

Background about the Book – The Giver

"It was almost December, and Jonas was beginning to be frightened."

Thus opens this haunting novel in which a boy inhabits a seemingly ideal world: a world without conflict, poverty, unemployment, divorce, injustice, or inequality. It is a time in which family values are paramount, teenage rebellion is unheard of, and even good manners are a way of life.

December is the time of the annual Ceremony at which each twelve year old receives a life assignment determined by the Elders. Jonas watches his friend Fiona named Caretaker of the Old and his cheerful pal Asher labeled the Assistant Director of Recreation. But Jonas has been chosen for something special. When his selection leads him to an unnamed man -the man called only the Giver -he begins to sense the dark secrets that underlie the fragile perfection of his world.

Told with deceptive simplicity, this is the provocative story of a boy who experiences something incredible and undertakes something impossible. In the telling it questions every value we have taken for granted and reexamines our most deeply held beliefs.

<http://www.loislowry.com/giver.html>

About the Author



Biography

Lois Lowry is known for her versatility and invention as a writer. She was born in Hawaii and grew up in New York, Pennsylvania, and Japan. After several years at Brown University, she turned to her family and to writing. She is the author of more than thirty books for young adults, including the popular Anastasia Krupnik series. She has received countless honors, among them the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award, the California Young Reader's Medal, and the Mark Twain Award. She received Newbery Medals for two of her novels, *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*. Her first novel, *A Summer to Die*, was awarded the International Reading Association's Children's Book Award. Ms. Lowry now divides her time between Cambridge and an 1840s farmhouse in Maine. As a child, and later as an adult, Lois Lowry moved with her family all over the world. Strong family ties and the leaving behind of people and places she came to love play a central theme in much of her work.

Lois Lowry's rich life story is best told in her own words: "I've always felt that I was fortunate to have been born the child of three. My older sister, Helen, was very much like our mother: gentle, family-oriented, eager to please. Little brother Jon was the only boy and had interests that

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he shared with our father; together they were always working on electric trains and erector sets, and later they always seemed to have their heads under the raised hood of a car. That left me in between, exactly where I wanted to be: on my own. I was a solitary child who lived in the world of books and my own imagination.

Because my father was a career military officer - an army dentist - I lived all over the world. I was born in Hawaii, moved from there to New York, spent the years of World War II in my mother's Pennsylvania hometown, and from there went to Tokyo when I was eleven. High school was back in New York City, but by the time I went to college (Brown University in Rhode Island) my family was living in Washington, D.C.

I married young. Women often did so in those days. I had just had my nineteenth birthday - finished my sophomore year in college - when I married a naval officer and continued the odyssey that military life frequently is. California. Connecticut. Florida. South Carolina. Finally, Cambridge, Massachusetts, when my husband left the service and entered Harvard Law School; and then to Maine -- by this time with four children under the age of five in tow.

My children grew up in Maine. So did I. I returned to college at the University of Southern Maine, got my degree, went to graduate school, and finally began to write professionally, the thing I had dreamed of doing since those childhood years when I endlessly scribbled stories and poems in notebooks.

After my marriage ended in 1977, when I was forty, I settled into the life I have led ever since. Today I live and write in Cambridge, in a house dominated by a very shaggy Tibetan terrier named Bandit. Weekends find me in Maine, where we have an early-nineteenth-century farmhouse surrounded by flower gardens, woods, and wildlife.

My books have varied in content and style. Yet it seems to me that all of them deal, essentially, with the same general theme: the importance of human connections. *A Summer to Die*, my first book, was a highly fictionalized retelling of the early death of my sister, and of the effect of such a loss on a family. *Number the Stars*, set in a different culture and era, tells the same story: that of the role that we humans play in the lives of our fellow beings.

The Giver, *Gathering Blue*, and *Messenger* take place against the background of very different cultures and times. Though all three are broader in scope than my earlier books, they nonetheless speak to the same concern: the vital need of people to be aware of their interdependence, not only with each other but also with the world and its environment.

