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**KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN SPEZIAL**

Textanalyse und Interpretation zu

**Lois Lowry**

# **THE GIVER**

Patrick Charles

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Analyse | Interpretation in englischer Sprache

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## 1. AT A GLANCE – THE MOST IMPORTANT POINTS

This study guide to Lois Lowry's *The Giver* is designed to provide an easy-to-use overview of the structure, context, themes and characters of the novel. Here is a quick rundown of the most important points.

**Part 2** takes a brief look at **Lois Lowry and her career**.

- ⇒ p. 9 → Lowry was **born in Hawaii in 1937**. Her father worked for the **US military**, so like many other military families they moved around the world a lot from base to base.
- ⇒ p. 11 → She wrote her first novel in 1977 and *The Giver* in the early 1990s. Its **contemporary background** is interesting but actually less relevant to the book itself than is frequently the case, in particular for dystopias or SF.

**Part 3** provides analyses and interpretations of the novel.

### ***The Giver* – Origins and Sources:**

- ⇒ p. 23 We have in Lowry's 1994 *Newbery Medal* acceptance speech an unusually detailed and open discussion of the precise influences and inspirations which combined to form *The Giver*.

### **Summaries:**

- ⇒ p. 30 Jonas is about to turn 12, at which point he and all other children his age will be given their Assignments, telling them what their future role in society will be. He is selected as Receiver of Memory, an unique and mysterious position. He trains with an old man called The Giver who is the only person in the community who has access

to the knowledge and memories of the past. Jonas learns that his world has decided to give up on or control everything which can potentially cause conflict or limit efficiency. This includes many bad things, like war, hunger, unemployment or chaotic social systems, but also things like colours, weather, love, family and individuality. Jonas becomes increasingly sceptical about the nature of this society until he finally sees that euthanasia is used to kill all unwanted or “inadequate” citizens in the community. He takes his baby brother Gabriel and escapes from the community.

### Structure:

*The Giver* is a linear, chronological narrative told from Jonas’ perspective. The book is short and divided into 23 chapters. ⇨ p. 42

### Characters:

There are really only two characters in the book, **Jonas and The Giver**. All other characters are limited by the social conditioning and the medication they take and are more like robots or pets than real individuals.

- **Jonas** – becomes 12 years old at the start of the book. An intelligent, brave boy with a great capacity for empathy. ⇨ p. 50
- **The Giver** – an old man who is feeling the burden of the memories he must keep and the pain he must carry alone. He is tired and sad. ⇨ p. 53
- **Jonas’ family** (mother, father, his sister Lily and baby Gabriel) ⇨ p. 54
- **Further characters:**
  - Fiona and Asher** (childhood friends of Jonas), **Rosemary** and **the Chief Elder**. ⇨ p. 56

**Themes:**

- ⇒ p. 60 The major themes we will look at in this study guide are **control, pain, Sameness and diversity, memory** (history and the past) and **choice**. Another major theme is **human connections**.

**Style and Language:**

- ⇒ p. 87 This is a particularly important aspect of the novel, because one of the major methods by the dystopian society in the novel to control the people is “precision of language”. The horrific secrets are hidden by euphemisms: truth and the very nature of reality is hidden or manipulated by the use of specific language.

**Interpretation:**

- ⇒ p. 99 → The book can be interpreted in the context of at least three genres to which it belongs – Young Adult fiction, science fiction and dystopian fiction.
- ⇒ p. 105 → There has been a major film adaptation (in 2014), which allows us a different perspective on the story and its themes.
- ⇒ p. 107 → Other ideas about interpretations of *The Giver*



