

The Giver Study Questions

The Giver is a “dystopian” novel; it presents a very disturbing vision of a possible human society. In the case of The Giver, that society may seem at first to be a “utopia,” a perfect society whose people do not suffer from problems such as war and poverty, but as the story goes on, we come to understand all of the important things that have been sacrificed in the process of creating this society. There are a lot of deep and complex issues raised in this novel, and I hope that these questions will help you understand and reflect on these issues.

Note:

- *The highlighted questions are the ones I think are the most important and/or interesting questions to reflect on and discuss.*
- *The page numbers given in some questions may differ from other editions of the book.*

Chapters 1-4

1. Describe the society that Jonas lives in. How is it different from our society? How is it governed, and in what ways is harmony maintained? How are rules enforced?
2. How would you describe the physical environment in which the people live? How is it symbolic of the social environment?
3. Discuss the behavior and values of the people of Jonas’s community. What are their culture and lifestyle like? What things are missing from their lives that are important to us?
4. What disturbing aspects of Jonas’s society are revealed in these first few chapters? What negative effects might living in this kind of society have on people? Why do you think they don’t question the way things are and how they came to be that way?
5. Describe Jonas. What is his personality like, and what do his values seem to be? What is the significance of his name—does it suggest anything about the story? What signs are there that Jonas is special?
6. Why do you think the author chose to start telling the story from this point—how is it appropriate?

Chapters 5-8

1. What do you think are the reasons for the customs of the telling of feelings and the sharing of dreams?
2. Why do you think Jonas rarely dreams? Why do you think the family doesn’t discuss Jonas’s dream?
3. Why do you think the people of Jonas’s community are required to take pills after the Stirrings begin? What do you think some of the consequences of this practice might be?
4. What do you think is significant about having different markers for each age group such as the ribbons, the clothes that button in front, etc.?
5. What does the custom of replacing a “Lost” child show about Jonas’s society?
6. Why does Jonas’s society match spouses instead of letting people choose their spouses? What is your opinion of this practice?
7. Discuss how children are taught in Jonas’s society. What is your opinion of these methods?

8. Why do you think Jonas's selection is named last? What effect does this have?

9. Why do you think a Receiver must have the qualities named by the Chief Elder?

Chapters 9-11

1. What immediate effect does Jonas's selection as Receiver have on his life? What disturbs him about his new life?

2. Why do you think Jonas is exempt from the rules governing rudeness? Why do you think he is not allowed to discuss his training or his dreams with anyone? Why do you think he is allowed to lie?

3. Why do you think Jonas is not allowed to apply for medication or release?

4. What effect can you imagine a life almost completely free of pain might have on people?

5. Why is precision of language so important to the people of Jonas's community? Why might lying be allowed for all members of the community after becoming twelves?

6. Why do you think the community has a rule against locking doors? What reasons might the Receiver (The Giver) have for locking his door besides the one the Attendant gives Jonas? Why do you think he alone has the power to turn off the speaker in his dwelling?

7. What things are unique about The Giver's dwelling, and what do these things tell us about him and his role in the community?

8. What do you think pale eyes might be intended to symbolize in the novel?

9. Why does The Giver look older than he really is? How is receiving memories like riding on a sled? Why do you think the previous successor failed?

10. Why is it necessary for there to be a Receiver?

11. Describe the process of transmission of memories. What is the experience like for Jonas?

12. What is Sameness, and why do you think the people of Jonas's society chose to institute it? What are some of the consequences of Sameness for people's lives?

13. Why do you think The Giver seems sad at the end of Jonas's first day of training, and why doesn't he respond to Jonas's comment about understanding what pain is?

14. What major theme of the novel does The Giver's decision to share the memories of both sunshine and sunburn relate to?

Chapters 12-15

1. How would you interpret the meaning of Jonas's dream?

2. Why does Jonas have such a hard time describing what "seeing beyond" is?

3. How is the inability to see color symbolic of the lives of the people in Jonas's society—what theme does it parallel? Why are they unable to see color?

4. What do we learn in these chapters about the color of people's skin in Jonas's society? What does this suggest about the history of Jonas's society?