My older son was a fighter pilot in the United States Air Force. His death in the cockpit of a warplane tore away a piece of my world. But it left me, too, with a wish to honor him by joining the many others trying to find a way to end conflict on this very fragile earth.

I am a grandmother now. For my own grandchildren—and for all those of their generation—I try, through writing, to convey my passionate awareness that we live intertwined on this planet and that our future depends on our caring more, and doing more, for one another.”

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(From <http://www.loislowry.com/>)

Reviews – The Giver

Horn Magazine, July/August 1993

In a departure from her well-known and favorably regarded realistic works, Lois Lowry has written a fascinating, thoughtful science-fiction novel. *The* story takes place in a nameless community, at an unidentified future time. The life is utopian: there is no hunger, no disease, no pollution, no fear; old age is tenderly cared for; every child has concerned and attentive parents. Each aspect of life has a prescribed rule: one-year-olds — "Ones" — are Named and given to their chosen family; "Nines" get their first bicycles; Birthmothers give birth to three children and then become Laborers, "family units" get two children, one male, one female. In Jonas's family, his father is a Nurturer, one who cares for the "new children" before they go to a family unit; his mother is in the Department of Justice, and he has a younger sister, Lily. But although their life seems perfect, the reader somehow becomes uneasily aware that all is not well. Young Jonas is eagerly waiting his Ceremony of Twelve, the time when all the twelve-year-olds in the community receive their Assignments for their lifelong professions. He can guess that his playful, jolly friend Asher will work in Recreation and that gentle Fiona will be Caretaker of the Old but he is astonished to be selected to be trained to be the new Receiver of Memories, the most respected of the Elders. As he begins his training by the old Receiver, whom he calls the Giver, he discovers that the community is spared all memories of pain and grief, which are lodged in the mind of the Giver, and now transmitted to Jonas. He learns about war, starvation, neglect, misery, and despair. He learns, to his horror, the truth about the happy release given to old people and new children who do not thrive. But he learns also about joys that the community never experiences: they do not see color, or hear music, or know love. In a cliffhanger ending which can be construed as allegory or reality, he asserts his new wisdom and knowledge. The story is skillfully written; the air of disquiet is delicately insinuated. And the theme of balancing the values of freedom and security is beautifully presented.

By Ann A. Flowers

School Library Journal, May 1993

In a complete departure from her other novels, Lowry has written an intriguing story set in a society that is uniformly run by a Committee of Elders. Twelve-year-old Jonas's confidence in his comfortable "normal" existence as a member of this well-ordered community is shaken when he is assigned his life's work as the Receiver. The Giver, who passes on to Jonas the burden of being the holder for the community of all memory "back and back and back," teaches him the cost of living in an environment that is "without color, pain, or past." The tension leading up to the Ceremony, in which children are promoted not to another grade but to another stage in their life, and the drama and responsibility of the sessions with The Giver are gripping. The final

flight for survival is as riveting as it is inevitable. The author makes real abstract concepts, such as the meaning of a life in which there are virtually no choices to be made and no experiences with deep feelings. This tightly plotted story and its believable characters will stay with readers for a long time.

