

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

by

Mark Haddon

2003



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Ray Mescallado

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The story is set in England, primarily in Swindon - a town between Bristol and London - and in London itself. The events occur in 1998.

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Christopher John Francis Boone - The book's narrator, Christopher is fifteen years old, gifted in mathematics, and has Asperger's Syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism. He lives at 36 Randolph Street with his father.

Ed Boone - Christopher's father, who owns and runs a heating maintenance and boiler repair business.

Judy Boone - Christopher's mother, who Ed told Christopher died two years ago when she actually moved to London with her lover, Roger Shears.

Siobhan - Christopher's main teacher since he was twelve.

Eileen Shears - A neighbor of Christopher and ex-wife of Roger Shears. Lives at 41 Randolph Street.

Roger Shears - Former husband of Eileen Shears, a banker who moved to London with Christopher's mother.

Mrs. Alexander - Another neighbor of Christopher's who, she is an older woman who tries to befriend Christopher.

Wellington - A large poodle with black fur owned by Eileen Shears, found dead at the start of the novel.

Toby - Christopher's pet rat.

Minor Characters

Mr. Jeavons - The psychologist at Christopher's school.

Edward Paulson - A fellow student at Christopher's school.

Mr. Paulson - Edward's father, who died from gliding accident.

Steve - A student who comes to Christopher's school on Thursdays, needs help to eat his food.

Unnamed Policeman - Called to the scene of Wellington's death, is hit by Christopher when he touches him.

Kate - The officer accompanying the policeman that Christopher hit.

Police Sergeant - Asks Christopher for information when he's taken into custody.

Uncle Terry - Ed Boone's brother, he works at bakery factory and lives in Sunderland.

Grandma Burton - Lives in a nursing home and suffers from senile dementia.

Inspector - Gives Christopher a caution for hitting the policeman.

Rhodri - Ed Boone's employee.

Francis - A student at Christopher's school, called a spastic ("spazzer") by his brother Terry.

Terry - The older, delinquent brother of Francis.

Mrs. Peters - Teaches art at Christopher's school.

Mrs. Hardisty - A neighbor who died of an aneurysm.

Sarah - A student at Christopher's school, he once punched her when she pulled his hair.

Mrs. Forbes - An older woman who works at Christopher's school.

Reverend Peters - Mrs. Peters' husband and a vicar, he volunteers to be the invigilator for Christopher's A-level math exam.

Mr. Thompson - Lives at 40 Randolph Street.

Mr. Thompson's brother - Speaks to Christopher during his investigation.

Unnamed woman - Mother of the family who lives at 44 Randolph Street, speaks to Christopher during his investigation.

Mr. Wise - Lives at 43 Randolph Street with his disabled mother, speaks to Christopher during his investigation.

Number 38 - Next door neighbors, Ed Boone says they take drugs and forbids Christopher from talking to them.

Mrs. Gascoyne - Headmistress at Christopher's school.

Mr. Davis - Works at Christopher's school.

Mrs. Gray - The life skills instructor at Christopher's school.

Indian shopkeeper - Runs the local grocery where Christopher buys candy.

Ivor - Mrs. Alexander's dachshund.

Randyman - A Red-Faced Black Spider Monkey at the Twycross Zoo.

Miracle and Star - A pair of Patagonian Sea Lions at the Twycross Zoo.

Maliku - An Orangutan at the Twycross Zoo.

Joseph Fleming - A student at Christopher's school who is disruptive.

Mr. Land - Went to school with Judy Boone.

Angie - Secretary at Perkin and Rashid desk who befriends Judy Boone.

Mr. Perkin - An employer of Judy Boone, co-owner of Perkin and Rashid, Chartered Surveyors.

Mr. Rashid - An employer of Judy Boone, co-owner of Perkin and Rashid, Chartered Surveyors.

Julie - Christopher's main teacher when he first began attending school.

Aunt Ruth - Cousin of Judy Boone who lives in Manchester and has cancer.

Lady - Mother of a baby and a little boy, Christopher approaches her to ask for directions to the Swindon train station.

Nigel - Policeman who speaks to Christopher at the Swindon train station and loses him on the train to London.

Jack - Student at Christopher's school.

Polly - Student at Christopher's school.

Unnamed Man - Encounters Christopher in London and tells him to wait for the policeman looking for him.

Man in blue jacket - Tries to help Christopher at the London train station.

Woman at Information Booth - Tells Christopher how to get to Willesden.

Man with argyle socks - Rescues Christopher from being run over by a train at a London station.

Woman with guitar case - Tries to help Christopher, has a dog on her case.

Drunken Man - Present at the Willesden station when Christopher arrives.

Man in shop - Indian shopkeeper at Willesden who sells Christopher a map of London.

Unnamed policeman - Checks on Christopher at his mother's place in London.

Sandy - Golden retriever puppy given to Christopher by his father.

MAJOR LITERARY OR CULTURAL REFERENCES

Sherlock Holmes - Famous detective character created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Christopher's role model.

Doctor Watson - Companion to Sherlock Holmes and narrator of his stories.

Hound, James Mortimer's spaniel - Dogs that die in the Sherlock Holmes story *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Sir Charles Baskerville - Murder victim in the Sherlock Holmes story *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Sir Hugo Baskerville, Mrs. Stapleton, Mr. James Mortimer, Sir Henry Baskerville, Selden - Other characters in the Sherlock Holmes story *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Craig F. Whitaker - Submits the Monty Hall Problem to Marilyn Vos Savant's column.

Marilyn Vos Savant - Person with the highest I.Q. in the world, according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, she has a column in *Parade* magazine.

Robert Sachs, Scott Smith, Kent Ford, W. Robert Smith, E. Ray Bobo, Everett Harman - Scientists and mathematicians who wrongly disagreed with Vos Savant's answer to the Monty Hall Problem.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle - The creator of Sherlock Holmes who believed in the Cottingley Fairies Hoax and wrote of it for *The Strand*.

Frances Griffiths - One of the perpetrators of the Cottingley Fairies Hoax.

Elsie Wright - The other perpetrator of the Cottingley Fairies Hoax and cousin to Frances Griffiths.

Harold Snelling - Expert in fake photography who states the photograph of the Cottingley Fairies were real.

Joe Cooper - Interviewed Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths in 1981, when they admitted the photos were faked.

Arthur Shepperson - Author of *Princess Mary's Gift Book*, used as the basis for the fairies drawn in the Cottingley Fairies Hoax.

Robert May, George Oster, Jim Yorke - Discovered a mathematical explanation for chaotic animal population fluctuations.

James Gleick - The author of *Chaos*, a popular science book about chaos theory.

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The narrator Christopher Boone, who wishes to solve the murder of Wellington and finds another mystery as a result.

Antagonist - The world removed from his routine: that is, the everyday world of chaos, disorder, absence. The initiator of chaos is the murderer of Wellington, a mystery Christopher chooses to solve. This turns out to be Christopher's father, Ed Boone, who brings further turmoil with his deception regarding the death of Christopher's mother.

Climax - Christopher discovers his mother isn't dead, as his father claimed, and that he killed Wellington.

Outcome - Christopher goes to London to be with his mother and they return to Swindon, where his father slowly regains the trust of his son.

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Christopher Boone is a mathematically-gifted autistic teenager who one night discovers the dead body of Wellington, the large poodle of his neighbor Mrs. Shears. After a misunderstanding with the police that gets him arrested, Christopher decides to solve the mystery of who killed Wellington despite his father's order that he stay out of other people's business. Christopher's mother died of a heart attack two years earlier, leaving Ed the sole caregiver of his son.

Christopher decides to write about this mystery for an assignment at school; the book he writes is the one we read as the novel. He is also preparing for his A-level math exam, which has never happened at his school

before. Regarding Wellington's demise, Christopher investigates around the neighborhood and eventually finds out from Mrs. Alexander that his mother Judy had an affair with Roger Shears, Mrs. Shears' former husband. Ed Boone grows angry when he discovers Christopher's book: they get into a fight and Ed throws the book away. Later, Ed apologizes to his son and takes him to the zoo, making sure Christopher knows he loves him.

Christopher wants his book back and searches for it; when he discovers it in his father's bedroom, he also finds a letter that seems to be from his mother. With his father unaware, he reads several of the letters and realizes his mother isn't dead but is living in London with Roger Shears. She had run away with Mr. Shears two years ago, unable to care for Christopher any longer. Christopher's father had lied to him by telling him she was dead. The trauma of this discovery causes him to black out, which is how his father finds him.

Ed apologizes to Christopher for this lie, then also tells his son that he was the one who killed Wellington. He did so in a fit of frustrated rage against Mrs. Shears, with whom he thought a romantic relationship was possible. Christopher panics at this news, equating his father's ability to kill Wellington with the possibility of being murdered himself. He hides behind the shed that night and decides to go to London to live with his mother. With some difficulty, Christopher goes to the train station and takes the rail to London, throwing off the police twice along the way. However, traveling the rail system is traumatic for him, and he almost dies when he tries to recover his pet rat Toby on one of the tracks. His mother Judy is surprised when she sees Christopher waiting for him at her door, and even more surprised to find out he had thought her dead all this time. The presence of Christopher strains Judy's relationship with her now-longtime lover; she finally decides to leave Roger Shears and return with Christopher to Swindon.

Christopher is able to take his A-level math exam despite his mother trying to delay it a year while they were in London. He and his mother find a new place to live in Swindon as she resumes caring for her son. Toby dies of old age, and Ed gives Christopher a gift as part of a project to regain his trust: a golden retriever puppy that Christopher names Sandy. Christopher finds out he earned an A grade on his A-level math exam and will take more A-level tests in preparation for college. He believes he can become a scientist - or do anything else - based on all he has accomplished as described in his book.

THEMES

Major Themes

The search for order and stability is the first major theme of the novel. That is, the entire novel is an account by narrator Christopher Boone of how his world is upended by chaos - the death of a favorite dog, the discovery of a deception regarding his parents - and how he restores order. For Christopher, the desire for order and stability is actually a necessity of living: as he suffers from Asperger's Syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism, he needs an ordered and stable life to be happy and safe. Anything that jeopardizes this not only damages his mental state, but also brings him physical pain.

The title of the book - a reference to the Sherlock Holmes mystery "The Adventure of Silver Blaze" - points to the other major theme of the novel: the role of absences in life, and how people often fail to see the significance of what isn't there. The novel is a double mystery, and the second mystery deals with the absence of his mother, which Christopher had accepted the way the silence of the dog in "The Adventure of Silver Blaze" was mistakenly accepted as normal in that story.

Minor Themes

The minor themes in the novel involve specific ways stability can be found, especially as relevant to Christopher's life. First, there is the stability of family: something which seems evident in Christopher's life at first, but is shown to be a lie and must be re-established by the end of the novel. Second, there is the importance

of mathematics and science - an essential motif, but also of thematic significance as Christopher uses these fields of study to help understand the world around him.

MOOD

The primary mood of the novel is serious, reflecting Christopher's own seriousness as narrator and character. He actually writes early on, "This will not be a funny book," which isn't exactly true - humor often arises inadvertently in the story - but makes clear his intention.

There is also a mood of erudition - that is, a constant flow of new information, much of it theoretical and mathematical in nature. Part of this seems to be an attempt to educate the reader (at least on Haddon's part), but it more obviously stems from the way Christopher deals with the world around him. The flow of theories and facts work with the seriousness of the narration by emphasizing the importance of logical and ordered thinking for Christopher, as well as the importance of focus in maintaining a sense of stability.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Mark Haddon was born in Northampton, England in 1962. He earned a BA in English at Oxford University in 1981 and later studied for an MSc in English Literature at Edinburgh University. As a young man, he worked with autistic individuals, an experience which helped shape *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

A writer and illustrator with many magazine publication credits, Haddon's first children's book, *Gilbert's Gobstopper*, was published in 1987. More would follow, including the Agent Z and Baby Dinosaurs series. He also worked in television, winning BAFTA awards for episodes in the series *Microsoap*.

In 2003 his novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, was published. Originally intended as a children's book, the potential for a larger audience led to the unusual decision of publishing the book simultaneously in two imprints - one for children and one for adults. It won a string of prestigious awards, including England's prestigious Whitbread Book of the Year as well as prizes in other countries.

Haddon's first book of poetry, *The Talking Horse and the Sad Girl and the Village Under the Sea*, was published in 2005.

LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The most important literary reference in the novel is Sherlock Holmes, who functions as a kind of role model for narrator Christopher Boone. Sherlock Holmes was the creation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who serialized stories of the detective in English magazines - primarily *The Strand* - starting in 1887. In all, Doyle wrote fifty-six short stories and four novels, the third novel being *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which was originally serialized in 1901-1902.

In the 1892 Sherlock Holmes story "Silver Blaze," "the curious incident of the dog in the night-time" is an example of a clue whose importance is based on its *absence*. The curiousness of the dog's behavior is that it did *nothing* on the fateful night of the story - that is, the fact that it did nothing is unusual given the circumstances that supposedly were occurring at the time. In this way, Holmes was able to solve the case.

Sherlock Holmes has emerged as the quintessential example of the master detective and has been the basis for numerous adaptations and homages, including Haddon's novel.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

Note: The story is divided into chapters using prime numbers as the chapter title.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

Christopher is outside at seven after midnight when he sees Wellington, Mrs. Shears' dog, dead in the middle of the lawn. A garden fork is sticking out of the black poodle and Christopher goes through the Shears gate to kneel beside the dog. Wellington's muzzle is still warm and he wonders who killed him.

Notes

What Christopher is doing out in the middle of the night is explained in the following chapter, where we discover he enjoys the idea of being the only person in the world.

CHAPTER 3

Summary

Christopher introduces himself, mentioning also that he knows all the countries of the world and their capitals, as well as very prime number up to 7,057. Eight years ago, Siobhan used simple pictures of faces to indicate sad - which he feels now for Wellington - and happy, which is when he walks around in the middle of night and feels like the only person in the world.

Siobhan tried to show him other faces with more complex emotions and Christopher tried to use them when he didn't understand what people were saying. He told Siobhan this, who was amused. He tore up the paper and Siobhan apologized; now, when Christopher doesn't know what someone is saying, he asks what they mean or walks away.

