

“The Giver” Study Guide: Literary Elements

- **Plot**

The most basic of the literary elements of “The Giver” is the plot. “The Giver” is basically the story of a young boy named Jonas who lives in a dystopian society in which there is very little pain or emotion. Jonas is named the new Receiver of Memories, and he is apprenticed to the Giver, who passes along communal memories from the past, filled with both pain and pleasure. Jonas eventually comes to see the disadvantages to his society’s way of removing all emotion from life, and he runs away, releasing the memories to the rest of the community. (See the first article in this series for a brief summary of the novel.)
- **Setting**

The setting of “The Giver” is a dystopian, futuristic world in which war, pain, and emotion are foreign concepts. Families (or family units) consist of two parents and two children, both of whom were birthed by Birthmothers who would never see them again. When people age or become ill, they are Released – a word which Jonas later realizes is a euphemism for “killed.”
- **Characters**

The two main characters in the book are Jonas and the Giver. Jonas is intelligent and willing to think outside of his community’s norms. The Giver is patient and wise, and he helps Jonas to absorb the memories and to choose which path he will take. (See the analysis of main characters article for a more complete list of characters and their descriptions.)
- **Point of View**

The point of view of the novel is third-person, subjective. This means that although the story is told as if by an outside observer (refraining from using first person pronouns, for example), the narrator still describes Jonas’s thoughts and emotions. The reader learns about the events in the story through Jonas’s perceptions, which enables the reader to learn about various hidden aspects of the dystopian society along with him.
- **Conflict**

There are several major conflicts in the novel. One “man vs. nature” conflict is depicted by the way in which society tries to control or overcome the forces of nature. They do this by controlling life and death, the weather, and any other aspects of nature that they can. At the same time, pain and suffering from nature sometimes do overcome society’s constraints on them.

Perhaps the most important conflict in the novel is that of man vs. himself, or Jonas’s struggle to do what he thinks is best for society. Having grown up believing that his society was perfect, Jonas’s decision to leave the society and release all of the memories takes considerable courage.

Various man vs. man conflicts appear in the book as well, including the Giver’s conflict with Jonas when he transmits some of the memories, as well as Jonas’s minor conflict with his father over whether Gabriel should be Released.
- **Theme**

There are several themes that run throughout this novel:

 - Taking away people’s choices will not make them happier.
 - Memories are important and make us who we are.
 - You cannot truly feel pleasure without true pain.

These literary elements of “The Giver” serve as the backbone of the novel, and Lois Lowry crafts her story around these important elements.

“The Giver” Study Guide: Analysis of Main Characters

- **Jonas**

Jonas is one of the main characters of “The Giver.” When one thinks of the character of Jonas, three main words come to mind: intelligent, determined, and passionate. Although these character traits are rare in the community in which he lives, they make him perfect for the role of Receiver.

Jonas’s pale-colored eyes and his ability to see color for short flashes of time set him apart from his peers, and he is mildly concerned with these differences in the beginning of the book. He also wishes that he could feel closer to other people, and he cares about his friends and family – a concept that is foreign to many in his society.

In time, he becomes passionate about the memories and the emotions that they evoke, and he feels more and more frustrated towards his society. In the end, he combines his traits of determination, intelligence, and passion to escape with Gabriel to Elsewhere.

- **The Giver**

The Giver is the ultimate teacher. He is patient, calm, and wise, and he is able to deal with the strong emotions of others. Emotionally he is very strong, having been able to absorb all of the community’s memories and emotions and go on living. Because he is so nurturing, he feels ready to help the entire community absorb the memories when Jonas escapes to Elsewhere.

- **Gabriel**

Jonas’s father brings home Gabriel, a newchild who is having trouble sleeping at night. He is a pleasure during the day, however, and Jonas becomes more and more attached to him. When he is at risk for being released, Jonas saves him. (See this article for an activity related to “The Giver” and euthanasia.)

- **Jonas’s Father**

Jonas’s father has been brought up to maturity in a society that does not value love or compassion. Therefore, although he does seem to love the newchildren under his care (he is a Nurturer of newchildren), he is unable to feel true compassion for them or to understand the pain of releasing them. He is extremely loving and caring to his two children and to the newchildren, but he does not verbally recognize the value of love or caring, viewing them as abstract concepts.

These are the main characters of “The Giver” whom Lowry develops. Other characters include Jonas’s mother, his friends Fiona and Asher, and his little sister Lily.

A Brief Summary of “The Giver,” by Lois Lowry

- **The Setting**

The setting of “The Giver” is a world in which there exists no pain, no war, and very little emotion. In this utopia, everything is as pleasant as possible. Birthmothers give birth to “newchildren” and never see them again. These newchildren then move to the Nurturing Center, then to a family unit, and then together with the other “Childless Adults.” When they become too old or infirm, they are “released” – although they don’t realize it, those who are released are actually killed.

- **Jonas**

At the beginning of the novel, Jonas is a young boy who is nervous about the Ceremony of Twelve, when he will receive the Assignment, or job, that he will spend the rest of his life doing. Jonas often perceives flashes of “change” when he looks at an object; he does not realize that he is perceiving color, which disappeared once the community went over to “Sameness.” At the ceremony, Jonas is chosen to become the new Receiver, a prestigious Assignment that consists of keeping all of the old memories of the community from before the time of the “Sameness.”

- **The Giver**

The Giver transmits memories to Jonas – memories of fear and joy, of happiness and despair. These memories are filled with colors and emotion, both of which are lacking in Jonas’s world. Jonas becomes very close with the Giver and frustrated with the world that he lives in.

The Giver then tells Jonas about the last Receiver, his daughter, who became overwhelmed by all of the memories and begged to be released. When she was, the memories that she had gotten were dispersed to the rest of the community. Because Jonas has received so many memories, the Giver suggests that he run away to Elsewhere, at which point his memories will disperse to the community, and the Giver will help the community come to terms with emotions.

- **The Escape**

When Jonas finds out that Gabriel may be “released” soon, he is appalled to learn that being “released” is the same thing as being killed. Jonas runs away with Gabriel on his father’s bicycle, off in search of Elsewhere. The landscape becomes more and more filled with color, but Jonas grows hungry and tired. Finally, he finds a sled at the top of a hill and rides with Gabriel towards twinkling lights and merry music.

This short summary includes only the main events that occurred in the novel. To understand the full story, however, you will need to read this incredible book by Lois Lowry.