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THEATRE
KENT THOMPSON,
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



COMPANY

LOIS LOWRY'S
THE GIVER

Dramatized by ERIC COBLE

DENVERCENTER.ORG

Box Office 303.893.4100



THE
GIVER

2012/13
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COMMUNITY

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InsideOUT

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Synopsis

The struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

—Milan Kundera. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting.*

Through Jonas' eyes his community appears to be a Utopia—a perfect place—that is self-contained and isolated from every other place in the world. No disease, hunger, poverty, war or lasting pain exists in this world. Jonas's family, like all the others, includes a caring mother and father and two children—one boy and one girl. Each morning they discuss the dreams they had the previous night; during dinner they share their feelings about the events of the day, comforting and supporting each other.

The community is ruled by a Committee of Elders that controls everyone and everything, proclaiming regulations and reprimands from loudspeakers located everywhere. Every child must follow specific rules about the kinds of clothing, haircuts and activities appropriate for their age group. In their behavior the children are evaluated by members of the Committee who judge what lifelong professions each one will be assigned.

At the Ceremony of Twelves, Jonas is assigned the life role of Keeper of Memories. This is considered an extremely high honor. But it's not long before he begins to realize the hypocrisy of his community, which projects an illusion of good where none, in fact, exists. It's all a charade and Jonas feels he must change it. ■

THE AUTHOR, LOIS LOWRY

Lois Lowry was born on March 21, 1937, in Hawaii to parents Robert and Katherine Hammersberg. Lois was the middle of three children with an older sister Helen and a younger brother Jon. Helen, three years her senior, died in 1962 at the age of 28; this experience led to Lowry's first book, *A Summer to Die*, which is about a young girl who tragically loses her older sister.

Lois' father was an Army dentist and his career moved the family all over the United States and abroad. They moved from Hawaii to Brooklyn, New York, in 1939 when Lois was two years old, and later relocated to her mother's hometown of Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

In 1942 Lowry's father was deployed to the Pacific during World War II where he served on a hospital ship called the USS Hope and on the island of Tinian, one of the Marianas in the Philippine Sea.

Following World War II Lowry and her family moved to Tokyo where her father was stationed from 1948-1950. She went through junior high school at the Tokyo American School, a special school for children of military families, and then returned to the United States to attend high school. They moved to Fort Jay at Governors Island, New York, where Lowry attended Curtis High School on Staten Island, later transferring to Packer Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn Heights.

Lowry entered Brown University in 1954 which she attended for two years until her marriage to Donald Lowry, a U.S. Navy officer. They had four children: daughters Alex and Kristin and sons Grey and Benjamin.

The Lowrys moved frequently in the early years of their marriage because of Donald's military career. They resided in California, Connecticut, Florida, South Carolina and finally Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Donald left military service to attend Harvard Law School. After Donald graduated, the family moved to Portland, Maine.

When her children were older, Lois found time to complete her degree in English literature from the University of Southern Maine in Portland in 1972. After earning her B.A. she pursued graduate studies in literature, but was introduced to photography, which became a life-long passion as well as a profession. She specialized in child

photography and took pictures to accompany the articles she submitted as a free-lance journalist. An article for *Redbook Magazine* caught the attention of an editor at Houghton Mifflin Publishing. The editor recognized her talent and suggested that Lowry write a children's book. She agreed and wrote *A Summer to Die* which was published in 1977.

The same year Lowry and her husband divorced. Of those transitional years in her life Lowry has said: "My children grew up in Maine. So did I. I returned to college at the University of Southern Maine, got my degree, went to graduate school, and finally began to write professionally, the thing I had dreamed of doing since those childhood years when I had endlessly scribbled stories and poems in notebooks."¹

Lowry's experience with her elderly parents added to the themes that she would develop in *The Giver*. Both her parents were dying when she was writing the book, so the topic of memories and their transference from one generation to another was uppermost in her mind. Her mother passed along stories from her past, but her father, plagued with Alzheimer's, was unable to remember his own children.

While *The Giver* won a Newbery Award in 1994 and has been a popular book, it has generated a certain amount of controversy. The book has been challenged (at times removed from library shelves) because of its references to violence, infanticide, euthanasia and sexual feelings.

