



# The curious incident of the dog in the night-time

By Mark Haddon

First published in 2003

## Genre & subject

Detective and mystery stories

Autism

## Synopsis

Despite his overwhelming fear of interacting with people, Christopher, a mathematically-gifted, autistic fifteen-year-old boy, decides to investigate the murder of a neighbour's dog and uncovers secret information about his mother.

## Author biography

Haddon was born on 28 October 1962 to Janella Murphy in Northampton, England. He was educated at Uppingham School and Merton College, Oxford, where he studied English. In 1984, he completed an MA in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh.

In 1987, Haddon wrote his first children's book, Gilbert's Gobstopper. This was followed by many other children's books, which were often self-illustrated.

In 2003, Haddon won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award—in the Novels rather than Children's Books category—for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. He also won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in the Best First Book category, as *The Curious Incident* was considered his first written for adults; yet he also won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, a once-in-a-lifetime award judged by a panel of children's writers. It was also long listed for the Man Booker Prize.

His short story "The Pier Falls" was longlisted for the 2015 Sunday Times EFG Private Bank Short Story Award, the richest prize in the world for a single short story.

Mark Haddon teaches creative writing for the Arvon Foundation and Oxford University. He lives in Oxford with his wife Sos Eltis, a Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, and their two young sons

## Discussion starters

1. Were you confused by Christopher's odd way of telling a story when you first began the book? Did that frustrate you or draw you into the novel?
2. How do you think this novel bridges the gap between literature for adults and children?
3. What do you think Haddon's illustrations add to the story and to our understanding of Christopher's character?
4. Although seemingly ill equipped as the narrator of a book, Christopher's character succeeds in eliciting a wide range of emotions in the reader. How do you think Haddon uses his protagonist's voice to touch his audience in such a way?
5. Discuss the relationship between father and son in the novel. How well do you think Christopher's father copes with his son's condition?
6. The author has used his extensive knowledge of Asperger's syndrome to allow us to see the world through Christopher's eyes, how do you think the story further enhances our attachment to the character and our enjoyment of the book in general?
7. How has the author used Christopher's alienating condition to expose intricate truths about our modern lives? Do you think this was his intention in Christopher's exposure of his parent's secret?
8. Is it easier for you to forgive his father or his mother? Why do you think it is so much easier for Christopher to trust his mother than his father? How does that reveal the way Christopher's mind is different?
9. Christopher uses the stories of Sherlock Holmes as the basis for his style of detection. Is this story a detective story? In what ways does it comply with the average mystery novel? How is it different? Does Haddon's playing with genre reinforce themes in the book? How so?
10. Christopher places a high value on truth. He does not like fiction and attempts to tell his story as truthfully as possible. How truthful do you find Christopher's tale with its emphasis on logic at the expense of emotion? Does the reader get the entire story?

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