## 2.1 Biography

## 2. LOIS LOWRY: LIFE &amp; WORKS

## 2.1 Biography

YEAR	PLACE	EVENT	AGE
1937	Honolulu/ Hawaii (USA)	20th of March: Lois (originally Cena) Lowry is born. She is the middle child of three. Her parents are Norwegian (father) and German, English, Scots-Irish (mother).	
1939	Brooklyn/New York (USA)	Her father was a dentist in the US military and like many military families, they had to move often. This was the first relocation of Lois' life.	2
1942	Carlisle/ Pennsylvania (USA)	When her father had to serve on a hospital ship in the Pacific during World War 2, the rest of the family moved back to Lois' mother's hometown.	5
1948– 1950	Tokyo (Japan)	Her father was stationed in Japan and the family lived on a military base for a couple of years. Lois returned to the US to attend high school.	11–13
1954– 1956	Providence/ Rhode Island (USA)	Lois studied at Pembroke College for two years until she married Donald Lowry.	17–19



Lois Lowry  
(\*1937)  
© 2016 Larry D.  
Moore<sup>1</sup>

1 2016 Larry D. Moore CC BY-SA 4.0 [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lois\\_Lowry\\_2016.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lois_Lowry_2016.jpg)

## 2.2 Contemporary Background

## 2.2 Contemporary Background

Lois Lowry wrote *The Giver* in the early 1990s. She had already been a professional writer for nearly 20 years by that time. It is maybe surprising for a writer to have their most famous and critically acclaimed work come in the middle of their careers, rather than in an explosion of energy at the beginning or as a crowning achievement towards the end.

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**SUMMARY**

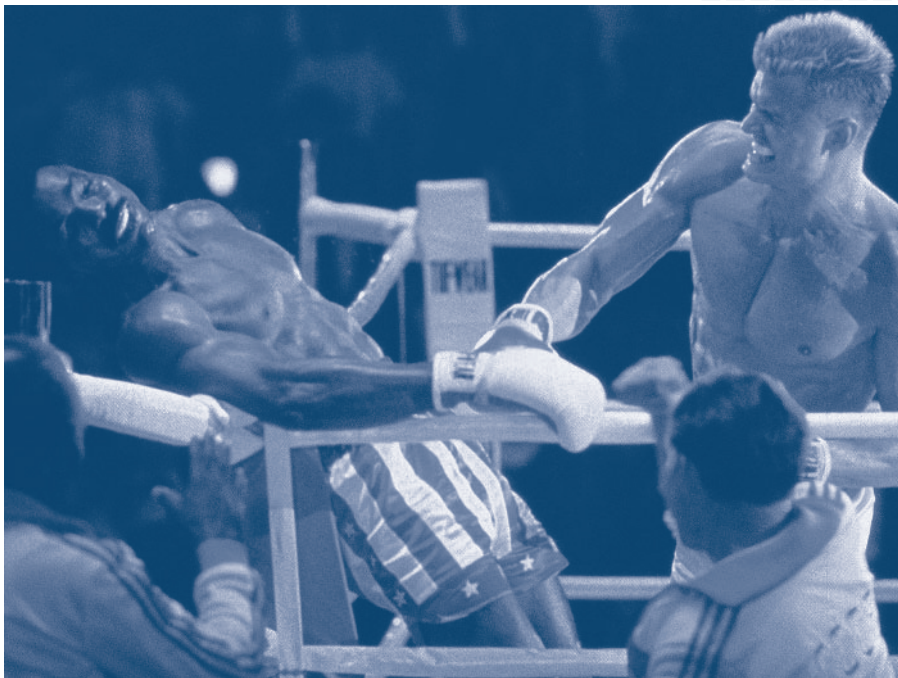
### The 1990s and the “end of history”

The early 1990s were a strange time in history. Following the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the **reunification of Germany**, many people thought that the world had reached what was called “the end of history”. This was a philosophical idea made popular by Francis Fukuyama 1992 in his bestselling book *The End of History and the Last Man*. Fukuyama’s idea, very basically, is that Western-style liberal democracy had “won” the competition between different political and social systems, and that from this point on all people and countries would be increasingly on the same path to shared **enlightenment, progress, peace and security**. Formerly competing ideologies like Communism and extreme nationalism would become weaker and would vanish into history.

End of the Cold War

But this view of the world turned out to be premature and optimistic. Within just a couple of years it was clear that rampant nationalism was still widespread, China’s capitalist-Communist hybrid system was becoming an increasing concern for Western nations, and globalised terrorism had a historic comeback in the public eye with al Qaeda’s 9/11 attacks. By the turn of the millennium Fukuyama’s theories seemed quaint and lost to history.