Writing about both serious and amusing issues has sustained Lois Lowry through her own stressful times. Her son Grey was killed when his fighter plane crashed in 1995; Lowry has acknowledged that this was the most difficult day of her life. She said: "His death in the cockpit of a warplane tore away a piece of my world. But it left me, too, with a wish to honor him by joining the many others trying to find a way to end conflict on this very fragile earth."²

Today, Lois Lowry remains active by writing, speaking, but also enjoying her homes in Massachusetts and Maine. She takes pleasure in reading, knitting, gardening and entertaining her four grandchildren. ■

1. en.wikipedia .org

2. Ibid.

BOOKS BY LOIS LOWRY

The Giver Quartet—*The Giver, Gathering Blue, Messenger, Son.*

.....

The Anastasia Series—*Anastasia Krupnik, Anastasia Again, Anastasia at Your Service, Anastasia, Ask Your Analyst, Anastasia on Her Own.*

.....

The Sam Series—*All About Sam, Attaboy Sam!, See You Around, Sam.*

.....

The Gooney Bird Series—*Gooney Bird Greene, Gooney Bird and the Room Mother, Gooney the Fabulous, Gooney Bird is So Absurd, Gooney Bird on the Map.*

.....

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lois_Lowry

Sanderson, Jeanette. *A Reading Guide to the Giver*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2003.

.....

THE ADAPTER, ERIC COBLE

Eric Coble was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, and raised on the Navajo and Ute reservations in New Mexico and Colorado where his mother was a teacher. His plays for young audiences include *Cinderella Confidential*, *Pecos Bill and the Ghost Stampede*, *Pinocchio 3.5*, *Vote?* and *Nightfall with Edgar Allan Poe*.

His scripts have been produced off-Broadway, throughout the United States and abroad. His works have been seen at Manhattan Class Company, the Kennedy Center, Playwrights Horizons, Actors Theatre of Louisville Humana Festival, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Alliance Theatre, Alabama Shakespeare Festival and South Coast Repertory. His awards include an Emmy nomination, the AT&T Onstage Award, National Theatre Conference Playwriting Award, an NEA Playwright in Residence grant and two Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence grants. ■

Dramatic Publishing Service, England, 1996.

Interview with playwright Eric Coble by Kiersten Parkinson
1/18/2011

THE THEMES IN THE GIVER

*For all the children
To whom we entrust the future.*
—Lois Lowry, from the dedication to *The Giver*

One of the most important themes of the play is the significance of memory to human life. Jonas' community experiences no pain. By cancelling memories of pain, the Community also loses its memory of the past. With no remembrances the people are not accustomed to thinking for themselves. According to Ulric Neisser in his book *Memory Observed*, "people use their own past experiences in meeting the present and the future."¹ Everyone uses the past to define him- or herself, for each person has a name, a family, a home, a job. Lacking this information, how can a person live a meaningful life?

Another theme is the relationship between pain and pleasure. One cannot experience pleasure without knowing pain and vice versa. Members of Jonas's community live lives of monotony, devoid of emotional variation; for them life is routine, predictable and unchanging. Only when Jonas receives memories from the Giver does he become open to the feelings of love, fear, indignation and comfort.

Lowry emphasizes the importance of the individual. At the Ceremony of the Twelves, the Elder remarks that this day is a celebration of individual differences. However, when people cannot experience their past, their individuality is devalued; people learn from their memories and gain wisdom from remembering prior events. The play is, thus, the story of Jonas' development into a caring individual, the maturation from a child dependent upon a community to one with unique abilities, dreams and desires.

The play is also an examination of society's rules. When a community opts for conformity over individuality, something is amiss. The author says the book speaks to "the vital need for humans to be aware of their interdependence, not only with each other, but with the world and its environment."² ■

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1. Neisser, p. 12.
 2. Sanderson, p. 33.
 3. Ibid, p. 35.

Neisser, Ulric. *Memory Observed*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1982.

Sanderson, Jeanette. *A Reading Guide to the Giver*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2003.

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/giver/themes.html>

http://www.cliffnotes.com/study_guide/literature/the-giver/critical-essays/major-themes.html

UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS

Utopia is that which is in contradiction with reality.
—Albert Camus. *Between Hell and Reason*

The word “Utopia” comes from the Greek words *ou*, meaning no or not, and *topos*, meaning place. Utopia has come to mean a place that people can only dream about, a true paradise. “Dystopia,” the direct opposite of Utopia, is a term used to describe a Utopian community in which things have gone terribly awry. Both Utopias and Dystopias share characteristics of science fiction and fantasy; both are usually set in a future in which technology has been used to create perfect living conditions. However, the focus of a Utopian or Dystopian novel is usually not on the technology but rather on the psychology and emotions of the characters who live under such conditions.

Although the word Utopia was coined in 1516 by Sir Thomas More when he wrote *Utopia*, other writers have written about Utopias for centuries, including the Biblical Garden of Eden in *Genesis* and Plato’s *Republic*, which is about a perfect state ruled by philosopher kings. Thomas More’s *Utopia* protested contemporary English life by describing an ideal political state in a land called Utopia, or Nowhere Land. Other early fictional Utopias included various exotic communities in Jonathan Swift’s famous *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726).

The idea of Utopias continued to be popular during the 19th century. For example, English author Samuel Butler wrote *Erewhon* (1872) which is nowhere spelled backwards (despite the transposition of the *w* and the *h*) and *Erewhon Revisited* (1901) while William Morris wrote *News from Nowhere* (1891). In the United States people have attempted to create real life Utopias such as Fruitlands, Massachusetts; Harmony, Pennsylvania; Corning, Iowa; Oneida, New York and Brook Farm, Massachusetts. Although the founders of these communities had good intentions, none of them flourished as their creators had hoped.

Dystopian novels offer ways in which authors share their concerns about society and humanity. They also serve to warn members of a community to pay attention to the society in which they live. Examples of fictional Dystopias include Aldous Huxley’s *Brave*

New World and George Orwell's *1984*.

In *Brave New World* (published in 1931) the embryos belong to five castes: Alpha are the leaders, and the Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon are less impressive and bred to be workers. The World State wants to remove strong emotions, desires, human relationships and eliminate all art, science and religion. John, who harbors a collection of forbidden Shakespeare, believes the system dehumanizes the residents of the World State while Mustapha Mond, the Resident World Controller, argues that stability and happiness are most important. To relieve stress the people take "soma," a hallucinogen that takes them on a holiday.

In *1984* by George Orwell (published in 1949), Winston Smith is a low ranking party member in the country of Oceania. The Party watches him through huge telescreens with the face of the Party's leader, Big Brother, warning, "Big Brother is watching you." The Party controls everything and is forcing the use of a new language called Newspeak.

Lois Lowry chose to write *The Giver* as a Dystopian novel because it was the most effective means to communicate her displeasure with the lack of awareness that human beings have about their interdependence with each other, their environment and their world. She uses Jonas as the catalyst who recognizes that the community is a fraud and that memory, freedom, individuality and choice are more important than conformity. ■

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1931.

Orwell, George. *1984*. New York: Signet Classics, 1949.

<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guide/literature/the-giver/critical-essays/what-are-utopias-dystopias.html>

EMOTIONS AND MEMORY

Emotion is the chief source of all-becoming conscious.
—Carl Gustave Jung. *Psychological Reflections: a Jung Anthology.*

Although the family in *The Giver* discusses “feelings” at the evening meal, no one really expresses emotion of any depth. When Jonas experiences “stirrings” (adolescent hormonal urges), his mother gives him a pill to curb them. She also says “love” is an imprecise word.

“An emotion is a basic judgment about ourselves and our place in our world...according to which we live and through which we experience our lives,” writes Robert C. Solomon in his book *The Passions: Emotion and Meaning of Life*.¹

Our emotions set up our world and constitute the framework with which we can judge facts and their relevance to us. Emotions give meanings to our lives, as they demand a change or a different course of action. Thus, after witnessing the casual killing of an infant, Jonas feels so strongly he decides he must leave the Community. David Brooks in his book, *The Social Animal*, says that most people believe they take action because of reasoning and will power, but Brooks argues that “nondeliberate emotion, perception and intuition are much more important in shaping our lives than reason and will.”²

Emotional well-being refers to one’s overall psychological well-being. People who are emotionally healthy have: a sense of contentment, a zest for living and the ability to have fun, the ability to deal with stress, a sense of meaning and purpose, the flexibility to learn new things and adapt to change, a balance in work and play, the ability to build and maintain fulfilling relationships and have self confidence and high self esteem.