Notes

The use of ideograms - basic visual images - begins in this chapter, with a variety of faces. Visual iconography is a key part of this novel, further emphasizing the limitations of language.

CHAPTER 5

Summary

Christopher pulls the fork out of Wellington and hugs the dead dog's body. He likes dogs because they have only four moods, are faithful, and tell no lies since they cannot talk. After four minutes, he hears Mrs. Shears screaming and running towards him from the patio. She wants to know what Christopher is doing with dog and demands he lets go. Scared of people shouting and touching him, Christopher backs away. Mrs. Shears checks on the dog's body and stars screaming again, so Christopher covers his ears and closes his eyes and rolls forward, until he's hunched up against the grass.

Notes

Describing how he rolls himself into a ball and blocks out the world around him, Christopher concludes, "It was nice." This shows how he is so sensitive to outside stimuli that being able to limit it is not only important, but also pleasurable.

CHAPTER 7

Summary

Christopher tells the reader that this is a mystery novel. Siobhan suggested he should writing something he would read himself, but he reads mostly science and math. He also does not like proper novels, which he finds difficult to understand. However, he does like murder mystery novels because they are puzzles that can be solved - and if it's a good puzzle, can be solved before the book ends. Siobhan also suggested he should begin

with something that would grab people's attentions, which is why he started with the dog. Siobhan then added that people are usually the victims in murder mystery novels, which Christopher counters by saying that *The Hound of the Baskervilles* features two dead dogs. Siobhan responds that the main victim is a human, Sir Charles Baskerville. However, Christopher wants to write something real and doesn't know anybody who's been killed, except Mr. Paulson who died from a gliding accident and not murder. Further, dogs were sometimes better than humans, such as Steve from school.

Notes

Though Christopher later professes to not telling jokes, inadvertent humor often occurs due to his unique view of the world. The comparison between a dog and Steve is an example of this.

CHAPTER 11

Summary

The police arrive at the Shears home, a man and a woman. The policewoman leads Mrs. Shears away while the policeman talks with Christopher, trying to ascertain what happened. The questions are too many and too fast for Christopher, however, and he rolls back onto the lawn and starts groaning, which is like white noise used to block the outside world. The policeman grabs his arm to lift him up. Christopher does not like being touched, so he hits the policeman.

Notes

Christopher compares his thinking to a slicing machine in a bakery: this shows how the mind works by certain processes and his own mind processes at a different rate than other people.

CHAPTER 13

Summary

Christopher emphasizes that his book will not be funny. He uses a joke that his father likes and explains how its humor is drawn from playing with three different sets of meanings. For Christopher, having to deal with all three meanings at the same time hurts, like having three people talking to him at the same time.

Notes

Jokes are built on linguistic ambiguity, which Christopher's mind cannot properly process. Other examples of complex linguistic ambiguity also hurt Christopher, and he sometimes deems them "lies" since they are not straightforwardly true.

CHAPTER 17

Summary

The policeman stares at Christopher after being hit and decides to arrest him for assaulting a police officer. Christopher is calmed by this, as it's something he's heard police say in the media. The policeman asks Christopher to get into the back of the police car and radios his partner, Kate, to have someone else pick her up. On the drive, Christopher looks up at the Milky Way and observes that scientists have found the universe has been expanding since the Big Bang. When it finishes exploding, the stars will move in reverse and collapse into one another. Christopher believes humans will be extinct by then and, if not, they will be burned to death by this process.

Notes

Christopher's love of scientific theories are introduced here, as is his coldly clinical attitude towards humanity.

CHAPTER 19

Summary

Christopher has chosen to give his chapters prime numbers and describes the process by which prime numbers are determined. Prime numbers are useful and, Christopher claims, is considered Military Material in America. He considers that prime numbers are like life: even though they are logical, it's impossible to work out the rules.

Notes

The conceit of the chapter numbers are explained here, again making clear how the narration reflects the unique view Christopher has of the world.

CHAPTER 23

Summary

Christopher is taken to the police station and processed, giving up his shoelaces and emptying his pockets. He is told to give up his watch but screams and is allowed to keep it. The police asks if he has family and he responds in detail; they then ask for his Father's phone number. Christopher likes his police cell and wonders how he would escape if he was in a story. He decides on a plan that involves starting a fire with glasses on a sunny day. He also wonders whether Mrs. Shears told the police he killed Wellington, which would place her in jail because it would be slander.

Notes

This is the chapter where we first learn that Christopher's mother is dead. The metafictional aspect of the story is elided by Christopher when he wonders about how he would escape if he was jailed in a story - he is, in fact, in a story of his own devising, albeit the truthful nature of his story perhaps sets his experiences apart from a fictional setting in his own mind. The notion that Mrs. Shears would accuse him of Wellington's murder is immediately seen as a lie by Christopher and not merely a false accusation; language comes down to what is true and what is not true alone - intention doesn't matter, as we see later in the book with Father's confession.

CHAPTER 29

Summary

Christopher finds people confusing for two reasons. First, they do a good deal of talking without words; Siobhan had given him examples of how the same behavior can have different meaning, depending on how that behavior is performed exactly. Second, people talk in metaphors, which is when something is described by a word that it isn't. Christopher believes that metaphors are lies since they do not reflect actual facts. Further, his name is a metaphor, which means "carrying Christ". His mother said his name was a nice name because it was a story about being helpful, but Christopher wants his name to mean himself.

Notes

The brilliance of Christopher is evident again with his etymological examination of both the word "metaphor" and his own first name. His distaste for ambiguous language is again made clear with the example of metaphor.

CHAPTER 31

Summary

Father arrives at the police station at 1:12 a.m., which Christopher can tell from hearing him shouting; Christopher does not actually see him until 1:28 a.m. Since Christopher does not like to be touched, Father holds up his hand, fingers spread apart; Christopher does the same so fingers and thumbs touch, and this is their way of hugging. An inspector takes Christopher and Father to a room and they discuss the incident with the policeman and whether or not Christopher killed Wellington. The inspector decides to give Christopher a caution, which means the incident will be kept on record and can be used against him if he gets in trouble again. Christopher says he understands and is allowed to go home, picking up his belongings before leaving.

Notes

At one point in the conversation with the inspector, Christopher is asked if he meant to hit the policeman, which he says yes. The ambiguity of the question is about intention: was there malice aforethought, as the inspector meant, or was there a simple decision to respond to being touched. Christopher does not see this issue of intention, which explains his frustrating answer.

CHAPTER 37

Summary

Though his Mother says it's because he's a good person, Christopher claims he does not tell lies because he is unable to do so. This is because a lie is when you say something that did not occur, but for him mentioning something that did not occur at a certain time and place will make him think of everything that did not occur at that certain time and place. Using an example of breakfast, he explains how these meanings occur to him and how they hurt him. This is another reason why he doesn't like novels: they are about things that didn't happen and are therefore lies, which are painful to him.

Notes

The notion of novels being elaborate lies has long been a convention of literary history and theory. Christopher's view on this, however, adds a damaging physical component to this truism and not just the moral consequences sometimes invoked by writers.

CHAPTER 41

Summary

Christopher apologizes to his father about having to fetch him at the police station and Father says its OK. Christopher adds that he didn't kill the dog and Father says he knows. Father then asks Christopher to stay out of trouble and keep his nose out of other people's business. Christopher says he will find out who killed Wellington, which prompts Father to ask if he was listening. Christopher was, but insists when someone gets murdered he has to find the person responsible so they can be punished. Father gets angry; Christopher can tell because he was shouting, so he didn't say anything else for the rest of the ride.

Arriving home, he feeds his rat Toby and played Minesweeper 76 times. Before going to sleep at 2:07 a.m. he gets a drink of orange squash and sees Father watching TV and crying. He asks Father if he's sad about Wellington's death and Father replies, "You could very well say that." Christopher leaves Father alone since that's what he would want in such a situation, and returns to his room.

Notes

Clues to Wellington's murderer are evident here, but only if one knows Father did it. Otherwise, one would only assume that Father is either lonely or upset about what happened to Christopher this evening. Part of it may be because Christopher is so insistent as a truthful narrator that it's more difficult to note any prevarication on the part of other characters, especially those who see to his well-being.

CHAPTER 43

Summary

Christopher's mother died two years ago. One day he came home from school and nobody was home. He let himself in and later Father came home from work, asking where Mother is. Father placed some calls and went out, returning 2 1/2 hours later with the news that Christopher won't be able to see his mother for a long while. When Christopher asked why, he was told after a long while, because Mother had gone to the hospital. Christopher asks if he can visit and, when told no, asks if it's a psychiatric hospital. Father explains that Mother has a problem with her heart. Christopher insists on bringing food to Mother, since hospital food is not very

good; Father says he will handle it, even though he can't cook. Christopher says he will make Mother a get well card and Father says he will take it to her the next day.

Notes

Again, one does not suspect the duplicity of Father's behavior until after the truth is revealed.

CHAPTER 47

Summary

Back to the present, the following morning Christopher sees four red cars in a row, which means that today will be a good day. He has a system by which to measure how good or bad a day, based on the number of cars of the same color he sees: four red cars is a Good Day, three red cars is a Quite Good Day, five red cars is a Super Good Day, and four yellow cars is a Black Day. On a Black Day Christopher speaks to no one and takes no risks. The school psychologist Mr. Jeavons is surprised that Christopher should follow such an illogical system since Christopher himself is so logical. Christopher, however, believes that there are other ways of putting things in order besides logic and that other people do illogical things as a matter of routine. Mr. Jeavons tells Christopher he is clever but Christopher insists that he is merely being observant; he then asks Christopher if he likes things in order, which he does. When Mr. Jeavons asks Christopher if he doesn't like change, Christopher states that he wouldn't mind change if he became an astronaut; Mr. Jeavons says that it's difficult to become an astronaut, which Christopher already knew, but that it's possible to still want something even if it's not likely to happen. Terry, the older brother of his schoolmate Francis, says spazzers don't get to drive rockets; Christopher is not a spazzer and believes he will go to university to study physics and mathematics, but Terry won't. Returning to the main topic, Christopher says that since today is a Good Day he will try to find out who killed Wellington. When he tells Siobhan, she tells him that today they were supposed to write stories, so why not write about events related to this.

Notes

The creation of the story - that is, the reason why Christopher is giving his account of events in the first place - is explained here.

CHAPTER 53

Summary

Returning to his story of Mother, she died two weeks later. Christopher had never been to the hospital but he had made a card for her with nine lino-cut red cars for a Super Super Good Day. Father said she died of a heart attack; she was only 38 and heart attacks usually happen to older people. Father did not know what kind of heart attack she had but Christopher thinks it was an aneurysm, which is a broken blood vessel and how their neighbor Mrs. Hardisty died, or an embolism, which is a blood clot. Father says he is sorry but it wasn't his fault. Mrs. Shears then came over and cooked for them, telling Father, "We're going to get through this," and played Scrabble with Christopher afterwards.

Notes

More clues are given to the second mystery of the novel, and the ambiguity of language again plays a role. In Mrs. Shears saying, "We're going to get through this," one assumes that "We" is just a general statement of empathy with the bereaved Ed Boone; in reality, both Ed Boone and Mrs. Shears are the victims of spousal abandonment, making the "We" more specific in intent.

CHAPTER 59

Summary

Despite his father's instructions, Christopher decides to find Wellington's killer. The reason is because he doesn't always do what he's told, because when people tell him what to do it is often confusing and does not

make sense. Though Father told him to "stay out of other people's business" that is unclear since he does many things with other people and it's their business in those cases as well. In contrast, Siobhan is very specific in her instructions to Christopher so he knows exactly what she wants him to do.

That evening Christopher knocks on Mrs. Shears' door and tells her he's going to find out who killed Wellington. He asks if she knows and she closes the door on him. Christopher then decides to do detective work and investigates the lawn. He looks inside the padlocked shed in the garden and sees various tools, including a fork that looked like the one found in Wellington. He concludes that the fork used in the murder either belongs to Mrs. Shears or is a Red Herring. He considers the possibility that Mrs. Shears killed her own dog but believes her reaction made it unlikely. Mrs. Shears then comes out of the patio and threatens to call the police, so Christopher goes home. He says hello to Father, feeds Toby, and feels happy because he is a detective who is finding things out.

Notes

Christopher feels obliged to explain different terms in murder mystery novels as they become relevant to his story. In this way, he isn't only solving a mystery but also showing how mysteries are structured as a narrative genre - the conventions of the mystery and how they can be applied in his own case. This is actually an example of deductive reasoning - using a broad pattern or concepts or behavior to determine the meaning of a specific instance - being used on a genre that's based on deductive reasoning.

CHAPTER 61

Summary

Mrs. Forbes told Christopher that when Mother died she went to heaven. Christopher does not think this since he believes heaven does not exist. When he asked Reverend Peters where heaven is, the vicar told him that it's not in our universe. Christopher says there isn't anything outside of the universe and thinks people believe in heaven because they don't like the idea of dying. Reverend Peters amends his statement by stating that what he really means is that people are with God after they die; this prompts Christopher to ask where God is. Reverend Peters says that they will talk about it on another day when he had more time. Christopher states when people die their brain stops working and their body rots, decomposing and becoming part of nature again. Coffins slow this down and in Mother's case she was cremated. He does not know what happened to the ashes but when he sees clouds he sometimes thinks Mother is a part of them.

Notes

Christopher cannot abide with religion, since it speaks towards an experience outside of the physical realities by which he bases truth and facts. The metaphorical value of heaven is lost on Christopher precisely because it is metaphorical. Ironically, his association of his Mother's ashes as being somewhere far away is not that different from the truth of her situation, as she has indeed moved to another place, London.

CHAPTER 67

Summary

There is a football game on television that Saturday, so Father is watching it and Christopher doesn't have much to do. He decides to continue his detection and talk to other people on Randolph Street about Wellington. Christopher does not like strangers and it takes a long time for him to get to know people, so doing this requires that he be brave. First, he makes a plan for his part of the street, then makes sure he has his Swiss Army knife in his pocket.