## 2.2 Contemporary Background

**Pop culture: Hybridisation and self-awareness**

In pop culture, **the 1990s** saw the beginning of a widespread process of fusion and hybridisation. This occurred in cinema, music and literature. **Previously underground or subcultural musical genres became increasingly mainstream** – this was most dominantly and lastingly true of hip hop, which in the 1980s was seen by the mainstream as being a gimmick or an underground phenomenon, and is now possibly the single most popular pop music genre in the world.

Movie scene from *Rocky IV* (1985) with Dolph Lundgren as Soviet boxer Ivan Drago. © picture alliance/ Everett Collection

## 2.3 Notes on Other Important Works

## 2.3 Notes on Other Important Works

Lowry has written more than 40 books for children and young adults. She has won and been nominated for many prizes for her work, including the most prestigious awards in the field of children’s literature, including the *Hans Christian Andersen Award* and the *Newbery Medal* (twice). Her most famous, popular and acclaimed books are *The Giver* (1993) and *Number the Stars* (1989).

### SUMMARY

Many of her books have been multi-volume series, like *The Giver*, which became a quartet, and the *Anastasia* series for younger readers, with nine books written between 1979 and 1995. She has also written several stand-alones and an autobiography. Her most recent book was *Gooney Bird and all her Charms* (2014), the sixth title in the *Gooney Bird* series for younger readers.

Writer for young people

Lois Lowry has written too many books to present them all in this study guide, but here is **an overview of a few of her most important published titles.**

### ***The Giver* Quartet**

Lowry says of the “sequel” to *The Giver* that she imagined a world “of the future [...] one that had regressed instead of leaping forward technologically as the world of *The Giver* has”<sup>4</sup>. All of the books are set in the same world, but each one has a different protagonist.

4 *The Giver*, US edition: author interview, p. 6. Or <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/review-giver-tripreading-morgan-1200->

## 3. ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATIONS

### 3.1 Origins and Sources

Lowry's inspirations and sources for *The Giver* were her own memories and her thoughts about how memory works. The other major themes of conflict and individualism are also drawn from her own experience and thoughts about life. In her 1994 *Newbery Medal* acceptance speech, Lowry gave an unusually detailed and thoughtful account of the accumulated inspirations and origins of the book.

#### SUMMARY

In her acceptance speech when she was awarded the *Newbery Medal*<sup>10</sup> for the second time in 1994, Lois Lowry spoke in detail about things from her own life which had influenced *The Giver*. She uses **a river as a metaphor for a life**, for the accumulation of memories and influences, and for the idea of the past and the passage of time itself. She quotes from *The Giver*, a scene where Jonas looks at a river and “the history it contained ... there was an Elsewhere from which it came, and an Elsewhere to which it was going”<sup>11</sup>. She then uses this idea of “Jonas looking into the river and realizing that it carries with it everything that has come from an Elsewhere” as an expression of “the origins of this book”. Staying with the river metaphor, Lowry says that the individual memories she is about to discuss are like tributaries (small streams which flow into a river to increase it in size) which have contributed not only to the river

The river

<sup>10</sup> [www.walden.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Newbery\\_Award.pdf](http://www.walden.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Newbery_Award.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 17: p. 102.31–34.

## 3.1 Origins and Sources

of her life, but to the river which was the creative process which became/gave birth to *The Giver*.

Lowry's Newbery Medal

It is relatively **unusual for a writer to talk so openly and in such detail about the specific events**, feelings and situations which contributed to creating something. This is not just because of shyness or a desire for privacy or wanting to cultivate an aura of mystery: it is probably very often also just because a lot of writers aren't able to precisely identify where and how their ideas developed and grew, and what the original seeds of an idea actually were. Lowry's *Newbery Medal* acceptance speech is therefore an interesting and rare example of a writer talking very openly and in great detail about the specific details of how an idea grew over the years to become a novel.