Memory and emotion are closely linked. We remember emotionally charged events better than boring ones. In *The Giver*, no member of the Community has any memories of the past; only the Giver retains the remembrances of what has gone before. The amygdala is the portion of the brain most strongly implicated in emotional memory. While this region is important for all, men and women do show differences in the parts of the brain they use to encode

memory. Women are better at remembering emotional events, but they seem more likely to forget the information presented just before the emotional event. ■

1. Solomon, p. 126.
2. Brooks, nytimes.com.

Deresiewicz, William. *A Jane Austen Education*. New York, Penguin Books, 2012.

Solomon, Robert C. *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993.

Spencer, Dale; Walby, Kevin and Hunt, Alan, eds. *Emotions Matter: a Relational Approach to Emotions*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/13/books/review/book-review-the-social-animal-by-david-brooks.htm/?-r=1&pagewanted=print>.

http://www.decision-making-solutions.com/emotional_decision_making.html

<http://www.memory-key.com/memory/emotion>

<http://cnx.org/content/m14358/latest/>

<http://www.lyricsmania.com/>

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/mental_emotional_health.htm

THE NEWBERY AWARD FOR
THE GIVER, JUNE, 1994

“**H**ow do you know where to start?” a child asked me once, in a schoolroom, where I’d been speaking to her class about the writing of books. I shrugged and smiled and told her that I just start wherever it feels right. This evening it feels right to start by quoting a passage from *The Giver*, a scene set during the days in which the boy, Jonas, is beginning to look more deeply into the life that has been very superficial, beginning to see that his own past goes back farther than he had ever known and has greater implications than he had ever suspected.

“...now he saw the familiar wide river beside the path differently. He’s aware of the light and color and history it contained and carried in its slow-moving water; and he knew that there was an Elsewhere from which it came, and an Elsewhere to which it was going.”

Every author is asked again and again the question we probably each have come to dread the most: HOW DID YOU GET THIS IDEA? We give glib, quick answers because there are other hands raised, other kids in the audience waiting.

I’d like, tonight, to dispense with my usual flippancy and glibness and try to tell you the origins of this book. It is a little like Jonas looking into the river and realizing that it carries with it everything that has come from an Elsewhere. A spring, perhaps, at the beginning, bubbling up from the earth; then a trickle from a glacier; a mountain stream entering farther along; and each tributary bringing with it the collected bits and pieces from the past, from the distant, from the countless Elsewheres: all of it moving, mingled, in the current.

For me, the tributaries are memories, and I’ve selected only a few. I’ll tell them to you chronologically. I have to go way back. I’m starting 46 years ago.

In 1948, I am eleven years old. I have gone with my mother, sister, and brother to join my father, who has been in Tokyo for two years and will be there for several more.

We live there, in the center of that huge Japanese city, in a small American enclave with a very American name: Washington Heights. We live in an American style house, with American neighbors, and our little community has its own movie theater, which shows American movies; and a small church, a tiny library, and an elementary school, and in many ways it is an odd replica of a United States village.

(In later, adult years I was to ask my mother why we had lived there instead of taking advantage of the opportunity to live within the Japanese community and to learn and experience a different way of life. But she seemed surprised by my question. She said that we lived where we did because it was comfortable. It was familiar. It was safe.)

.....

At eleven years old I am not a particularly adventurous child, nor am I a rebellious one. But I have always been curious.

.....

I have a bicycle. Again and again – countless times without my parents’ knowledge – I ride my bicycle out the back gate of the fence that surrounds our comfortable, familiar, safe American community. I ride down a hill because I am curious and I enter, riding down that hill, an unfamiliar, slightly uncomfortable, perhaps even unsafe ... though I never feel it to be ... area of Tokyo that throbs with life.

It is a district called Shibuya. It is crowded with shops and people and theaters and street vendors and the day-to-day bustle of Japanese life. I remember, still, after all these years, the smells: fish and fertilizer and charcoal; the sounds: music and shouting and the clatter of wooden shoes and wooden sticks and wooden wheels; and the colors: I remember the babies and toddlers dressed in bright pink and orange and red, most of all, but I remember, too, the dark blue uniforms of the school children: the strangers who are my own age.

I wander through Shibuya day after day during those years when I am 11, 12 and 13. I love the feel of it, the vigor and the garish brightness and the noise; all of such a contrast to my own life.

But I never talk to anyone. I am not frightened of the people, who are so different from me, but I am shy. I watch the children shouting and playing around a school, and they are children my age, and they watch me in return; but we never speak to one another.

