

Sherlock holmes' mentorship of christopher boone



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Living in a world surrounded by people who function in a disparate way could cause one to feel neglected, but finding another person, fiction or non-fiction that shares similar characteristics can help one feel valuable. In Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher Boone, a seemingly autistic child, is caught in the middle of both an alcoholic father and a mother disjointed from the family. One way he finds inspiration and motivation throughout the novel is through Sherlock Holmes.

Christopher relies on fictional character Sherlock Holmes as a mentor due to the lack of congruence he has with the people around him. Christopher finds similarities in thinking patterns, personality traits, and social skills that help him to relate to Sherlock. Christopher uses Holmes as his incentive to both solve the death of Wellington and travel to London to find his mother.

Throughout the novel, Haddon incorporates special insights into Christopher's brain that help the reader understand the way Christopher thinks. By doing this, the reader can see a clear difference between Boone and his father. The way he processes events and approaches situations is different than the average person. When Christopher finds Wellington he "decide[s] to do some detective work" to figure out what happened (30).

Similar to Sherlock Holmes who, when on a case, looks to find all the detail needed to solve his mystery. Holmes and Christopher both use the unique qualities within their brain, which result in them both approaching situations from a different, but similar angle.

Christopher states that his "memory is like a film" and that he can "simply press Rewind and Fast Forward and Pause like on a video recorder" when he wants to remember something (76). He then mentions how if he doesn't

know something he will search his mind to see if he has seen or heard it before. An interesting point in regards to Christopher's brain is that the average brain works similar to this film analogy but Boone has figured out an organized way of understanding it. He does not understand the use of metaphors or the idea behind telling a lie. He says he "[does] not tell lies... [he] can't tell lies" and this is because it is hard for him to comprehend the idea of only one thing that didn't happen (19). He says that if he "think[s] about something which didn't happen [he] start[s] thinking about all the other things which didn't happen" and this ends up confusing him, this contrasting how his father views the use of lying (19). Christopher's father uses lying to mask a situation that is hard for Christopher to understand, whether it be the absence of his mother or the death of Wellington. Christopher's father admits to Christopher that " maybe [he] [doesn't] tell the truth all the time" but relies on the use of lying to help communicate with his son (121).

Sherlock Holmes, similar to Christopher's film analogy, has a famous quote where he compares the human brain to an attic. He states that " a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and [one has] to stock it with such furniture as [they] choose" (A Quote from A Study in Scarlet). He then says that " the skillful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic" to which he is referring to himself and other intelligent people (A Quote from A Study in Scarlet). Sherlock is said to have an " uncanny ability to gather evidence based upon his honed skills of observation and deductive reasoning" that helps him come to a conclusion (Willson). During the novel, Christopher references a point where Watson states that " the world is full of

obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes” to where Boone states that Sherlock “ notices them, like [he] does” (73). Here being one point where Christopher shows his admiration for someone, though fictional, who sees the world in a similar way to him. Another instance is when Christopher explains his correlation to Sherlock and how he “ doesn’t believe in the supernatural” where as, he then explains his hatred toward Arthur Conan Doyle (the creator of Holmes) and his belief in supernatural beings (74). Showing how Christopher seems to relate to a fictional character more than a real human. Holmes doesn’t use lying and is able to pick up the fine details that Christopher can relate too unlike Boone’s father who does not see the world in the same way.

Christopher and Sherlock share a similar narcissistic personality that is caused by their belief that they are smarter than those around them. Christopher is aware of his intelligence and knows that though he goes to a special school, he is not any less bright than the other students. In comparison, Sherlock Holmes is a very conceited person and chooses to display his intelligence to everyone he encounters. Christopher, like Sherlock, knows the people around him are not as intellectually apt as he is; so with the help of Sherlock, he is able to express his intelligence and is able to see what he is capable of succeeding.

