

The Giver



INTRO

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

themes occur throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, use the numbers instead.

1 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.

2 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.

3 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.



THEMES

In LitCharts each theme gets its own color and number. Our color-coded theme boxes make it easy to track where the

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.

4 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.

5 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 **red text** throughout the Summary & 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

The color-coded boxes under each quote below make it easy to track the themes related to each quote. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1 QUOTES

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

- **Speaker:** Jonas's Father
- **Related themes:** The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Coming of Age
- **Theme Tracker code:**



CHAPTER 3 QUOTES

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

- **Mentioned or related characters:** Jonas
- **Related themes:** The Individual vs. Society
- **Theme Tracker code:**



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:** The Individual vs. Society
- **Theme Tracker code:**



CHAPTER 4 QUOTES

It was against the rules for children or adults to look at another's nakedness; but the rule did not apply to newchildren or the Old... [Jonas] couldn't see why it was necessary. He liked the feeling of safety her in this warm and quiet room; he liked the expression of trust on the woman's face as she lay in the water unprotected, exposed, and free.

- **Mentioned or related characters:** Jonas
- **Related themes:** The Individual vs. Society, Feeling and Emotion
- **Theme Tracker code:**



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.

- **Speaker:** Larissa
- **Related themes:** The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion
- **Theme Tracker code:**



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.

- **Speaker:** Asher
- **Related themes:** The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice
- **Theme Tracker code:**



CHAPTER 8 QUOTES

"Jonas has not been assigned," she informed the crowd, and [Jonas's] heart sank. Then she went on. "Jonas has been *selected*."

- **Speaker:** Chief Elder
- **Mentioned or related characters:** Jonas
- **Related themes:** The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice
- **Theme Tracker code:**



CHAPTER 11 QUOTES

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

- **Speaker:** The Giver
- **Mentioned or related characters:** Jonas

- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice

- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 12 QUOTES

There was a time, actually—you'll see this in the memories later—when flesh was many different colors. That was before we went to Sameness. Today flesh is all the same.

- Speaker: The Giver
- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Memory
- Theme Tracker code:



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. >

- Speaker: The Giver
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion
- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas
- Related themes: Feeling and Emotion, Coming of Age, Memory
- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas

- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion, Coming of Age

- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Speaker: The Giver
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion, Memory
- Theme Tracker code:



They need a Receiver to contain all that pain. And knowledge.

- Speaker: The Giver
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion, Coming of Age, Memory
- Theme Tracker code:



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?

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas
- Related themes: Freedom and Choice, Coming of Age
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 14 QUOTES

The sled hit a bump in the hill and Jonas is 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.

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas
- Related themes: Feeling and Emotion, Memory

•Theme Tracker code:



Was there someone there, waiting, who would receive the tiny released twin? Would it grow up Elsewhere, not knowing, ever, that in this community lived a being who looked exactly the same? For a moment, he felt a tiny, fluttering hope that he knew was quite foolish. He hoped that it would be Larissa, waiting. Larissa, the old woman he had bathed.

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas, Larissa
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society
- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas
- Related themes: Feeling and Emotion, Memory
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 16 QUOTES

Things could change, Gabe," Jonas went on. "Things could be different. I don't know how, but there must be some way for things to be different. There could be colors. And grandparents," he added.

- Speaker: Jonas
- Mentioned or related characters: Gabriel
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion, Coming of Age
- Theme Tracker code:



"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.

- Speaker: Jonas, The Giver
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Feeling and Emotion

•Theme Tracker code:



"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!"

- Speaker: Jonas, Jonas's Father
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society
- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Coming of Age
- Theme Tracker code:



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: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Coming of Age
- Theme Tracker code:



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

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas, Asher, Fiona
- Related themes: Feeling and Emotion, Memory
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 18 QUOTES

Memories are forever.

- Speaker: The Giver
- Related themes: Memory
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 19 QUOTES

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

- Speaker: Jonas
- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas's Father
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion, Coming of Age
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 20 QUOTES

"Having you here with me over the past year had 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.

- Speaker: The Giver
- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion, Coming of Age
- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas, The Giver
- Related themes: Memory
- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas
- Related themes: Freedom and Choice, Coming of Age
- Theme Tracker code:



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

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas, Gabriel
- Related themes: The Individual vs. Society, Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion, Coming of Age
- Theme Tracker code:



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.

- Mentioned or related characters: Jonas
- Related themes: Freedom and Choice, Feeling and Emotion
- Theme Tracker code:



SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

The color-coded boxes under "Analysis & Themes" below make it easy to track the themes throughout the work. Each color 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.

*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.*

2 3

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.

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.

3

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.

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.

3

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.

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

2 3

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.

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.

3

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.

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.

1 3 4

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.

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.

1 4

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.

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.

2 3

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.

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.

1 2 4

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.

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.

1 2 4

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.

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.

1 2 3 4

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."

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.

1

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.

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



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.

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 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.

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.



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 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.

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.



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.

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.

1 2 3 4

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.

1 3 4

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.

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.

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.

1 2 3 4

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.

1 3

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

1

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.

*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.



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 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.

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'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.



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.

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.

1

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.

1 4

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.

1 3 4

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.

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.

1 3

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.

3 5

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.

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



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 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'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.



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."

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



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.

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.



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.

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



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."

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.



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 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 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 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 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.



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.

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



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.

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.



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.

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



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.

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.



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.

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



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.

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.



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 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.*

2 3 4 5

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.*

3 5

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.*

1 3 4 5

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.

1 3

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.

1 2 3 4

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

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.

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 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.

1 2 3 4

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

1 2 3 4

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.

1 2 3 4

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

1 2 3 4

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

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.

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

1 2 3 4

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.

1 2 3 4

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.

1 2 3 4

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.

Rosemary's suicide was a way of escaping the community. But suicide is a cowardly and selfish, and does nothing to change 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.

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



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 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 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 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.



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.

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 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**.

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.

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.



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.

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.



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.

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.

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 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.

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



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.

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.

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.



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 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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