The Book Report, September/October 1993

In this impressive science fiction novel, Jonas lives in a future society where every aspect of life is lovingly controlled by the Committee of Elders. Fifty children are born each year to women assigned as birthmothers; the infants are tended by nurturers until age one, when they are placed in families. All children aged four to six wear jackets that button up the back to promote interdependence. At seven, they receive front buttons as a sign of their growing independence. At nine, they get their bicycles (there are no motorized vehicles in this society although supplies are brought in by plane). At 12, all are told their predetermined life assignments--pilot, nurturer, fish hatchery attendant, instructor. Jonas is approaching his Ceremony of Twelve with some trepidation, though his father, a nurturer, and his mother, a judge, try to reassure him. To his alarm, Jonas is passed over during the regular assignments. He has been selected as the society's next Receiver of Memory. In each generation, there is only one Receiver--the person who holds the memories for the whole society. The former Receiver (now the Giver) passes on his burden to Jonas, who experiences for the first time not only snow, sunshine and color but also pain, hatred and war--all things the society gave up when it opted for sameness. Meanwhile, Jonas' father brings baby Gabe home from the Nurturing Center. Gabe, unlike the proper infants, has not been sleeping through the night. When the decision is reached for Gabe's "release," (euthanasia), Jonas steals supplies, a bicycle and Gabe. Together they set out for Elsewhere, where hopefully the memories originated. In the final scene, a freezing Jonas sees a light through the snow, and students will want to believe the boys will be saved. This book will leave no reader undisturbed. When I realized that Jonas' so-called gift to "see beyond" was his first perception of the color red, I was stunned. What starts as a description of a benign alien culture gradually becomes an ominous look at a society that believes, we really have to protect people from wrong choices. It's safer." That statement alone could lead to myriad discussion or essay possibilities. This is what every sci fi book should be--thought provoking yet enjoyable. The cover photo (by Lowry herself) is intriguing. Highly Recommended--should be included in all collections;

By Sherry Hoy, Librarian, Tuscarora Junior High School, Mifflintown, Pennsylvania

Read Alikes – The Giver

Gathering Blue by Lois Lowry

Messenger by Lois Lowry

The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm by Nancy Farmer

The White Mountains by John Christopher

Among the Hidden by Margaret Peterson Haddix

Discussion Questions: The Giver

- 1) How is the society in which Jonas lives different from the one in our world? Is it better or worse?
- 2) The community depicted in *The Giver* is one in which every person and their experiences are exactly the same. Everything is controlled and competition has been eliminated in favor of people working only for the common good. Are there advantages to this type of community? Do you think the loss of diversity is worthwhile?
- 3) In Jonas' community, choice has been taken away from people. What effect does this have on their lives?
- 4) Jonas is chosen to be the next Receiver of Memory for the community. Is this an honor or a punishment?
- 5) What does Jonas realize after he has received a year's worth of training and memories? How does his training affect his relationship with his parents?
- 6) Jonas remarks that loving another person must have been a dangerous way to live. Describe the relationship between Jonas and his family, his friends Asher and Fiona, and the Giver. Are any of these relationships dangerous? Perhaps the most dangerous is that between Jonas and the Giver--the one relationship built on love. Why is that relationship dangerous and what does the danger suggest about the nature of love?
- 7) Why is Jonas allowed to lie? Do you think there is ever an appropriate time for lying either in Jonas' community or your own?
- 8) Do you agree with Jonas's decision to leave the community? Why or why not?
- 9) Why is the Giver able to keep his role for so many years, yet Jonas is unable to continue after only one year? What is the most important thing the Giver passes on to Jonas?
- 10) What do you think happened to Jonas and Gabriel at the end?
- 11) Why do we need to have our memories, good and bad, to live a complete life?
- 12) Is it right or wrong for society to be controlled by a small group of people such the "elders" in *The Giver*? Does free choice allow a society to be productive and hopeful despite the possibility of making poor choices?

Questions from Novelist, Reading Raps by Rita Soltan

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions can be applied to any book. You can tweak the questions for your specific book. They can be cut into strips and passed around in a basket to help facilitate discussion.

My favorite part of the book was...

A better title for this book would be...because...

(Name of character) reminds me of myself because...

My least favorite character was...because...

If I were (name of character, -----) I would (wouldn't) have...

(Name of character) reminds me of someone I know because...

I changed my mind about...because...

I would (wouldn't) like to read another book by this author because...

This book made me think...When I finished this book, I still wondered...

This book reminded me of...

I'd like to tell the author...

What happened in this book was very realistic (unrealistic) because...

This book was better (worse) than the movie version because...

When I started reading his book, I thought...

I didn't like...because...

This book made me realize...

If I could talk to (name of character), I would say...

One thing I have noticed about the author's style is...

If I could be any character in the book I would be...because...

I was surprised when...

I think the main thing the writer was trying to say was...

The most important thing about this book is...

I predicted that...

I think the writer must be ...because...

I would change the ending...

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