Note:

Pay attention to the repeated mantra of “comfortable, familiar, safe” throughout the speech: this is something Lois Lowry has identified as a common thread throughout all these memories, and which is one key to *The Giver*.

These are **the memories and inspirations** Lois Lory talks about in her 1994 acceptance speech:

→ When she was 11 years old in 1948, Lois moved with her family to **Tokyo in Japan**. They lived in an entirely American environment. Later as an adult she asked her mother why they hadn't tried to interact more with Japanese people and learn more about the culture and the country, and her mother is surprised. “She said that we lived where we did because it was comfortable. It was familiar. It was safe.” Driven by curiosity, 11-year old Lois rode her bike out of the American area into another part of Tokyo, where she was overwhelmed by the

## 3.2 Summaries

## 3.2 Summaries

### SUMMARY

*The Giver* is organised in 23 numbered chapters. The book is short, so the chapters are also quite compact. Here is a brief synopsis of the major events and developments in each chapter, with the page number of the beginning of the chapter provided.

- The first seven chapters can be treated as a kind of **introduction** to this strange world.
- The **plot** begins in chapter eight, when Jonas is selected as the new Receiver of Memory.
- We will look more at **the structure and organisation** of the narrative of *The Giver* in the chapter in this study guide on 3.3 Structure (p. 42).

### 1 (p. 9)

Jonas is nearly 12 years old. He is returning home on his bicycle. At home he has dinner with his family (parents and younger sister Lily) and they go through a ritual of talking in turn about their feelings. He is feeling apprehensive about the approaching **Ceremony of Twelve**.

### 2 (p. 16)

At dinner, Jonas' father reminisces about his own childhood and tells Jonas what he can expect from the coming Ceremony of Twelve.

### 3 (p. 23)

Jonas' father brings a **baby** home to care for, one with pale eyes like Jonas. Lily is excited and talks about potential Assignments. Jonas

Baby Gabriel comes into the family

## 3.2 Summaries

recalls an incident at school where he had been publicly shamed for taking an apple, and thinks about why **the apple** had caught his attention: he had seen it change in some way he can't describe while he and Asher had been tossing it back and forth.

**4 (p. 28)**

Jonas goes to do his volunteer work, and looks for his friend Asher. He finds him working at the House of the Old. Jonas, **Asher and another Eleven called Fiona** are helping to care for the elderly ("the Old"). The woman Jonas is helping, called Larissa, tells him about a release they had celebrated that morning.

House of the Old

**5 (p. 34)**

The family's morning begins with the ritual of **Dream-telling**, and Jonas tells his family about a vaguely disturbing dream he had had about the girl Fiona. The dream has sexual connotations, with Jonas' strongest impression being "*wanting*" (p. 35) the girl, and he doesn't understand this and feels awkward and uncomfortable. Jonas' parents tell him he has experienced "the Stirrings" (first sexual feelings of desire). **The Stirrings** must be reported – which he has done – and treated with pills. His mother gives him a pill and tells him he will now be taking them for the rest of his life. Jonas is on the one hand proud to now be taking the pills like everyone else above a certain age, but he also in a way misses the warm and exciting feelings of sexual desire which he had briefly experienced in his dream.

The pills



## 3.3 Structure

## 3.3 Structure

## SUMMARY

- The narrative of *The Giver* is linear and chronological: it begins at a certain point (Jonas' life, shortly before the Ceremony of Twelve) and moves forward through time without taking detours into other characters' perspectives or into other time frames.
- The structure, like the language of the novel, is clear and efficient. The content of the book – its concepts and messages – are in reality quite complex and deep, and are presented as clearly as possible.

