly divided social system of the Community allows. Jonas only knows how to assign words to very specific feelings, like "apprehension," and is overwhelmed by a feeling that is difficult to contain in a word, though the Giver provides him with "love." It is this memory that will ultimately fuel Jonas to want to leave the Community and release his memories, so that the people that he feels love for will one day understand what it means that their feelings have been restricted, and perhaps reciprocate love for him as well.

●● "Do you love me?"
There was an awkward silence for a moment. Then Father gave a little chuckle. "Jonas. You, of all people. Precision of language, *please!*"

Related Characters: Jonas, Jonas's Father (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

After the Giver shows Jonas his favorite memory--the love between family members--Jonas takes advantage of his new ability to ask whatever questions he wants, and he asks his parents whether they love him. In this quote, they scold him for using such a general word, since precision of language is an important part of maintaining accuracy in their Community. Their incredulous response immediately tells Jonas that not only do they not love him, but that they have no comprehension of what the word love even means.

Life within the Community is designed to discourage close bonds between people, indicated by the ways in which Mates and Children are assigned by the Elders, and then sent to live in different parts of the Community when they reach a certain age. Thus, strong bonds between people don't have time to develop, and are not predicated on intrinsic biological relationships between people. Similarly, the pill that people take to suppress their "stirrings," or sexual impulses, likely serves to suppress strong emotions between humans as well. "Precise language" therefore comes to mean that members of the Community are bound to feel only things that they can put into concrete terms. Complex and strong emotions like love cannot be put into words, and are therefore not understood or felt by most members of the Community. With this question, Jonas realizes that though he now knows what love means--and does feel it for his family and friends--that their lives are designed in such a way that they can never feel it back.

 The next morning, for the first time, Jonas did not take his pill. Something within him, something that had grown there through the memories, told him to throw the pill away.

Related Characters: Jonas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

After experiencing the memory of love and giving Gabe part of the feeling of it, Jonas abruptly decides to stop taking his pill. Though he does not quite understand what a "Stirring" is, he remembers how pleasurable it used to be to think and

dream of Fiona. Since taking the pill, he no longer has those dreams or feels quite the same about her. Now that he is experiencing so many ideas and feelings through the memories from the Giver, however, Jonas wonders if these experiences may be even more vibrant--like the thoughts of Fiona were--if he stops taking the pills that his Mother gave him as soon as he reported his dreams. After he does so, he immediately begins to see colors everywhere, not just flashes, suggesting that the pill is not just connected to sexual arousal, but to perception of other senses that come with the onset of sexual development.

By suppressing sexual arousal, the pill allows the Elders to control relationships, mating, and the overall number of members in the population. As there are many feelings associated with such sexual development, it also serves to squelch a number of other feelings that are associated with such desires, including dreams and personal connection. The pill and the feelings it is revealed to suppress show that the "dream-telling" ritual of each morning was likely engineered to reveal when adolescents were beginning to sexually mature, and therefore reveal themselves as "needing" the pill. Though Jonas experiences much more after stopping taking the pill, it makes him feel even more alone in his sensations and desires in a Community of sterile and unfeeling individuals.

Chapter 17 Quotes

 He saw the familiar wide river beside the path differently. He saw all of the light and color and history it contained and carried in its slow-moving water; and he knew that there was an Elsewhere from which it came, and an Elsewhere to which it was going.

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

When Jonas rides his bike along the river one day, as he has his whole life, he suddenly sees it differently as a result of the memories: it suddenly has a color to it, and has a history that differentiates it from the rest of the dull and uniform Community. In the Community, where everything is identical to the largest extent it can be as a result of the "Sameness," there is little to no understanding or knowledge of history. If members of the Community were to know of a

time before the Sameness, they would no longer be satisfied and complacent with their dull, utilitarian existence devoid of diversity and feeling. However, the past cannot simply go away--thus the Giver and the Receiver are burdened with all the emotions and memories of the entire world, so that the Community can live fully in the present and know only the history of very recent events.

The Elders also keep the idea of "Elsewhere" very nebulous in the public mind, although Jonas soon finds out that the "release" that leads to this "Elsewhere" is not a movement to another Community, but rather systematic government-imposed death upon those deemed unfit for society. Optimistically, Jonas hopes this "Elsewhere," where the flowing river might lead, could be the places where his memories--good and bad--might take place, and where life could have different flavors and feelings. More than anything, Jonas's training with the Giver inspires him to question his own life in a way neither he nor anyone he knows ever has before. Of course, the rules of "rudeness" in the Community are designed to suppress this kind of curiosity, but as Jonas's Assignment packet stipulates, the rules of rudeness don't apply to him anymore.

☝ He felt such love for Asher and for Fiona. But they could not feel it back, without the memories.

Related Characters: Jonas, Asher, Fiona

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

Jonas gets into a fight with Asher and some of his friends when they begin to play a game that simulates war. Though he frequently played the game as a child, once he experienced the horrors of war and the senseless death it brings through the memories, he becomes angry about the carelessness with which his friends pretend to attack and kill one another. Fiona finds Jonas distraught, comforts him shortly, and leaves. In this quote, Jonas realizes that though he now understands that he loves his friends Asher and Fiona, they can never love him back.

Like his parents, Jonas knows that his friends' emotional shortcomings are not due to their personal faults, but the society that they have been raised and exist in. In order to preserve peace, strong emotions like fear and love have had to be erased from society. Jonas feels immeasurable sadness at the realization that he and the Giver are the only

people in their Community who can truly feel love, and this understanding pushes him further into emotional isolation. Thanks to the pills, forced separation to avoid bonds between people and their biological relations, and the containment of the memories into the Giver and the Receiver, society has no collective understanding that there ever was such a thing as love or fear. The only way for people to understand what they lost with the Sameness, Jonas now knows, is to have them experience the memories for themselves.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☝ Memories are forever.

Related Characters: The Giver (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

The Giver tells Jonas about what happened when Rosemary, the previous Receiver, applied for release: when she went Elsewhere, all of her memories were also released into the Community, and caused widespread panic. Jonas asks what would happen if he drowned in the river, and the Giver warns him severely against anything that would cause his death: only five weeks' worth of memories were released when Rosemary died, but a whole years' worth would escape if Jonas did. Though the Community does its best to suppress all the memories of life before the Sameness, as the Giver notes here, they can never truly go away; "Memories are forever."

Though the people who imposed the Sameness were extremely thorough in ironing out any differences in society--sexual preferences, colors, ages after Twelve, ill-chosen spouses or careers, friendships, relationships, and so on--there was only so much they could do due to the fact that memories never truly go away. Thus, the role of the Receiver was born, a terribly painful and isolating position in which one is given artificial "honor" to bear every joy and every pain felt throughout time. Though Jonas is distraught the more he learns how sterilized his life has been, he and the Giver are mildly comforted by the fact that what they alone can feel will continue to be felt, at least by one singular member of the Community, for the rest of time. No matter how many pills or rules are created, memories will never disappear to an elusive "Elsewhere."

Chapter 19 Quotes

☞ *He killed it! My father killed it!* Jonas said to himself.

Related Characters: Jonas (speaker), Jonas's Father

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

One day, Jonas asks the Giver about the true nature of release, and where people go when they are sent "Elsewhere." The Giver shows Jonas a video of the release that his Father performed earlier in the day on the smaller of a set of twins born (due to the fact that the Rules state there can only be 50 children in any age group in a given year, and that only one of each set of twins is allowed to remain in the Community). Jonas's father injects the newborn with a mysterious substance, and it almost instantly dies. Jonas is horrified to realize that to be released is to be killed.

