

## **Incoming Sophomore Honors Summer Reading Requirements**

There are two reading requirements for incoming sophomores taking Honors British Literature. One is Geraldine Brooks' *A Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague*; the second is *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon.

All work will be handed in on or Monday, August 28, 2017. All work must be typed using Times New Roman text, 12 pt. font and double spacing. A heading should appear at the top of the first page and be formatted as indicated below.

Student first and last name  
Mrs. Euclide  
Honors British Literature  
28 August 2017

In August, you will hand in the following:

- A Year of Wonders*
  - Reading reflection guide
  - Final Project
- The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*
  - Reading reflection guide
  - Final Project: object and explanation

There will be a formal assessment, the form and content to be determined by the teacher.

### **A Year of Wonders**

When an infected bolt of cloth carries plague from London to an isolated village, a housemaid named Anna Frith emerges as an unlikely heroine and healer. Through Anna's eyes we follow the story of the fateful year of 1666, as she and her fellow villagers confront the spread of disease and superstition. It is inspired by the true story of Eyam, a village in the rugged hill country of England.

Please type your answers to the discussion questions below.

1. All of the characters in this novel have their failings and as a result they are all fully human. Are you surprised by the secrets Elinor and Michael Mompellion each reveal to Anna about their marriage? How do they change your feelings about each character? Do they make either seem weaker in a way?
2. The Bradford family bears the brunt of Mompellion's rage when they leave town to save themselves. However, weren't they only doing what every other noble family did in those days: run because they had the means to run? Setting aside the events near the end of the novel which make it clear that readers would be hard-pressed to find a redeeming quality in any of them, can you really blame the Mompellion's for running?

3. How much of Mompellion's push for the quarantine had to do with the secrets he shared with Elinor? Did his own dark side and self-loathing push him to sacrifice the town or was he really acting out of everyone's best interests?
4. Keeping in mind that this story takes place a good twenty-five years before the Salem witch trials in Massachusetts, what is the role of the Gowdie women in the novel? What is it about these women that drives their neighbors to murderous rage? How does their nonconformity lead to their becoming scapegoats?
5. How would you explain Anna's mental and spiritual unraveling? What are the pivotal experiences leading up to her breakdown and her eventual rebirth?
6. Discuss the feminist undertones of the story. How does each female character—Anna, Elinor, the Gowdies, and even Anna's stepmother—exhibit strengths that the male characters do not?
7. In a story where the outcome is already known from the very beginning—most of the villagers will die—discuss the ways in which the author manages to create suspense.
8. The author creates an incredible sense of time and place with richly textured language and thoughtful details—of both the ordinary (everyday life in Eyam) and the extraordinary (the gruesome deaths of the villagers). Discuss some of the most vivid images and their importance to the story and to your experience as a reader.
9. Can we relate the story of this town's extraordinary sacrifice to our own time? Is it unrealistic to expect a village facing a similar threat to make the same decision nowadays? What lessons might we learn from the villagers of Eyam?

#### Final Project:

Faced with such unspeakable horrors, characters make difficult decisions that reveal their loyalties and values. Create a visual representation of something of great value to you. This can be in the form of a collage (a half-sheet of poster-board, with all white space completely covered), a symbol of what you value, or an object itself; it may be an abstract or concrete representation. It must be accompanied by a polished paragraph that explains your object. Additionally discuss what your loyalty to this valuable thing reflects about what you value and who you are as a person.

#### **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time**

Christopher John Francis Boone knows all of the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. And he detests the color yellow. This is the *improbable* story of Christopher's quest to investigate the suspicious death of a neighborhood dog. While it seems to be a piece of realistic fiction, Mark Haddon's goal is to take his readers to a place unknown in the mind of Christopher.

Please type your answers to the discussion questions below.