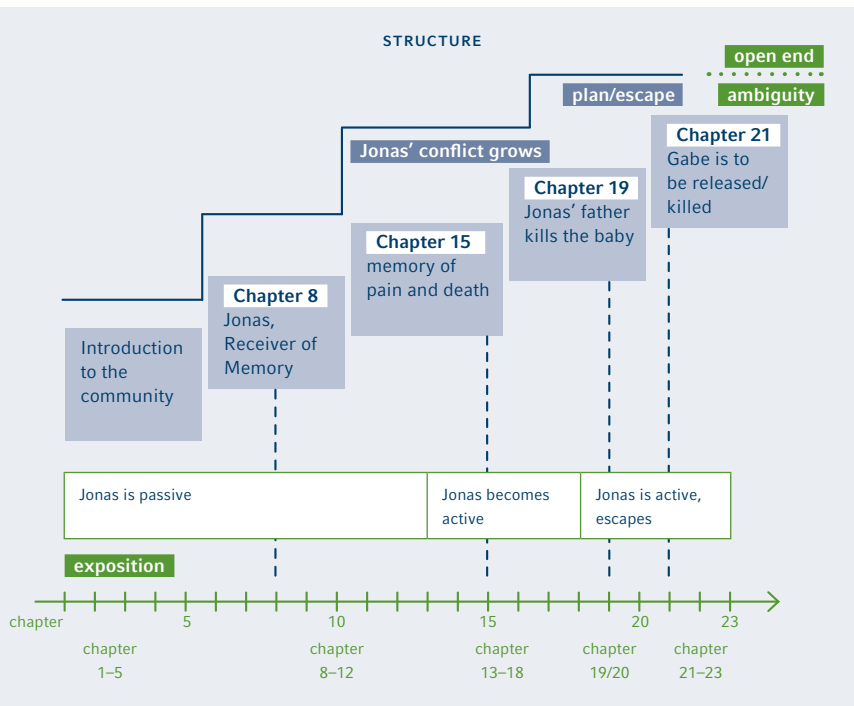
Jonas' view of things

The dynamic motion of the story takes a couple of huge leaps forward as the narrative unfolds. At the beginning it is quite **steady and uneventful**: we are introduced to the fictional world. Then Jonas becomes the Receiver, and the story jumps forward, because our perspective (which we share with Jonas) changes radically. And then, very quickly, everything changes again, this time in a quite disorientating manner, when we learn from The Giver about Sameness, and how this world has been reshaped (literally) to ensure that there is Sameness everywhere and in everything. This revelation causes a dramatic and fundamental shift in how Jonas sees the world – and, again, how we see it, because **as readers we share Jonas' perspective**: we don't have any more information about the world than he does, we don't have an omniscient narrator giving us a God's-eye view of what is happening.

Euthanasia

The next big leap in the story is a traumatic one, in which Jonas watches **his father kill a baby** and learns the truth of "release" (pp.113–117). From this point on everything is different for Jonas.

## 3.3 Structure



## 3.4 Characters

## 3.4 Characters

The characters in *The Giver* are not what you might expect from a book you are reading for school. They aren't rounded, "real" people at all – and this is quite intentional. The characters are products of a society which has been focussed on control and Sameness for generations, and so have very little individuality or personality – or even free will.

---

**SUMMARY**

*The Giver* may be the first book you have read (at school or for yourself) which intentionally does not contain "real" characters. There are **only two real characters in the book – Jonas and The Giver**. The others have more in common with robots than with real people, and this is not because Lois Lowry lost interest while she was working on the book, or because she was unable to write more convincing characters – it is because **this is what the world of the book is about**.

Figures like robots

Because we are dealing with a world in which physical differences have been either genetically erased or have become basically invisible thanks to social conditioning, it is not actually possible to provide the physical descriptions of the characters we would include in a chapter like this. We know that Jonas has "pale eyes" (p. 23.7) and that Fiona has red hair. We know the ages of most of the characters, sometimes quite precisely – Jonas, Fiona, Asher and Lily are explicitly given ages – and sometimes by context: Jonas' parents we can assume to

Note:

## 3.4 Characters

be in their 30s to 40s, we can assume that the Chief Elder is probably older than 50, and we know that The Giver is an old man (but, it is suggested, not as old as he looks, the implication being that his work has aged him prematurely – see p. 63.25–35). But this is the limit of what we as readers can know about the characters in the book.

**Jonas**

Jonas is the main character in the book. Jonas is a healthy young boy. He has “unusually pale eyes” which suggest hidden depths (p. 23).