In watching this video, Jonas finally comes to understand that the "Elsewhere" that people go to after release is really death. His father, he now knows, killed a perfectly healthy newborn simply because of the Community's arbitrary rules about its number of citizens. In killing the child, his father did not seem upset or guilty about his actions, showing that he neither understood exactly what he was doing nor was it the first time he had performed such a senseless release. Though many of the Community's rules seem to have good intentions, the systematic killing of people deemed unfit for society marks it as a mostly dystopian, rather than idyllic, way of life. After seeing this video, Jonas understands further what is at stake with his acquisition of memories and rare understanding of love, pain, and what it means to be a human.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☞ "Having you here with me over the past year has made me realize that things must change. For years I've felt that they should, but it seemed so hopeless. Now for the first time I think there might be a way," The Giver said slowly.

Related Characters: The Giver (speaker), Jonas

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

After seeing the video of his father release the newchild, Jonas is inconsolable. He refuses to leave the Giver's room, and demands that he and the Giver do something to force the Community to stop living in ignorance. In this quote, the Giver slowly comes to the conclusion that perhaps there is a way to impose the memories onto the Community, and to help them cope with the onslaught of feelings so that they can finally understand what it means to know of strong emotions.

Like Jonas, the Giver felt incredibly isolated by his role as Receiver, one that left him completely alone, save for the few weeks that he trained Rosemary. Having known love for her, whom he later reveals to be his daughter, her loss was particularly difficult for him to bear, since no one else in the Community understands what it means to love, let alone lose someone that you love. The only thing giving him the will to continue bearing these memories alone was the belief that by feeling these things, he was infinitely wiser and more human than those who live and die by the Sameness. Yet now, with two minds sharing the memories, the Giver and the Receiver are inspired to find a way to force the Community to bear these memories too, and thus finally feel the joys and pain that the Giver and Receiver currently bear alone.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☞ Though he had never seen one before, he identified it from his fading memories, for The Giver had given them to him often. It was a bird.

Related Characters: Jonas, The Giver

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

While everyone is at the annual Ceremony, Jonas escapes away from the bounds of the Community with a pack of food and Gabe strapped to his Father's bicycle. After some time, airplanes come trying to look for them, which they deftly hide from. One day, Gabe cries that he sees an airplane, but Jonas looks up and sees something else flying in the sky. He immediately identifies it as a bird, something that he has only seen in memories before, since no animals beyond fish for food exist within the Community.

The sight of the bird gives Jonas the first real-life taste of his own experience of something that he has previously seen only in a memory. It shows him that other things he knows

from memories, but not from personal experience, like the ocean and war and elephants and snow and sledding, really do exist in the world and are out there for him to find now that he has escaped from the Community. It also shows the reader that the Sameness exists only within the bounds of the Community, and perhaps other settlements of people exist where all of these ideals previously intangible to Jonas may be right at his fingertips. The sight and understanding of this bird fuels Jonas to keep on pedaling, to save and enrich both he and Gabe's lives.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☛ If he had stayed in the community, he would not be. It was as simple as that. Once he had yearned for choice. Then, when he has had a choice, he had made the wrong one: the choice to leave. And now he was starving.

Related Characters: Jonas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

As they travel farther away from the Community, Gabe and Jonas experience hunger and the cold for the first time in their lives. Though the Community is emotionally repressive, it did provide them with all bodily needs and ensured they were never uncomfortable. In this quote, Jonas desperately wonders if he made the right decision to leave the Community. However, after understanding everything he was missing from his life through the memories, he knows that a life in the Community, even one that was warm and well-fed, would not be a life at all. As he states here, "he would not be." He would not be a *human*, though he would technically be alive and comfortable. Similarly, Gabe's fussiness meant that he was scheduled to be released by Jonas's Father—even though the family had come to care for him as their own child—simply because he didn't fit into the calm mold of the Community members. This experience has been Jonas's first foray into real choice, and it makes him understand why perhaps all choice was eliminated from society after the Sameness. Still, it can be argued that he really didn't have a choice, if he wanted a life full of feeling and for Gabe to survive.

☛ He wept because he was afraid now that he could not save Gabriel. He no longer cared about himself.

Related Characters: Jonas, Gabriel

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

As Gabe and Jonas travel on, their conditions worsen, and they do not reach another Community. Both boys become very weak, and in this quote, Jonas weeps not for his own life, but for Gabe's. Though this moment can be interpreted as very tragic, since the boys have no concept of how to fend for themselves in the wild, but Jonas knows they will be killed if they turn back, it can also be interpreted as a triumph: by caring for Gabe's life more than his own, Jonas is expressing true love for another human being, something he would not have likely felt had he stayed in the Community. He risked his own life to save Gabe's--had the baby not been there, Jonas might have had more food and energy to save himself, but the love he came to know and develop meant that he knew he had no choice to leave the child in the Community to be released. Thus, though Jonas knows there is little chance either of them will survive, he is more human than ever before, thanks to his escape from the Community.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☛ For the first time, he heard something that he knew to be music. He heard people singing. Behind him, across vast distances of space and time, from the place he had left, he thought he heard music too. But perhaps it was only an echo.

Related Characters: Jonas

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

One day during the escape, it begins to snow--Jonas and Gabe's first comprehension of this kind of weather, beyond the memories of sledding. Jonas must abandon his bike and carries Gabe. As they both begin to freeze and Jonas tries to conjure memories of warmth and sunshine, Jonas begins to see flashbacks of many memories: He and Gabe sliding down a hill together on a sled, into a warm room of colored lights, where the family that first taught him love is.

In this quote, Jonas begins to hear something he has never

heard before, but knows the word from the Giver: music. Because memories endure forever, Jonas can hear people doing what he assumes to be "singing" from long ago through "distances of space and time." This quote marks the end of the novel, and it is ambiguous as to what extent this sensation is real for Jonas: it could be that the two boys are finally happening upon a Community where love and warmth are realities, or it could be, sadly, that they are succumbing to the snow and dying. Regardless of what Gabe and Jonas's true fate is, by escaping the Community,

they see, feel, and hear more than they ever would in a lifetime in the Sameness. This final experience for both boys, of love, happiness, and music, is something that is worth sacrificing their sterile lives for. Heroically, by leaving, Jonas also sacrifices all of his memories to his Community, as will the Giver when he is released. Perhaps, at this moment back in the Community, the Sameness has finally been broken, and the music Jonas hears behind him is symbolically coming from the changing Community itself.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Jonas, the novel's 11-year-old protagonist, is nervous about the upcoming Ceremony of Twelve. While struggling to find the right word to define his feelings, he decides he is apprehensive rather than frightened. The only time he can remember being frightened was when a strange plane flew over the community the year before. Afterward, the Speaker for the community announced over the loudspeakers that the pilot had been punished by being "released," a word which Jonas knows should only be used with caution. He once used it jokingly to his friend Asher, and was reprimanded for it. Asher, however, is not always as careful with his use of words, and is always getting in trouble for it.

After dinner that night, Jonas's family engages in the nightly "telling of feelings," in which each person shares a troubling feeling from the day in order to try to resolve it. Jonas's sister Lily says she was angry when a visiting group of Sevens (seven-year-olds) disobeyed the rules on the playground. Jonas's mother tries to make Lily see that maybe the visitors felt strange and unused to the rules of playground. After thinking about it, Lily realizes that her mother is right.

Jonas's father is a Nurturer, which means he cares for the community's babies, or newchildren. He explains that he's worried about a newchild who's growing too slowly and isn't sleeping well at night. Sick babies, like the elderly, are released. He hopes he can help the newchild get better and asks the family for permission to bring him home at night to care for him.

Lily jokes that maybe their family can keep the newchild. But her mother scolds her. She tells Lily to remember the rules: only one male and one female child can be assigned to each family.

After Jonas's mother explains her worries about a criminal who came before her as a second offender in the Department of Justice and will be released after a third offense, Jonas describes his apprehension about the upcoming Ceremony of Twelve, in which he will be assigned the job he will have for the rest of his life.

*The opening of *The Giver* plunges the reader into Jonas's unfamiliar world. That Jonas can only remember one time when he was frightened implies that his community is very safe. However, the loudspeakers spouting instructions and the fate of the pilot make it clear that this community is also very structured and rule-based, and that rule-breaking leads to punishment. The emphasis on precise language implies that the community is very rational.*



At this point in the novel, the "telling of feelings," seems like a wonderful ritual in which families share and help each other to resolve issues and problems maturely. Jonas's family seems caring and committed to each other. The continued strong emphasis on rules is a bit unsettling, however.



Jonas's father seems especially caring. The repetition of the word "release," first in connection to the pilot and here to the struggling infant, establishes it as important. By not explaining what "release" is, the novel builds tension around it.



Strict limits on children and children "assigned" to families reveal this society's emphasis on putting rules above personal choice or emotion.



Another mention of "release." Just as children are assigned to families, people work in assigned jobs. The members of this society seem to have no choice at all in the direction of their lives. Just as interesting is that they seem not to mind.



CHAPTER 2

After sharing, Jonas's parents ask to speak with Jonas alone. Jonas's father tries to calm his fears by telling him that people are rarely disappointed in their Assignments, because the Committee of Elders monitors Elevens' interest so as to place them where they would best be able to do good work for the community. Jonas remembers the Committee monitoring his group of Elevens, but he is unsure what kind of job he will be given. Most children are given jobs they show interest in, and so suspect their Assignments ahead of time. But Jonas has been floating from one interest to another.

Jonas and his parents discuss the annual ceremonies. At the ceremony of One, the 50 babies in that year's group are given names and assigned to families so that each family unit eventually has one boy and one girl. Whether a baby is already walking or just born does not matter. All babies born within that year are considered one year old.

Jonas's father reveals that he has actually peeked at the name of the newchild about whom he is concerned, because he thought that calling the baby by his name, Gabriel, might help him to thrive. Jonas is surprised his father would break the rules.

They continue to discuss the ceremonies. At Eight, children's stuffed animals are taken away. At Nine, they are given bicycles. At Twelve, they are given their jobs, which they will hold for life. Rules are made by the Committee of Elders, and rules are very hard to get changed. One of the only rules ever broken is when children are taught to ride bicycles before the appropriate time, a rule that Jonas's father broke by teaching Lily how to ride a bicycle.

Jonas's father tells him that after the Ceremony of Twelve, when children get their Assignments, age is not important. Also, Jonas's father explains that Jonas's group of friends will likely change after Twelve, since he will be spending time with people who have the same jobs as him.

Lily comes into the room and asks for her comfort object, a stuffed elephant. Jonas's mother tells her that once she is an Eight her comfort object will be taken away, so she should get used to sleeping without it.

That the Committee takes personal interests into account when assigning jobs suggests that they want what's best for their citizens. The Committee and the citizens agree that the Committee will know what's best for the citizens better than the citizens themselves will. That among all his friends, only Jonas has yet to settle on one interest is the first indication that he might be different from the other citizens.



Birthday's mark an individual's growth and development. By placing all children into a single group that all become One, Two, Three, and so on at the same time, the community emphasizes the group over the individual.



Jonas's father is further established as a caring man. Jonas's surprise at his father's rule-breaking indicates that as of now Jonas is perfectly happy in his community.



Responsibilities as well as pleasures are allotted at specific times regardless of a child's development, and adulthood occurs at a pre-determined age, when children are assigned jobs. In other words, all children are forced to fit into the same mold, eliminating individuality.



When children turn Twelve, they gain a means of differentiation—their job—but they must give up another in return—their age. Also notice how little this society values the bonds of friendship.



The existence of "comfort objects" in a community that's completely safe suggests that fear is an innate human emotion. But this society forces all children to face these fears at the same time, regardless of their individual development.



CHAPTER 3

The next day Jonas's father brings home Gabriel. Although mirrors are rare so that he has only seen his own reflection a few times, Jonas notices that Gabriel has **pale eyes** like his, while most people in the community have dark eyes. Jonas thinks Gabriel's eyes have depth and are "solemn and knowing."

Lily also comments on the newchild's pale eyes, and jokes that maybe Gabriel and Jonas have the same Birthmother. Lily is scolded for her joke, because in the community, it's always considered rude to refer to someone's differences.

Lily then says she would like to be a Birthmother because Birthmothers eat better food and do little work. Her mother scolds her, saying that Birthmothers never see their newchildren and, after three years and three babies, Birthmothers become Laborers. Jonas's mother comments that there is no honor in either assignment.

Jonas privately recalls when the Speaker made an announcement directed at him, though like all announcements it was phrased so as to avoid singling anyone out. The announcement, directed to male Elevens, said, "snacks are to be eaten, not hoarded," in reference to an apple Jonas had taken home with him. He took the apple because, as he had been tossing the apple back and forth with Asher, he had noticed that the apple seemed to change. But Jonas could not identify how it had changed, and Asher didn't notice any change at all. To study the apple, Jonas took it home. After the announcement, Jonas apologized for taking the apple, but the fact that the way the apple changed was visible only to him still bothers Jonas.

CHAPTER 4

The next day, Jonas joins Asher and their friend Fiona at the House of the Old, where they do their volunteer hours. When they become Eights, children are required to start volunteering, but they are allowed to choose where they go—one of the few choices they are allowed. Unlike other children, who usually pick a single volunteer slot and stick with it, Jonas has volunteered at many places. His changing interests are the reason he is uncertain about what his Assignment will be.

The absence of mirrors is part of the community's attempt to eliminate individuality. Jonas's response to Gabriel's pale eyes shows how shared differences can create bonds between people.



The community doesn't want people to notice differences, perhaps because they want to prevent the bonds (or discord) that differences can create.



By breaking the bond between mother and child, the community severs the most fundamental human emotional connection. It is now clear that the community's aim is to eliminate all of these connections, to eliminate all strong bonds or emotions.



Jonas's ability to see the changing of the apple is another of his unique traits. In a community that values similarity, or as the novel calls it Sameness, these differences set Jonas apart. As of now, since Jonas still thinks of his community as ideal (which is evident when he returns the apple the next day and apologizes), his uniqueness makes him feel uncomfortable. It's scary to stand out.



The choice that children have regarding where they volunteer is negated somewhat by the fact that volunteering itself is not a choice. Again, Jonas stands out because he has not been drawn to a certain kind of volunteering, as most other children have.



On that particular day, Jonas helps bathe an old woman named Larissa. He notes that only babies and the elderly are allowed to be seen naked—even adults are not allowed to see each other naked. However, Jonas doesn't understand this rule, and likes the human contact that bathing Larissa gives him.

Larissa joyously tells Jonas that her friend Roberto was released yesterday after a beautiful ceremony. She says Roberto's whole life story was told before he was led into a private room to be released, and that he was very happy about it. Jonas asks where people go when they are released, but Larissa says no one knows except the Committee.

The community wants to eliminate strong emotions, so it makes sense to forbid nakedness and the passion it can inspire. Jonas's questioning of this rule shows that he is starting to have some differences with his society.



Jonas is uncomfortable with the idea that certain knowledge is forbidden. The fact that an institution cares for the elderly shows the lack of family connection. The society is purely practical, with no human bonds of love.