One afternoon I am standing on a street corner when a woman near me reaches out, touches my hair, and says something. I back away, startled, because my knowledge of the language is poor and I misunderstand her words. I think she has said, “Kirai des” meaning that she dislikes me; and I am embarrassed, and confused wondering what I have done wrong; how I have disgraced myself.

Then, after a moment, I realize my mistake. She has said, actually, “Kirei-des’.” She has called me pretty. And I look for her, in the crowd, at least to smile, perhaps to say thank you if I can overcome my shyness enough to speak. But she is gone.

I remember this moment – this instant of communication gone awry – again and again over the years. Perhaps this is where the river starts.

In 1954 and 1955 I am a college freshman, living in a very small dormitory, actually a converted private home, with a group of perhaps fourteen other girls. We are very much alike: we wear the same sort of clothes: cashmere sweaters and plaid wool skirts, knee socks, and loafers. We all smoke Marlboro cigarettes and we knit – usually argyle socks for our boyfriends – and play bridge. Sometimes we study; and we get good grades because we are all the cream of the crop, the valedictorians and class presidents from our high schools all over the United States.

One of the girls in our dorm is not like the rest of us. She doesn’t wear our uniform. She wears blue jeans instead of skirts, and she doesn’t curl her hair or knit or play bridge. She doesn’t date or go to fraternity parties and dances.

She’s a smart girl, a good student, a pleasant enough person, but she is different, somehow alien, and that makes us uncomfortable. We react with a kind of mindless cruelty. We don’t tease or torment her, but we do something worse; we ignore her. We pretend that she doesn’t exist. In a small house of fourteen young women, we make one invisible.

Somehow, by shutting her out, we make ourselves feel comfortable, familiar, safe.

I think of her now and then as the years pass. Those thoughts – fleeting, but profoundly remorseful – enter the current of the river.

In the summer of 1979, I am sent by a magazine I am working for to an island off the coast of Maine to write an article about a painter who lives there alone. I spend a good deal of time with

this man, and we talk a lot about color. It is clear to me that although I am a highly visual person – a person who sees and appreciates form and composition and color – this man’s capacity for seeing color goes far beyond mine.

.....

I photograph him while I am there, and I keep a copy of his photograph for myself because there is something about his face – his eyes – which haunts me.

.....

Later, I hear that he has become blind. I think about him – his name is Carl Nelson – from time to time. His photograph hangs over my desk. I wonder what it was like for him to lose the colors about which he was so impassioned. Now and then I wish, in a whimsical way, that he could have somehow magically given me the capacity to see the way he did.

A little bubble begins, a little spurt, which will trickle into the river. In 1989 I go to a small village in Germany to attend the wedding of one of my sons. In an ancient church, he marries his Margret in a ceremony conducted in a language I do not speak and cannot understand. But one section of the service is in English. A woman stands in the balcony of that old stone church and sings the words from the Bible: where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people.

How small the world has become, I think, looking around the church at the many people who sit there wishing happiness to my son and his new wife – wishing it in their own language as I am wishing it in mine. We are all each other’s people now, I find myself thinking.

Can you feel that this memory, too, is a stream that is now entering the river?

Another fragment, my father, nearing 90, is in a nursing home. My brother and I have hung family pictures on the walls of his room. During a visit, he and I are talking about the people in the pictures. One is my sister, my parents’ first child, who died young of cancer. My father smiles, looking at her picture. “That’s your sister,” he says happily. “That’s Helen.” Then he comments, a little puzzled, but not at all sad, “I can’t remember exactly what happened to her.”

We can forget pain, I think. And it is comfortable to do so.

But I also wonder briefly: is it safe to do that, to forget? That uncertainty pours itself into the river of thought which will become the book.

1991. I am in an auditorium somewhere. I have spoken at length about my book, *Number the Stars*, which has been honored with the 1990 Newbery Medal. A woman raises her hand. When the turn for her question comes, she sighs very loudly and says, “Why do we have to tell this Holocaust thing over and over? Is it really necessary?”

I answer her as well as I can – quoting, in fact, my German daughter-in-law, who has said to me, “No one knows better than we Germans that we must tell this again and again.”

But I think about her question – and my answer – a great deal. Wouldn't it, I think, playing Devil's Advocate to myself, make for a more comfortable world to forget the Holocaust? And I remember once again how comfortable, familiar and safe my parents had sought to make my childhood by shielding me from ELSEWHERE. But I remember, too, that my response had been to open the gate again and again. My instinct had been a child's attempt to see for myself what lay beyond the wall.