He goes to number 40, right opposite Mrs. Shears, and speaks to Mr. Thompson - who actually turns out to be the brother of the Mr. Thompson who lives there. This brother has no idea who did it and was in Colchester on Thursday. No one answers at number 42 and at number 44 he is greeted by a black woman who is the mother of

that household. He asks her if she knows anyone who might want to make Mrs. Shears sad and the woman tells Christopher to ask his father. He responds that his father told him to stay out of other people's business and the woman concurs. At number 43 he speaks to Mr. Wise, who lives with his invalid mother, but Mr. Wise starts laughing at Christopher so he walks away. Christopher does not talk to the people at number 38 since Father says they take drugs and warned him to never talk to them. He proceeds to number 39, which is next to Mrs. Shears' house, and sees Mrs. Alexander in her front garden. She has a dachshund, but it was inside the house. He asks Mrs. Alexander if she knows anything about Wellington's murder but she doesn't. She then tries to start a conversation with Christopher - that is, chatting - and invites him for tea. He refuses since he doesn't go into other people's houses, so instead she offers him squash and a slice of Battenberg cake. Unfortunately, there is yellow in that kind of cake and Christopher doesn't like yellow. So Mrs. Alexander instead offers biscuits and goes into the house. More than six minutes pass and Christopher worries that she might be calling the police, so he walks away.

As he heads home, Christopher is struck with a Chain of Reasoning and concludes that the person who killed the dog would be the one person he knew who didn't like Mrs. Shears, which was Mr. Shears, and that he didn't like Wellington either. Thus, Mr. Shears has become his Prime Suspect. Mr. Shears used to live with Mrs. Shears but left two years ago, which is why she did a lot of cooking for Christopher and Father after Mother died. She sometimes stayed overnight and Christopher liked how she puts things in order but didn't like when she said things he didn't understand. He doesn't know why Mr. Shears left exactly, though he knows reasons why people get married and subsequently divorce. Christopher decides to try to find out more on Mr. Shears.

Notes

More clues are provided for the second mystery, which Christopher is still not aware of as a mystery. Adultery is one of the reasons he states for people getting divorces, and this turns out to be the key to the mystery of his mother.

CHAPTER 71

Summary

Christopher states that all the other children in his school are stupid, though he's not supposed to call them stupid but instead refer to them as having learning difficulties or having special needs. This in itself is stupid, because everybody has learning difficulties, depending on the subject, and everyone has special needs of one kind or another. Siobhan insists that these terms should be used because otherwise the children at the school will be called nasty words. Christopher finds this odd, since other children use "Special Needs!" to taunt students in his school as well. Christopher is going to prove that he's not stupid by taking his A levels in math and getting an A grade. Mrs. Gascoyne, his school's headmistress, didn't want to do this but Father convinced her. After this first test Christopher plans to take A-level further maths and physics; and from there, he will go to university, get a degree, find a job, and get married.

Notes

Christopher again points out the absurdities of language, this time regarding the use of politically correct terms for the mentally challenged (which is itself a politically correct term). He describes his plans for life and it's worth noting how it's a typical aspiration. The only unusual aspect is his desire to eventually marry, emphasizing companionship and being cared for, but not considering love or romance.

CHAPTER 73

Summary

Christopher used to believe his parents would divorce because they argued often when he was younger due to the stress of looking after someone with Behavioral Problems. However, he doesn't have as many problems as

he does now. He lists from A to R some of the Behavioral Problems he has and speaks of how his parents would shout at him when he didn't behave.

Notes

The list of Behavioral Problems is idiosyncratic, ranging very specific as well as very general. One point, "P. Hating France," is mildly amusing because of a traditional disdain held between the two countries. However, it is comprehensible in Christopher's case as he does not like unfamiliar experiences and details the discomfort of trips to France with his parents.

CHAPTER 79

Summary

Father has prepared supper when Christopher comes home; Christopher's plate is laid out so the different foods were not touching because if they touched he could not eat them. Father asks where Christopher has been and he responds that he's been out, which is a white lie. Christopher explains that a white lie isn't a lie at all, but not telling the whole truth. Father says that he received a phone call from Mrs. Shears and reminds Christopher to keep his nose out of other people's business. Christopher tells Father that Mr. Shears is the Prime Suspect, but this only angers Father further. He bangs the table and knocks some of the food together, meaning Christopher couldn't eat it anymore. Father does not want the man's name mentioned in the house because he is evil; Christopher asks if that means he might have killed Wellington, which only frustrates Father further. Christopher adds that he knows he was told not to get involved but Mrs. Shears is a friend; Father says she's not a friend anymore. Father repeats his orders to Christopher: to not ask Mrs. Shears about who killed the dog; to not ask anyone about who killed the dog; to not trespass in other people's gardens; and to stop the detective game. Father makes Christopher promise this, and he does.

Notes

More clues about the second mystery are provided in Father's reaction to Mr. Shears. Ironically, while Father told a lie about what happened to Mother, according to Christopher's view of the world he only told a white lie about Wellington since he never denied killing the dog because he was never asked.

CHAPTER 83

Summary

Christopher believes he will make a good astronaut because he is intelligent and likes being in tiny spaces on his own. He wouldn't be homesick because he'll be surrounded by things he likes. He would like to take Toby with him, perhaps as part of an experiment, but would go even if Toby couldn't because it would be a Dream Come True.

Notes

The depths of Christopher's isolation are revealed in his reasons for wanting to be an astronaut. What many would consider a drawback - being alone in a tiny space - is one of the aspects that most appeals to him.

CHAPTER 89

Summary

The next day Christopher tells Siobhan that Father wants him to stop detecting and so the book was finished. Siobhan likes the book and says Christopher should be proud of himself, but he insists that it isn't a proper book since there is no proper ending because the murderer of Wellington was still At Large. Siobhan compares this to real life, such as Jack the Ripper, but this does not appease Christopher. He mentions how Father did not like hearing Mr. Shears' name and thinks he may be the killer and Siobhan suggests that he may just not like Mr. Shears very much. She adds that Mrs. Shears is a friend and so Mr. Shears' treatment of her may be why Christopher's father doesn't like him. However, Christopher points out that Father claims Mrs. Shears is no

longer a friend. Siobhan doesn't know what else to say. The next two days Christopher sees four yellow cars in a row, meaning they were Black Days and so he keeps to himself. On the third day he closes his eyes all the way to school because he's allowed to do that after two Black Days in a row.

Notes

More clues abound in the hidden second mystery, but again the misdirection continues to draw the reader's attention to Wellington. Note how Christopher gives himself a way out of facing too many Black Days in a row, which shows that he can make accommodations to make his life more tolerable.

CHAPTER 97

Summary

Five days later Christopher sees five red cars in a row, which is a Super Good Day. He goes to buy candy at the local shop and meets Mrs. Alexander again, who asks why he ran off the other day. He explains that he was afraid she would call the police but she doesn't understand why he'd think that. As Mrs. Alexander makes her purchases, Christopher goes outside and pets Mrs. Alexander's dachshund. When Mrs. Alexander soon joins him and says the dog's name is Ivor. At first, Christopher doesn't want to chat with Mrs. Alexander but decides that since it's a Super Good Day, something special should happen but hasn't yet. He thinks he can find out from her something about Wellington or Mrs. Shears without asking her, which would mean he doesn't break his promise to Father. He tells Mrs. Alexander about taking A-level maths and he watches while she cleans up after Ivor's poo.

He thinks of the different orders given by his father and decides to take a risk since today is a Super Good Day. So he asks Mrs. Alexander if she knows Mr. Shears. She says she knows him only in passing and suspects he's asking in relation to Wellington. She then believes it best not to talk about these things because Christopher's father is right and he shouldn't be asking questions on this topic. Christopher asks if Mr. Shears killed his Mother, which Mrs. Alexander denies. He asks if Mr. Shears caused Mother enough stress to die of a heart attack and Mrs. Alexander is surprised to hear Christopher's Mother had been in the hospital and died. Mrs. Alexander realizes Christopher doesn't know something she does and decides to tell him as long as he promises not to tell his father she did so. She knows that if she doesn't answer, Christopher will keep pushing and it will upset his father. Christopher makes his promise and Mrs. Alexander tells him that before she died, Christopher's mother and Mr. Shears were having an affair. She apologizes and says she didn't mean to upset Christopher, but he needed that answer and didn't want his father to relive bad memories. Christopher asks if this is why Mr. Shears left Mrs. Shears and Mrs. Alexander says she expects so. Christopher goes home, but not before Mrs. Alexander reminds him of the promise he made her.

Notes

Using language to his advantage, Christopher follows the exact instructions of his father while still going against his overall wish - that is, he observed the letter of the law but not the spirit of it. Mrs. Alexander's surprise about Christopher's mother's hospitalization and death are a clue as to her real whereabouts. Christopher's views on human relations is very specific, so he describes the relationship between his mother and Mr. Shears not under the euphemism of an affair or the even subtler "very, very good friends" (as Mrs. Alexander says), but that "they were doing sex". This cuts to the heart of the matter but does not trouble Christopher because it is the truth.

CHAPTER 101

Summary

Mr. Jeavons believes that Christopher likes maths because it is safe and has straightforward answers which life rarely provides. Christopher disagrees with this view of maths and explains in great detail The Monty Hall Problem to prove this. Someone wrote a letter to a column written by Marilyn Vos Savant, who has the highest

IQ in the world according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, asking what to do in a scenario where there's a game show where a contestant must choose between three closed doors, two with goats and one with a car. After choosing a door, the game show host opens one of the other two doors and shows it has a goat behind it. When asked what to do from there, Vos Savant responds that she would always change the choice of what door to open because the chances are 2 in 3 that the car would be in that door. Her response raised a furor among mathematicians and other scientists, who believed the chances are 50/50, but Vos Savant proved her point mathematically. Thus, Christopher argues that intuition can be wrong and that numbers can be very complicated.

Notes

The Monty Hall Problem allows Christopher to express his appreciation of life's complexity but still remain within his safe zone of mathematics.

CHAPTER 103

Summary

Christopher comes home and finds Rhodri, Father's employer, there, watching television and drinking a beer with Father. Father asks what he's been up to and Christopher tells a white lie about talking to Mrs. Alexander's dogs. Rhodri asks him what is 251 times 864 and Christopher tells him it's 216,864; Christopher asks Rhodri if this is right but he doesn't know. Father offers to cook some Indian food for Christopher and he agrees. Christopher mentions this because Siobhan told him to include descriptions in his book, including one or two details of the people in it so readers can better picture them. Christopher tries this, then tries to describe the garden but it isn't very interesting or different. The sky is interesting, though, and he describes some clouds, one of which looked like an alien spaceship. From here he discusses how people make false assumptions of what spaceships could be, then returns to writing about sounds in the garden. He tries to determine if the garden has a particular smell, doesn't sense anything, and goes inside to feed Toby.

Notes

Christopher describes a shortcut he uses to figure out Rhodri's math problem, an unusual but effective approach. That Rhodri doesn't know the answer and doesn't particularly care shows how Christopher's mathematics skills can be seen as an oddity by some people. Siobhan's advice to include certain descriptions and details is taken up by Christopher, however the quality of those details show how his concerns are different from other storytellers.

CHAPTER 107

Summary

Christopher's favorite book is *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and he sums up the plot of the story. He doesn't like some aspects of the book: a passage from an ancient scroll which is difficult to understand and some of the descriptions written by author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He does like finding words he doesn't know so he can look them up in the dictionary. He likes the book because it is a detective story with clues and Red Herrings, and he lists three examples of each. Christopher also likes Sherlock Holmes for his intelligence and some of the things he says; like Holmes, he also gets lost in a field of study if it catches his attention. And like a description of Holmes by Watson, he wants to fit strange and seemingly disconnected episodes into a coherent scheme. He also likes Holmes because he doesn't believe in the supernatural and ends with two interesting facts about Sherlock Holmes, of how his portrayal in the original stories are different from how we know him today.

Notes

Christopher's discussion of Holmes breaks down some basic elements in the mystery story itself as well as helps remind readers of what to look for in Christopher's own story. The importance of Red Herrings - that is, information that seems like clues but aren't - ties into the pursuit of the obvious mystery of Wellington's death

when the true mystery is the whereabouts of Christopher's mother, something he isn't even aware yet is a puzzle that needs solving.

CHAPTER 109

Summary

Christopher writes in his book that night and shows it to Siobhan the next morning at school. Siobhan sits down with Christopher and asks if he's discussed with his father the conversation with Mrs. Alexander. When he says no and that he has no intention of doing so, Siobhan says that she thinks it's a good idea. She then asks Christopher if he is upset finding out about the affair but he says he isn't. Siobhan assures him it's okay to be sad but Christopher doesn't because Mother is dead and Mr. Shears isn't around anymore. He then spends the rest of the day doing maths, describes his lunch, and shows a likeness of some pictures he draw in Mrs. Peters' class after lunch.

Notes

Christopher's reasoning shows how fundamental his mother's death is to his view of the world. If she was alive, there is a chance he'd be upset; since he think she isn't alive, he isn't upset.

CHAPTER 113

Summary

Christopher likens his memory to a film, which is why he can remember things very well; as he goes through his example, he realizes it's more like a DVD player because it can jump instantly to whatever scene he needs, something film cannot do. If asked what his mother is like, he can recall different scenes, such as 4 July 1992 when he was nine and his family were in holiday in Cornwall. He cannot remember anything before he was four, however. Christopher goes on to state that he recognizes people in the same manner, as well as figure out how to act in difficult situations: by accessing his memory to see what happened previously and allow that to guide him. All the pictures in his head are of things that really happened, unlike other people: for example, his mother once imagined what it would be like if she hadn't married Christopher's father, while Siobhan says that she imagines a house in Cape Cod with her friend Elly when she's sad. People sometimes ask what he would say to someone who's died, but he finds that stupid since it's not possible. Further, his grandmother has pictures in her head but they are muddled and she cannot tell real life from television.

Notes

The dissatisfaction of Christopher's mother in her marriage is described by Christopher, who describes it only as a memory he can access and not an explanation of what may have happened with Mr. Shears. His description of his grandmother's mind is an attempt to express how her senile dementia seems to influence her thoughts.