At the start of the story he is eleven years old, about to turn twelve, at which point he will be told by the Elders of his community which Assignment he will follow for the rest of his life. Surprisingly for everyone, at the Ceremony of Twelve he is told that he will be the community’s new Receiver of Memory. Around this time his family is given a new baby to care for, called Gabriel.

He begins his training with the old man known as The Giver. The training is surprising, challenging, sometimes hard and painful, and Jonas learns about the origins of the society in which he lives. He learns about the decision, made generations ago, to pursue the goal of Sameness in order to minimise conflict and increase efficiency. **He learns that the people have been denied all opportunities to choose, even down to the ability to see colours.** The desire for efficiency through Sameness means that the landscape, the weather and humanity itself has been manipulated to erase all differences and potential sources of conflict. But the memories of everything which has been removed have been kept: and the Receiver of Memories is the individual within the community who must keep all the

Manipulated  
environment

## 3.5 Themes

## 3.5 Themes

## SUMMARY

The themes in *The Giver* have to do with control, pain, Sameness and diversity, memory (history and the past) and choice. Another important theme to consider is the one which Lowry believes to be her most important theme as a writer: human connections. In this chapter we will look at examples of these themes and how they are approached in the book.

## Pain

The two most important themes in the book are **pain and control**. Lois Lowry says in an interview with *The Washington Post* that “I don’t think thematically but narratively. [...] The themes emerge in retrospect.”<sup>13</sup> The interviewer believes, however, that Lowry’s central theme “is the problem of pain”<sup>14</sup>. This was true of her debut novel, which was a fictionalised treatment of the death by cancer of her older sister at the age of 28, and is also true of *The Giver*. The heart of this dystopia, the reason for all the control, manipulation and euthanasia, is the desire to eradicate things like conflict, misery, suffering, grief, uncertainty and insecurity – in short, **to erase pain**. How do we as humans deal with “the problem of pain”? This book provides one possible answer: by creating a controlling society in which everything possible is done to remove the chance of experiencing any kind of pain, no matter the cost in quality of life, freedom of will or the balance of positive emotion and sensation.

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/michael-gerson-lois-lowrys-the-giver-is-a-serious-summertime-movie/2014/07/17/8390d6cc-0de6-11e4-8341-b8072b1e7348\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.81310626ffe7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/michael-gerson-lois-lowrys-the-giver-is-a-serious-summertime-movie/2014/07/17/8390d6cc-0de6-11e4-8341-b8072b1e7348_story.html?utm_term=.81310626ffe7)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

## 3.5 Themes

The first experience Jonas has with transmitted **memories of pain** comes in Chapter 14 (pp. 87–91), in which The Giver also explains to him the importance of pain and suffering as a source of wisdom. The most intense and traumatic experience of pain is the **memory of warfare** (Chapter 15, pp. 94–95).

### Control

The dominant theme of the narrative of *The Giver* is control. The society we see is **very strictly regulated**, and even though breaking some of the rules (i.e. by being rude) doesn't automatically mean that you'll be severely punished, there is a strong element of self-regulation among the citizens which stops them from breaking the rules. The community has developed a sense of shame and obedience and **a fear of non-conformity** in its citizens which means that they will behave in a predictable, controllable way. Their only true bond must be with the Community. Each individual is like a jigsaw piece, which must fit perfectly into a larger picture (the community): pieces which don't fit are "released" (killed).

The book contains many examples of how this total control is implemented by the Community, including daily medication to suppress feelings, the self-regulating system of shame and honour, the education and conditioning to embrace **Sameness, the euthanasia, and the historical changes** made to the landscape, the weather and the genetic makeup of the people of this world. The nature of the society we see is defined by its **need to control everything** about the citizens' lives, from their weight and behaviour as new-born babies to how they spend their days as adults to their euthanasia when they are too old to be useful (and before they become a burden to themselves and others).

The plot of the story – Jonas' growing rejection of the Community and decision to escape with Gabriel – is driven by the main charac-

Pain must be erased

Jonas – his life is being controlled

## 3.6 Style and Language

## 3.6 Style and Language

Language and how it is used is very important in *The Giver*, and this is clear from the opening chapter. The importance of language as a theme influences the style of the narrative: in a book which talks about language, it's important to look at how the book talks.