The thinking becomes another tributary into the river of thought that will create *The Giver*.

Here's another memory. I am sitting in a booth with my daughter in a little Beacon Hill pub where she and I often have lunch together. The television is on in the background, behind the bar, as it always is. She and I are talking. Suddenly I gesture to her. I say, “Shhhh” because I have heard a fragment of the news and I am startled, anxious, and want to hear the rest. Someone has walked into a fast-food place with an automatic weapon and randomly killed a number of people. My daughter stops talking and waits while I listen to the rest.

Then I relax. I say to her, in a relieved voice, “It's all right. It was in Oklahoma.” (Or perhaps it was Alabama. Or Indiana.)

She stares at me in amazement that I have said such a hideous thing. How comfortable I made myself feel for a moment, by reducing my own realm of caring to my own familiar neighborhood. How safe I deluded myself into feeling.

I think about that, and it becomes a torrent that enters the flow of a river turbulent by now, and clogged with memories and thoughts and ideas that begin to mesh and intertwine. The river begins to seek a

place to spill over. When Jonas meets the Giver for the first time, and tries to comprehend what lies before him, he says, in confusion “I thought there was only us. I thought there was only now.”

In beginning to write *The Giver* I created – as I always do, in every book – a world that existed only in my imagination – the world of “only us, only now.” I tried to make Jonas’s world seem familiar, comfortable, and safe, and I tried to seduce the reader. I seduced myself along the way. It did feel good, that world. I got rid of all the things I fear and dislike; all the violence, prejudice, poverty, and injustice, and I even threw in good manners as a way of life because I liked the idea of it.

One child has pointed out, in a letter, that the people in Jonas’s world didn’t even have to do dishes.
It was very, very tempting to leave it at that.

But I’ve never been a writer of fairy tales. And if I’ve learned anything through that river of memories, it is that we can’t live in a walled world, in an “only us, only now” world where we are all the same and feel safe. We would have to sacrifice too much. The richness of color and diversity would disappear feelings for other humans would no longer be necessary. Choices would be obsolete.

And besides, I had ridden my bike Elsewhere as a child, and liked it there, but had never been brave enough to tell anyone about it. So it was time. A letter that I’ve kept for a very long time is from a child who has read my book called *Anastasia Krupnik*. Her letter – she’s a little girl named Paula from Louisville, Kentucky – says:

“I really like the book you wrote about Anastasia and her family because it made me laugh every time I read it. I especially liked when it said she didn’t want to have a baby brother in the house because she had to clean up after him every time and change his diaper when her mother and father aren’t home and she doesn’t like to give him a bath and watch him all the time and put him to sleep every night while her mother goes to work... Here’s the fascinating thing: Nothing that the child describes actually happens in the book. The child – as we all do – has brought her own life to a book. She has found a place, a place in the pages of a book, that shares her own frustration and feelings.

And the same thing is happening – as I hoped it would happen – with *The Giver*. Those of you who hoped that I would stand here tonight

and reveal the “true” ending, the “right” interpretation of the ending, will be disappointed. There isn’t one. There’s a right one for each of us, and it depends on our own beliefs, our own hopes.

Let me tell you a few endings which are the “right” endings for a few children out of the many who have written to me. From a sixth grader: “I think that when they were traveling they were traveling in a circle. When they came to “Elsewhere” it was their old community, but they had accepted the memories and all the feelings that go along with it...”

From another: “...Jonas was kind of like Jesus because he took the pain for everyone else in the community so they wouldn’t have to suffer. And, at the very end of the book, when Jonas and Gabe reached the place that they knew as Elsewhere, you described Elsewhere as if it were heaven.”

And one more: “A lot of people I know would hate that ending, but not me. I loved it. Mainly because I got to make the book happy. I decided they made it. They made it to the past. I decided the past was our world, and the future was their world. It was parallel worlds.”

Finally, from one seventh grade boy: “I was really surprised that they just died at the end. That was a bummer. You could of made them stay alive, I thought.”

Very few find it a bummer. Most of the young readers who have written to me have perceived the magic of the circular journey. The truth that we go out and come back, and that what we come back to is changed, and so are we. Perhaps I have been traveling in a circle too. Things come together and become complete.

