

The giver assignment



The giver is written from the point of view of Jonas, an eleven-year-old boy living in a futuristic society that has eliminated all pain, fear, war, and hatred. There is no prejudice, since everyone looks and acts basically the same, and there is very little competition. Everyone is unfailingly polite. The society has also eliminated choice: at age twelve every member of the community is assigned a job based on his or her abilities and interests.

Citizens can apply for and be assigned compatible spouses, and each couple is assigned exactly two children each. The children are born to Birthmothers, who never see them, and spend their first year in a Nurturing Center with other babies, or “newchildren,” born that year. When their children are grown, family units dissolve and adults live together with Childless Adults until they are too old to function in the society.

Then they spend their last years being cared for in the House of the Old until they are finally “released” from the society. In the community, release is death, but it is never described that way; most people think that after release, flawed newchildren and joyful elderly people are welcomed into the vast expanse of Elsewhere that surrounds the communities. Citizens who break rules or fail to adapt properly to the society’s codes of behavior are also released, though in their cases it is an occasion of great shame.

Everything is planned and organized so that life is as convenient and pleasant as possible. Jonas lives with his father, a Nurturer of new children, his mother, who works at the Department of Justice, and his seven-year-old sister Lily. At the beginning of the novel, he is apprehensive about the upcoming Ceremony of Twelve, when he will be given his official Assignment

as a new adult member of the community. He does not have a distinct career preference, although he enjoys volunteering at a variety of different jobs.

Though he is a well-behaved citizen and a good student, Jonas is different: he has pale eyes, while most people in his community have dark eyes, and he has unusual powers of perception. Sometimes objects “change” when he looks at them. He does not know it yet, but he alone in his community can perceive flashes of color; for everyone else, the world is as devoid of color as it is of pain, hunger, and inconvenience. At the Ceremony of Twelve, Jonas is given the highly honored Assignment of Receiver of Memory. The Receiver is the sole keeper of the community’s collective memory.

When the community went over to Sameness—its painless, warless, and mostly emotionless state of tranquility and harmony—it abandoned all memories of pain, war, and emotion, but the memories cannot disappear totally. Someone must keep them so that the community can avoid making the mistakes of the past, even though no one but the Receiver can bear the pain. Jonas receives the memories of the past, good and bad, from the current Receiver, a wise old man who tells Jonas to call him the Giver. The Giver transmits memories by placing his hands on Jonas’s bare back.

The first memory he receives is of an exhilarating sled ride. As Jonas receives memories from the Giver—memories of pleasure and pain, of bright colors and extreme cold and warm sun, of excitement and terror and hunger and love—he realizes how bland and empty life in his community really is. The memories make Jonas’s life richer and more meaningful, and he wishes that he could give that richness and meaning to the people he loves. But in

exchange for their peaceful existence, the people of Jonas's community have lost the capacity to love him back or to feel deep passion about anything.

Since they have never experienced real suffering, they also cannot appreciate the real joy of life, and the life of individual people seems less precious to them. In addition, no one in Jonas's community has ever made a choice of his or her own. Jonas grows more and more frustrated with the members of his community, and the Giver, who has felt the same way for many years, encourages him. The two grow very close, like a grandfather and a grandchild might have in the days before Sameness, when family members stayed in contact long after their children were grown.

Meanwhile, Jonas is helping his family take care of a problem newchild, Gabriel, who has trouble sleeping through the night at the Nurturing Center. Jonas helps the child to sleep by transmitting soothing memories to him every night, and he begins to develop a relationship with Gabriel that mirrors the family relationships he has experienced through the memories. When Gabriel is in danger of being released, the Giver reveals to Jonas that release is the same as death. Jonas's rage and horror at this revelation inspire the Giver to help Jonas devise a plan to change things in the community forever. The Giver tells Jonas about the girl who had been designated the new Receiver ten years before. She had been the Giver's own daughter, but the sadness of some of the memories had been too much for her and she had asked to be released. When she died, all of the memories she had accumulated were released into the community, and the community members could not handle the sudden influx of emotion and sensation. The

Giver and Jonas plan for Jonas to escape the community and to actually enter Elsewhere.

Once he has done that, his larger supply of memories will disperse, and the Giver will help the community to come to terms with the new feelings and thoughts, changing the society forever. However, Jonas is forced to leave earlier than planned when his father tells him that Gabriel will be released the next day. Desperate to save Gabriel, Jonas steals his father's bicycle and a supply of food and sets off for Elsewhere. Gradually, he enters a landscape full of color, animals, and changing weather, but also hunger, danger, and exhaustion.

Avoiding search planes, Jonas and Gabriel travel for a long time until heavy snow makes bike travel impossible. Half-frozen, but comforting Gabriel with memories of sunshine and friendship, Jonas mounts a high hill. There he finds a sled—the sled from his first transmitted memory—waiting for him at the top. Jonas and Gabriel experience a glorious downhill ride on the sled. Ahead of them, they see—or think they see—the twinkling lights of a friendly village at Christmas, and they hear music. Jonas is sure that someone is waiting for them there.