**The Giver**

By Lois Lowry

**Book Summary**

Lowry narrates *The Giver*in third person ("He said," as opposed to "I said," which is called first person), using a limited omniscient viewpoint (only Jonas' thoughts and feelings are revealed). Through Jonas' eyes, his community appears to be a utopia — a perfect place — that is self-contained and isolated from Elsewhere, every other place in the world. No evidence of disease, hunger, poverty, war, or lasting pain exists in the community. Jonas' family, like all other families in the community, includes a caring mother and father and two children — one male child and one female child. Jonas' mother has an important job with the Department of Justice, and his father has a job as a Nurturer, taking care of newborns. Jonas has one younger sister, Lily. His family *seems*ideal. Each morning, they discuss their dreams that they had the previous night; during the evening meal, they share feelings about the events of the day, comforting and supporting each other according to the rules of the community.

As we learn more about Jonas' family, we also learn about the community as a whole. Family units must apply for children, spouses do not get to choose one another but, instead, are matched, and grandparents do not exist. All of a sudden, this utopia that Lowry has created doesn't seem quite right. The mood is foreboding, a feeling that something bad will happen. This mood suggests that Jonas' community is far from perfect.

A long time ago, the people in Jonas' community chose to have the community ruled by a Committee of Elders. The Committee of Elders controls everyone and everything, blasting rules and reprimands from loudspeakers located throughout the community, including in every family dwelling. A total of fifty infants are born to Birthmothers every year. Each peer group is identified by its age — for example, Threes, Sevens, Nines — and must follow specific rules about appropriate clothing, haircuts, and activities for that particular peer group. When children become Eights, they begin mandatory volunteering and are closely observed by the Committee of Elders so that the committee can assign a lifelong profession to each child at the Ceremony of Twelve, which takes place every year during the December Ceremony.

*The Giver*begins with Jonas' apprehension about his Ceremony of Twelve, when he will be assigned his lifelong job. He can guess which jobs his friends, Fiona and Asher, will be assigned, but he has no idea what his own job Assignment will be. At the Ceremony, Jonas learns that he has been selected to become the next Receiver of Memory, the highest position in the community.

Jonas begins training under the present Receiver of Memory, an older man whom Jonas calls The Giver. The Giver lives alone in private rooms that are lined with shelves full of books. Jonas' training involves receiving, from The Giver, all of the emotions and memories of experiences that the people in the community chose to give up to attain Sameness and the illusion of social order. The first memory that Jonas receives from The Giver is a sled ride down a snow-covered hill. Jonas has never before experienced going downhill, cold weather, or snow. Eventually, through memories, The Giver teaches Jonas about color, love, war, and pain. Jonas begins to understand the hypocrisy that exists in his community — that is, the illusion that everything in the community is good when in fact it isn't. The people *appear*to love each other, but they don't really know what love feels like because their lives are a charade; their reactions have been trained. Jonas realizes that people have given up their freedoms to feel and think as individuals, choosing instead to be controlled by others.

One day, Jonas asks The Giver if he can watch a video of a release his father performed on an infant earlier that morning. He watches and is horrified when he realizes that a release is really forced death by lethal injection. Jonas discusses his feelings with The Giver, and they decide on a plan that will force the people to give up Sameness. However, before they can carry out their plan, Jonas learns that Gabriel, a two-year-old infant who has been staying with Jonas' family unit because Gabriel has trouble sleeping through the night, is going to be released — killed. To prevent Gabriel from being killed, Jonas takes Gabriel, whom he loves, and together they ride a bicycle out of the community to Elsewhere. By escaping the community, all of the memories that Jonas has received from The Giver will be transmitted back to the citizens in the community, forcing them to experience feelings and emotions and to remember their past.

Jonas travels for days and days with Gabriel, who is dying from starvation and the cold weather. Finally, they come to the top of a hill where there is snow and a sled. They get on the sled and ride downhill toward music and Christmas lights. What actually happens to Jonas and Gabriel? Do they die? Are they dreaming? Do they go to a house with lights and music? Do they end up back in their original community? Do the people in the community change? All of these questions are left unanswered at the end of the book. Lowry intentionally writes an ambiguous ending so that readers can decide for themselves what happens to Jonas and Gabriel at the end of *The Giver*.

Source:

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