Here is what I’ve come back to:

The daughter who was with me and looked at me in horror the day I fell victim to thinking we were “only us, only now” (and that what happened in Oklahoma, or Alabama, or Indiana didn’t matter) was the first person to read the manuscript of *The Giver*.

The college classmate who was “different” lives, last I heard, very happily in New Jersey with another woman who shares her life. I can only hope that she has forgiven those of us who were young in a more frightened and less enlightened time.

My son, and Margret, his German wife – the one who reminded me how important it is to tell our stories again and again, painful though they often are – now have a little girl who will be the receiver of all of their memories. Their daughter had crossed the Atlantic three times before she was six months old. Presumably my granddaughter will never be fearful of Elsewhere.

Carl Nelson, the man who lost colors but not the memory of them, is the face on the cover of this book. He died in 1989 but left a vibrant legacy of paintings. One hangs now in my home.

And I am especially happy to stand here tonight, on this platform with Allen Say because it truly brings my journey full circle. Allen was twelve years old when I was. He lived in Shibuya, that alien Elsewhere that I went to as a child on a bicycle. He was one of the Other, the Different, the dark-eyed children in blue school uniforms, and I was too timid then to do more than stand at the edge of their school yard, smile shyly, and wonder what their lives were like.

Now I can say to Allen what I wish I could have said then: *Watashi-no comodachi des'*. Greetings, my friend.

I have been asked whether the Newbery Medal is, actually, an odd sort of burden in terms of the greater responsibility one feels. Whether one is paralyzed by it, fearful of being able to live up to the standards it represents. For me the opposite has been true. I think the 1990 Newbery freed me to risk failure.

Other people took that risk with me, of course, One was my editor, Walter Lorraine, who has never to my knowledge been afraid to take a chance. Walter cares more about what a book has to say than he does about whether he can turn it into a stuffed animal or a calendar or a movie.

The Newbery Committee was gutsy too. There would have been safer books. More comfortable books. More familiar books. They took a trip beyond the realm of sameness, with this one, and I think they should be very proud of that.

And all of you, as well. Let me say something to those of you here who do such dangerous work.

The man that I named the Giver passed along to the boy knowledge, history, memories, color, pain, laughter, love, and truth. Every time you place a book in the hands of a child, you do the same thing.

It is very risky.

But each time a child opens a book, he pushes open the gate that separates him from Elsewhere. It gives him choices. It gives him freedom. Those are magnificent, wonderfully unsafe things.

I have been greatly honored by you now, two times. It is impossible to express my gratitude for that. Perhaps the only way, really, is to return to Boston, to my office, to my desk, and to go back to work in hopes that whatever I do next will justify the faith in me that this medal represents.

There are other rivers flowing. ■

QUESTIONS

PRE-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

- 1) What would your version of utopian society look like? What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a perfect society?
- 2) How would you describe color to someone who only knows the color gray? How would you describe snow without using the word snow?
- 3) What is the difference between collective memory and individual memory? Can collective memory change or be distorted? Can individual memory change or be distorted? How can memory be manipulated?

POST-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

- 1) How are sound and images used to convey the idea of memory? How is the information shared between characters?
- 2) How would you describe the culture of the community in *The Giver*? How are individuals treated? How does their culture resemble or differ from our culture?
- 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of Sameness? What conclusions do the Giver and Jonas come to about Sameness?
- 4) Why are occupation assignments arranged for the people in the community? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having these assignments chosen for the people?
- 5) What is the importance of specific language? Why do they consider some words to be obsolete or vague?
- 6) Why does the community entrust only one person to be the Receiver of Memory? Why does the Giver want to hold on to certain memories and share others?
- 7) Why is snow banned in the community?
- 8) Why do the people take pills for their “stirrings?” What are the “stirrings” and why is the community worried what may happen?
- 9) What does it mean to be “released?” How would you describe the characters’ reactions to characters that are released? How does Jonas react?
- 10) What is your interpretation of how the play ends? What happens to Jonas and Gabriel? What do you think happens to the community?

