

BOOKNOTES

TEACHERS GUIDE

thematic connections

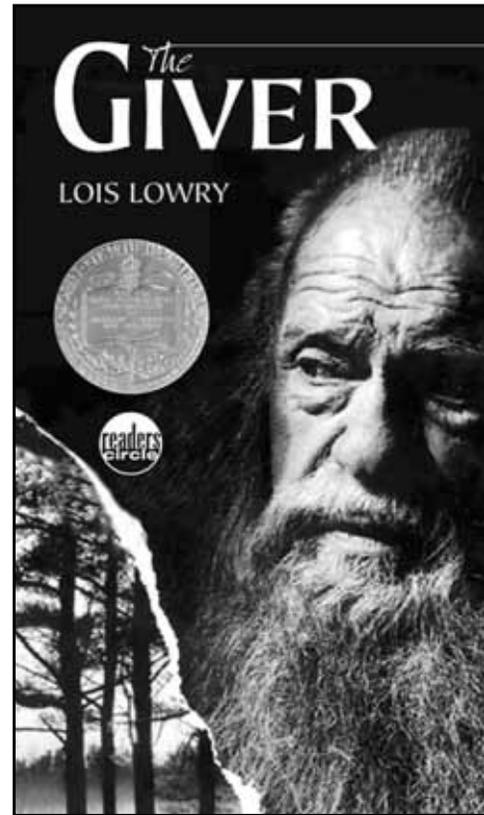
Family–Parental Relationships
Diversity • Euthanasia • Feelings

Grades 5 up

about the book

In Jonas’s perfect world, everything is under control. There is no war or fear or pain. But when Jonas learns the truth, there is no turning back.

In a utopian community where there are no choices—where everyone has his or her place in the world assigned according to gifts and interests—the time has come for 12-year-old Jonas to become the new Receiver of Memory. He will be the one to bear the collective memories of a society that lives only in the present, where “Sameness” is the rule. But Jonas soon recognizes the losses and discovers the lie that supports his community. He decides he will change his world—but he cannot predict how that change will come about, or what that change will mean for himself and the “newchild” Gabriel, whom he has resolved to protect.



Dell Laurel-Leaf Readers Circle paperback 0-440-23768-8

awards

A Newbery Medal Book
An ALA Notable Children’s Book
An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
A *Boston Globe–Horn Book* Award Honor Book
A *Booklist* Children’s Editors’ Choice
A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year
A *Horn Book* Fanfare
The Regina Medal
An IRA–CBC Children’s Choice
An NCTE Notable Trade Book for the Language Arts
An NCSS–CBC Notable Children’s Book in the Field of Social Studies

pre-reading activity

Have students create a “perfect” community, giving it a name, a system of government, and a physical description, and accounting for how its people spend their days. Discuss how that community would change and grow. What roles would history and memories of painful events play in the growth of the community? What would have to be added to our own society in order to make it perfect? What would be lost in this quest for perfection?

thematic connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Family–Parental Relationships—In *The Giver*, each family has two parents, a son, and a daughter. The relationships are not biological, but are developed through observation and a careful handling of personality. In our own society, the makeup of family is under discussion. How are families defined? Are families the unchanging foundations of a society, or are they continually open for new definitions?

Diversity—*The Giver* pictures a community in which every person and his or her experience is precisely the same. The climate is controlled, and competition has been eliminated in favor of a community in which everyone works only for the common good. What advantages might “Sameness” yield for contemporary communities? In what ways do our differences make us distinctly human? Is the loss of diversity worthwhile?

Euthanasia—Underneath the placid calm of Jonas’s society lies a very orderly and inexorable system of euthanasia, practiced on the very young who do not conform, the elderly, and those whose errors threaten the stability of the community. What are the disadvantages and benefits to a community that accepts such a vision of euthanasia?

Feelings—Jonas remarks that loving another person must have been a dangerous way to live. Describe the relationships between Jonas and his family, his friends Asher and Fiona, and the Giver. Are any of these relationships dangerous? Perhaps the most dangerous is that between Jonas and the Giver—the one relationship built on love. Why is that relationship dangerous and what does the danger suggest about the nature of love?

vocabulary/use of language

Lois Lowry helps create an alternate world by having the community use words in a very special way. Though that world stresses what it calls “precision of language,” in fact it is built upon language that is not precise, but that deliberately clouds meaning. Consider what Jonas’s community really means by words such as: *released* (p. 2), *feelings* (p. 4), *animals* (p. 5), *Nurturer* (p. 7), *Stirrings* (p. 37), *replacement child* (p. 44), and *Elsewhere* (p. 78).

