The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time
By Mark Haddon

Like all well-written books, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, by Mark Haddon, generates many questions and ideas from many different angles. The purpose of this assignment is to expose you to as many of these questions, ideas, and angles as possible, in order to stimulate your interest, encourage you to re-read passages, and engage you in the book’s complexity as you examine it by yourself or discuss it with others.

Directions:

- You are encouraged to purchase your own copy of this text and annotate it heavily.
- I suggest that you keep track of important quotations because we will be writing about and presenting on this text when you return to school.
- Answer each of these questions in a carefully considered way and using details from the text as supporting evidence.
- **This assignment must be submitted to Turnitin.com by the first Friday of school.**

First: An important, 5-minute task

Christopher Boone, the narrator of The Curious Incident, is unique. Everything about the novel – its plot, pacing, dialogue, characterization, perspectives, ideas, format, style, themes, and motifs – takes its cues from this unusual and engaging narrator. Because Christopher is autistic, the very first thing that you will want to do is to spend 5 minutes on-line, looking up Autism and a related cognitive condition, Asperger’s Syndrome, on the web. Knowing something about these conditions will enable you to appreciate Christopher’s “take” on life and to understand more fully how and why he sees things the way he does.

Linking this text to “The Adventure of Silver Blaze”

In 2-3 well developed paragraphs explain the link between the title of Haddon’s novel and the Sherlock Holmes story. What is the significance? Why would Christopher like Sherlock Holmes and Murder Mystery novels? In what ways does Haddon borrow Doyle’s storytelling techniques in The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time?

General Questions about your Reading Experience

The following questions ask you about your impressions – your “gut” response or your subjective response – to the novel. These questions also ask you to explore how this book may or may not be different from other stories that you have read.
I expect you to answer the questions clearly and explicate/defend your responses.

1. What was your first impression upon reading the first few pages of this novel?
2. In what ways did your first impression about the book change, as you continued to read the story? Why did it change? If your first impressions did not change, why is this the case?
3. What made reading this book an unusual, engaging, and sometimes challenging experience?
4. It is safe to say that most of you have not read a book such as this one before. Because you haven’t, the novel will strike you as “different” in many ways. In what ways is this novel different from many of the other novels or short stories that you have read? Examine everything about the novel, from its style (word choice, voice, sentence structure, and sentence length) and characterization, to its plot and formatting (e.g., chapter numbers, use of italics, boldfacing, etc.) and make a list in your mind, or on paper, of all the ways in which this novel does NOT fit your usual idea of a novel.
5. Generally speaking, what did you appreciate the most about this story? The least? And why?

Questions about the Narrator

Since the whole story is filtered through Christopher’s gaze, the more you try to see the world through his eyes, the more you’ll come to appreciate the special way in which he tells his story.

I expect you to answer the questions clearly and explicate/defend your responses.

Questions about the Narrator:

1. What does Christopher like? What does he not like? Does he offer any rationalization for his likes and dislikes?
2. What does Christopher eat?
3. What does Christopher see in the world around him? What details and things in this world does he share with his readers? What information about the world does he omit? Why does he include information about some things but omit information about other things?
4. How does he see the world around him? What might be his attitude toward the world around him: other people, animals, his mother and father, his teacher, nature, the neighborhood in which he lives, his home, his belongings, etc.?
5. How does Christopher make sense of his environment? What makes sense to him and what confuses him, and why?
6. To what extent does Christopher change or grow during the narrative?
7. In what ways would you describe Christopher as a static, 2-dimensional character or a dynamic, 3-dimensional character? Offer some explanations for your answers.
8. Regardless of whether or not Christopher is autistic, in what ways are Christopher’s viewpoints, attitude, and behavior the same as some of our own?
Play “devil’s advocate” for a moment, as ask yourselves how Christopher is more like than unlike us. What do you learn about yourselves when you compare yourselves to Christopher? What do you learn about your world when you see the world through Christopher’s eyes?

9. How do others respond to Christopher? Why and is their response justified?

**Questions about Passages and Chapters**

These questions focus your attention on key events in the plot, on certain digressions in the story, on certain characters (especially Christopher), on the book’s style, on some of the book’s dialogue, and on important interactions between Christopher and others. Read through all of the questions then decide on 5 to answer (some of the later questions are more interesting) Be sure you specify to me which questions you answering!

*Each answer should at least 100 words.*

1. Read the first paragraph of the novel (p. 1). What do you learn about Christopher by reading this passage? What do you learn about what is important to him? How does he see things? How might he be different from you, or even the same? What kind of narrative style characterizes this passage?

2. Why does Christopher tear up the piece of paper that Siobhan has drawn for him (p. 3)?

3. Examine the footnote on p. 5 of the book. When does Christopher use footnotes? Page 8 also has an example of numbered lists, and page 53 has an example of boldface. When does Christopher resort to such additions or “flourishes” in his storytelling? What do these font changes, lists, and so on, tell us about this narrator?