CHAPTER 127

Summary

Christopher comes home from school. His father hasn't arrived yet so he leaves his book in the kitchen and in the living room watches a Blue Planet video about underwater life. His father comes home at 5:48 p.m. and says hello to Christopher, who forgot that he left his book in the kitchen, an example of Relaxing Your Guard. At 5:54 p.m. his father returns to the living room with the book in his hand. He asks of the conversation with Mrs. Alexander, which Christopher says is a rhetorical question; Christopher responds that he didn't break any of Father's orders but he won't accept this excuse. Still angry, Father reminds Christopher not to stick his nose into other people's business; Father grabs Christopher, which surprises him, and he hits Father, who's still shouting, and hits him again. Christopher has no memory of what happened right after, though it was only a short lapse based on his watch. When he switches back on he is sitting on the carpet with blood on his right hand and his head hurting, Father standing a meter away, the book still in his hand. He goes outside to throw the book in the dustbin and gets himself a beer.

Notes

This incident of lost time is a precursor to a greater loss in a later chapter. Christopher contrasts the temperament of his father and mother to show how his father is usually even-tempered and, unlike his mother, didn't hit Christopher.

CHAPTER 131

Summary

Christopher gives two lists: one of why he doesn't like yellow and one of why he doesn't like brown. Mrs. Forbes says that hating these colors is silly but Siobhan says everyone has favorite colors. Christopher actually agrees with both of them, but believes you have to make a lot of decisions and if you don't you spend all your time choosing between things.

Notes

The dislike of brown and yellow is shown as being arbitrary in the choice of color, but necessary as a means of simplifying certain decisions in life.

CHAPTER 137

Summary

Father apologizes the next day and says he didn't mean to hit Christopher. Father cleans up Christopher's cut and since it's Saturday they go to Twycross Zoo together, packing sandwiches for Christopher since he doesn't like eating food from places he doesn't know. Christopher had never been to this zoo before and they didn't have a route worked out in his mind; so they purchased a guidebook and walked around the whole zoo so he could decide which were his favorite animals. He lists his favorite animals: Randyman the Red-Faced Black Spider Monkey; the Patagonian Sea Lions, named Miracle and Star; and Maliku the Orangutan. They ate at the cafe, where Father says he loves Christopher: if he sometimes gets angry, it's because he worries about Christopher and doesn't want him to get hurt. Christopher doesn't know if he understands but Father asks if he at least understands that he loves Christopher, to which Christopher says yes. They touch fingers and thumbs to show this. Christopher then provides a map of the zoo and describes seeing the gerbils before going home.

Notes

It's important for Christopher to have favorite animals in mind, which is why he draws this list. Father's discussion with Christopher helps to establish his motives later on in the novel.

CHAPTER 139

Summary

While Christopher likes Sherlock Holmes, he does not like Holmes' author and creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Unlike his creation, Doyle believed in the supernatural. In 1917, he was one of those fooled by The Case of the Cottingley Fairies, where two cousins claimed to play with fairies and took five photographs as proof. Harold Snelling, an expert in fake photography, declared these images were real and Doyle wrote about the pictures for *The Strand*. In 1981, Joe Cooper interviewed the cousins, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths: Wright said all five photographs were fake and Frances claimed only one was real. This case shows that people can be stupid if they don't want to know the truth and that Occam's razor is true.

Notes

The hoax of the fairies is analogous to the hoax Ed Boone pulled on his son. The idea of people being stupid because they don't want to know the truth is an important idea, because it helps to explain Christopher's reluctance to understand the letters from his mother in the next chapter. Occam's razor translates to "No more things should be presumed to exist than are absolutely necessary." It is a heuristic guide - that is, a guide to

solving problems - by advising that the simplest of explanations is often the correct one. However, this is not a strict rule more than a general guideline, and there are times when a more complex answer is actually the truth.

CHAPTER 149

Summary

When Christopher goes to school on Monday, Siobhan asks about the bruise on his face. He explains what happens and Siobhan makes sure Christopher is alright, asking if he's scared of going home or wants to talk anymore about it, then going over when grabbing is okay and why hitting is not allowed. Father is still at work when Christopher goes home, so Christopher checks the dustbin to get his book back. It isn't there, however, so he begins a search of the house to see where Father may have hidden it. He checks all the rooms except his own and Father's bedroom - the only way Father would have hidden the book in his room was as a Double Bluff, so he checks on Father's bedroom. He promised Father not to mess with anything in his room, and so decides to move things when looking for the book and then move them back to how they originally were. After searching throughout the room, he finds in a cupboard a shirt box with his book. He is happy that the book wasn't thrown away but knows he can't take the book or Father will know what he's done.

Just as he hears Father coming home, Christopher notices envelopes underneath the book in the shirt box. The envelopes were unopened and addressed to him, with a handwriting where the i's have little circles instead of dots. He knows only three people who do this: Siobhan, Mr. Loxely, and Mother. As Father starts calling for him, Christopher takes an envelope and hides it under the mattress of his own room. He goes downstairs to greet Father, and they prepare supper together. After eating, Christopher returns to his room and reads the letter in the envelope: it's a letter from his mother, describing her work as a secretary, how she and Roger have moved to a new flat in London and expressing understanding at his not writing back yet but hoping he doesn't stay angry forever. Christopher is confused by this letter as it didn't correspond with anything he knew about Mother. While there was no date on the letter, the postmark on the envelope was 16 October 1997, which was 18 months after Mother died. Father then stops by Christopher room and asks what he's doing, and Christopher answers that he's reading a letter. Given his mother's death, Christopher considers possible answers for this letter and is excited that he now has two mysteries to solve. He decides not to think of it any further that night as he doesn't want to Leap to the Wrong Conclusions and decides to wait until Father is out of the house to investigate further. He hides the letter under his mattress and goes downstairs to watch television.

Notes

Despite the evidence before him, Christopher still believes his mother is dead. The idea is too integral to his understanding of the world that he can let go of it so quickly. Also note how he lists pornography among his father's belonging but places no value to this fact; this emphasizes the loneliness of Ed Boone for readers, as well as Christopher's lack of interest or understanding in sexual matters.

CHAPTER 151

Summary

Christopher states that many things are mysteries but that doesn't mean there isn't an answer - just that scientists haven't found the answer yet. He uses the example of ghosts, such as the one his Uncle Terry saw at the Greyfriars Shopping Center. Christopher believes scientists will discover an explanation for ghosts, as they have for electricity and lightning. However, sometimes a mystery isn't a mystery and he gives an example: involving the frog population for a pond at school. The fluctuation in the number of frogs every year can be attributed to a mathematical formula about animal populations, tied into population density and the application of a constant. When the constant is greater than 3.57, the population numbers stop being regular and become chaotic, as discovered by Robert May, George Oster, and Jim Yorke.

Notes

Christopher finds comfort in explaining chaotic experiences through mathematics. That is a way to try to understand things that would otherwise cause him mental discomfort.

CHAPTER 157

Summary

Six days later, Christopher is able to return to his Father's bedroom. It's a Monday evening and Father has two emergencies that his business has to handle: Rhodri takes care of the first and so Father must take care of the second. When Father is gone, Christopher goes to his bedroom and looks into the shirt box: he finds forty-three letters in all and opens one to read. Dated May 3, Mother writes about getting a new fridge and cooker, and of how she looked at some old photos and remember what Christopher was like when he was younger.

Christopher reads another letter, this one where Mother explains why she left Christopher and Father to be with Roger Shears. She tells him that she wasn't as patient as father and they had many arguments; she spent more time with Roger as a result. Then there was an argument with Christopher where he accidentally broke her foot with a chopping board; soon after, when Roger said he was leaving for London and asked her to join him, she said yes. She meant to say goodbye but when she called Father he said she couldn't come back or talk to Christopher. She asks Christopher to write to her, or call.

Christopher opens a third envelope, this dated September 18, where Mother talks about getting a job with Perkins and Rashid, a Chartered Surveyors. A fourth letter, dated August 23, begins with an apology for not writing the previous week. She had been to the dentist and taken a good deal of painkillers... Before Christopher can finish the letter, however, he feels sick. He realizes Mother had been alive all this time and Father had lied. He rolls onto the bed and curls up in a ball, but there is a gap in his memory. It's a large gap, as when he wakes it's dark outside and he had been sick all over the bed and himself. Christopher hears Father coming into the house and when he comes to the bedroom, sees what has happened. He apologizes to Christopher and tries to explain that he did it for Christopher's own good and that it was an accident. When Mother left, he didn't know what to say so he told Christopher she was in the hospital and from there it went out of control. He tells Christopher that they need to clean him up, and so Father starts a bath and carries him to the bathroom. Christopher doesn't scream or fight or hit.

Notes

The spelling in the letters of Christopher's mother is often flawed, indicating a lack of education. Christopher's inability to fight at being touched shows how traumatic the revelation about his mother proves to be for him. In effect, the second mystery is solved almost immediately after it's discovered by Christopher.

CHAPTER 163

Summary

When Christopher first started in school, his main teacher was Julie. One day she held open a Smarties tube and asked him what was inside; he said Smarties but it turned out to be a pencil. She then asked if his mother came in and was asked the same question, what would she say? Christopher answered, "A pencil." At that time, Christopher did not understand about other people having minds, something Julie believed he'd have difficulty with but which he now understands. He likens this to how people think their minds are different from computers but it's really the same. An experiment shown on a TV series called *How the Mind Works* explains how the eye processes changes in its view through flicks called *sacades*, creating a sense of continuous motion for the mind viewing the image. Further, people can have pictures on the screens of their minds that aren't what they are looking at, which gives them an advantage over animals. As a result, people believe there is someone in their heads, a *homunculus*, which observes brain activity and sets them apart from computers. However, Christopher says, the homunculus is just another picture on the mind's screen. Also, people think they're not like computers

because they have feelings and computers don't, but Christopher sees that as just another screen responding to a certain event or image.

Notes

What Christopher describes is the homunculus fallacy, which argues that there is an agent within the mind that observes the behavior of the mind. However, such an argument leads to infinite regress - that is, there must be another agent that controls the agent making the observation, and in turn that agent needs its own agent, and so on.

CHAPTER 167

Summary

Father gives Christopher a bath, dresses him in clean clothes, and places him in bed. He asks Christopher if he's had anything to eat but he doesn't respond. When Father goes to put the dirty clothes and linens in the wash, Christopher tries to clam himself by doubling 2's in his head. When Father returns to check on Christopher, he continues not to respond. Father sits next to him and confesses to killing Wellington. Christopher at first thinks this is a joke since he doesn't understand jokes, but Father continues to talk. He explains how he thought the friendship with Mrs. Shears would continue but she said something hurtful and seemed to care for the dog more than Father and Christopher. After one argument with Mrs. Shears, Father was so angry that he took it out on the dog, which is when he killed Wellington.

Father holds out his hand to touch fingertips and thumbs with Christopher, but he screams and pushes himself away from Father. Father apologizes again and leaves the room. Christopher is now scared: Father murdered Wellington, which means he could murder Christopher as well. However he couldn't leave immediately, he had to wait until Father was asleep. At 1:20 a.m. he checks to find Father asleep downstairs. Making sure of this, he packs some items and takes Toby in his cage to the garden, where he hides in a gap between the shed and the fence. Here he feels safer and wonders what to do next.

Notes

Christopher equates the ability to murder a dog with the ability to murder a human, which isn't surprising since Christopher has more respect for dogs - who are easy to understand - than humans, who are more difficult to understand.

CHAPTER 173

Summary

From his hiding place, Christopher sees the constellation Orion. He explains how the stars in the constellation form the image of Orion the hunter but argues that there are other ways to connect the stars together. And all of it is pointless anyway, as they are stars, nuclear explosions that are billions of miles apart.

Notes

The truth of constellations - that they are arbitrarily drawn connections of stars - is another variation of the literal way he approaches the world.

CHAPTER 179

Summary

Christopher tries to stay awake but falls asleep at 3:47 a.m. When he wakes it is dawn and he hears Father in the garden, calling for him. He prepares himself by taking out his Swiss Army knife but Father then turns around and leaves the garden. He then hears Father drive away in his van. Christopher decides to knock on Mrs. Shears' door and live with her, since she wasn't a stranger and he had stayed in her house before. When he goes there, however, nobody answers. He sees other people on the street and hides behind the dustbins of Mrs. Shears'

house. He goes over possible actions he can take and finally determines that the only real choice he has is to go and live with Mother in London. He had never been to London before but he imagines all the possibilities and this is the only one that was possible. He thinks of how he could not be an astronaut because it was much further than London and the thought of going to London already hurts him.

Deciding he needs money if he's going to London and should have somebody watch Toby. He goes to Mrs. Alexander and asks her to watch Toby; when she asks why, he explains why, mentioning Wellington's death as well. Mrs. Alexander is alarmed at hearing all this, and tries to convince Christopher that they should contact his father to smooth out the misunderstanding. Instead, Christopher leaves and returns to his house. The kitchen door is locked so he breaks in with a brick. Christopher sees Father's mobile phone and wallet and address book in the kitchen and thinks Father is home, then realizes he left it behind when he drove away earlier. He takes Father's bank card out of his wallet and takes Toby out of its cage to instead carry in his pocket. He starts walking to the school to ask Siobhan where the train station is. As he approaches school he sees his father's van and grows sick again. He approaches a lady with a baby and a little boy and asks where he can buy a map; when she asks why and he says to find the train station, she points out the building where the station is. She tells him to follow a certain bus and Christopher runs after it but loses sight of that bus. He finds himself lost but knows the train station is near; he thus chooses to walk in a spiral pattern and in this way locates the train station.

Notes

Christopher uses the certainties of logical thinking to help the choices he makes: in determining his course of action he narrows it down with the help of a diagram, and when he loses sight of the train station he uses a basic heuristic to find his way. Math is also a way to understand the intense feelings he has, as he draws up an equation that shows how the mathematical constant of his total fear comes from the inverse proportion between his fear of a new place and his fear of being near Father.