CHAPTER 5

Just as they share their feelings at night, each morning the families in the community share their dreams. Jonas tells his family about his dream: he was in a bathing room and tried to get Fiona to take off her clothes and bathe with him, but she kept refusing. After Jonas's father and Lily leave, Jonas's mother explains that Jonas is experiencing Stirrings, which are normal for his age. Jonas's mother gives Jonas a pill and tells him that he must take one of these pills daily in order to stop the Stirrings. Jonas remembers that his father and mother take a pill every day, and he has seen Asher taking one also. In addition, the Speaker occasionally issues reminders over the loudspeakers that Stirrings should be reported immediately.

Jonas is proud that he is now such an adult that he has to take the pill, but he also remembers the pleasurable feelings in the dream. He misses the feelings once they disappear after he takes the pill.

The community uses science to eliminate sexual feelings because sex leads to passion, competition, privacy, loneliness, and other strong emotions that the community considers dangerous to the common good. By removing sexual desire before people can act on it, the community ensures that its people will not long for sex and the emotions that it inspires.



Jonas's pride indicates his continuing belief in his community. Yet the fact that he misses the pleasures of his sexual dreams shows that he has a sense that his community's rules deny him aspects of his humanity.



CHAPTER 6

On the first day of the two-day December ceremony, Assignments for Ones through Eights are given out. Jonas learns that because his father pleaded Gabriel's case to the Committee, Gabriel is allowed one extra year of nurturing to gain weight. He will remain at home with Jonas's family, although the family is required to sign a pledge saying they won't get attached to the newchild.

Jonas's father's plea for Gabriel shows he is more prone to bending rules than other members of society are—a trait that Jonas may have inherited. The pledge the family signs foreshadow the opposite of its intended effect: Jonas will become attached to the baby, despite the rules.



During the ceremony, the Chief Elder, a female, names Ones and gives them to families. One child is named Caleb and is given as a replacement child to a family whose Four, also named Caleb, had fallen into the **river** and drowned. Jonas remembers the Ceremony of Mourning for the drowned boy, in which everyone murmured the lost child's name softer and softer until it seemed to fade away entirely. When the new Caleb is assigned to the family, there is a Ceremony of Replacement, in which everyone chants the name "Caleb" louder and louder.

When a different newchild is assigned to a family and named Roberto, Jonas realizes that names are given out to replace the names of those who were recently released. This idea makes Jonas uncomfortable.

The next day, as the ceremony continues, Sevens are given jackets that button up the front. Prior to this age, children have jackets that fasten at the back, forcing them to rely on others to fasten them, and in turn to learn to depend on others and the group in general. Eights like Lily are given jackets with pockets, so that they can be responsible for their own possessions.

At ten, girls' braids are cut off and boys' hair is cut shorter so that all boys and girls have the same haircuts. Jonas knows Lily is excited not to have to wear her hair ribbons anymore, when she reaches that age.

During lunch, the Elevens worry about their assignments. Asher worries he'll get Sanitation, and tells Jonas that he once heard that someone in Sanitation swam the **river** and left to join another community. Jonas has never heard of someone joining another community, but he knows that someone who feels that they don't fit in can apply for release.

Jonas also can't imagine someone feeling as if they don't fit into the community. He knows that the Committee considers all decisions very carefully, especially Assignments and Matching of Spouses. The Matching can take years, and then the couple is monitored for three years before they can apply for a child.

CHAPTER 7

After lunch, Jonas and the other Twelves take their seats at the front of the room in the order of their numbers, which they were given at birth according to order of birth. Jonas is number 19, Asher is 4, and Fiona is 18.

The Ceremony of Loss ensures that emotions are dealt with and then stifled, the same way that the pill stifles sexual feelings. Because families aren't actually related, strong family bonds don't exist. And because the community ensures that no one is truly unique, everyone is completely replaceable. As a result, no one in the community feels any genuine grief when someone dies unexpectedly.



The reuse of names shows how people in the community are easily replaced. Jonas's discomfort at this practice is unique.



*Children in the real world are taught to dress themselves to learn independence. In contrast, in the society of *The Giver*, reliance on the group is key to the proper functioning of the community.*



Sameness in physical appearance, like the lack of mirrors, discourages individualism.



Through Asher's story, the river becomes a symbol of escape. But community members still think it's better to follow the rules if you want to leave—to ask for release, whatever that might be—rather than taking matters into your own hands and trying to escape.



Community members are taught that the Committee always knows best, even regarding marriages. This belief strips community members of individuality and makes them childlike. They can't imagine making choices for themselves.



Using numbers as an alternative to names is a way to strip babies of individuality and eliminate attachments that Nurturers might form to them.



The Chief Elder begins to announce the Assignments for Twelves. When it is Asher's turn, the Chief Elder laughingly mentions language mistakes Asher made. She recalls when Asher was three and confused the words "snack" and "smack." To teach him the difference, he was smacked with the "discipline wand" when he asked for a smack instead of a snack. This continued for weeks, until Asher stopped talking altogether for a little while. As everyone (including Asher) laughs, the Chief Elder comments that now Asher seldom makes such mistakes and announces that Asher has been made the Assistant Director of Recreation. Jonas is pleased that Asher received a job that fits him so well.

The Chief Elder continues to give Assignments to the Elevens. When it is her turn, Fiona is assigned as Caretaker at the House of the Old, which Jonas knows she will enjoy. After each Assignment, the Chief Elder tells the assigned child, "Thank you for your childhood." This signifies that a child has become an adult.

It is now Jonas's turn to receive an Assignment. But the Chief Elder skips Jonas and calls number 20. Jonas is terrified and wonders what he has done wrong. The crowd also is uneasy because the Chief Elder has made Jonas the object of attention.

CHAPTER 8

After all the Assignments have been given out, the Chief Elder tells the crowd that she has skipped Jonas purposely. Jonas, she says, has been selected to be the next Receiver of Memory. The crowd gasps, and Jonas notices an elder who stands out from the crowd because of his pale **eyes**. He knows this man is the Receiver. The Chief Elder recalls how ten years ago the wrong selection was made for this position, and the Committee has been waiting for the right person ever since.

The Chief Elder says that Jonas has all the qualities necessary for Receiver, such as intelligence and courage, which he'll need in order to endure the physical pain he will experience. He has integrity, as he showed when he apologized for taking the apple. She says that in time, Jonas will gain wisdom. He also has something rare called the Capacity to See Beyond. Jonas is unsure what this Capacity to See Beyond is, but remembers the incident with the apple and notices that the faces in the crowd seem to change just like the apple. The crowd begins to chant Jonas's name. Jonas is proud, grateful, and nervous.

The Chief Elder's story and the audience's appreciative response to it show that in the community physical punishment is an acceptable teaching method, even if it causes trauma. (Asher's silence indicates that his did.) In a community that eliminates individuality, causing pain to someone seems like a small thing. And physical punishment is a way to teach a lesson quickly, to ensure that everyone learns at the same rate, eliminating difference.



In the community, the onset of adulthood is marked by a mass advancement of a group into the workforce. In our society, adulthood is marked by age and sexual development, which are individual milestones.



By skipping Jonas, the Chief Elder singles him out. Jonas and the crowd are shocked because it's considered rude to call attention to an individual.



The Receiver's eyes are the same color as Jonas's, implying that the Receiver is also unique, and that there might be a genetic link between them. Gabriel too might be related to Jonas and the Receiver. The Chief Elder is careful not to go into detail about the failure of the previous Receiver trainee because it is improper to discuss uncomfortable topics.



In a society based on the idea of Sameness, Jonas has been singled out as special, with his name chanted by the crowd. The Chief Elder explicitly connects the idea of experiencing pain with gaining wisdom. But Jonas alone will experience this pain, which means that no one in the rest of the community has wisdom. Instead, they all just follow the rules, without thinking.



