

THE GIVER

by LOIS LOWRY · Language: EN

Summary by booksummaryai.com — <https://booksummaryai.com/country/en/the-giver>

Overview

Lois Lowry's 'The Giver' introduces a seemingly utopian Community where pain, conflict, and strong emotions have been eradicated through a system called Sameness. Citizens live highly regulated lives, with their roles, spouses, and even children assigned to them. The protagonist, Jonas, is an eleven-year-old boy on the cusp of the Ceremony of Twelve, where he will receive his lifelong assignment. Unlike his peers, Jonas is selected for the highly unusual and solitary role of the Receiver of Memory, a position that holds all the collective memories of humanity's past.

Jonas begins his training with the current Receiver, who instructs him in the true history of their world, revealing the vibrant colors, intense joys, and profound sorrows that the Community has sacrificed for its tranquil existence. As Jonas receives memories of war, love, and individuality, he becomes increasingly disillusioned with his society's sterile perfection and the hidden cruelties it perpetrates, such as 'release.' His growing awareness of the truth, particularly concerning the infant Gabriel, compels him to make a desperate choice: to escape the Community and return the memories to its people, hoping to awaken them to a richer, if more challenging, way of life.

Key Takeaways

- Memory is essential for understanding history, making informed decisions, and appreciating the full spectrum of human experience.
- True freedom requires the ability to make choices, even if those choices lead to mistakes or pain.
- A life devoid of suffering and strong emotions also lacks genuine joy, deep love, and meaningful connection.
- Individuality and difference are crucial for a vibrant, evolving society, rather than obstacles to be eliminated.
- Questioning societal norms and the status quo is vital for personal growth and the potential for collective improvement.
- The pursuit of a perfectly controlled, pain-free society often comes at the cost of humanity's most fundamental qualities.
- Love and empathy are powerful forces that can drive individuals to extraordinary acts of sacrifice and courage.

Chapter Summaries

The Ceremony of Twelve

Jonas, an eleven-year-old boy, lives in a highly structured community where every aspect of life is controlled. As the annual Ceremony of Twelve approaches, he feels apprehension about his future assignment. During the ceremony, while his friends receive their designated roles, Jonas is skipped, causing him immense anxiety. He is eventually singled out by the Chief Elder for the most prestigious and unusual assignment: the Receiver of Memory.

Beginning the Training

Jonas begins his training with the current Receiver, an old man who instructs him on the true nature of his role. The Receiver, who insists Jonas call him The Giver, explains that he holds all the memories of the past, both joyful and painful, which have been removed from the Community to maintain Sameness. Jonas receives his first memory: the sensation of snow and sledding down a hill, a concept entirely alien to his world.

Memories of Color and Pain

As Jonas continues his training, The Giver transmits more vivid memories, including the experience of sunshine, sunburn, and the concept of color, which the Community has eliminated. Jonas begins to see 'glimmers' of color in his own world. He also receives his first truly painful memory: a broken leg from a sledding accident, which leaves him deeply shaken and isolated by his unique experiences.

Love and War

Jonas experiences memories of profound love, family, and celebration, contrasting sharply with his Community's bland emotional landscape. He also receives a devastating memory of war, witnessing suffering and death, which leaves him traumatized. These memories deepen his understanding of the sacrifices made for Sameness and the true cost of their peaceful existence.

The Truth About Release

Jonas learns the true meaning of 'release,' a euphemism for euthanasia, when The Giver shows him a video of his own father 'releasing' a newchild. This horrifying revelation shatters Jonas's perception of his father and his community, exposing the brutal reality hidden beneath their tranquil facade. He realizes the profound moral implications of their controlled society.

The Plan for Elsewhere

Distraught by the truth, Jonas refuses to return home. He and The Giver devise a plan for Jonas to escape the Community, believing that if he leaves, the memories he holds will be released back to the people, awakening them. The Giver, too old to join, plans to stay and help the Community cope with the influx of memories, while Jonas will seek 'Elsewhere'.

Escape with Gabriel

The plan is accelerated when Jonas learns that the infant Gabriel, whom his family has been nurturing, is scheduled for 'release' due to his inability to sleep soundly. Jonas impulsively takes Gabriel and flees the Community in the middle of the night. They face immense challenges, including hunger, cold, and the constant threat of search planes, as they journey into the unknown.

Reaching Elsewhere

Exhausted and near starvation, Jonas and Gabriel struggle through a harsh, snowy landscape. Jonas uses his remaining strength and memories of warmth to sustain them. As they reach the summit of a hill, Jonas perceives a faint sound of music and sees lights in the distance. He finds a sled, and together, they descend towards the source of the music, towards what he believes is 'Elsewhere,' and a new beginning.

Themes

- Memory and history
- Individuality vs. conformity
- Freedom and choice
- Pain and pleasure
- Love and connection
- Utopia's cost

Notable Quotes

- "We don't dare to let people make choices of their own." — The Giver explains to Jonas why the Community chose Sameness and eliminated individual choice.
- "The worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It's the loneliness of it. Memories need to be shared." — The Giver expresses his profound isolation to Jonas, emphasizing the burden of his role.
- "If everything's the same, then there aren't any choices! I want to wake up in the morning and decide things!" — Jonas, frustrated by the lack of individuality and freedom in his Community, expresses his desire for choice.
- "He had been startled by the certainty of the knowledge. He had been so completely, so thoroughly, not-Jonas." — Jonas reflects on the powerful experience of receiving a memory, feeling a profound connection to a past self.
- "They were satisfied with their lives, and they hadn't changed. But he had." — Jonas observes his family and friends, realizing the vast chasm that has grown between his new

understanding and their contented ignorance.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is THE GIVER about?

The Giver is about a twelve-year-old boy named Jonas who lives in a seemingly perfect, emotionless society. He is chosen to be the Receiver of Memory, learning the true history of joy, pain, and color from the community's past. This knowledge leads him to question his world and ultimately seek a way to bring true feeling back to his people.

Is THE GIVER worth reading?

Yes, The Giver is widely considered a powerful and thought-provoking read. It explores complex themes like individuality, freedom, and the importance of memory in an accessible way, making it a staple in dystopian and young adult literature. Its unique world and moral dilemmas resonate with readers of all ages.

How does THE GIVER end?

Spoiler: Jonas escapes the Community with the infant Gabriel, carrying the memories. Exhausted and freezing, they reach a snowy hill. Jonas finds a sled and hears music, a sound unknown in his Community, as they descend towards a place he believes is 'Elsewhere,' implying a new beginning or a return to a world with emotion and sound.

Who should read THE GIVER?

The Giver is ideal for young adult readers (ages 10-14) and anyone interested in dystopian fiction, philosophical questions about society, or the importance of human emotion and memory. It's a great choice for book clubs and classroom discussions due to its rich thematic content.

How long does it take to read THE GIVER?

On average, it takes about 3 to 3.5 hours to read The Giver. This estimate is based on an average reading speed of 250 words per minute and the book's approximate word count of 47,000 words.