CHAPTER 181

Summary

At the station, Christopher sees everything. Most people are lazy and do not observe everything around them, instead choosing to glance and get general details. Christopher cannot do this and, using the example of a countryside, enumerates how much more he would observe than other people, including what each cow looked like in particular. At this point he realizes that he told a lie in Chapter 13 and does know three jokes he can tell. Siobhan tells him he doesn't have to change what he wrote in Chapter 13 and instead offer this clarification. The joke involves an economist, a logician, and a mathematician observing a cow at the border of Scotland. When Christopher is in a new place, seeing everything and dealing with people is like being a computer that is processing too much information at once. He closes his eyes and puts his hand over his ears and groans, which he likens to pressing the CTRL + ALT + DEL buttons to reset the computer. This ability to take in details and not be distracted is why he is good at chess and maths and logic.

Notes

The joke Christopher tells is built on the exactness of the characters' statements instead of the usual wordplay and ambiguity one associates with humor. The comparison of his mind to a computer is in keeping with his views of humans.

CHAPTER 191

Summary

Christopher describes the train station and draws out a rough diagram of the place. He is scared of the activity at the station, however, but also frightened of going home. He tries to make a plan of what he should do but he still suffers from a sensory overload. He puts his hand over his ears to block out the noise and think. He tells himself to walk down the tunnel, find a place to sit down, and shut his eyes so he can think. He manages this

and sits down at a cafe table. He covers his eyes and, when he uncovers them, groans to himself to block out the noise. To think more clearly, he plays a math problem called Conway's Soldiers. He is approached by a policeman, who asks Christopher what he's doing. While the policeman watches, Christopher uses his father's bank card to take out money and buys a train ticket. At the ticket counter, he's told to go to Platform 1 to catch the train and imagines this walk to the platform as a game in order to accomplish the task. He gets on the train and heads to London.

Notes

Again, math puzzles are used to help Christopher calm down and think more clearly. Christopher has to imagine himself in a different setting - that is, playing a video game - in order to make it to the platform, another way to cope with the sensory overload of this experience. A video game is more narrow in scope than life and allows Christopher to focus.

CHAPTER 193

Summary

Christopher likes timetables because he likes to know when everything is going to happen. He gives an example of a timetable he had when he lived at home with Father and thought Mother was dead. Unlike space, one's experience in time isn't based on a fixed relationship - time is always moving, while two spatially related items can have a distance that remains constant. This means time is a mystery that can't be solved like a puzzle. A timetable, then, helps to keep from getting lost in time.

Notes

Christopher provides a map of time and space to show how understanding time is relative. The timetable is a way to make sense of something Christopher cannot control, which is also why he always needs his watch.

CHAPTER 197

Summary

The train is crowded, which Christopher does not like. As he stands in the carriage he is approached by the policeman who had helped him earlier. He wants to take Christopher back to his father, who is waiting at the police station. Christopher starts to run away but the policeman grabs him, provoking a scream from Christopher. He insists that he's going to live with his mother and asks if Father has been arrested for the murder of Wellington. The train begins to move and Nigel, the policeman, can't stop it; he calls another officer to pick him up at the next train stop. Nigel sits down next to Christopher; Christopher watches the view and thinks of math, but then needs to use the bathroom. He can't hold it in and starts to wet himself, so Nigel tells him to use the bathroom in the train carriage. Christopher does so but is repulsed by how filthy it is. Afterwards he sees a luggage compartment opposite the toilet and hides himself in there to shut out all the noise and sights. He calms himself with quadratic equations and as the train slows down hears the policeman looking for him. Christopher does not answer and remains hidden in the luggage compartment. A woman notices him there but says nothing, and the train continues its route.

Notes

Christopher takes his Father's murder of Wellington seriously but begins to see how other people do not. Ultimately, the first mystery of the novel is negligible - much like the death of the dogs in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

CHAPTER 199

Summary

Christopher states that people believe in God because they believe it unlikely that the complexity of what they see around themselves is highly unlikely. However, he argues the very fact that asking such questions is only

possible because such an unlikely outcome could have occurred, especially in light of the billions of planets where such development didn't occur. The odds may be very high, but so are the number of times they can occur across the universe. Christopher adds that life on earth is accidental, occurring through three conditions: replication, mutation, and heritability. While rare, these conditions are possible. Christopher adds that people who believe in God think they are the best animal, but that may not always be the case.

Notes

Christopher again explicitly equates humans with other animals and gives possibilities of how they can lose their supremacy over earth. In this way, he can imaginatively fulfill the fantasy he has of being the only person on Earth.

CHAPTER 211

Summary

The train stops several times and Christopher keeps track with his watch. Several people find him in the luggage compartment but generally leave him alone. When the train becomes very quiet he steps out of his hiding place; he finds his belongings left at his previous seat have been taken. He sees another policeman but decides to avoid him. He traces his way back to the station but is approached by a man who tells him a policeman is looking for him. The man goes to fetch the officer but Christopher keeps walking. He feels panic at the sensory overload and the signs he sees begin to blur together and become meaningless. A man in a blue outfit with brown shoes tries to help Christopher, but he fends the man off with his Swiss Army knife. At the Information booth he asks how to get to his mother's address but only when he mentions Willesden is he told which train to take. He tells himself he can do this and goes ahead on his mission. He takes escalators down and buys a ticket to Willesden Green. He finds the platform to Willesden Junction and followed the signs there. He is frightened by the sound of trains arriving and leaving, and it feels like when he had the flu; he's shaking and wants to be back home, a wrong thought which means his mind wasn't working properly. Christopher closes his eyes and waits, even as he hurts.

Notes

The example of the signs and how they become incomprehensible illustrates how his thought processes are overwhelmed by all the new stimuli under which he suffers.

CHAPTER 223

Summary

Christopher includes another description, since this is what Siobhan recommends. Here, he talks about an advertisement for Malaysian tourism he saw at the train station, one which features two orangutans. He traces the etymology of the word orangutan and gives some facts on Malaysia. Siobhan told Christopher that people go on holidays to see new things and relax, but new places do not relax Christopher. Further, he believes there is a great deal of new things to discover in a familiar place. He recounts the text of the advertisement and recreates the image of the two orangutans.

Notes

The description seems superfluous, as was the previous one Christopher attempted, but it does allow him a chance to re-iterate his view on new places.

CHAPTER 227

Summary

Christopher keeps his eyes closed and doesn't look at his watch. A great deal of time passes and when he checks his watch it says 8:07 p.m., meaning he was sitting on the bench for five hours though it didn't feel that way for him. He also realizes Toby is no longer in his pocket. He watches the trains and keeps track of the sign of what

trains are arriving. He decides to look for Toby and locates him where the rails are. He goes down to fetch Toby but a man with black shoes and gray argyle socks starts yelling at him. The man grabs Christopher's shoulder but he screams at being touched; then a train came roaring up and the man pulls Christopher to safety, even as he screams because his shoulder is hurt by this. The man asks Christopher what he was doing and he finally says he was finding Toby. A lady with a guitar case approaches Christopher and asks if he is okay, touching him and causing him to scream. He drives away both her and the man.

After eight more trains, he gets on a train with Toby in his pocket. He gets off at Willesden Junction and sees two people at the station: a drunk in a stained coat and an Indian man running a shop. He asks the shopkeeper about the address of his mother's home and the shopkeeper makes him buy a map of London. Using the map, Christopher makes his way to his mother's home. No one answered the bell and he waited outside, hiding behind the dustbins. At 11:32 p.m. he hears a man and woman talking as they approach the building - the woman is his mother, Judy Boone, and she is with Roger Shears. Christopher meets them and Mother tries to hug him but he pushes her away. Answering her questions, he tells her that Father is back in Swindon, he took the train to London by himself, and that he came here to live with them because Father killed Wellington and he's now afraid of him.

They go into their apartment and Christopher takes a bath; he tells her that Father told him she was dead and she begins to wail and apologize. After Christopher's bath, a policeman comes by to speak to Christopher and make sure he's okay. Later that night, at 2:31 a.m., Christopher wakes to shouting: Father has arrived and is arguing with Mother and Mr. Shears. Father and Mother then come into Christopher's room, Father making sure he's alright and apologizing about Wellington and the letters. He holds up his hand with fingers spread but Christopher is afraid to touch him. The policeman comes back because Mr. Shears called for him and helps Father out of the flat. Mother tells him everything will be all right and Christopher goes back to sleep.

Notes

Christopher's narration of his near-death in the railroad station is underplayed and almost beside the fact. This is because Christopher is himself unaware of its significance, as his main concern throughout this scene is recovering Toby. This shows again how different his priorities are from other people.

CHAPTER 229

Summary

Christopher has one of his favorite dreams. In it, nearly everyone on earth is dead, and all that are left are special people like himself who want to be alone and don't look in other people's faces. In this dream, Christopher can go anywhere in the world and not be bothered. He goes to Father's house and it is quiet even at mid-day; he can go into other people's houses and play detective and does whatever he wishes, since you can do anything you want in a dream. He then finds someone's car keys and drives the car into the sea. He watches the surf afterwards then gets dry clothes and returns home to Father's house, which is now his. This dream makes him happy.

Notes

Again, this dream emphasizes how different Christopher is from others. The fact that he claims Father's house as his own shows how he is most comfortable there, that this is his true home.

CHAPTER 233

Summary

The next morning during breakfast, Mr. Shears and Mother argue over how long her can stay with them. Mother takes the day off from work and takes Christopher shopping for clothes, but he grows frightened and screams so Mother takes him home. She goes shopping on her own and returns with new pajamas for Christopher. He tells

her he has to go back to Swindon to take his maths A level exams, which surprises her. She doesn't know if returning to Swindon would be possible, which alarms Christopher. That night, he could not see the stars because of light pollution; when he finds he cannot sleep and at 2:07 a.m. he goes outside and sits between a skip and a Ford Transit van. He hears Mother calling for him and when he goes to her she warns him against going outside on his own again, as it's too dangerous in London.

The next day he spends indoors watching videos and the next day the office where Mother works called and told her she was replaced. Christopher again reminds Mother about going to Swindon for his A level, but she says it can be postponed. The next morning he looks out the window to count the cars but there are too many for him to be able to decide if it was a Good Day or Black Day - the system didn't work in London. That afternoon they go to Hampstead Heath to watch planes from Heathrow Airport and Mother tells Christopher that she spoke to Mrs. Gascoyne and delayed the exam until next year. Christopher is upset and screams, and they return home. Mr. Shears brought library books on math and science for Christopher, but they were for children so he didn't read them. Mother and Mrs. Shears argue and Christopher drowns them out by setting his radio to white noise.

Monday night, a drunk Mr. Shears wakes up Christopher to harass him verbally. The next day, Mother packs her clothes and takes Mr. Shears' car to return with Christopher and Toby back to Swindon. They go to Father's house and when Father comes home Mother tells him to stay with Rhodri until she finds a new place for herself and Christopher. Christopher continues to bring up his maths A level exams and Mother apologizes for this. The next day Mother drives Christopher to work and Mrs. Shears insults her. Siobhan meets with Mother and then arranges for Christopher to take his A level after all. She asks him if this is what he really wants to do and he isn't sure because he isn't able to think as clearly about maths as before. Still, he decides to take the test and that afternoon takes the first part while Reverend Peters serves as invigilator, as was originally planned.

Christopher is at first violently frustrated at Paper 1 but calms himself down, managing to take the test. The next day he takes Paper 2 and that evening Mr. Shears comes to take back his car. The following day Christopher takes Paper 3 and has a favorite question: he wants to write out how he answered this question but Siobhan told him it wasn't interesting to most people and he can include it in an Appendix. Christopher must wait to hear the results of his exams and is not sure of how well he did. The night of Paper 3, Father comes to the house to ask how the exam went. Christopher tells him and Father says thank you.

The next week Father tells Mother she has to move out of the house. Christopher asks her if Father will be arrested for killing Wellington but she says that the police can only do so if Mrs. Shears will press charges - which she won't. Mother gets a job and has pills prescribed to stop her from feeling sad. She and Christopher move to a room in a big house. He continues to wait for the exam results; mother gives him a wooden puzzle and they paint the room they now live in. Because of Mother's work, Christopher has to stay at Father's house between 3:49 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. To keep himself safe, Christopher pushes the bed against the door; Father sometimes talks to him through the door. Toby dies because he was old for a rat, so Christopher and Mother bury him in a plastic pot since the place they live has no garden. Christopher solves the puzzle that Mother gave him.

One day, Father asks to speak to Christopher; he refuses, but Mother says it's OK. Father says it hurts having Christopher refusing to talk to him and wants Christopher to learn to trust him again, no matter how long it takes. He calls this a project that they can work on together, to spend more time together to rebuild trust. He then brings in a cardboard box with a two-month old golden retriever inside. Christopher names the dog Sandy. Christopher finally gets the results from his maths A level and it is an A grade, which makes him happy. When Mother gets the flu, Christopher spends three days with Father but it's okay because he sleeps with Sandy keeping guard. Father begins a vegetable patch in the garden and Christopher helps with this.

Mother helps him get a book for A-level further maths, which he will take next year. He knows he will get an A grade, as he will in A-level physics the year after that. When this happens, he will go to university in another town - not London - and take Sandy with him, and wind up a scientist. He knows he can do this because he went to London on his own, solved the mystery of Who Killed Wellington?, found his mother, was brave, and wrote this book - which means he can do anything.

Notes

The only time we see Christopher in an aggressively violent mood - as opposed to defensively to protect himself - is at the start of his exam, when he isn't sure about his math skills. This is because his main source of stability, the logical way he looks at the world and filters its information, isn't as strong as it could be when he needs it most. The book ends on a realistically hopeful note, as Ed Boone slowly regains the trust of his son.

Appendix

Summary

This is the solution to Christopher's favorite exam question from A-level maths.

Notes

By ending with an actual mathematical problem, we not only see its importance in Christopher's life but are given a symbolic restoration of order in his world.

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

As the protagonist, Christopher is the character we most expect to grow and develop in the course of the novel. However, it's sometimes difficult to measure how much Christopher has matured as a character, if only because his thought processes are so different from other people.

The subtleties of Christopher's inner development - that is, his emotional growth - are not as evident as they would with other first person narrators, in part because he explicitly denies the importance of this aspect. He states time and again that the brain is as mechanistic as a computer and that humans are no more special than animals - views that reflect his own experiences with the limitations from autism. For him, the seams of human thought processes show up more obviously than others, and he has accepted them. Further, his social skills are limited by his autism, which makes it easier for him to identify with animals than people, which is why he values them as much as humans.