1. On pages 45-48, Christopher describes his “Behavioral Problems” and the effect they had on his parents and their marriage. What is the effect of the unemotional style in which he relates this information?
2. Given Christopher’s aversion to being touched, can he experience his parents’ love for him, or can he only understand it as a fact, because they tell him they love him? Is there any evidence in the novel that he experiences a sense of attachment to other people?
3. One of the unusual aspects of the novel is its inclusion of many maps and diagrams. How effective are these in helping the reader see the world through Christopher’s eyes?
4. What challenges does the novel present to the ways we usually think and talk about characters in movies? How does it force us to reexamine our normal ideas about love and desire. Which are often the driving forces in fiction? Since Mark Haddon has chosen to make us see the world through Christopher’s eyes, what does he help us discover about ourselves?
5. Christopher likes the idea of a world with no people in it (p. 2); he contemplates the end of the world when the universe collapses (pp. 10-11); he dreams of being an astronaut, alone in space (pp. 50-51), and that a virus has carried off everyone and the only people left are “special people like me” (pp. 198-200). What do these passages say about his relationship to other human beings? What is striking about the way he describes these scenarios?
6. According to neurologist Oliver Sacks, Hans Asperger, the doctor whose name is associated with the kind of autism that Christopher seems to have, notes that some autistic people have a “sort of intelligence scarcely touched by tradition and culture—unconventional, unorthodox, strangely pure and original, like the intelligence of true creativity” (*An Anthropologist on Mars* by Oliver Sacks, Vintage Books, 1995, pp. 252-253). Does the novel’s intensive look at Christopher’s fascinating and often profound thoughts suggest that in certain ways, the pity that well-meaning, “normal” people might feel for him is misdirected? Given his gifts, does his future look promising?
7. Christopher experiences the world quantitatively and logically. His teacher Mr. Jeavons tells him that he likes math because it’s safe. Christopher’s examination of the Monty Hall problem gives the reader more insight into why he likes math. Does Mr. Jeavons underestimate the complexity of Christopher’s mind and his responses to intellectual stimulation? Does Siobhan understand Christopher better than Mr. Jeavons?
8. Which scenes in the novel are comical, and why are they funny? Are these same situations also sad, or exasperating?

9. One of the primary disadvantages of the autistic is that they cannot project or intuit what other people might be feeling or thinking—as illustrated in the scene where Christopher has to guess what his mother might think would be in the Smarties tube (pp. 115-6). When does this deficit become most clear in the novel? Does Christopher seem to suffer from his mental and emotional isolation or does he seem to enjoy it?
10. Christopher's parents, with their affairs, arguments, and passionate rages, are clearly in the grip of emotions they themselves can't fully understand or control. How, in juxtaposition to Christopher's incomprehension of the passions that drive other people, is his family situation particularly ironic?
11. What is the effect of reading the letters Christopher's mother wrote to him? Was his mother justified in leaving? Does Christopher comprehend her apology and her attempt to explain herself (pp. 106-10)? Does he have strong feelings about the loss of his mother? Which of his parents is better suited to taking care of him?
12. Christopher's father confesses to killing Wellington in a moment of rage at Mrs. Shears (pp. 121-22). His father swears to Christopher that he won't lie to him every again. Christopher thinks, "I had to get out of the house. Father had murdered Wellington. That meant he could murder me, because I couldn't trust him, even though he had said 'trust me,' because he had told a lie about a big thing" (p. 122). Why is Christopher's world shattered by this realization? Is it likely that he will ever learn to trust his father again?
13. Mark Haddon has said of his novel: "It's not just a book about disability. Obviously, on some level it is, but on another level... it's a book about books, about what you can do with words and what it means to communicate with someone in a book. Here's a character whom if you met him in real life you'd never, ever get inside his head. Yet something magical happens when you write a novel about him. You slip inside his head, and it seems like the most natural thing in the world" ([www.powells.com](http://www.powells.com)). Is a large part of the achievement of the novel precisely this—that Haddon has created a door into a kind of mind his readers would not have access to in real life?
14. Christopher's journey to London underscores the difficulties he has being on his own, and the real disadvantages of his condition in terms of being in the world. What is most frightening, disturbing, or moving about this extended section of the novel (pp. 169-98)?
15. In his review of the novel, Jay McInerney suggests that at the novel's end "the gulf between Christopher and his parents, between Christopher and the rest of us, remains immense and mysterious. And that gulf is ultimately the source of this novel's haunting impact. Christopher Boone is an unsolved mystery" (The New York Times Book Review, 6/15/2003, p. 5). Is this an accurate assessment? Why or why not?

Final Project:

As your creative piece for this novel, I want you to think about a pivotal scene. Go back into the text and re-read this scene. Assign a color to the mood of the scene. Create an artifact of this color that represents some aspect of the scene.

For example, the opening scene of the novel presents Wellington's death in an unemotional manner. The color brown appeals to me as being representative of this scene because there are no emotions and brown is a color not associated with any specific emotion. For this scene, I would create a brown fork. It is directly connected to Wellington's manner of death, but really, also points at what the murder "pokes" Christopher to do—to discover who did it. As the murder was committed in an odd way, with a pitch fork, it also points to the oddity of Christopher's character, and really, the oddity of the premise of the entire novel.

You need to bring your object as well as a concise typed explanation of the connections of both color and object to the novel.