CHAPTER 9

After leaving the Auditorium, the other Twelves talk excitedly about their new jobs. Jonas feels left out and strange. Even Asher acts differently and respectfully toward him. Jonas realizes that he won't share this job with anyone the way the other Twelves will. He feels uncomfortably different.

At the evening meal, Jonas asks his parents what happened to the person selected for Receiver ten years ago. His father tells him it was a female, and no one knows what happened except that she disappeared and that her name is Not-to-Be-Spoken, which Jonas knows is a tremendous dishonor. This only adds to Jonas's uneasiness.

After dinner Jonas reads the file he was given at the ceremony describing his training to become Receiver. Other Twelves got thick folders of information. Inside his own folder is a single sheet of paper with a list of rules. He is allowed to ask anybody any question he wants, even if it's considered rude, and they must answer him. He is prohibited from discussing his dreams, or taking medication to relieve any pain he might experience. He is not allowed to apply for release. He is not allowed to discuss his training with anyone. He is allowed to lie. Jonas is troubled by the list. He is nervous about experiencing pain, but is even more uncomfortable about being allowed to lie. He wonders if any other members of the community are allowed to lie.

With Jonas's privileges and individualism comes loneliness, which does not exist in the rest of the community. Since everyone else is so similar, they never have secrets, unique experiences, or private thoughts.



Not mentioning unpleasant occurrences is a way of eliminating unpleasant emotions, the same way that not being allowed to mourn a loss after the established period ensures that grief is only temporary.



The differences between Jonas's instructions and those his friends' further distinguishes Jonas. The rule that forbade people from lying in the community ensured that everyone could trust everyone else. Now that Jonas learns that lying is permitted for some people, he wonders whom he can trust. The prohibition on applying for release suggests that what Jonas will learn or the pain he will experience might make him want to leave the community.



CHAPTER 10

After school the next day, Jonas reports to the Annex of the House of the Old, where a desk attendant unlocks a door and respectfully directs Jonas to The Receiver's room. Jonas is surprised because no doors are ever locked. The attendant tells Jonas the locks are for privacy, which the Receiver needs to do his job.

The Receiver's quarters are more luxurious and spacious than any houses in the community. His bed has nicer fabric, and there are walls full of books. Other dwellings are only allowed a dictionary, a community information book, and the Book of Rules. Jonas can't imagine what those books contain.

The Receiver is allowed privacy, which is forbidden to all others, again highlighting his uniqueness.



The Receiver has access to knowledge forbidden to others. He is also allowed more beautiful and costly goods, which are prohibited to others in order to prevent jealousy and materialism.



The Receiver is old and grey, and tells Jonas that he is going to use his last strength to pass those memories onto Jonas. Jonas thinks this means the Receiver is going to tell his lifetime of memories to Jonas, but the Receiver corrects him: the memories he contains are all the memories of the entire world, passed down from Receiver to Receiver, and that he is going to transmit these memories to Jonas. He explains that these memories provide wisdom that helps the community make decisions about its future.

The Receiver describes himself as weighed down by memories, like a sled traveling downhill but slowed by accumulating snow. Jonas fails to understand because he doesn't recognize the words "downhill," "sled," or "snow."

The Receiver instructs Jonas to lie on his stomach. He walks over to the wall speaker, which looks like the speakers in every house, and turns it Off. Jonas is shocked. No other rooms in the community have speakers with Off buttons.

CHAPTER 11

The Receiver places his hands on Jonas's back and transmits the memory of sledding down a **hill**: Jonas does not just remember the activity, he *feels* the cold air and the snowflakes against his face and the thrilling speed of sledding downhill.

Afterward, The Receiver tells Jonas that other people do not have the memories of sledding or hills or snow because the community gave up these things on purpose. Hills made it hard to move goods and snow made it hard to grow food, so the communities became climate-controlled. He says that these memories came from the time before "we went to Sameness."

Jonas wishes aloud that hills and snow and sledding still existed, and asks why the Receiver, with all his power, doesn't bring them back. The Receiver responds that he has honor, which is a very different thing from power.

The Receiver next gives Jonas a memory of sunshine. At Jonas's request, he then gives Jonas his first memory of pain—a mild sunburn. Jonas is startled by the sensation, but begins to understand that painful experiences are necessary to be able to appreciate the pleasant ones.

The Receiver's discussion with Jonas reveals that the community is founded not just on the idea of Sameness, but on the total elimination of all individuality. Even memories are forbidden. The community is stable and safe because it contains identical people in a uniform environment. Yet the price of safety and stability is knowledge and wisdom, which only the Receiver has.



Jonas's lack of knowledge about hills, sleds, and snow shows how Sameness makes people unaware of the differences between everyday things.



Community members all have speakers in their homes that they can't shut off, eliminating their privacy. And yet the Receiver can have privacy whenever he chooses.



Physical contact is necessary for transmittal. Exactly how memories are "transmitted" is never explained, making them seem magical and extra-powerful.



In order to make life easier, more comfortable, and more stable, the founders of the community had to sacrifice pleasurable experiences like sledding. To make these losses bearable, the people gave up any memory, for them and their descendants, of what they lost.



The people of the community aren't interested in the Receiver's memories or wisdom. The Receiver has given up trying to assert his power.



The community chose to give up pain and hardship for stability. But through his first painful memory, Jonas starts to understand that one must feel pain in order to feel joy.



As Jonas leaves for the day, The Receiver tells Jonas not to call him "The Receiver" any longer, since Jonas is actually the new Receiver. Instead, Jonas should call him The Giver.

The change in names is a passing of the torch. Jonas is assuming his new role.



CHAPTER 12

That night Jonas dreams he is at the top of a snow-covered hill, needing to reach whatever is waiting at the bottom. The next morning, during dream-telling, he follows the rules about not revealing anything connected to his training and lies to his family, saying that he had no dreams.

The downward-sloping hill symbolizes Jonas's desire for freedom from the community. Jonas feels conflicted about disobeying the rules he has been taught.



At school, the other Twelves are all talking about their new Assignments. Fiona tells Jonas there is a lot she didn't know about the House of the Old, like how they use a discipline wand on the Old just as they do on children. Jonas knows Fiona wants to know details about his job, but he knows he can't tell her anything. Even if he could, she wouldn't understand, so he remains silent. But he's sad to disappoint Fiona.

The rules isolate Jonas, but his job isolates him even more—his friends can't understand him anymore. The use of the discipline wand on the old shows how the rules make the community act without compassion.



As Fiona rides away, Jonas notices that her hair changes the same way that the apple changed. When he arrives a minute late to his session with The Giver, The Giver asks him why he arrived late. He explains that the sight of Fiona's hair startled him for a moment. The Giver explains that Jonas has seen a memory of the color red, and that before there was Sameness, everyone saw in color.

The discovery that everyone sees in black and white reveals just how limited and numb the community is. The community's visual handicap serves as a metaphor for their deeper lack of compassion, knowledge, and understanding.



Jonas wonders why the community would want to get rid of the color red, which is so beautiful. The Giver responds that the community had to give up some things in order to gain control of others. When Jonas says that the community should not have made such a choice, The Giver tells him that he is gaining wisdom.

Because they both have the gift of memory, Jonas and The Giver agree that the community made a mistake in instituting Sameness. But now, unlike The Giver, will Jonas take action to try to change that?



The Giver explains that Fiona's hair is unlike other people's hair—just as Jonas's eyes are different from other people's eyes—because genetic scientists have still not mastered Sameness well enough to ensure that everyone looks the same. Then The Giver gives Jonas a memory of a rainbow to show him the variety of colors.