ACTIVITIES

CREATING AN UTOPIAN SOCIETY

- 1) Start by dividing the large group into smaller groups of four or five people.
- 2) Each group is going to brainstorm and list what would be included in their utopian community and then share it with the other groups.
- 3) Each group will start by creating a name for their community, if necessary.
- 4) Create a list of five common cultural values. What does your community value and why?
- 5) Describe how the community is governed? Is there a leader or leaders? How is this person or how are these persons selected? What are some of the laws/rules/guidelines that must be followed? What are some of the consequences for failure to comply? Who decides how these rules are enforced? Create a small flowchart of the structure and list the responsibilities.
- 6) Create a list of at least five occupations that would be necessary for your community to function. What qualities would be needed for this job? How do these occupations reflect the values of the community?
- 7) Create a list of five activities or hobbies that the community members do in their leisure time. How do people in the community spend their free time? What are some activities that they do? What do they do for entertainment or fun? How do these activities reflect the values of the community?
- 8) Gather the groups and compare and contrast the process of creating these lists. Was this a difficult or an easy process? Did anyone argue to include something that had value to them personally but not for the group as a whole? Were there any aspects of the community that needed to be added?
- 9) Compare and contrast the lists that each group had made. What were the similarities and differences in some of the choices in their creation of their cultures? As a group, create a combined list for the values, government, occupations and leisure time.

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- 10) Discuss what the strengths of this combined community and some of the dangers that could happen in this community. How does this community compare to the United States? How does it compare to the community in *The Giver*?

Civics PG: Analyze and practice rights, roles, and responsibilities of citizens

Civics PG: Analyze the origins, structure, and functions of governments and their impacts on societies and citizens

PAGE TO STAGE: ADAPTING *THE GIVER*

Materials: Pen and paper

- 1) Start by picking a short excerpt from *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. After reading the excerpt, find some key themes and character choices that you can adapt into a monologue or scene for the stage.
- 2) From the passage, change what happens on the written page into a script for a play. Pay close attention to the dialogue and the action in the passage.
- 3) After writing the first draft, cast the scene and have the students read the scenes that they have written.
- 4) Discuss the differences between the novel and scenes. What did the author do to convey the characters and plot? Did they have to invent, delete, or change anything to communicate the story?
- 5) Raising the bar: After the first draft of the scene or monologue has been adapted, change the narrative voice. For example, if the scene is of the Ceremony of Twelve, what changes would need to be made if the scene was told through Father's voice? Or through the Chief Elder's eyes? What changes would have to be made to clearly show that the events being described are from a different person?
- 6) Discuss how the scene may change when told through the different voice. Discuss the process of an adapter and how you chose to the best voice for your perspective?
- 7) After seeing the production, what did the adapter, Eric Coble, modify to tell his version of Lois Lowry's story? What were the differences between Coble's adaptation and the scenes that were written in class? Does a play adaptation limit the adapter's possibilities?

Writing PG: Effectively use content-specific language, style, tone and text structure to compose or adapt writing for different audiences and purposes.

Writing PG: Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

CULTURE CAPSULE

Materials: Pen and paper

- 1) Split the class into three groups. Each group will be assigned a culture to represent.

One group represents their school.

One group represents the United States.

One group represents the earth.
- 2) Explain that a “culture capsule” will be constructed to be sent to a neighboring community. Due to the size of the capsule, each group will have a limit of only five objects to best represent their group.
- 3) Each group will decide on the criteria for what the objects will be, but the objects must be representative of their group.
- 4) Each group will compile a list of their objects and share with the other groups.
- 5) Discussion questions: What was the criteria for selecting the objects? Were some of the objects similar? Did anyone argue to include something that had value to them personally but not for the group as a whole? What if you were representing a different culture or country?

Civics PG 1: Research, formulate positions, and engage in appropriate civic participation to address local, state, or national issues or policies.

History PG 3: The significance of ideas as powerful forces throughout history.

PERSPECTIVE WRITING – PERSONAL NARRATIVES

- 6) Take a moment from a typical day at your school; right before the morning bell rings, the morning announcements, a school wide assembly, the cafeteria at lunch, the final bell, or a football game. This should be a moment that involves more than one person.
- 7) Each person will write a short monologue describing the moment from their perspective of the experience. Make sure the moment is appropriate for school and that you are willing to share with the rest of the class.

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- 8) Select one of the monologues that have the most potential or detail to be the scaffolding for the rest of the class to add elements from their monologues to make it richer or more evocative.

 - 9) Discuss the similarities and differences that arose during the process. Was there general agreement or marked differences? If they were different why? Were they subtle or obvious variations? Did the class agree on what was important to include and why? If not how would the elimination of some elements change the way the story would be understood when read?

Writing PG: Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.

Writing PG: Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.