Christopher starts his story stating, “[his] name is Christopher John Francis Boone. [He] know[s] all the countries of the world and their capital cities and every prime number to 7057” (2). This quote shows all of the random information Christopher knows, but also helps the reader get an insight on his character. He states that he is going to “ prove that [he is] not stupid”
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and to do that he expresses the knowledge he has (44). He wants to prove to the people who bully him for his differences, that he can do anything he puts his mind to. He is very confident in the way he talks about his intelligence. He explains his desire to be an astronaut and how he would make a good astronaut because “ to be a good astronaut you have to be intelligent and [he is] intelligent” (50). His father acknowledges that Christopher’s personality is different but is shy of understanding him. For example when Christopher wants to investigate the death of Wellington, he says Christopher should “ just try and keep [his] nose out of other people’s business” not understanding how important solving the mystery was to Christopher. Where Sherlock would understand Christopher’s want to solve the mystery, his father doesn’t (20).

In one of the many stories containing Sherlock Holmes he states “[his] name is Sherlock Holmes...[and] it is [his] business to know what other people don’t know” (Steiner). He, similar to Christopher, states what he wants people to know about him. Watson claims, “[the] fellow (Sherlock Holmes) may be very clever... but he is certainly very conceited” (A Quote from A Study in Scarlet). Sherlock always attempts to make it a point to prove that he is dexterous. Throughout the novel, Christopher lacks people in his life who share his love for mysteries and his want to prove people wrong; if anything he is surrounded by people who want to hide other’s wrongdoings to keep him safe. So by having Holmes to look up to, he is able to express his love for those things and feel as though he is supported.

Christopher and Sherlock Holmes share distinct social skills that truly set them apart from the people Christopher is around every day. Christopher

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and Sherlock both enjoy being alone and neither shows empathy toward any situation. Christopher struggles to pick up on people's emotions and has to carry a note card around to help him identify emotions. Sherlock Holmes deals with death on a daily basis and has yet to discover the correct way to react in that type of situation. Both Christopher and Sherlock do not prefer to interact with strangers and are similar in the struggle of talking to people they don't know. This is Christopher's biggest difference from his father, yet his strongest similarity to Holmes. Christopher's father would be unable to comprehend how Boone is unable to read emotions because he can, in fact, understand emotions. But Sherlock can't, which allows it to be easier for Christopher to relate.

Christopher understands that he is able to comprehend things in a unique way and knowing this, he does not like the fact that he is alone in that sense. This realization only adds to his apparent social awkwardness due to the fact that he knows he is different. At one point in the story he talks about how he wished that " eventually there [would be] no one left in the world except people who don't look at other people's faces... and these people are all special people like [him]. And they like being on their own" (199). This quote includes people like his mother and father but not Sherlock Holmes. There is a point in the story where Christopher's mom is crying and he says " she made a loud wailing noise like an animal on a nature program on television. I didn't like her doing this because it was a loud noise, and I said ' why are you doing that'" (193). This incident is just one that pertains Christopher and his lack of empathy. Christopher and his mother do not correspond well with each other at some points of the story. There was a point where his mother

wants to hold hands with him but due to his social skills and personality he was unable to let her do that saying “ I don't like people holding my hand” (194). Actions like this cause Christopher to realize just how contrasting he is from his mother and parallel he and Sherlock are.

Sherlock Holmes, like Christopher, enjoys being alone and supports that when he says “ alone is what I have...alone protects me” (Sherlock (TV Series)). He too feels that it is hard to be around people who are not like him. In his case, the people he is accompanied by don't mentally move as fast as he does. His brain figures things out at a more rapid pace than those around him. He goes on to make fun of this by saying “ dear god, what is it like in your funny little brain... it must be so boring” (Sherlock (TV Series)). He, similar to Christopher, does not show empathy. He is never affected by what he sees on a case and therefore does not always act in the appropriate manner. This similarity between Christopher and Sherlock is beneficial to Boone. He is able to see how his differences are not always a burden. He sees that though Sherlock lacks empathy, he is able to have a successful job. He also is witness to the fact that being similar to Sherlock, he could pursue one of his dreams and live alone one day.

At the end of the story, the reader might look back on Christopher and not understand why he chose to bring Sherlock Holmes into the story.

Throughout the novel, Christopher finds constant guidance through what Holmes had taught him through his books. It gives Christopher motivation to become an astronaut and travel to London on his own. Sherlock was an example to Christopher that one with similar characteristics to him can still be successful and do what he desires. The comparison between Christopher

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and Sherlock helps show the reader that Christopher has someone he can relate to in his life, though that person is not physical. It helps build sympathy and hope for Christopher to grow up and do what he loves, not letting any type of disability hold him back.