The revelation that Sameness has not been perfected means other flaws may exist in the community. Jonas is horrified that the community has been prevented from seeing beauty for the sake of Sameness.



CHAPTER 13

Jonas soon becomes angry that color has been removed from his world. He tells The Giver that he wants to choose things for himself, like which color shirt to wear in the morning. The Giver responds that choice was taken away to prevent people from making the wrong choices. Jonas realizes that there could be choices more important than choosing what color to wear that could have terrible consequences. Even so, he's not fully satisfied with The Giver's answer.

The next day Jonas tries to transmit color to Asher by touching his shoulder while Asher looks at some flowers. But Asher is suspicious and uncomfortable and asks Jonas what he's doing.

One day soon after, The Giver gives Jonas a memory of an elephant killed by poachers, with its tusks cut off and red blood flowing from its wounds. Later, Jonas tries to explain to Lily that her stuffed elephant resembles a real animal that once existed. She laughs at the idea.

One day, Jonas asks whether The Giver has a wife. The Giver says that he did, once, but now his wife was sent to live with the Childless Adults, a group of parents who are no longer needed to create family units. The Giver warns Jonas that as a Receiver he won't be able to tell his spouse anything about his work, memories, or books.

The Giver tells Jonas that he wishes the Committee of Elders would ask for his wisdom more often. No one else in the community, not even teachers, knows anything compared to what he knows because of his memories. Jonas wonders why the people even need a Receiver, if not for advice. The Giver responds that he is primarily needed to contain all the pain that comes with memories. For instance, when the female Receiver trainee failed, all her memories were released to the community, and there was chaos until the memories could be contained.

Some afternoons, Jonas arrives for training and The Giver is hunched over in pain with a memory. On those days he sends Jonas away. Jonas usually spends those afternoons practicing seeing in color or standing on the bridge over the river that marks the border of the community.

The community's decision to eliminate choice entirely strips people of their individuality. If people had even small choices like shirt color, they would yearn for more and more freedoms and individuality. Jonas is beginning to disagree with the basic principles of the system he's been trained to think is perfect.



Human touch is made to seem shameful, even among friends, in order to prevent emotional intimacy and emotional bonds.



The elephant's blood shows that color can also be associated with negative things. Jonas must learn that with every pleasure comes pain. Without memory, Fiona can't comprehend a world without Sameness.



Jonas realizes that he'll have to spend his whole life in utter loneliness. The privileges of being an individual come with many sacrifices.



Without the experience of memories, the Committee cannot know when there might be the need for advice. The Receiver is used as a kind of shield, so that people can hide in their comfortable stable lives and not have to face the pain of real human life. Of course, that means they are denied the pleasures of life as well.



Jonas may not have admitted it to himself yet, but by regularly going to stand on the bridge he shows at least a subconscious interest in leaving the community.



One day, Jonas asks The Giver to give him one of the painful memories. By taking a painful memory, Jonas realizes, he will be able to assume some of the The Giver's burden. The Giver decides to start with the memory of the sled.

Jonas decides to take on The Giver's pain because he cares about The Giver. The knowledge of pain has allowed Jonas and The Giver to form a bond of real friendship. Jonas's selfless choice shows his growing maturity.



CHAPTER 14

The Giver gives Jonas a memory of falling from the sled, breaking his leg and scraping his face on ice. In agony, Jonas begs for medicine to relieve the pain. The Giver refuses, and Jonas remembers the rule in his instruction file.

The Giver's refusal to give Jonas pain medication indicates that he still believes in, or at least follows, the community's rules.



That afternoon, with his leg uninjured but still aching, Jonas goes home feeling lonely because no one else can experience the kind of pain he feels. He realizes why the Chief Elder told him he needed courage.

Through Jonas's experiences, The Giver makes the claim that it is only by facing pain, loneliness, and other trials that a person can grow and develop courage.



After many more days in which The Giver transmits painful memories to him, Jonas, frustrated, asks The Giver why they have to hold all of those terrible memories. The Giver tells him that such pain gives them wisdom. For example, when the Committee of Elders wanted to increase the rate of births in order to have more Laborers, The Giver was able to warn them against it, because he had a memory of terrible hunger. And when the strange plane flew over the community, The Giver told them not to shoot it down because he knew it wasn't a danger.

The Giver's story shows how the Committee, like the community members, just blindly follows the rules set down for it by the community founders. It has no knowledge that it can draw upon to adapt to new circumstances. Even so, The Giver can only try to influence the Committee. He lacks the power and the will to use his wisdom to make decisions himself.



The Giver tells Jonas that people do not want memories of pain. The Receiver's job is so important and honored because he can carry the memories for them. When Jonas voices a desire to change things, The Giver responds that it has been this way for many generations.

The Receiver has been in place for so long that people don't know that they're giving up joy by not having pain. The Giver seems to think that there is no other way for society to work.



Meanwhile, at Jonas's home, Gabriel is growing but is still fretful at night. Jonas's father worries that he may still have to release Gabriel, but he comments that first he will have to release one of the identical twins scheduled to be born soon. Because the community does not allow identical twins, the smaller twin must be released.

Identical twins would have a closeness that is forbidden in the community. The decision between the twins based on size is totally pragmatic and unsentimental: the large twin is more likely to thrive, so the smaller twin will be released.



Jonas wonders where people who are released go. He hopes that release means that the little twin will be sent Elsewhere where he will meet Larissa, the old woman Jonas had bathed and who had recently been released. He has a vision of Larissa welcoming the twin into open arms. But secretly, even from himself, he senses that this is a false hope.

Jonas, hoping he can somehow help Gabriel avoid release, asks his father if Gabriel can sleep in his room that night. His father agrees. That night when Gabriel is restless, Jonas puts his hands on him. As he does, he idly thinks about a memory of a beautiful day spent sailing that The Giver transmitted to him, and realizes with a start that he is transmitting the memory to Gabriel. He stops transmitting, but when Gabriel starts to fret again he transmits the full memory. Gabriel is calmed and is able to sleep.

Worried that he will be reprimanded or worse, Jonas decides not to tell The Giver about what he has done. He frightens himself with the thought that he has more power than he ever realized.

Jonas's intuition that release is not as beautiful as people believe foreshadows his discovery of the true meaning of release in Chapter 19.



When Jonas first accidentally transmits his memories to Gabriel, he stops, realizing that he was breaking the rules. So when he then decides to transmit the memories to Gabriel after all, Jonas is making a conscious choice—his first real choice—to break the rules of the community in order to try to save an individual.



Jonas's newfound power is not only the ability to transmit memories, but also to take action, to choose to break the rules, and to work for the individual good regardless of the will of the community.



CHAPTER 15

The next day The Giver is in terrible pain, and he asks Jonas to take the memory he is having. He gives Jonas a memory of a war, a battlefield and men injured and dying. In the memory, Jonas is a young man who gives another badly injured soldier water and then stays with the other soldier as he dies. Jonas is himself injured, and the pain he feels is horrifying. Afterward, The Giver is repentant and asks Jonas to forgive him, although they both know that The Giver didn't have the strength to carry the memory himself any longer.

The war scene shows Jonas the best and worst of humankind. Just as the young man cares for the injured soldier, Jonas is himself caring for The Giver, courageously taking on The Giver's troubling memory in order to spare him pain.



CHAPTER 16

The Giver is gentle with Jonas for days following the war memory. He gives Jonas wonderful memories of birthday parties, paintings in museums, horseback riding, and camping trips. None of these things exist in the community.

To relieve Jonas's trauma at being forced into maturity by becoming aware of pain, The Giver gives Jonas memories associated with childhood.