Examine the ways that Jonas’s community uses euphemism to distance itself from the reality of what they call “Release.” How does our own society use euphemism to distance the realities of death, bodily functions, aging, and political activities? What benefits and disadvantages are there to such a use of language?

connecting to the curriculum

Philosophy—A number of utopian communities were established in the U.S., such as the Shakers in the eighteenth century or Fruitlands, led by Bronson Alcott (father of Louisa May Alcott), in the mid-nineteenth century. Have students choose one of these communities and list the principles that guided it, as well as the assumptions behind those principles. What generalizations might be made about why such a community may not last?

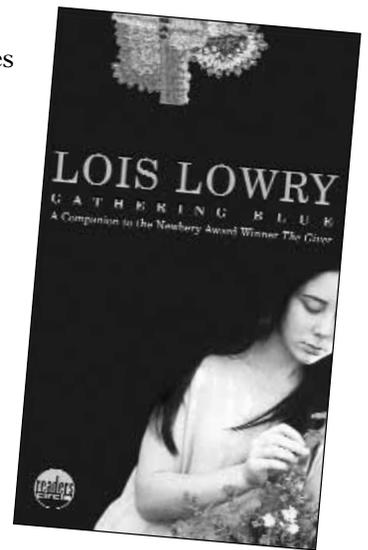
Science—While throwing an apple back and forth, Jonas suddenly notices that it “changes”; in fact, he is beginning to perceive color. Divide the class into groups and have them research and report on the following subjects: the nature of color and of the spectrum, how the human eye perceives color, what causes color blindness, and what causes the body to react to any stimulus. Is it possible to train the human eye so that it does not perceive color?

Language Arts—The ending of *The Giver* may be interpreted in two very different ways. Perhaps Jonas is remembering his Christmas memory—one of the most beautiful that the Giver gave to him—as he and Gabriel are freezing to death, falling into a dreamlike coma in the snow. Or perhaps Jonas does hear music and, with his special vision, is able to perceive the warm house where people are waiting to greet him. In her acceptance speech for the Newbery Medal, Lois Lowry mentioned both possibilities, but would not call one correct, the other not. After discussing the role of ambiguity in writing, have students craft short stories that end on an ambiguous note. Discuss some in class, noting the writers’ clues for such an ending.

Sociology—Choose a group in the U.S. today that actively seeks to maintain an identity outside of the mainstream culture: the Amish or Mennonites, a Native American tribe, the Hasidic Jewish community, or another group. Have students research and report on the answers to questions such as the following: What benefits does this group expect from defining itself as “other”? What are the disadvantages? How does the mainstream culture put pressure on such a group?

Using the Companion Novels Together

Language Arts—*Gathering Blue* is a companion novel to *The Giver*. Discuss the difference between a companion novel and a sequel. Talk about the similarities and differences in the two novels. Ask students to write a letter that Kira, the main character in *Gathering Blue*, might write to Jonas where she tells him the frightening truths that she discovers about her community. Share the letters in class, and discuss what Jonas might write back to her.



For a complete teachers guide for *Gathering Blue*, visit us at www.randomhouse.com/teachers

related titles

by theme

Gathering Blue

*A Companion to *The Giver**

Lois Lowry

Fear • Courage • Friendship
Truth • Freedom

Grades 7 up / 0-440-22949-9
Dell Laurel-Leaf Readers Circle

The Sign of the Beaver

Elizabeth George Speare

Adventure • Cultural Diversity
Historical Fiction

Grades 5–9 / 0-440-47900-2
Dell Yearling



A Single Shard

Linda Sue Park

Courage • Survival • Honesty
Hope • Family • Death

Grades 4–8 / 0-440-41851-8
Dell Yearling



Photo credit: Bachrach

about the author

Lois Lowry has written over 20 novels spanning several genres. Her Anastasia Krupnik series, set in contemporary Boston, follows with poignant humor the exploits of Anastasia (a precocious adolescent), her younger brother Sam, and their artistic parents. Books like *Rabble Starkey* and *A Summer to Die* focus on families and crisis, and examine the strength and love that bind them together. *Number the Stars*, Lowry's first work of historical fiction and a Newbery Medal winner, is set during the Holocaust. *The Giver*, Lowry's first work of fantasy, is now joined by its companion novel, *Gathering Blue*.

reviews for *The Giver*

★ "The simplicity and directness of Lowry's writing force readers to grapple with their own thoughts."

—Starred, *Booklist*

"A powerful and provocative novel."

—*The New York Times*

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