

***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, by British author Mark Haddon**

Assignment for 12th Grade English students: Read the novel by the start of school. Expect a reading quiz on the second day of classes, followed by group work and analysis. A full assessment will occur after approximately one week of study.

Mark Haddon's bestselling novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has won seventeen literary prizes, including the Whitbread Award, since its publication in 2003. The 2012 play adaptation won seven Olivier Awards in 2013 and the 2015 Tony Award for Best Play.

Told from the first-person point of view of a neurologically atypical teenager, this novel offers the reader insight into the inner workings of "someone who has Behavioural Problems," as the narrator Christopher describes himself in the book. Haddon draws from his own experience working with teens and adults with various disabilities, but hesitates to officially label his main character in *A Curious Incident*:

"I prefer the wry humour in these words. I like the way it gently mocks the diagnostic medical language. I like the way it includes all of us (who doesn't have behavioural problems?). But I like it most of all because it is Christopher's own phrase. Labels tell us very little about the person who has been labelled and a lot about the people doing the labelling. If you want to find out who someone is, just ask them... I'm in favour of anything that introduces a little more empathy into the world, but I'd like to fight the corner for *Curious* simply as a novel. Of course, it's about disability and our attitudes towards it, but it's about many other things as well: mathematics, families, Sherlock Holmes, truth, bravery, Swindon, railways..."

In the end, this coming-of-age story is compelling, accessible, and relevant, especially for young people themselves learning to navigate the adult world.

Critical acclaim:

"A murder mystery, a road atlas, a postmodern canvas of modern sensory overload, a coming-of-age journal and lastly a really affecting look at the grainy inconsistency of parental and romantic love and its failures..."

—*The Washington Post Book World*

"Haddon's gentle humor reminds us that facts don't add up to a life, that we understand ourselves only through metaphor."

—*Chicago Tribune*

"Beautifully written... Heart-in-the-mouth stuff, terrifying and moving. Haddon is to be congratulated for imagining a new kind of hero, for the humbling instruction this warm and often funny novel offers and for showing that the best lives are lived where difference is cherished."

—*The Daily Telegraph*

Disclaimer: *Contains foul language*

The book contains multiple uses of swear words, although in no way in the functional context of the words. Instead, the words are used merely as expletives by frustrated adults acting badly in regards to the narrator's problematic behavior. In fact, the consistent use of swearing is a realistic, unifying tool used by the author to separate the narrator from his environment, a separation that is fundamental to the coming-of-age theme of the book. The author responded to controversy raised in American schools over the language in an article by *The Guardian's* Alison Flood:

... "one irony" about the situation was that *Curious Incident* is "not just a novel that contains swearing but a novel about swearing... Christopher is completely unaware of the offence that swearing is intended to cause and therefore it simply washes over him..."

Alternate Assignment

If any student or parent is uncomfortable with the use of swear words in the text, students are welcome to read and study the alternate summer reading assignment for rising 12th graders: *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson.