

WU?@therep

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

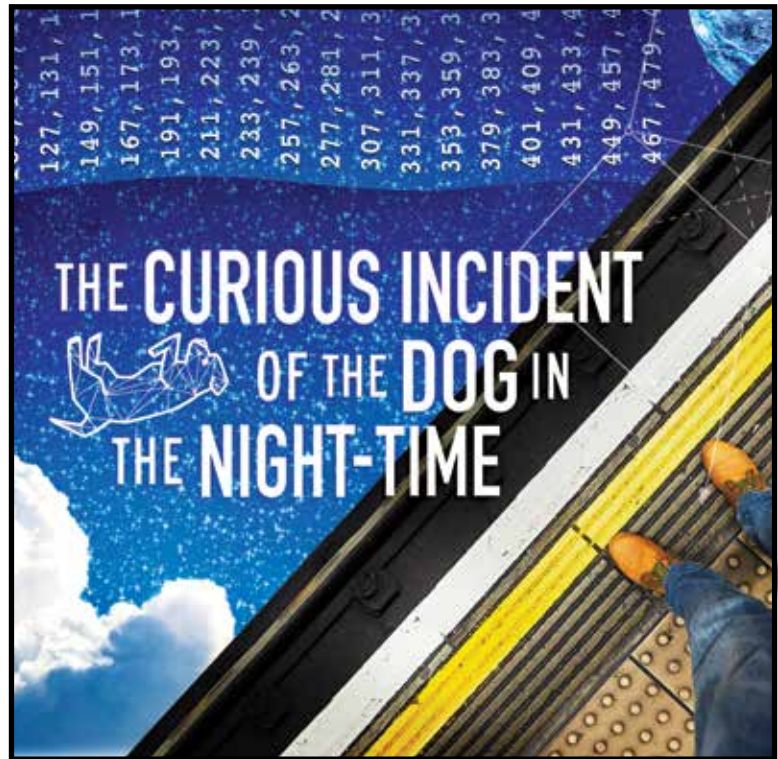
by Simon Stephens

Based on the novel by Mark Haddon

Directed and choreographed by Marcia Milgrom Dodge

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The Rep REPERTORY THEATRE ST. LOUIS



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At The Rep, we know that life moves fast—okay, really fast. But we also know that some things are worth slowing down

for. We believe that live theatre is one of those pit stops worth making and are excited that you are going to stop by for a show. To help you get the most bang for your buck, we have put together WU? @ THE REP—an IM guide that will give you everything you need to know to get at the top of your theatergoing game—fast. You'll find character descriptions (A/S/L), a plot summary (FYI), biographical information (F2F), historical context (B4U), and other bits and pieces (HTH). Most importantly, we'll have some ideas about what this all means IRL, anyway.

CU@therep!



The Teacher's Lounge

In an effort to make our educational materials accessible to students and easy for educators to incorporate into the classroom, our study guide is written in a student-oriented format. We hope that you will circulate this guide among your students in the weeks preceding your visit to The Rep, encouraging them to browse it before and after class and as time allows, using it as a launch point for both pre- and post-performance discussions. You may also want to visit our website, www.repstl.org, for additional information including activity suggestions and behind-the-scenes information. Any materials, either from this guide or from our website may be reproduced for use in the classroom.

NEATO!

As always, we appreciate your making live theatre a part of your classroom experience and welcome your feedback and questions.

HOW TO BE THE BEST AUDIENCE EVER!

TAKE YOUR SEAT

An usher will seat your class as a group, and often we have a full house with no seats to spare, so be sure to stick with your school until you have been shown your section in the theatre.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Before the performance begins, be sure to turn off your cell phone and watch alarms. If you need to talk or text during intermission, don't forget to click off before the show resumes.

BREAK TIME

This performance includes an intermission, at which time you can visit the restrooms in the lobby. Intermission is only 15 minutes though, so hurry back to your seat.

SNACK TIME

There is no food or drink permitted inside the theatre, so make sure you finish your snacks in the lobby before you enter the house.

NOW HEAR THIS

Just as you can see and hear the actors, they can see and hear you. Any talking, even whispering, can be heard by those around you and those onstage, so please wait until the show is over to chat.

NO PAPARAZZI PLEASE

The theatre is a camera-free zone. Flash photography interrupts the action onstage and is prohibited by Actors' Equity Association rules. You can sneak a peek at production photos on The Rep's website at repstl.org.

TAKE A BOW

Let the actors know you respect their work by responding to the curtain call at the end of the performance. Show your appreciation for a job well done through applause.

THANKS FOR BEING A GREAT AUDIENCE!

REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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A/S/L

CHRISTOPHER BOONE is a 15-year-old amateur detective investigating the murder of his neighbor's dog, Wellington, in order to clear his own name and discover the truth.

Christopher's father, **ED BOONE**, wishes for Christopher to stop his detective work, fearing that he will get into more trouble.

SIOBHAN, Christopher's teacher, helps him understand how to navigate the world around him. She also acts as the narrator for Christopher's mystery novel about Wellington's murder.

MRS. SHEARS is the owner of Wellington, the dog at the heart of Christopher's murder mystery. She and Ed have a complicated relationship as well.

JUDY, Christopher's mother, died before the murder of Wellington. During the course of his investigation, Christopher discovers secrets about her that he never knew before.

ROGER SHEARS, Mrs. Shears' husband, disappeared many years ago and becomes Christopher's prime suspect in the case of Wellington's murder.

MRS. ALEXANDER is one of Christopher's neighbors who helps him with his investigation and unravels a mystery that Christopher never knew existed.

H

ABREAST: Up-to-date, aware

ANEURYSM: A weakness in a blood vessel in the brain that balloons and fills with blood

BUBONIC PLAGUE: Also called "black death," it is a rare but serious bacterial infection that's transmitted by fleas and often carried by animals or vermin, such as rats

A-LEVEL EXAMINATION/ "A-LEVELS": A set of subject-based tests taken in the United Kingdom at the end of high school (around ages 17 or 18). They are used by colleges to determine admittance, like the ACT or SAT here.

PRECEDENT: An earlier event or action that becomes an example for future similar events or actions

ANEMIC: Describing those who suffer from anemia, or a shortage of red blood cells. This shortage can cause weakness and dizziness, among other symptoms.

DOUBLE BLUFF: The act of tricking someone by telling them the truth when you know they will think you are lying to them, resulting in them mistrusting the truth

RED MIST: A fit of extreme anger that clouds a person's judgment.

QUID/POUND: The currency in Britain

JESUS WEPT: An expletive used to express mild disbelief

BISCUITS: Cookies

BOLLOCKS: Nonsense

MOBILE: Cell phone

TUBE: The London subway system

ICED LOLLY: Popsicle



SPOILER ALERT!

This synopsis contains spoilers about the story of the show. If you wish to be completely surprised by what you see on stage, you may want to wait until after the play to read this article.

As *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* begins, Mrs. Shears' dog, Wellington, has died. He has a gardening fork sticking out of his side. It is standing straight up in the air, indicating that he has been murdered. He is discovered by 15-year-old Christopher Boone, Mrs. Shears' neighbor. Mrs. Shears discovers Christopher standing over the body and calls the police. The scene, as well as much of the rest of the play, is narrated by Siobhan, Christopher's teacher, who is reading from Christopher's retelling of the events.

Mrs. Shears calls the police, who arrive on the scene as Christopher becomes overwhelmed by the murder of Wellington. After a short line of questioning, the policeman attempts to touch Christopher, who screams and hits him. As a result, Christopher is taken to the police station. His father, Ed, arrives after some time to take him home; Christopher explains that he did not kill Wellington, and he is going to investigate to find out who did.

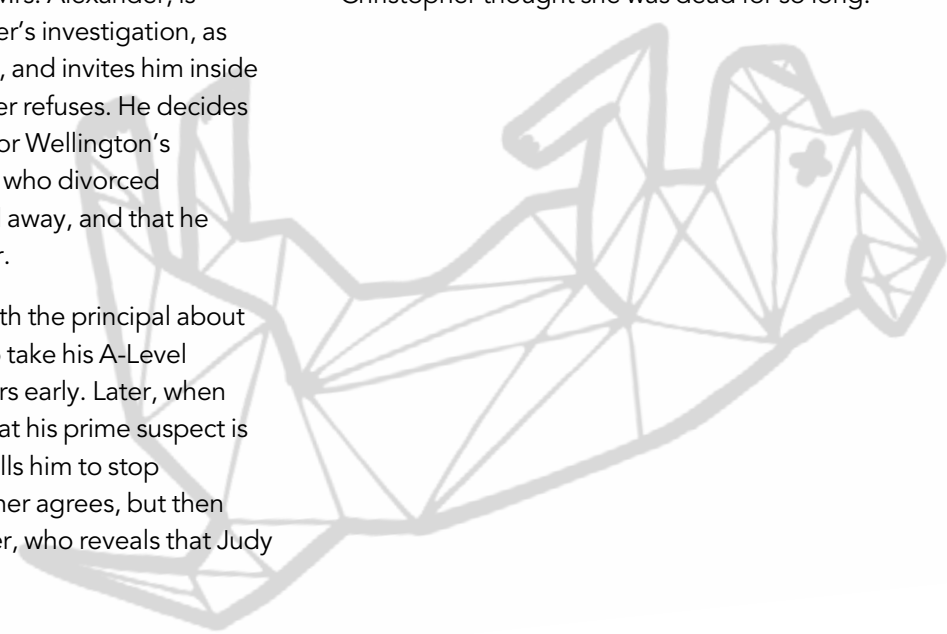
Through Siobhan's narration and a flashback, it is revealed that Christopher's mother, Judy, died two years before. She had a heart attack after becoming sick, and Christopher was not allowed to visit her in the hospital. As Christopher begins his investigation into Wellington's murder, he questions some of his neighbors, who are mostly unhelpful. One neighbor in particular, Mrs. Alexander, is interested in Christopher's investigation, as well as his pet rat, Toby, and invites him inside for cake, but Christopher refuses. He decides that his prime suspect for Wellington's murderer is Mr. Shears, who divorced Mrs. Shears and moved away, and that he must investigate further.

At school, Ed argues with the principal about allowing Christopher to take his A-Level Examinations a few years early. Later, when Christopher explains that his prime suspect is Mr. Shears, his father tells him to stop investigating. Christopher agrees, but then runs into Mrs. Alexander, who reveals that Judy

was having an affair with Mr. Shears before he moved away. Christopher remembers a day at the beach with his mom before she died. When Ed finds out that Christopher spoke to Mrs. Alexander, they get into a fight and Ed hits Christopher. He also takes away Christopher's book about Wellington's murder investigation.

The next day, Christopher looks around the house for the book he's been writing. He finds his book in his father's room, along with letters addressed to him from his mother. The letters reveal that his mother is still alive and living in London. Christopher is so overwhelmed that he gets sick all over himself. His father finds him with the letters and cleans him up, struggling to explain himself. When Christopher refuses to talk to him, Ed reveals that he killed Wellington in a fit of rage. The act ends with Christopher deciding that he is no longer safe with his dad and that he is going to go to London and find his mom.

At the start of Act Two, Siobhan asks Christopher if they can make a play out of his book, but he refuses, saying that acting is like lying and he hates lying. Christopher takes his father's credit card and goes to the train station, where he boards a train to London. Although overwhelmed by the station in London, Christopher is able to successfully find his mother's house in London. She is happy to reunite with him, but shocked to hear that Christopher thought she was dead for so long.



SPOILER ALERT!

That night, a policeman arrives to make sure that Christopher is safe, stating that his father had sent out a search for him. Christopher says he wants to stay with his mother, who is living with Mr. Shears. In the middle of the night, Ed arrives to take Christopher home, but he doesn't want to leave with his father. During breakfast the next morning, Christopher says he needs to go back home to take his A-Levels. Judy tells him that he won't be able to take his exams this year, which upsets Christopher.

Living with his mom and Mr. Shears becomes difficult, leading Mr. Shears to get drunk and attack Christopher. In the middle of the night, Judy takes Christopher and leaves London.

They return on the day Christopher is to take his A-Levels. Exhausted from traveling all night, Christopher finds it hard to concentrate on his exam. Slowly, Christopher begins to repair his relationship with his father. As the play ends, Christopher receives the results of his A-Level Examinations.

TRUTHS AND METAPHORS

The main plot of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* centers on the murder mystery of Mrs. Shears' dog, Wellington. The secret of who killed the dog becomes a driving question in the first act of the show. However, it is through his investigation that Christopher learns about even more secrets surrounding him, ones that he never even thought to consider. Conversations throughout the play with Siobhan reveal that Christopher is set against lies of any form; he absolutely refuses to tell lies himself and struggles to understand those who lie around him. In fact, Christopher goes as far as to state that all metaphors are lies, as likening something to something else is a form of deception. While Christopher himself is incapable of lying, he finds himself surrounded by people who are hiding the truth. The murder mystery of Wellington may drive the action of the play, but it is the reveal of these long-hidden truths that support the show's main conflicts. **While watching the play, try to imagine how different the story would be if all the characters were as honest as Christopher.**

RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

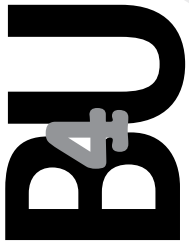
Christopher struggles to form relationships outside of those with his father, Siobhan, his pet rat Toby, and his mother. He is cautious around other people, refusing to let them touch him and referring to them as strangers. He openly states that he finds people confusing, as he takes

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everything they say literally and therefore cannot understand what they really mean. When Christopher discovers secrets about his parents, he finds himself overwhelmed and loses trust in his father almost immediately. The core of the second half of the play deals with Christopher struggling to trust his father once more, and explores the trust and relationships of those around him, specifically his mother and Mr. Shears. **How many people in your life do you trust, and what might have to happen for that trust to be broken?**

PERFORMANCE VS. REALITY

In Act Two, Christopher is asked if he might want to turn his murder mystery book into a play. However, Christopher says that he does not like plays, as acting is just another form of lying, in his opinion. It is not real, and is a form of deceptive performance. However, following this conversation, the play includes moments where it breaks the fourth wall and recognizes that it is actually a performance. Christopher redirects a moment to be more like how he remembers it, ensuring that the scene is as realistic as possible and Siobhan notes that Christopher's book is eventually turned into a stage play. We are made to understand that what we are seeing is the closest thing to the real story as a performance can get, and that this is a performance that has been carefully directed by Christopher himself. **While watching the show, consider how the play might work differently without these small moments.**



UNDERSTANDING THE SPECTRUM

Since the publication of Mark Haddon's novel in 2003, Christopher Boone has been labeled by critics and medical professionals alike as a young man on the Autism Spectrum. However, for those unaware of what exactly being on the Spectrum entails, Christopher is just a regular teenage boy with a larger than average intelligence and a different way of seeing and interacting with the world.

It is important to note that individuals with autism must be diagnosed with the developmental disorder by a licensed medical professional. There is no evidence in the play or Mark Haddon's novel to suggest that he has been formally diagnosed by anyone as having a developmental disorder, and further, Haddon himself has stated that he would not label Christopher as such due to his lack of a full understanding of the disorder. "I don't want him to be labeled, and because, as with most people who have a disability, I don't think it's necessarily the most important thing about him," Haddon has stated in response to claims about his character's understanding of the world.

However, Haddon's disclaimer has not stopped critics or even the publishers of his novel from assigning Christopher a place on the Spectrum. Why, for the past 13 years, has Christopher been considered autistic? What is it specifically about him that makes him a strong candidate for the label?

Autism is a serious developmental disorder than impairs the ability to communicate and interact with people. It is considered a fairly common disorder, with more than 200,000 cases in the United States per year. As it is a developmental disorder, it is commonly diagnosed as a person begins to develop socially, beginning around 3 years of age (though earlier diagnoses are not unheard of)

and continuing well into a person's later years. The severity of autistic symptoms can vary widely, with some individuals able to lead generally normal lives, while others require daily assistance to help combat their inability to interact with those around them.

People with autism may exhibit difficulty in social interaction, repetitive movements or persistent repetition of words or actions. Christopher's actions can and have been categorized accordingly, including his complicated interactions with strangers and family.

Christopher Boone has become a positive representation for the autism community, regardless of Haddon's original intention for the character. It is probably the lack of focus on this possible disability that allows for him to exist as more than just a teenager with autism. Christopher is an engaging and special individual who finds a way to navigate his world. He takes his A-Level Examinations two years early; he successfully travels away from home; he is fiercely independent. There is an understanding that no matter what medical professionals or others may diagnose him with, Christopher is fighting and finding his way through the world around him.

While Haddon may be averse to labeling Christopher as a representative of an entire community of people, it is still important to be aware of Autism Spectrum Disorders and what it means for people living with ASD. The likelihood of you meeting someone with autism during your lifetime is extremely high and it is beneficial to have an understanding of that person's struggle.

For more information on autism, you can visit autismspeaks.org or autism-society.org.



SIMON STEPHENS

Simon Stephens did not always want to be an award-winning playwright. As a young man, he enjoyed writing for fun, but he fully intended to be a singer-songwriter instead. However, it was during his time as a history student at the University of York that he became interested in theatre and the idea of writing for theatre.

In his early works, Stephens would begin with only characters and a setting in mind and then shape the play out of pages of freewriting. While this led to his plays being full of sharp and exciting dialogue, they usually also featured a weak plot. Later in his career, Stephens would begin each playwriting process with prewriting and planning before actually sitting down to write the play.

Stephens has been labeled as an “in-yer-face” playwright, being a strong proponent of “in-yer-face” theatre. This dramatic style emerged in Great Britain in the 1990s and was defined as “vulgar, shocking and confrontational material on stage as a means of involving and affecting their audiences” by theatre critic Aleks Sierz. Many of Stephens’ plays fit this criteria, including *Pornography* (2007) and *Punk Rock* (2009), the titles of which allude to the plays’ shocking nature.

Stephens has won multiple awards for his work in theatre, including two Olivier Awards for Best New Play (2006 and 2013), as well as a 2015 Tony Award for Best Play for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.



MARK HADDON

Mark Haddon is an English novelist who has written works of fiction for both young adults and adults. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, which is considered a novel for both youth and adults, is his best known work. He has won multiple awards, including the Whitbread Book of the Year Award in 2003 and the Guardian Children’s Fiction Prize.

While the first edition cover of *The Curious Incident* labeled Christopher as an autistic character, Haddon has stated outright that he does not consider himself to be authority on understanding and representing individuals with autism. However, this has not stopped critics from labeling the character as such, and Haddon has received a lot of positive feedback for his depiction of someone on the Autism Spectrum. The novel is included as part of high school curriculum in England, its country of origin, and the United States.

Haddon has written other works as well, including numerous titles for children and *A Spot of Bother*, his second novel for adults.

IRL

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time tells the story of a teenager struggling to navigate the world around him, discovering secrets that upset his previously innocent perspective of life and causing him to re-orient himself in an unfamiliar adult world. Stories of adolescence such as these have been told for as long as anyone has been telling and recording stories, across all types of media. An entire genre of literature known as coming-of-age stories commits itself to these narratives. Television shows and movies such as *The Fosters* and *Boyhood*, respectively, devote more of their screen time to characters' internal struggles than action and plot. What makes these stories about teenagers transitioning from childhood to adulthood so everlasting? Why do they seem to appeal to the masses, regardless of generation?

During the teen years, people find themselves in new and confusing places and situations. They go through physical, emotional and mental changes that affect their understanding of everything around them. While each

protagonist in a coming-of-age story is different and experiences different events that bring them into adulthood, they are at their core the same type of character: an innocent teenager that must mature in some way throughout the course of the story's action. From the first moments of the play, the audience understands that Christopher is a special protagonist; his story is different because he is different, and that is where the renewed interest in this typical story develops. It is how Christopher reacts to it that makes it new and exciting for the audience.

Have you ever found out something big about someone that you thought you knew really well? How did this new information change your relationship with that person? How do you feel about it now?

Think about how you would feel if you visited a new place without your parents. What about that new place might cause you to feel overwhelmed or frightened? How would you get through that situation?

BTW

If you enjoy *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, you may like these other coming-of-age works and murder mysteries:



The Perks of Being a Wallflower
by Stephen Chbosky

This novel follows 15-year-old Charlie as he shares his unique perspective of adolescence through letters written to an unknown recipient.



Dear Evan Hansen (musical)
Music and Lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul
Book by Steven Levenson

Socially awkward high school student Evan Hansen finds himself in the middle of a viral nightmare when a fellow student commits suicide and appears to have addressed his final note to Evan in this contemporary musical drama.



The Complete Sherlock Holmes
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Join Christopher Boone's favorite detective as he investigates murders with his friend Dr. John Watson in the incredibly famous British novels.