

Reading Response #2

Book: The Giver

Author: Lois Lowry

Pages read: Finished book

PART 1: SUMMARY

The Giver is a science fiction novel set in a utopian society. The story centers around a 12 year old boy named Jonas. In the beginning of the novel he is nervous about the Ceremony of Twelve, where he will be assigned a career in service to the community. In Jonas' society, rules are readily accepted, so it is without protest that he accepts his position as "Receiver of Memory."

As Jonas undertakes his training, he begins to receive memories of all the joys and pain that have been eliminated from society in order to protect the people, and he begins to feel that this security has come at a great loss. The people may be protected from suffering, hunger and war, but they are not free to experience love, music or colour. It is when he learns about "release"- the killing of citizens and babies that do not fit society's prescribed mold- that Jonas decides that something must change.

Jonas and the Giver develop a plan whereby all the memories will be returned to the people. Jonas must cross the boundary into Elsewhere in order to accomplish this. He decides to take Gabriel (the baby being nurtured by his family) with him after learning that Gabriel would be released the next day. Their escape is fraught with dangers, and the two are near death from cold and starvation when they reach the border of what Jonas believes must be Elsewhere. Jonas finds a sled waiting for him at the top of a snowy hill. He and Gabriel ride the sled down towards a house filled with coloured lights, warmth, love and a Christmas tree, and for the first time he hears something he knows must be music.

PART 2: ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT

Probably the most notable conflict in The Giver is between an enlightened Jonas and his controlling society. The more memories that Jonas receives, the more uncomfortable he becomes with the accepted way of life. He begins to see how lifeless their existence really is and recognizes the evils of sameness and being controlled.

This realization alienates Jonas from the people he loves. It causes a rift between he and his best friend Asher, who is turning into a "model" citizen; his attempt to talk to his family about "love" is met with confusion and absurdity; and he knows that the feelings he has for his friend, Fiona, will never be returned to him.

As time goes on, the realization that there is a better way to live prompts Jonas to act. The discord between the way things are and the way things should be finally becomes too much for Jonas to tolerate

and he makes the decision to liberate the people by returning all of their memories. This shows how much Jonas has changed in just a few months from a compliant, contributing member of society, to a revolutionary figure, and it highlights the idea that knowledge is a driving force in bringing about change.