When Jonas asks The Giver to describe his favorite memory, The Giver tells Jonas he wants to give it to him, not just describe it to him. The Giver transmits the memory of a group of people, very young and very old, opening presents under a tree covered in lights. He tells Jonas the memory is of family and love. Jonas asks who the two old people were, and The Giver tells him they are called grandparents. Jonas has never heard of Grandparents. In the community, parents aren't a part of their children's lives once their children become full adults. They go to the House of Childless Adults, and then the House of the Old, and they are released without their children even knowing. Jonas wishes aloud that his own family could be more like the family in the memory and that The Giver was his grandfather.

Jonas realizes that maturity is not just an awareness of pain. It is also an awareness of love. He realizes that in his community family exists solely for practical purposes, without deeper emotions that truly make human, like love. His wish that the community could be more like this other world is another indication that his faith in the community is cracking. Also notice how the gift giving grandparents in the memory are in fact a lot like The Giver, who shows his love for Jonas by giving him the precious gift of his favorite memory.



At home that evening, Jonas asks his parents if they love him. They laugh at the question and chide him for using such a vague term. They tell him that they take pride in his accomplishments and enjoy having him around, but they cannot say they love him.

Another stage of Jonas's development is his realization that those he loves cannot love him in return because, lost in Sameness, they don't know what love is.



That night, Jonas gives Gabriel another happy memory to help him sleep and tells the sleeping newchild that he wishes he could change the community to make it have colors, grandparents, and love. The next morning, Jonas decides to stop taking his pill for the Stirrings.

Jonas continues to make choices and break the community's rules in minor ways. But his wish indicates a desire to break rules and change things much more profoundly.



CHAPTER 17

Four weeks later, the community loudspeakers declare an unscheduled holiday. Jonas does not have to go to school. Now that he has stopped taking the pills, his Stirrings have returned. He feels a little embarrassed about the dreams he is having at night, but also has no intention of giving up the pleasure that the dreams give him. He understands that his dreams and the memories that he has gotten from The Giver have given him a new depth of feeling, and he gets annoyed when people use expressions like sadness and anger because he knows that only he has actually felt genuine emotions.

Jonas is now filled not only with the emotions of his training, but the emotions of a regular boy going into adolescence. He has realized that there is nothing wrong with these feelings and his lack of remorse indicates a continuing belief that the way the community is run is wrong. In fact, Jonas now understands that feelings are no more than ideas to the community members, which seems robotic and cruel to him.



Jonas rides his bike along the **river**. He knows the river must lead to Elsewhere and wonders what Elsewhere must be like.

Jonas's thoughts of escape and a world outside of the community grow stronger.



Returning from the river, Jonas sees Asher and his friends playing a game of war. He tries to explain to Asher that the game is a cruel mockery of the terrible realities of war. Asher doesn't understand him, and angrily responds that he has to play these games because of his job in recreation. Jonas realizes it is hopeless to try to explain all that he has experienced.

Jonas tries to change his friends' behavior by explaining why it's wrong. When his friends can't even conceive of the things he is trying to explain, Jonas sees that only through shared experience would his friends be able to understand what he knows.



Fiona arrives and tries to comfort Jonas, but eventually leaves on her bicycle. Jonas sadly realizes that he loves Asher and Fiona, but that they can never love him back.

Jonas's realization that his friends can't love him further isolates him.



When he gets home, Jonas takes comfort in Gabriel, who has now learned to walk and talk, and can say his own name.

Jonas has shared experiences with Gabriel, and their loving connection grows stronger.



The identical twins are scheduled to be born the next day, and Jonas's father mentions having to release one of them. Curious, Jonas asks whether his father will personally take the smaller child Elsewhere. His father says no. Instead he will just identify which of the boys has a lower weight, and then someone else from Elsewhere will then come and get the boy. Lily comments about the strangeness of two identical twins growing up separated, one in the community and one in Elsewhere.

Release is an important part of life in the community, but the fact that none of the citizens seem to know what it entails signals to the reader that it is probably something unpleasant. After all, the community tries to shield its members from all unpleasant or uncomfortable experiences.



CHAPTER 18

The next day, Jonas asks The Giver about release. The Giver responds that on days when his memories particularly pain him, he thinks of his own release. But then he reminds Jonas of the rule prohibiting Jonas or himself from asking for release. He tells Jonas that the rule was created ten years earlier, when the previous trainee failed.

Jonas's continuing questions about release suggest that he is not satisfied with the community's explanations of what release is, so he is investigating the truth for himself.



The Giver tells Jonas that her name was Rosemary, and that he loved her very much, the same way he loves Jonas. She loved the happy memories The Giver gave her, but after receiving memories of loneliness, loss, and fear, she was so distraught that she applied for release without telling The Giver. Afterward, her memories were released to the community and The Giver was too grief-stricken to help the people cope with the lost memories.

The Giver and Jonas can now speak openly about the love they share, a love grounded in the shared experience of joy and pain. To be able to talk about love in this way is an important point in Jonas's personal growth.



Jonas wonders what would happen if he fell in the **river** and died accidentally. The Giver tells him that memories are forever, and that all of Jonas's memories would be given to the community. He says that Jonas has many more memories than Rosemary had and if they were given to the community it would be catastrophic. He adds that he now thinks he might be more ready to help the community cope with such an overwhelming tragedy. Even so, he tells Jonas to stay away from the river.

The Giver's grief at Rosemary's release hints that release is not just a ceremony in which a member of the community gets to leave for Elsewhere. Though The Giver thinks he might now be able to help the community cope with memories, his demand that Jonas avoid the river shows he has no intention of trying to change the community.



CHAPTER 19

Jonas explains that his interest in release stems from the fact that his father is releasing a twin that morning. The Giver wishes newchildren weren't released, then tells Jonas that as Receiver he can actually watch releases. In fact, The Giver says, if Jonas wants he can watch his father release the identical twin that morning. Jonas is nervous about spying on his father and also because The Giver seems so serious. Nevertheless, he agrees to watch.

The Giver understands that witnessing release is one of the final lessons Jonas must learn in his path toward wisdom. Jonas's decision to spy on his father marks a break with his family, the final tie connecting Jonas to the community. It's also a sign that Jonas is a true adult who can make his own choices.



The Giver turns on the video screen, and he and Jonas watch as Jonas's father weighs the two babies and then places the smaller one on a table. Jonas's father takes out a syringe and injects a needle into a vein on the newchild's forehead. The newchild jerks its muscles and then stops moving. Then Jonas's father says, "Bye bye," waves, puts the body into a carton, and sends it down a chute. Jonas realizes with horror that his father has killed the newchild—it twitched just as the dying man did on the battlefield. He realizes that "to be released" means to be killed.

Without memory, Jonas father can't understand the consequences of what he is doing. He doesn't understand the pain involved in death or the need to value individual life. He kills a healthy baby just because the rules say that he should. The weirdly childish way he acts after killing the baby, saying "bye bye," shows how little he understands his actions.



The Giver explains that this is why he was so sad when Rosemary was released. He tells Jonas that Rosemary actually asked to inject herself with the needle.

The fact that Rosemary chose to kill herself rather than carry on her duty as the Receiver speaks to the danger of sacrificing one individual for the sake of society as a whole. In theory, the purpose of the Receiver being the sole keeper of the all the world's memories is to spare the rest of the Community from having to experience the difficult emotions associated with remembering. But young Rosemary was unable to shoulder the loneliness and anguish of this role alone, emphasizing the importance of collectively reckoning with humanity's past mistakes and painful memories rather than delegating the responsibility to a single individual. The Giver's sadness in reaction to Rosemary's suicide speaks to the inherent value of every life and shows the detrimental toll that such a loss has on a person's loved ones. As such, this passage further calls into question the practice of "release" (euthanasia) that's so casually accepted in the Community.



