

### **Literature Analysis: The Giver**

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Lois Lowry's *The Giver* is a children's book that seeks to address the issues concerning freedom, choice, diversity and connections in our society. The book was inspired by several life experiences. When she was eleven, her family used to stay in a small gated American community in Tokyo, where her military father had been stationed after the Second World War. This community, just like the one described in *The Giver*, was comfortable and familiar, as well as well secured. Just like Jonas, Lois did not want that type of comfort, so she would set out on her bike to explore the outside environment, where she found a lovely area called Shibuya. She loved the feel of the place, and for her, that was her "Elsewhere". Later experiences in her life added to the story, and her experience with a painter from Maine who loved and appreciated color more. He later on went blind, but still had passion for color. This man's face would later be used for the cover of *The Giver*, in reference to the giver's ability to interact with color in the text.

The book is written in the past tense with the third-person narration, and it mainly focusses on Jonas's experiences and observations. The setting is in the future, as we see Birthdays being a memory of the past (Pg. 121). The community is utopian, and the members experience no pain and suffering. The community is full of rules that govern their lives, and their organization is quite different from ours.

There are no ordinary families but family units and dwellings instead of homes. Feelings are meant to be hidden and no family unit should have more than two children: male and female each. The author introduces us to ceremonies such as Naming ceremonies where newborn babies are given names, and the Ceremony of Twelve, where the children get their life-time community assignments. People are also identified based on their roles. For instance, The Receiver who becomes The Giver, The Nurturer, The Twelve(s), among others. The community is also unique in that there is no privacy. This world is clearly different from the current world we live in, and Lowry intends to show us that we should not take the small things we see for granted.

Jonas is the main protagonist in the story. He is to be the next receiver of the community's memories, and through his experiences we get to understand the community and how it is different from our communities. The community exists in safety and comfort, with no suffering, pain, poverty, crime or competition. The community also lacks imagination and the ability to be creative, and their life stages are controlled throughout.

There are specific stages of life that each member of the community is required to go through, and they do so as a group and not individually. Jonas is curious to know what would become of him at The Ceremony of Twelve, where he would be given his life-time assignment.

The Chief elder says, "Jonas has been selected to be our next Receiver of Memory" (Pg.60). She adds that he would be faced "with pain of a magnitude that none of us here can comprehend because it is beyond our experience." (Pg. 63).

The rising action of the story comes about when Jonas becomes the new receiver. Jonas gets memories from his predecessor, and they are so painful that he wishes the whole community could help him bear it all. He asks the giver, "I think it would seem a little easier if the memories were shared", to which the giver agrees but says people would be troubled and burdened, and it would be good for a single person to bear their pains (Pg. 112-113 ). The community had done away with color and memories for sameness, and they were reserved for the receiver.

The main conflict in the story arises when Jonas gets overwhelmed by his discoveries on the community's restriction to freedom of choice and emotional experience, and he decides to rebel against them. He decides to escape so that everyone in the society gets to bear the pain caused by the memories equally. The Giver agrees with Jonas on that. He says, "That's true. And having you here with me over the past year has made me realize that things must change." (Pg. 155). The climax of the story comes about when Jonas witnesses his father kill a baby in the name of "releasing" it. Together with The Giver, they vow to change things. The falling action comes about when Jonas decides to flee.

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Jonas learns that Gabriel, who is a receiver-to-be, is to be released next, and he escapes with him, cycling throughout the night. They experience challenges along the way, but they have to go on, even if it would lead to their death.

The community Lowry brings us to shows us the essence of our connections and interdependence with each other, with our environment and with our world in general. The fact that Jonas can experience colors, affection, music and even pain sets him apart from the other members of the community. The Giver experienced so much pain with the memories that Jonas offered to help him ease the pain. Jonas asks, " ... What is it that makes you suffer so much? If you gave some of it to me, maybe your pain would be less." (Pg. 107). Jonas wishes the whole community would be involved in bearing these memories.

Lois Lowry brings out the issue of sameness versus diversity in the story. The community believes it is safe in its sameness, and any risks are thus avoided. To some extent, this sameness can be equated in the current world to cases where groups of people find themselves more associated with specific kinds of dressings and behaviors, for one reason or another. Some religious groups also specify specific dressings for their members, restricting diversity in their modes of dressing. Jonas, in such a case, could symbolize people who are fed up with living under certain behavioral and dressing restrictions, and who would want to get out to explore more on their own. Upon escaping, Jonas was "awed by the surprises that lay beyond each curve of the road."

Due to sameness, the community has no individualism, and everything is done in groups, apart from their lifetime assignments. The children don't even know their individual birthdays, as birthdays are celebrated in December for the groups. The Giver gives Jonas a Birthday memory where a single child is celebrated individually by a group (pg. 121). Jonas starts valuing the joy of being an individual. Honesty is also another issue addressed in the book. The final rule in the printed set of rules for Jonas states, "You may lie" (Pg. 68). Jonas had never lied, and he wonders if the previous receivers had often lied. He also learns that his father lies to him on "releasing the babies", where he actually kills them. However, Jonas learns that The Giver had made the decision to be honest.

The theme of family in the book is brought out differently, where they have family units. Unlike in our communities, they apply to get spouses and even children. They don't take care of the children for all their lives. They leave the grown children and move to stay with other childless adults. Their family units are not related by blood. The Giver gives Jonas a memory of several generations of a family opening Christmas gifts around a tree (Pg. 125).

Jonas admires it and wishes their families were also based on love, and not just duty and obligation. He, however, notes that the elderly may not get well catered for in such a community. That is quite true in our communities, as people get involved so much in their individual jobs and responsibilities that they forget to look after their elderly.

Lois Lowry uses various things symbolically. The river was symbolic of the memories flow. The sled served to usher Jonas and Gabe into a new world, where he believed they would fit in (Pg. 179). Gabe was himself symbolic of a new beginning for Jonas. Jonas acknowledges that Gabriel was the one person left for him to love (Pg. 177).

**Works Cited**

Lowry, L., & Rifkin, R. (1993). The giver ..