His emotional expressions are expressed in a limited fashion, and for a simple reason: when they grow too strong - such as when he discovers his mother is alive or when he travels to London by himself - it manifests in a more physical manner, such as growing sick or blacking out or his mind overloading. Add to this, his emotional reactions to certain revelations are limited by his focused perspective: he is not upset to find out of his mother's affair because he assumes his mother is dead; he does not appreciate the significance of almost dying at the train tracks of London because he was too busy fetching Toby. However, he does feel loneliness and heartache as he leaves Swindon for London, and there is a note of personal triumph at the end of the book which is different from what we encounter before. In this sense, his character is allowed to feel new emotions through the experiences he goes through.

The most obvious measure of growth are the accomplishments he lists in the last paragraph of the novel, the observable events which make up the bulk of his story. Christopher uses these events as proof that he can fulfill his ambitions to go to university and be a scientist - for him, there is an irrefutably logical chain between accomplishing the past set of actions and fulfilling the future set of actions. He has become a more confident and experienced person, better able to cope with the complexities of life after his unusual adventures.

The development of Ed Boone as a character is interesting in how he starts as an apparent saint and becomes more flawed as the story progresses. We are introduced to him as a patient father and widower, but flashes of anger at Christopher's mystery investigation show that there is more to his personality than infinite patience and kindness. The depths of his patience, however, are upended by the secret he keeps: if anything, the decision to tell Christopher that his mother is dead shows a lack of patience, a search for the easiest, most convenient way to cut ties with Judy Boone and spare Christopher any suffering. However, Ed Boone's innate goodness resurfaces as the story comes to a close. His understanding of Christopher, called into question by the secrets he kept and the anger he vents as he loses control of the situation, is also regained in the project he describes to his son about rebuilding trust. He does not see the trust as being recovered immediately and even states he'll work at it for as long as it takes, which shows the reserves of patience which readers first associated with him does indeed exist.

In contrast, Judy Boone's character undergoes a more straightforward positive transformation. From the start, we know she didn't have as much patience with Christopher as Ed; however, the extent of her inability to handle him only becomes clear when we discover she isn't dead but has run away with Roger Shears. She is traumatized by the news that her son believed her dead for the past two years; though this is never stated as a motivation for reclaiming her responsibility as Christopher's mother, it does tie into a symbolic "resurrection" for Judy Boone. She not only comes back from the dead in Christopher's eyes, she also comes back reborn as a better parent and more committed caregiver, even giving up her relationship with Roger Shears to take care of her son. A line about being prescribed medicine that keeps her from being sad indicates the possibility that she suffers from her own mental illness - depression, perhaps, though the scattered thoughts of her letters may indicate something more serious. At the end of the novel, she seems as stable a force in Christopher's life as Ed Boone.

Outside of the Boone family, there is no discernible character development. Indeed, we do not know if there are any further resolutions in the relationships with important characters such as Mrs. Alexander or the Shears. That is because the story is being told from Christopher's view and the restoration of the family - and his success at his math exam - are the most important concerns by the end of the narrative.

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Reflecting the themes of the book, the structure of the plot is based on order, a disruption of the order, and a re-establishment of a new kind of order. The novel begins as a straightforward whodunit, as Christopher tries to solve the death of Wellington. A second mystery is also in the process of being solved, which he initially does not realize. When he does, the seemingly simple problem of a dog's death takes on a new dimension. Then, the mystery narrative is disrupted in the middle of the novel: both mysteries, the overt and the covert, are solved by Ed Boone's confession. From there, a less esoteric kind of puzzle-solving (going from point A to point B, Swindon to London) and a more everyday narrative (uniting with his mother and taking his A-level math exam) takes over.

Thus, the mystery of the novel is itself built on a trope that Christopher does not mention: the MacGuffin, which is a Red Herring which starts the action but misdirect readers away from the true central plot. This is how the second, hidden mystery manifests itself, as the details of that hidden mystery - the affair of Judy Boone and Roger Shears, then their running away to London together - becomes entwined to the facts surrounding Wellington's death.

In being a mystery novel of this kind, the book is also a kind of bildungsroman - the solving of the mystery is also a means for education and a new level of self-awareness for Christopher. For him to completely solve the mysteries of who killed Wellington and whether his mother is dead, Christopher not only learns new things

about his parents but also forces himself to undergo difficult tasks that he would have otherwise avoided - most notably, taking the train to London.

The mystery plot also allows a family history to emerge, one which eventually takes over the book: in piecing together details about Wellington and the other Shears, Christopher discovers the truth about his mother and father. He also describes what his life was like when he was young and his mother was around. To complete the obvious gap in this family history - what his mother did after leaving Swindon and before returning with Christopher - we have Judy Boone's letters.

Finally, there is a metafictional thread in the narrative - that is, the story calls attention to its being created, as the narrator Christopher discusses how exactly he writes the story that we read. Unlike other books that employ metafictional devices, this self-reflexivity isn't used to subvert or upset traditional narrative conventions - if anything, it's Christopher's unique perspective that upsets those conventions and not the metafictional elements. Rather, the act of writing the book is part of Christopher's claim to being able to do anything he wants - an assertion of control in the very narrative of his life, which he shares with the readers.

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

It is difficult to discuss the two major themes of the novel - the search for order and stability and the role of absence in life - because the search for order in this novel often involves the acknowledgment and filling of an absence. The theme of the search for order and stability in life develops subtly but is changed radically when the presence of the second mystery is revealed - an absence. While it seems that the story is about the search for Wellington's murderer, most all the clues that Christopher discovers also seek to answer an absence he isn't even aware exists: the status and whereabouts of his mother Judy. This is the true "curious incident of the dog in the night-time" - the incident which is significant precisely because nothing happens, it is the absence which points to a deeper truth. The solving of the two mysteries are only the prologue to the true fulfillment of order in Christopher's life: a reunion with his mother and the restoration of a more balanced family order, as well as the successful completion of his A-level math exam to pave his planned future as a scientist.

Further, it should be noted this is not a story about "overcoming" a disease, but rather of living with a specific condition. The triumph does not hinge on acting as if this condition doesn't exist but in working with that condition to lead as rich a life as possible. Christopher makes no attempt to pretend he is anything other than he is, nor is there any encouragement to do so by the people around him. This is played subtly, since the kind of autism that Christopher suffers from - Asperger's Syndrome - is never named in the text and the exact clinical parameters of his condition are never explained. As we see things from within his perspective, these are things he would take for granted as just how his life is and how his mind works. Stability and order, then, isn't the removal of all obstacles in life, but dealing with the situation one is given.

As for the theme of absence, it manifests in various ways throughout the book. The loneliness of Ed Boone is brought up subtly, in his failed romance with Mrs. Shears and the pornography that he keeps in his bedroom. A larger absence occurs when he loses his son's trust after his deception is revealed - this is accentuated by Christopher's refusal to speak or touch his father in the latter half of the book. Christopher is given his own taste of absence, not when his mother dies, but when he realizes she is still alive and thus still within reach. Further, his decision to leave Swindon and all that's familiar provokes new emotions in Christopher: he feels heartache and longing for home, further accentuated once he goes to London and loses such things as the nighttime stars and a garden. The restoration of a new family order and Christopher's continued success intellectually help fill this loneliness, as father and son work to re-establish trust at the end of the novel.

Related to these major themes are various minor themes which spring from Christopher's basic struggle.

There is the theme of family: the story begins with a truncated family unit of son and widower father, seemingly stable and happy. However, we also get a hint that there was a maternal figure in Mrs. Shears after Judy Boone "died" but this did not work out; we also are told that when she was around, Christopher's mother was not as patient a mother as she needed to be. Finally, the notion of a stable family is disrupted in both the past and present: we find out that two years earlier, Judy Boone had an affair with Roger Shears and ran off with him; and we find out that in the present day, Ed Boone has been hiding from Christopher that his mother is indeed alive, a lie which shatters the trust between father and son. Christopher goes on to seek a new stability with a reconstituted family: another dyad, this of mother-son in London instead of father-son in Swindon. Unfortunately, there is also a potential father figure in Roger Shears who stands in the way of this new dyad; motherhood finally usurps misguided romance, however, as Mr. Shears is quickly jettisoned by Judy Boone.

All these permutations of family are exposed as being unbalanced, either by a lack of patience or deception. But from here, an uneasy but ultimately productive equilibrium is reached in the family structure. Christopher and his mother return to Swindon from London, which is itself a return to stability. Judy becomes the main caretaker for Christopher, but Ed Boone begins a project to re-establish trust with his son. Christopher has both parents again: a mother who has re-asserted her claim to her son and the responsibilities involved; and a father whose patience will allow a new trust to develop.

The theme of mathematics and science as a source of order and stability in Christopher's life. They provide a framework not only to simplify aspects of his life, but also to safely consider how complex life is, as seen by his view of how prime numbers are like life and the example of the Monty Hall Problem. As another example, Christopher is reading James Gleick's best-selling popular science book *Chaos* at one point in the novel: far from being about disorder, the book deals with chaos theory and how seemingly random events are actually ordered in a highly complex but logical manner. Chaos is thus tamed by *Chaos*, an irony Christopher can appreciate.

Throughout the novel, Christopher uses math to explain things which could otherwise prove frustrating or difficult; it also gives him something to focus on when he is under extreme stress, such as during his trip to London or when his parents argue. In this sense this theme doesn't change from start to finish - this is a fixed part of his personality, and one that he stakes his future upon. In that light, the most obvious development in this theme is Christopher's success in taking A-level maths and his plans to become a scientist.

AUTHOR'S STYLE

As the story is narrated from the perspective of a mathematically-gifted autistic teenager, the style reflects this experience. The descriptions are often straightforward and factual, though when he becomes involved in a particular idea or is describing a stressful experience the writing becomes more convoluted, with long run-on sentences to indicate the excess of sensory or intellectual stimuli that he cannot fully process. To help keep his ideas clear, Christopher makes certain orthographic decisions - bolds, italics, capitalizations - to make a particular word or phrase stand out, thus making their importance more apparent to the reader.

To help convey the unique perspective of Christopher, the novel is often unbalanced in how it presents details of the world. Expectations of what belongs in a narrative are often re-prioritized to fit his understanding of the world. Sometimes this is done by omission: for example, Christopher is not able to always gauge a person's emotion (including his own), so sometimes he will not mention this and thus the dramatic effect of a moment is underplayed.

Other times the unexpected comes through the addition of elements that seem outside of the narrative: details that seem superfluous to the reader but which are deemed worth mentioning by Christopher. Some of it reflect the immediate concerns of any student, while others are elaborate mathematical or scientific ideas, or even word

meanings and narrative definitions. There are whole chapters devoted to a specific mathematical problem or some other cultural reference, such as the plot of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. These help create a sense of how Christopher understands the world, the way he uses maths and logic and mystery novels to better cope with the difficulties of coping with life's complexities.

The nature of Christopher's seemingly tangential details is best contrasted to passages where Christopher purposefully includes "descriptions" as per Siobhan's suggestions. Told that such details would be of interest to readers, they actually do not particularly concern Christopher the way his maths and Holmes does. Thus, these descriptions in particular seem out of place and disrupt the *feel* story, more so than Christopher's chosen tangents, precisely because they don't accurately reflect his own concerns.

Diagrams and drawings appear throughout the narrative - sometimes to illustrate a scientific observation, other times just to see what a picture is like. This shows the limitations of written language for Christopher, and his need to convey ideas in as full a manner as possible.

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS - QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

Early in the novel, Christopher gives his opinion on dogs:

I like dogs. You always know what a dog is thinking. It has four moods. Happy, sad, cross and concentrating. Also, dogs are faithful and they do not tell lies because they cannot talk. (3-4)

Christopher seems to be describing how he sees himself: someone who is transparent in his moods and meanings, and who does not lie. The novel begins with many straightforward, detailed descriptions - things we would often take for granted, but which Christopher feels obliged to explain in order to keep clear in his mind as well as his readers. Thus, we have this surprising statement:

This is a murder mystery novel.

Siobhan said that I should write something I would want to read myself. Mostly I read books about science and maths. I do not like proper novels. In proper novels people say things like, "I am veined with iron, with silver and with streaks of common mud. I cannot contract into the firm fist with which those clench who do not depend on stimulus." What does this mean? I do not know. Nor does Father. Nor does Siobhan or Mr. Jeavons. I have asked them. (4-5)

Rarely does a novel tell you what genre it inhabits - the reader is supposed to understand it from the beginning. And ironically, this work is *more* than a murder mystery novel - if anything, the murder mystery becomes a MacGuffin for the family drama in the second half of the book. With the quote that Christopher uses, Haddon subtly pokes fun at the grandiose language of the literary novel. It not only eludes Christopher as impenetrable, but also the adults he knows. With that in mind, Christopher explains why he likes mysteries:

In a murder mystery novel someone has to work out who the murderer is and then catch them. It is a puzzle. If it is a good puzzle you can sometimes work out the answer before the end of the book. (5)

This becomes a challenge to the reader to find out not only whodunnit but also whatwasdun. As with any other murder mystery, the clues to Wellington's murderer become more obvious on a second reading of the book - but so does the hidden second mystery that is the true driving force of the novel, the mystery of Christopher's Mother.

Christopher makes a point of stating that his book will not be funny, and explains that he doesn't like jokes because of his condition:

If I try to say the joke to myself, making the word mean the three different things at the same time, it is like hearing three different pieces of music at the same time, which is uncomfortable and confusing and not nice like white noise. It is like three people trying to talk to you at the same time about different things. (8)

This ability to hold three different layers of meaning at the same time isn't as traumatic for other people - and even provides pleasure, as seen by its use in humor. However, this is not possible for Christopher, who can only detect cacophony in such an excess of meaning.