5. What reaction does Jonas have to the idea of Sameness? Why do you think he has this reaction? How does The Giver apparently feel, and what does this suggest about how the story will proceed?
6. What fundamental exchange did the people of Jonas's society make when they instituted Sameness?
7. Why does Jonas start to feel "irrationally angry" in his day-to-day life?
8. What especially disturbing memory involving elephants does The Giver give Jonas, and what aspects of it make it so disturbing?
9. What does the breaking up of family units (when parents go to live with the "Childless Adults") suggest about relationships between people in Jonas's society?
10. What does Jonas think constitutes the essence of life as he has lived it so far? What does The Giver suggest is the essence of *his* life?
11. Why does The Giver react with scorn when Jonas mentions the lessons that he has learned about the brain?
12. What does Jonas do at the end of Chapter 13, and what does this show about him?
13. What more does The Giver reveal about why the community needs a Receiver? How does Jonas feel about the community's decision to impose such a heavy burden on one person? In light of this situation, what disturbing new significance does the phrase "and back and back and back" have for Jonas?
14. What significance might Gabriel's inability to sleep soundly have? What does the fact that Gabriel is able to absorb the memory that Jonas transmits to him suggest about him? What is the significance of Gabriel's name?
15. How do you think the memory of warfare is likely to affect Jonas?
16. Describe The Giver, now that more has been revealed about his personality and character. Why was he a good choice for the position of Receiver? In light of his words at the end of Chapter 15, how might the task of being a Giver be difficult for a person like him?

Chapters 16-19

1. What attitude do the people of Jonas's society have toward the concept of love? How is this attitude reflected in family members' relationships?
2. How would you define love?
3. What is Jonas's initial reaction to the idea of giving everyone choices about, and control over, their lives? Why do you think he reacts this way? What changes his mind?
4. How is the nature of Jonas's feelings different from that of everyone else's feelings? Why do you think he decides to stop taking the pill?
5. How is Jonas coming to feel alienated from his family and friends? What events happen in these chapters to highlight and intensify this sense of distance?

6. In light of what Jonas discovers later, why do you think his father uses his “silly voice” when he answers Jonas’s question about the release of one of the twins? What does this show about him (and, probably, all of the other adults of the community) as a person?

7. Why do you think all of the painful memories seem to outweigh the happy ones in terms of their effect on The Giver, Jonas, and Rosemary?

8. What do you think The Giver is thinking about at the end of Chapter 18?

9. What does the fact that all private ceremonies are recorded suggest about Jonas’s society?

10. What aspects of the ceremony of release are disturbing? Why do you think the term “release” is used? What effect do you think witnessing the ceremony will have on Jonas?

11. In your opinion, why did Rosemary fail as a Receiver? The Giver doesn’t see it as a failure of her courage. How do you define courage, and why might The Giver feel that way?

Chapters 20-23

1. Why does The Giver not hate the people of their community, despite their dishonesty and lack of compassion?

2. Why is the expression “lied easily” repeated at the top of page 158, and what does it suggest about Father and then Jonas himself?

3. How is the timing of The Giver and Jonas’s plan ideal?

4. What new meaning does the term “Elsewhere” have for Jonas and The Giver?

5. What does The Giver mean when he says that he wants to “be with [his] daughter”? What foreshadowing of this has occurred in the story?

6. What reaction do you think the author intends the reader to have to Father’s “sweet, sing-song voice” when he uses it on page 165?

7. How is Gabe’s upbringing different from that of other children, and how do you think it affects his development and his personality?

8. What fundamental change occurs in Jonas as their difficult journey continues and they grow weaker? See page 174 especially.

9. What must Jonas learn to do as the memories of strength and courage given to him by The Giver begin to fade? What theme does this process suggest? See p. 178 especially.

10. What theme is suggested by the first paragraph of Chapter 23?

11. What do the following things symbolize near the end of the book?

- the snow and the single snowflake (p. 176)
- the warmth that Jonas transmits
- the hill that Jonas climbs

12. In what ways do the “memories” passed from Giver to Receiver differ from real memories—what special characteristics do they have that memories don’t have in the real world?

Review Questions

1. Describe the society that Jonas lives in. How is it different from our society? How is it governed, and in what ways is harmony maintained? How are rules enforced? What is the goal of the differences from our society that those in charge of Jonas's society have established?

2. A *euphemism* is a word or expression used in place of another to sound more pleasing and less disturbing or offensive. Give some examples of euphemisms used in the novel. The questions below might help you identify and analyze euphemisms:

- In what context is the word used?
- What word is it used in place of, and what are the connotations of the original word (i.e. what is the tone of the word, and what feelings, images, and associated ideas does it suggest)?
- What are the connotations of the euphemism, and what does it "cover up" that is suggested by the more direct original word?
- Why do you think Jonas's community uses this particular expression; how does it fit into the community's social goals (peace, order, stability, sameness, etc.)?

3. What is the function of the Receiver (and the Giver)? Why did Jonas's society decide that it was necessary to have such people? What qualities make Jonas suited to becoming the Receiver?

4. What is Sameness, and why do you think the people of Jonas's society chose to institute it? What are some of the consequences of Sameness for people's lives? What fundamental exchange did the people of Jonas's society make when they instituted Sameness?

5. What do you think are the major themes (ideas and messages) of the novel?