CHAPTER 20

Crying because of what he just saw, and because he now realizes that his father lied to him about what would happen to the newchild, Jonas refuses to go home. He spends the night in The Giver's room. Jonas asks The Giver if he too has lied to him, and The Giver tells Jonas he has not. He tells Jonas that release is the same procedure for babies as it is for the Old and for criminals. Jonas wonders what Fiona will say when she finds out that her job involves killing people. The Giver says Fiona already knows.

Jonas demands that they do something to stop the community from living in ignorance. The Giver argues that change is hopeless, and that the other people of the community don't feel what he and Jonas do. Finally, though, he admits that Jonas's presence over the past year has convinced him that maybe they can do something together.

Jonas and The Giver hatch a plan: Jonas will escape from the community, so that all of his memories will return to the people of the community. Jonas begs The Giver to escape with him, but The Giver refuses, saying he is too old and weak, and that he will be needed to help the people cope with the painful memories left behind. Jonas realizes that The Giver is right to care about the people of the community even if they aren't capable of caring about him. He further realizes that the reason he and The Giver have made this plan is because they *both* care about the people of the community.

The Giver tells Jonas he is not able to see colors anymore because he has given them all to Jonas. But he has one more skill he has been keeping to himself, called hearing-beyond. He calls it music and offers to give the memory to Jonas. Jonas refuses. He prefers that the The Giver keep his memories, because they are so precious to him.

The Giver and Jonas decide that over the next two weeks, The Giver will transmit as many memories as he can to Jonas, while also storing food and supplies. On the morning of the annual Ceremony, Jonas will leave his bicycle by the **river**. Meanwhile, The Giver hides Jonas in the trunk of a vehicle and drives Jonas a ways to give him a good start on his escape. When people discover Jonas is missing, and then find his bicycle by the river, they'll think that he's drowned.

The Giver will stay behind and help people cope with their new memories. He tells Jonas that after this work is finished, what he wants most is to be with his daughter, Rosemary.

Fiona, although patient and kind, can't understand death any more than Jonas's father can. Jonas has now been betrayed by the two people he loves most, other than The Giver. His refusal to go home for the night symbolizes his inability to go back to his own life, burdened with terrible knowledge no one can understand.



Jonas is finally giving something back to The Giver—the courage to act.



The Giver commits his final act of selflessness—giving up his own future for the good of the community. Jonas now takes the next step on his journey toward maturity, gaining the capacity to love others even without being loved in return. He is leaving the community not to save himself, but instead to save the community from itself, to free the people of the community from their numb robotic lives.



The Giver has sacrificed his most precious memories for Jonas and is still willing to give more. But Jonas responds with his own selfless act. In this way, Jonas and The Giver show their love for each other.



So far, Jonas has made choices to break rules of the community that affect only himself. Now he is making a larger choice from which he will be unable to hide: he is going to try to change the community. This is a courageous choice with consequences that will cut him off from the community.



The Giver yearns for the release of death and the peace it brings, suggesting that he believes in a kind of Elsewhere in death.



CHAPTER 21

Jonas and The Giver's plan hits a snag that night: at dinner, Jonas's father tells the family that the previous night he brought Gabriel to a Nurturing Center to see how he would sleep, and that Gabriel was unable to sleep at all. As a result, the staff of the Nurturing Center, including Jonas's father, unanimously voted that Gabriel should be released on the following day.

Jonas refuses to let Gabriel be killed. When everyone is asleep, he takes some leftover food and steals his father's bicycle (which has a child seat for Gabriel). Terrified, with only his own courage to support him rather than all the memories of courage he had expected to have from The Giver, he rides across the **river** and out of the community.

Jonas rides all night, then hides with Gabriel during the day as planes fly overhead searching for them. To make Gabriel sleep, Jonas transmits memories of exhaustion to him. To evade the plane's heat-seeking tracking devices, he transmits memories of snow to keep their bodies cold. After several days of traveling at night and hiding and sleeping during the daylight hours, the planes cease to appear.

Now that Jonas (and the reader) knows what release is, Jonas's father calmness about killing a baby who has lived with him for a year seems monstrous. That this caring man would think nothing of such an action justifies Jonas's desire to enlighten and transform the community.



This is the first choice Jonas makes without The Giver's guidance. He decides that an individual life is more important than the community, and makes his escape not on the borrowed courage of a memory but with his own courage.



The novel comes full circle here. Jonas experiences his first real fear since seeing the planes in the beginning of the novel. Yet now, rather than following the instructions given to him over a loudspeaker, he uses his own judgment. Unlike the other members of his former community, he is a true adult.



CHAPTER 22

As Jonas and Gabriel continue to travel, the road they have been following narrows and gets rough. The landscape starts to change and become irregular. Jonas trips and twists an ankle on the unfamiliar terrain, but also sees a bird and waterfalls and wildflowers for the first time. The sight of these new things is thrilling, yet at the same time Jonas worries he won't be able to protect Gabriel. He manages to forage some berries and catch fish in a makeshift net, but it isn't enough to curb their hunger.

Jonas wonders if by leaving he has sentenced them to starve. But he knows that if he had stayed he would have been starved of feelings and that Gabriel would have been killed.

It starts to rain, which lasts for two days. The rain is not as pleasant as it was in his memories. The cold, wet, and hunger make Gabriel cry. Jonas cries too, not because he is afraid he will die, but because if he dies he won't be able to save Gabriel. Yet he has a feeling that Elsewhere is nearby, and continues on.

The changing landscape shows that Jonas has escaped Sameness. Jonas is actively living what he has only learned about through memories—survival through suffering. Now he sees that choices have consequences—sometimes deadly consequences—and experiences fear, pain, and hunger for real, not as memories.



Jonas must also reflect on his choices. In this case, he knows that uncertainty is better than certain death.



This is Jonas's greatest act of selflessness and his most important life lesson. He has gained the maturity to love Gabriel more than himself, giving him the strength to go on.



CHAPTER 23

One day, it snows, leaving Jonas and Gabriel cold, hungry, and exhausted. Jonas has just a few memories left from The Giver, but he finds one of sunshine and transmits it to Gabriel. Soon, though, the snow makes it impossible for Jonas to bicycle up the hill he is on. He abandons the bike and carries Gabriel. When the memory of sunshine is gone, he focuses on his memories of his friends, family, and The Giver. These memories, and his intense desire to keep Gabriel safe, help him make it to the top of the hill.

When he reaches the top of the **hill**, Jonas recognizes it. He also sees a sled. Jonas and Gabriel ride the sled downhill. At the bottom of the hill, Jonas sees rooms full of colored lights. He is certain that there are people inside those rooms who keep their memories and understand what love is, and who are waiting for him and Gabriel. From the houses, he hears what he knows must be music, and realizes that the people are singing. Jonas also thinks he hears music playing far behind him, where his old community is located, but he can't be sure. It could be real, or it could be an echo.

The hill symbolizes Jonas's final struggle. He must face this struggle without any help (or a bicycle). Yet he realizes he is not alone. Now he has his own memories and feelings to hold onto for strength, and his genuine love for Gabriel to push him forward even though part of him wishes he could give up.



The end of the novel is ambiguous: the village at the bottom of the hill could be Elsewhere (a community unaffected by Sameness), or it could be heaven after Jonas has died. In either case, Jonas has reached his destination, making choices only he could make. Through the music that Jonas may or may not hear behind him, The Giver makes it clear that Jonas has given his former community the opportunity to make its own choice: to seek out the wisdom that comes only through the experience of joy, love, and pain, or to once again hide from everything unpleasant and go back to the robotic comforts of Sameness. Jonas could give the community the opportunity to choose, but the choice is up to them and out of his hands.





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