In explaining the odd numbering of his chapters, Christopher provides one of many philosophical applications of mathematics in this passage:

Prime numbers are what is left when you have taken all the patterns away. I think prime numbers are like life. They are very logical but you could never work out the rules, even if you spent all your time thinking about them. (12)

Christopher implicitly states that he understands there are rules to life, but that there are too many for him to come up with a clear pattern of behavior. In a similar fashion, by using prime numbers the book is itself an example of how life works: the logic is clear but there may be too many rules to make the workings of Christopher's life completely comprehensible. In contrast, Christopher takes severe umbrage at metaphors, which aren't complicated in his view but simply deceptive:

I think it should be called a lie because a pig is not like a day and people do not have skeletons in their cupboards. And when I try and make a picture of the phrase in my head it just confuses me because imagining an apple in someone's eye doesn't have anything to do with liking someone a lot and it makes you forget what the person was talking about. (15)

While on the face of it this is a ridiculous simplification of the issue, the nature of metaphors are indeed a major concern of literary theory, as they are excellent examples of the gap between language and reality. The examples he uses are everyday sayings, but the way he phrases them makes the metaphors strange again, too literal in their meaning and thus exposing again the gap between language and reality that other people take for granted and gloss over - but which Christopher is unable to do. Later on, he shows why he is so averse to lies:

A lie is when you say something happened which didn't happen. But there is only ever one thing which happened at a particular time and a particular place. And there are an infinite number of things which didn't happen at that time and that place. And if I think about something which didn't happen I start thinking about all the other things which didn't happen.

For example, this morning for breakfast I had Ready Brek and some hot raspberry milk shake. But if I say that I actually had Shreddies and a mug of tea I start thinking about Coco Pops and lemonade and porridge and Dr Pepper and how I wasn't eating my breakfast in Egypt and there wasn't a rhinoceros in the room and Father wasn't wearing a diving suit and so on and even writing this makes me feel shaky and scared, like I do when I'm standing on the top of a very tall building and there are thousands of houses and cars and people below me and my head is so full of all these things that I'm afraid that I'm going to forget to stand up straight and hang on to the rail and I'm going to fall over and be killed. (19)

The example of the second paragraph is a strange mix of both the mundane and the exotic, thus emphasizing the lack of control Christopher has over such thoughts. In his mind, lies encompass all kinds of possibilities, not just the most likely ones. The second sentence is a long run-on that goes from the hypothetical scenario to a description of how these chaotic effects make him feel and ends in a fear of dying. For Christopher, such sensory overload is akin to death - extreme suffering and a desire for oblivion to ease the pain. As a kind of foreshadowing, the mention of falling off a rail mirrors his experience of jumping onto the tracks of the London rail system to find Toby and almost dying in a train's path.

The two mysteries weave into each other throughout the course of the novel, often in subtle ways. Early on, Christopher speaks to his father:

I asked, "Are you sad about Wellington?"

He looked at me for a long time and sucked air in through his nose. Then he said, "Yes, Christopher, you could say that. You could very well say that." (21)

Christopher had described earlier how he could not read people's expressions and here is a case where such an ability would have helped his mystery. Ed Boone's cryptic statement not only ties into regret for what he's done to the dog, but also the loneliness he feels at being abandoned - first by his wife, then by Mrs. Shears.

While Christopher may not want to be funny in his book, humor nevertheless arises from his unique view of the world around him. For instance,

All the other children at my school are stupid. Except I'm not meant to call them stupid, even though this is what they are. I'm meant to say that they have learning difficulties or that they have special needs. But this is stupid because everyone has learning difficulties because learning to speak French or understanding relativity is difficult and also everyone has special needs, like Father, who has to carry a little packet of artificial sweetening tablets around with him to put in his coffee to stop him from getting fat, or Mrs. Peters, who wears a beige-colored hearing aid, or Siobhan, who has glasses so thick that they give you a headache if you borrow them, and none of these people are Special Needs, even if they have special needs. (43-44)

There is humor in the first sentence, if only in Christopher expressing an idea that would not be acceptable in polite company or someone who wasn't a part of the group he's insulting. This is further brought home by what follows, where he admits to knowing the political correct terms but finds they are logically flawed in their application. Unwittingly, Christopher also makes an important point in the idea that everybody has limitations and needs, it's just that some people - such as those in his school - have a different level of limitations and needs than others.

His fondness for mathematics seems obvious to others, and Christopher handles this in one chapter:

Mr. Jeavons said that I liked maths because it was safe. He said I liked maths because it meant solving problems, and these problems were difficult and interesting but there was always a straightforward answer at the end. And what he meant was that maths wasn't like life because in life there are no straightforward answers at the end. I know he meant this because this is what he said. (61-62)

Christopher goes on to refute this with the Monty Hall Problem. What readers get from this is an understanding that Christopher sees numbers in a way very different from other people: it isn't always a means to simplify and comfort one's understanding of the world, but also an acceptable analogy to the complexities and contradictions

of life. We see a simpler example of this belief in his earlier statement about prime numbers, where the logical rules exist but extends too far to be able to know them all.

Another confounding aspect of Christopher's personality is his preference for certain colors - and corresponding hatred of others. He addresses this as well:

Mrs. Forbes said that hating yellow and brown is just being silly. And Siobhan said that she shouldn't say things like that and everyone has favorite colors. And Siobhan was right. But Mrs. Forbes was a bit right, too. Because it is sort of being silly. But in life you have to take lots of decisions and if you don't take decisions you would never do anything because you would spend all your time choosing between things you could do. So it is good to have a reason why you hate some things and you like others. (85)

In admitting some merit to Mrs. Forbes' opinion, Christopher shifts the question of hated colors from one of preference to one of *expediency*: the reason he hates certain colors does not come from an aesthetic or intuitive choice, but from an understanding that this makes his life easier by limiting his choices.

These limited choices no longer prove useful when contradictory information greets him with his mother's letters. Looking over the first envelope after reading its contents, Christopher tries to make sense of it:

I looked at the letter and thought really hard. It was a mystery and I couldn't work it out. Perhaps the letter was in the wrong envelope and it had been written before Mother had died. But why was she writing from London? The longest she had been away was a week when she went to visit her cousin Ruth, who had cancer, but Ruth lived in Manchester.

And then I thought that perhaps it wasn't a letter from Mother. Perhaps it was a letter to another person called Christopher, from that Christopher's mother.

I was excited. When I started writing my book there was only one mystery I had to solve. Now there were two. (99)

Ironically, Christopher had written just previously about Occam's Razor, where the simplest answer is often the right one. However, in his mind the notion of his mother being alive isn't the simplest answer because he has accepted it as a basic truth in his life. Realizing his mother is alive would lead to realizing his father lied to him, crumbling another foundation of his world view.

Christopher reprints the letters he reads from his mother, which has passages such as this:

We had a lot of argumants like that. Because I often thought I couldn't take any more. And your father is really pacient but I'm not, I get cross, and even though I don't mean too. And by the end we stopped talking to each other very much because we knew it would always end up in an argumant and it would go nowere. And I felt realy lonley. (107)

The poor spelling shows that Judy Boone may not be as educated as her son. However, it should be noted that Christopher mentions how Siobhan looks over his book as he composed it, so he has an advantage of an editor. In contrast, the letters of Mother may have remained unedited since they are historical documents in a sense, and to tamper with them would perhaps be a lie in Christopher's view. The letters are filled with details about everyday life with the kind of chatter that one associates with a normal existence, in contrast to Christopher's more erudite, often baffling style. They also emphasizes an emotional component that is purposely subdued in

his own narration. We understand why those emotions are so subdued when Christopher finally becomes aware of the truth of the matter in the following passage:

Mother had not had a heart attack. Mother had not died. Mother had been alive all the time. And Father had lied about this.

I tried really hard to think if there was any other explanation but I couldn't think of one. And then I couldn't think of anything at all because my brain wasn't working properly. (112)

The statements are simple; if anything, the sentences of the first paragraph take on the nature of a logical syllogism - that is, a series of basic premises leading to a logical conclusion. This is reinforced by the second paragraph, which shows the inevitability of this logical conclusion. The last sentence, though, shows the impact this conclusion has on him personally - the logic goes against a basic premise he's long held, that Father would never lie to him. Having to weigh two opposite notions - that Father lied to him and that Father would never lie to him - he suffers as he does when trying to understand a joke with its multiple, contradictory meanings. The lost trust and misread cues leads to a further tragedy in Christopher's understanding:

I had to get out of the house. Father had murdered Wellington. That meant he could murder me, because I couldn't trust him, even though he had said "Trust me," because he had told a lie about a big thing. (122)

The chain of reasoning doesn't take into account differences between humans and animals - and indeed, Christopher doesn't believe there are any significant differences in the value of humans as compared to other animals.

Later, as Christopher decides to leave Swindon to escape his father and join his mother in London, he is struck by ambivalence and heartache:

And then I thought how I could never be an astronaut because being an astronaut meant being hundreds of thousands of miles away from home, and my home was in London now and that was about 100 miles away, which was more than 1,000 times nearer than my home would be if I was in space, and thinking about this made me hurt. Like when I fell over in the grass at the edge of a playground once and I cut my knee on a piece of broken bottle that someone had thrown over the wall and I sliced a flap of skin off and Mr. Davis had to clean the flesh under the flap with disinfectant to get the germs and the dirt out and it hurt so much I cried. But this hurt was inside my head. And it made me sad to think that I could never become an astronaut. (132)

Christopher equates physical pain to emotional pain, in part because his mental pain does manifest in a clearly physical way. In this case, however, he is attempting to describe a kind of feeling that has been alien to him until now. Further, he applies this feeling to his earlier-stated ambition of becoming an astronaut - the comforts he had felt the occupation would provide are now weighed against the discomforts he experiences in an analogous situation. This sense of discomfort grows worse when he describes the rush and push of being in the Swindon rail station:

And when I am in a new place, because I see everything, it is like when a computer is doing too many things at the same time and the central processor unit is blocked up and there isn't any space left to think about other things. And when I am in a new place and there are lots of people there it is even harder because people are not like cows and flowers and grass and they can talk to you and do things that you don't expect, so you have to notice everything that is in

the place, and also you have to notice things that might happen as well. And sometimes when I am in a new place and there are lots of people there it is like a computer crashing and I have to close my eyes and put my hands over my ears and groan, which is like pressing CTRL + ALT + DEL and shutting down programs and turning the computer off and rebooting so that I can remember what I am doing and where I am meant to be going. (144)

This passage reflects a sense of anxiety in the run-on sentences that pack in too many ideas at once, itself a reflection of his problem in new places. The comparison of his mind to a computer is explored in an elaborate fashion. Finally, by describing his shutting out the outside world as a kind of mental reboot, the mechanical nature of the brain and its functions is emphasized. An alarmingly cold view of humanity is taken for granted as a fact of life by Christopher, who's more aware than most of the limitations placed on the machinery of his mind. As his trip continues, he is faced with increasingly traumatic sensory input, as in this description of the London Underground:

And then there was a sound like people fighting with swords and I could feel a strong wind and a roaring started and I closed my eyes and the roaring got louder and I groaned really loudly but I couldn't block it out of my ears and I thought the little station was going to collapse or there was a big fire somewhere and I was going to die. And then the roaring turned into a clattering and a squealing and it got slowly quieter and then it stopped and I kept my eyes closed because I felt safer not seeing what was happening. And then I could hear people moving again because it was quieter. And I opened my eyes but I couldn't see anything at first because there were too many people. And then I saw that they were getting onto a train that wasn't there before and it was the train which was roaring. And there was sweat running down my face from under my hair and I was moaning, not groaning, but different, like a dog when it has hurt its paw, and I heard the sound but I didn't realize it was me at first. (176)

The comparison of the train clattering to swords is an apt description but also shows the kind of violence it inflicts on Christopher's psyche. This is further emphasized with other catastrophic images, such as collapse and fire. While he tries to shut out this sensory input, when it quiets he is greeted by another problem: the crowds of people moving through the station. From all this, he moves on to a description of his physical state, which he likens to an injured animal - calling to mind Wellington, the murdered dog. Finally, the pain is brought home not only by the vivid description of the moaning but also the fact that Christopher didn't realize initially that he was making this pitiful sound.

When he arrives at his mother's home, he finds that one pain is replaced with another. However, he is better able to cope with the domestic dispute between his mother and her lover in a manner that he's mentioned previously:

And when Mother and Mr. Shears argued I took the little radio from the kitchen and I went and sat in the spare room and I tuned it halfway between two stations so that all I could hear was white noise and I turned the volume up really loud and I held it against my ear and the sound filled my head and it hurt so that I couldn't feel any other sort of hurt, like the hurt in my chest, and I couldn't hear Mother and Mr. Shears arguing and I couldn't think about not doing my A level or the fact that there wasn't a garden at 451c Chapter Road, London NW2 5NG, or the fact that I couldn't see the stars. (206-207)

The white noise that Christopher describes is a way to isolate himself, to find peace by shutting out everything around him. White noise is also an artificial creation, emphasized by the use of the radio, and an artifact of science, which Christopher requires to feel safe in life. The hurt in his chest may be likened to the hurt in his chest described earlier, when he left Swindon: a heartache, an emotional sense of loss. This is confirmed by what he lists as he is missing: his exam, a garden, the stars. Throughout the story, Christopher refers to his

mother's address in the full postal manner - often confusing other people when he asks for directions to this place. It shows how important his memory is and how he needs information in as ordered and straightforward a manner as possible.

Christopher manages to return for his A-level math exam but is troubled at first by the challenge, as he cannot think as clearly as math as he usually does. This provokes a surprisingly violent reaction on his part:

And when I opened the paper and read through it I couldn't think how to answer any of the questions and also I couldn't breathe properly. And I wanted to hit somebody or stab them with my Swiss Army knife, but there wasn't anyone to hit or stab with my Swiss Army knife except the Reverend Peters and he was very tall and if I hit him or stabbed him with my Swiss Army knife he wouldn't be my invigilator for the rest of the exam. So I took deep breaths like Siobhan said I should do when I want to hit someone in school and I counted 50 breaths and did cubes of the cardinal numbers as I counted... (212-213)

His inability to think of math clearly is paired with a physical reaction: he cannot breathe properly, just as he cannot function properly without his maths and sciences to guide him. This leads to a rage which is unusual in that it's still balanced by logic and his ambition to pass the exam - the main reasons he won't attack Reverend Peters is because he's bigger and because doing so would forfeit the rest of his exam. The Swiss Army knife is his protection from outside violence, and the fact that he brings it with him to his exam shows that the turmoil in his life has not yet settled - he is still afraid and off-balance. The rage shows how important the tests - which are the key to his future as a scientist, as well as his source of order and stability in life - are to him. Finally, he finds solace in mathematics - the cubes of cardinal numbers - which in turn paves the way for his mastery of the mathematics of the A-level exam.