4. Christopher provides insight into his behavior on p. 7 when he begins to press his forehead on the ground, ignoring the policeman. However, the policeman does not have the vantage point that we have. If we were ignorant about Christopher in the way that the policeman is, what would we think of Christopher? If the policeman had known what we know about this narrator, how might he have approached Christopher differently?

5. Chapter 19 (p. 11) provides us with a digression on prime numbers. What do we learn, factually speaking, about such numbers as we read this chapter? What do we learn about this digression on prime numbers vis-a-vis the chapter that precedes it? In other words, how does Chapter 19 shed light on the subject matter of the previous chapter? What philosophy does Christopher extract from his digression on prime numbers (read the end of Chapter 19 for an answer to this question.)

6. How would you characterize the relationship that Christopher has with his father? Re-read chapter 41 (pp. 20-21). Try to see the relationship through Christopher’s eyes, through his father’s eyes, and through your own eyes.
7. When Christopher is told that his mother has died, what is his response (pp. 26-28, chapter 53). In this chapter, as in many other chapters, he intersperses short sentences into his narrative. In fact, some of his paragraphs in this chapter are only 1 sentence long. What kind of information is conveyed in these short paragraphs? What is significant about the beginning of chapter 59, the very next chapter? Where has the discussion of his mother gone, and why?

8. Everybody processes the ideas of death and dying differently. Christopher, on pp. 33-34, discusses his rabbit’s death, his mother’s death, and the idea of dying. In what ways does Christopher’s scientific, factual interpretation also end up being a kind of consolation for him or for us?

9. Chapter 67 gives us a wonderful glimpse into the world of non-autistic persons, through the eyes of an autistic person. Examine, for example, the tee-shirt slogan that Christopher quotes on p. 36, and his comments on the idea of “chatting,” on the top of p. 40. When you see bits and pieces of your own world isolated and discussed, in the way that Christopher isolates and discusses them, how does your own world appear to you now? Discuss other pieces of our non-autistic world that Christopher points out for us throughout the novel. (See also p. 184 and lots of other pages!)

10. Christopher lists his “behavioral problems” on pp. 46-7. What do we learn about our own behavioral “problems” by reading Christopher’s list? What do we learn about his parents’ difficulties as well?

11. Mrs. Alexander, a neighbor, ends up being quite conversant with Christopher. Describe their relationship (and check out pp. 56-61 as well). What does Christopher learn not merely about the dog’s murder but about his mother and father as well, from this neighbor?

12. Christopher describes the “Monty Hall” math problem on pp. 64-5 and he provides us with a description of clouds on pp. 67-9. To what extent are these digressions unrelated to the story? What do these digressions tell us about Christopher? Find other digressions that are interesting to you and/or that may be relevant to the rest of the story (pp. 86, 88, etc.).

13. “My memory is like film,” says Christopher (p. 76). He continues to say that he never forgets anything, and from this he derives a great deal of confidence. What other tools does Christopher have to deal with problems, conflicts, uncertainty, and ambiguity?

14. “I looked at the letter and thought really hard. It was a mystery and I couldn’t figure it out” (99, referring to a letter from his mother that he finds in his dad’s room). When do Christopher’s tools fail him? When does the world shake up Christopher? Examine the passage on 113 (“I don’t know what happened then because there is a gap in my memory, like a bit of the tape had been erased…”) and the passage on 120 (“I killed Wellington, Christopher”) and Christopher’s response to these two frightening situations.

15. To what extent does Christopher develop new tools for being in the world, other than the ones he already has, in order to solve problems that his usual behavior does not permit him to solve? In other words, can you locate a passage or chapters that indicate that Christopher is changing in his own way to meet the demands of his life? “The mind is just a complicated machine,” says Christopher (p. 116).
How does Christopher adjust to the complicated world around him by also adjusting the “complicated machine” of his mind?

16. The “truth” is very important to Christopher. When he shares information with us about Orien and other constellations, he says, “And that is the truth” (126). How does Christopher react when the truth becomes grey or fuzzy?

17. Pages 129 to the end of the book chronicle Christopher’s journey to see his mother in London. How does Christopher survive on this journey? What characterizes this journey? Whom does he meet? How does he cope? What does he learn? What skills does he use in order to arrive safely at his mother’s?

18. Why does Christopher say that he “doesn’t like new places” (140)? See p. 143 as well.

19. This novel contains a great deal of gentle humor -- much, or most, of it unintentional. Take, for example, the dialogue on p. 150 or Mrs. Alexander’s dog “poo” (p. 56). Locate other passages that are humorous and share them with others. What makes them funny?

20. What does Christopher learn once he arrives at his mother’s house?

21. While at his mother’s house Christopher has one of his “favorite” dreams (pp. 198-200). What makes it his favorite? And would this dream be a favorite of yours? Why or why not?

22. How would you describe Christopher’s family, once he moves back to Swindon? What has changed for the better? How has the mother changed, and how has the father changed?

23. To what extent does the book conclude on a note that ties up all loose ends? Or are there some loose ends still dangling?