Sample Discussion Questions

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

2. What challenges does *The Curious Incident* present to the ways we usually think and talk about characters in novels? 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?

3. 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). Christopher often fantasizes about being the only person left in the world. What is comforting about fantasizing about being the only person left in the world?

5. 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?

7. The Sherlock Holmes mystery, *Silver Blaze* was about the theft of an expensive racehorse from its stable. The inspector of Scotland Yard asked Holmes if there was any particular aspect of the crime calling for additional study. Holmes replied, "Yes," and pointed to "the curious incident of the dog in the nighttime." Inspector Gregory replied, "The dog did nothing in the night-time." Holmes said, "That was the curious incident." In this case, the failure of the dog to bark when Silver Blaze was stolen showed the watch dog knew the thief. This was an important material fact; it considerably reduced the number of suspects, and eventually solved the case. What is the significance of Haddon's title?

11. How does your experience reading this book relate to a quote Christopher likes from *The Hound of the Baskervilles*: "The world is full of obvious things which nobody by chance ever observes" (p. 73)?

13. 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, akin to the intelligence of true creativity" (*An Anthropologist on Mars* by Oliver Sacks, NY: Vintage Books, 1995, pp. 252–53). Does the novel's intensive look at Christopher's fascinating and often profound mental life 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? Do you think he will achieve his goal of becoming a scientist? Which of his characteristics would predict success and which would predict failure?

19. 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)?
23. Share your favorite passage from the book and describe its significance. Which scenes are comical in this novel, and why are they funny? Do these same situations also stimulate other feelings (i.e. sadness, empathy)?

29. Christopher Boone finds lies confusing. He believes that metaphors and novels are lies, and he claims he "can't tell lies" (p. 19). In fact, he declares, "...everything I have written here is true" (p. 20). How reliable is this narrator? What limitations does he have that challenge the readers' beliefs? In what ways do the minor characters function as informants who provide alternate points of view?

31. Christopher provides insight into his behavior on p. 7 when he begins to press his forehead on the ground, ignoring the policeman. However, the policeman does not have the vantage point that we have. If we were ignorant about Christopher in the way that the policeman is, what would we think of Christopher? If the policeman had known what we know about this narrator, how might he have approached Christopher differently?

37. On pages 83–84, Christopher explains why he doesn't like yellow and brown, and admits that such decisions are, in part, a way to simplify the world and make choices easier. Why does he need to make the world simpler? Which aspects of life does he find unbearably complicated or stressful? Can you relate?

41. 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?

43. One of the paragraphs on the back of the book cover states that Christopher Boone "has no understanding of human emotions." If you disagree with this statement, how might you revise it to make it reflect more accurately Christopher’s grasp of human emotion? Can you cite examples of situations where Christopher not only is feeling human emotions, but also clearly is aware that he is doing so?

47. Why is the dog on the cover upside-down?

53. One of the primary disadvantages of the autistic is that they can't 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. 115–16). 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?

59. An alternative approach includes structuring the discussion into questions about the reading experience (i.e. what did you appreciate most about this story? the least?); the narrator (i.e. what does Christopher see in the world around him? what details and things in this world does he share with his readers? what information about the world does he omit?); thematic elements (i.e. diversity- what makes us similar to or different from others); the plot (i.e. re-tell the murder mystery from a non-autistic person’s point of view. how might the plot change?); passages (i.e. read the first paragraph of the novel (p. 1). what do you learn about Christopher by reading this passage?).