The last issue of the novel is the trust between Christopher and his father, which is a precarious situation but one that becomes optimistic in this passage:

And Mother got flu and I had to spend three days with Father and stay in his house. But it was OK because Sandy slept on my bed so he would bark if anyone came into the room during the night. And Father made a vegetable patch in the garden and I helped him. And we planted carrots and pea and spinach and I'm going to pick them and eat them when they're ready. (220)

The continued mistrust is emphasized in how Sandy is used as a guard against Father - but Sandy is also a symbol of hope, a gift from Christopher's father in the slow project of rebuilding trust. This is built upon with the last two sentences about the garden. First, the garden is a return to normalcy, as London had proved too urban for him to enjoy: the garden reinforces that Swindon is a place that isn't as hectic, that doesn't take away as many natural pleasures as London. The vegetable patch is a reflection of how Christopher likes his food: separate from each other, just as garden rows separate different kinds of plants. The fecundity of a garden also shows how the connection between father and son can also grow - slowly, naturally, with the proper amount of care and patience. True to his nature, Christopher also points out the factual result of this part of his father's project: he will eat the vegetables once they're ready. The story proper ends on a hopeful note:

And I know I can do this because I went to London on my own, and because I solved the mystery of Who Killed Wellington? and I found my mother and I was brave and I wrote a book and that means I can do anything. (221)

The neat summation of what happens in the novel is a way for Christopher to order what he's accomplished to himself as well as his reader. As always, he does not want his reader to mistake his intentions and what he

wants them to remember. Further, in this passage the past becomes prologue to the future: the book is not only a narrative, but proof to Christopher of what else he can accomplish. He can look at everything he's done and know he can do even more - "anything" as a matter of fact.

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

Many of the motifs in the book represent either controlled order or chaotic excess, as these are the things which most concern Christopher as narrator. Mathematics is the most prevalent motif in the book, as it's the means by which Christopher best understands the world around him. There are many passages devoted to seemingly esoteric issues of math and science, sometimes confounding the reader with its complexity. For Christopher, however, they provide mastery: of his intellectual capabilities, as well as of the outside world. Mathematics is a way for Christopher to set himself apart in a positive way from other people, and fuels his ambition to become a productive member of society as a scientist.

As he is quite gifted in understanding their particular logics and conclusions, they also prove useful as the framework by which he can connect to the less easily comprehensible aspects of the outside world. This does not always simplify the outside world, but at least provides a mean to better grasp complexities he cannot master - for example, with the analogy drawn between prime numbers and life, or the Monty Hall Problem. In a broad sense, it's the same way a sports-minded person will often resort to sports metaphors - though in Christopher's case, his autism and the limits it places on his brain makes the use of maths and sciences a more urgent coping tool than for other people.

Similarly, computers and mechanical objects are often used as an analogy to Christopher's mind and his view of humans in general. Because scientific logic is paramount not only for his overall mental health but also his pursuit of scholarly excellence, he boils down the human experience to its most logical elements. This motif also allows readers to see the distinctly atheistic view Christopher has of the world: he states several times he does not believe in God and believes that such beliefs stem from fear. It should be noted that not all scientists believe their studies discount the existence of God; if anything, the wonders of the universe open them up more to the idea of a higher power. Christopher's own refusal to believe in a supreme being stems from his primary need for science as confirmation of a clearly *discernible* order, as opposed to a heightened appreciation of the wonders of the natural universe.

Dogs are another important motif. For Christopher, they are preferable to humans because they are easier to relate to - which brings up his ability to equate the value of humans to animals. He implicitly and explicitly likens himself to dogs throughout the novel, sometimes to show the transparency of his statements and moods, other times to show his painful vulnerability in the outside world.

Mysteries, and specifically Sherlock Holmes, are important motifs: they combine narrative with puzzle solving, the two formal concerns that Christopher has when composing his book. The story becomes a self-reflexive examination of what makes a mystery novel: when Christopher first uses a term such as Red Herring or Prime Suspect, he makes sure to explain what it means. Interestingly enough, this contrasts to one specific motif that Christopher poses as the antithesis to the comfort of mysteries: that of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. This not only shows a heightened level of discernment on the part of Christopher, but also the extreme level at which he disdains superstition and prizes logic.

The railroad system becomes an important symbol in the book, as they are the Rubicon which Christopher must pass - not only to reunite with his mother in London, but in a larger perspective to eventually restore order to his life back in Swindon and with his father. With the noise and crowds that accompany rail travel, however, they also symbolize the chaos and sensory overload that pains him both emotionally and physically. Some of the

most effective passages of the book involve the terror he feels as he travels to London and must deal with the trauma of the rails.

The book Christopher writes is an important motif in itself. It provides a metafictional means of reading the book: just as Christopher sees the seams in the mechanistic nature of the human mind, we see the seams in the mechanistic assemblage of this novel. It also provides another kind of mastery for Christopher: to write the book is to control the narrative of his life, both literally in the pages we read and symbolically in his attitude to his abilities.

There are also a variety of pictures and ideograms in the book, some of which are used to explain mathematical and scientific principles, others are of a more personal "show and tell" nature. Perhaps most interesting are those visual images which clearly combine both functions, such as the ideograms of facial expressions and the chart by which Christopher decides to go to London. The facial ideograms are employed negatively in the beginning of the novel, but are used again in a positive way at the end. It should be noted that only the simplest of the facial ideograms - happy - is employed by Christopher; we may assume he still has not mastered the more complex facial expressions. That said, his willingness to use them shows growth on his part.

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

Author: Mark Haddon.

Date Published: 2003.

Meaning of Title: A reference to the Sherlock Holmes story "The Adventure of Silver Blaze" as well as the death of a neighborhood dog that initiates the plot of the novel.

Setting: Swindon and London, England.

Genre: Mystery, young adult.

Protagonist: Christopher Boone.

Antagonist: The chaotic world removed from Christopher's routine, best embodied by Ed Boone, his father.

Mood: Serious and erudite.

Point of View: First person, narrated by Christopher as the material of his book.

Tense: Past tense.

Exposition: Christopher is accused of killing Mrs. Shears' dog Wellington and decides to solve the mystery of who did this crime.

Rising Action: Christopher unravels the mystery of Wellington's death but in doing so discovers a new mystery regarding his supposedly dead mother.

Climax: Christopher goes to London to escape his father and be with his mother.

Outcome: His mother returns with him to Swindon and Christopher begins to learn to trust his father again.

Major Themes: The search for order and stability, and the significance of absences in life.

Minor Themes: The stability of family, the importance of mathematics and science.

STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUIZ

1. Why is Christopher taken to jail?

- a. Wellington's blood was found on his hands.
- b. He asked for a small enclosed place to feel safe.
- c. He hit a policeman who touched him.
- d. None of the above.

2. How does Christopher determine whether a day would be good or bad?

- a. He rolls a twenty-sided die.
- b. The number of clouds he can count in one minute.
- c. He asks Siobhan what she thinks.
- d. The number of cars of the same color.

3. What does Mrs. Alexander tell Christopher about his mother?

- a. That she is actually alive.
- b. That she had an affair with Roger Shears.
- c. That he saw her in London on a recent visit.
- d. All of the above.

4. What problem does Christopher relate to explain why intuition cannot be trusted?

- a. The Monty Hall Problem.
- b. The Orion Constellation Problem.
- c. The Two Orangutan Problem
- d. None of the above.

5. What is Christopher's favorite book?

- a. *Chaos* by James Gleick.
- b. *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand.
- c. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
- d. *All Creatures Great and Small* by James Herriot.

6. What is Christopher's attitude to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and why?

- a. Worship, since he created Sherlock Holmes.
- b. Anger, because he didn't write enough Holmes stories.
- c. Disdain, because Doyle believed in the supernatural.
- d. None of the above.

7. What happened to Christopher's book manuscript after the fight with his father?

- a. His father gave it to Siobhan for safekeeping.
 - b. His mother saved it from the dustbin and returned it to her son.
 - c. His father took it and hid it in his bedroom.
 - d. His father burned it and Christopher had to recreate it from memory.
8. How does Ed Boone explain his decision to Christopher regarding Christopher's mother?
- a. He believed it was best for Christopher to never be in touch with his mother again.
 - b. He was unsure of how to break the truth to his son and after the first lie had to maintain it.
 - c. Christopher's mother had told Ed to tell him that, to spare him grief.
 - d. None of the above.
9. What is in inverse proportion to one another when Christopher decides to go to London?
- a. Fear of a new place and fear of being near his father.
 - b. Proximity to his mother and proximity to his father.
 - c. Fear of railroad trains and happiness about his mother being alive.
 - d. Anger at his father's lie and fear of his father's murderous impulses.
10. What joke does Christopher know and recount for the reader?
- a. About the population of frogs in a pond.
 - b. About the "stupid" kids in his school.
 - c. About the astronaut who forgets something on Earth.
 - d. About an economist, a logician, and a mathematician that see a cow.
11. How does Christopher evade the policeman who sits with him in the train?
- a. He sits in the luggage compartment to feel safer.
 - b. He gets off at the next stop but gets on again before the train leaves.
 - c. He walks away and sits in another carriage.
 - d. He doesn't, the policeman agrees to take him to his mother.
12. What advertising does Christopher encounter on his trip to London that he recounts in detail?
- a. A Nike ad telling him to "Just do it".
 - b. A record company with a dog for its mascot.
 - c. A tourism ad for Malaysia.
 - d. None, as all the advertisements blurred together in his confused mind.
13. Why does Christopher have to return to Swindon while staying with his mother?
- a. He has to take his Math A-levels.
 - b. He needs Toby's cage.
 - c. He wants to speak to Mrs. Alexander and Siobhan.
 - d. He doesn't want to return to Swindon.
14. What is Christopher's living situation at the end of the novel?
- a. He stays with Siobhan at a boarding house the school runs.

- b. He lives with his reunited father and mother in the same house.
 - c. He lives with his mother in Manchester and never sees his father.
 - d. He lives with his mother but often visits his father.
15. What does Ed give Christopher to try to regain his son's trust?

- a. A female rat to mate with Toby.
- b. A new Swiss Army knife, to better protect himself.
- c. A puppy.
- d. A new computer to better study for his exams.

ANSWER KEY: 1.) c 2.) d 3.) b 4.) a 5.) c 6.) c 7.) c 8.) c 9.) a 10.) d 11.) a 12.) c 13.) a 14.) d 15.) c

ESSAY TOPICS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. How important is the voice of Christopher as the narrator of this story? How would this story be different if it were written by a different character - Ed Boone or Siobhan, for example? How would the story be different if written in a third person omniscient voice? What would be lost in such changes, what would be gained?
2. Explore how this is a novel *about* the creation of mystery stories as well as a mystery story in its own right. How does this metafictional element overturn various expectations in the book? How does the conventional mystery aspect work in relation to this metafictional element?
3. Explore in detail how the two distinct mysteries in the book work together. What clues unite them in the story, where do we see the hidden mystery of Christopher's mother overwhelm the more obvious mystery of Wellington's death? Is this novel a "fair" mystery puzzle - that is, one that an astute reader could solve if reading carefully enough? Why or why not?
4. It can be argued that the novel changes radically midway from a mystery to a family drama. Does this work to the story's advantage? Would there have been a way for the novel to remain more consistent in tone and approach throughout? Would such a unified approach be as satisfying for readers?
5. Take specific passages of Christopher's narration and explain how they accentuate the different perspective he has of the world from other people. Using those passages, consider how a more "normal" perspective would narrate it. What would be emphasized more, and what less? How does the very style of writing in this novel help us understand Christopher better?
6. Consider the communities that Christopher inhabits: the neighborhood of Randolph Street and the school he attends. What do we learn about each? Who are the inhabitants, what are the values upheld in each? What does this tell us of the world Christopher inhabits, of the challenges that Christopher faces?
7. Examine the different animals that Christopher encounters in the book. What kinds of animals does he like most, what reasons does he give? Using specific examples, in what way do they influence how his perspective on the world? Are they always a positive force, or are there any complications in their role in the book?
8. How is the dramatic and symbolic importance of Christopher's train trip accentuated in the story? Consider plot developments, style of writing, and the reactions Christopher has during the course of this epic journey. Does it change Christopher in a significant manner? Cite specific passages to prove or disprove this notion.

9. Compare and contrast the portraits of Swindon and London in the novel. List both positive and negative aspects of each locale. How do characters react to each location? What is the general impression one gets from each place, and how does this tie thematically to the book?
10. Popular culture - in the form of science and math, as well as entertainment - are a key part of the novel. Make a list of references, including both major and minor examples, and consider how they reflect the values of the narrator. What can we learn, for example, about Christopher's taste in entertainment? What role models does he have? How is his own struggles reflected in that of his chosen popular culture?
11. Examine the humor in this book, using specific passages and explaining what makes them funny. How are there different types of humor, and which ones come out in Christopher's narration. How do these instances of humor help the novel, how do they provide a different insight to the way Christopher thinks?

COMMENT ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

The study of literature is not like the study of math or science, or even history. While those disciplines are based largely upon fact, the study of literature is based upon interpretation and analysis. There are no clear-cut answers in literature, outside of the factual information about an author's life and the basic information about setting and characterization in a piece of literature. The rest is a highly subjective reading of what an author has written; each person brings a different set of values and a different background to the reading. As a result, no two people see the piece of literature in exactly the same light, and few critics agree on everything about a book or an author.

In this study guide, we have tried to give an objective literary analysis based upon the information actually found in the novel, book, or play. In the end, however, it is an individual interpretation, but one that we feel can be readily supported by the information that is presented in the guide. In your course of literature study, you or your professor/teacher may come up with a different interpretation of the mood or the theme or the conflict. Your interpretation, if it can be logically supported with information contained within the piece of literature, is just as correct as ours; so is the interpretation of your teacher or professor.

Literature is simply not a black or white situation; instead, there are many gray areas that are open to varying analyses. Your task is to come up with your own analysis that you can logically defend. Hopefully, these booknotes will help you to accomplish that goal.

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