## SUMMARY

Children's book writer Kate Milford read *The Giver* as an adult, having missed it when she was younger, and writing from the perspective of a professional writer of fiction for young people, she is envious of **Lois Lowry's writing style**: "It's such a good argument for things I'm not good at, elegance and brevity, for example."<sup>23</sup>

The prose of *The Giver* is careful, direct and precise. The two great principles of restraint in writing – **less is more** and **show, don't tell** – are in full effect in this book. Both approaches help to amplify the occasionally shocking events and revelations in the story, enhancing the effects of the story and increasing our sense of involvement in what we are reading.

Careful, direct and precise

**Less is more**

The idea that minimalist techniques can **produce intense and magnified effects** is common to any artistic medium, from fashion to literature to architecture. In *The Giver*, this approach can be seen in the prose style. Lois Lowry doesn't waste adjectives and complex sentences and persuasive or manipulative turns of phrase on

Minimalist

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/08/reading-lois-lowrys-giver-adult/324361/>

## 3.6 Style and Language

describing the world and the behaviour and thoughts of her characters. There is a great deal of restraint in her writing style. So on those occasions when the story requires a shock, and the language becomes more intense – for example, the memory of the aftermath of a battle in chapter 15 (pp. 94–95) – the effect is much greater precisely because the text surrounding this moment has been so calm and controlled.

This stylistic approach **reflects the content and message of the novel** – it is an integrated approach. This is a world which has had all its colour, conflict, confusion and chaos removed, along with any sense of pain, ecstasy, desire and exhilaration. The style of the novel reflects this **Sameness** – with the exceptions of those moments when Jonas, in his training, is exposed to memories of extremes of human experience and emotion. This technique helps to increase and amplify **moments of emotional or atmospheric intensity**.

**Show, don't tell**

This approach again can be found in any creative medium. The idea is to **not explain everything to the audience**, which would normally place a distance between the audience and the mediator (the author). By explaining too much the author becomes a guide to what is being presented (the story). The audience is kept at arm's length, so to speak, and while they may be given a lot of information about the author's world, the author is always standing between them and the world.

The opposite approach is to **show the world and let it explain itself**. This approach – what we experience as initially confused readers when confronted with the strange, overly-ordered world of the community in *The Giver* – allows the audience (or reader) to be more directly involved in the story. The author steps away from our line of sight, and no longer stands in the middle, telling us what

Linguistic  
intensityInvolved in the  
story



## 3.7 Approaches to Interpretation

## 3.7 Approaches to Interpretation

*The Giver* is a dystopian science fiction novel for young adults. Dystopian literature is about the here and now. It is always a warning – about what the consequences could be of developments and processes the author sees at work in his or her own time and environment.

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**SUMMARY**

*The Giver* can be categorised in at least three genres: **Young Adult fiction (YA)**, **science fiction (SF)** and **dystopian fiction**. These three terms are all used to describe genres these days, but should be treated with care.

### Young adult (YA) fiction

YA fiction is considered a kind of stepping stone for readers between children's books and the open world of fiction for adults. It tends to deal with topics and themes which are relevant to the target audience. Protagonists are always teenagers. YA fiction is not limited to one specific type of story – love stories, family tragedies, apocalyptic SF, etc. – but instead can cover a very broad range of genres. The pressures, conflicts, joys and **chaos of adolescence** provide a lot of material for any kind of setting or story.

YA fiction for readers aged roughly 12 to 18

This is because YA fiction is not, strictly speaking, a literary genre. It is instead a **marketing and publishing term** designed to identify and target a specific audience. However, all the different kinds of stories and genres now included under the term YA fiction do have some important literary features in common.

Marketing tool

The most important feature common to YA fiction is a focus on **issues relevant to the age group**. The uncertainty, intensity and

## 3.7 Approaches to Interpretation

Age-based  
topics: “growing  
pains”

complexity of adolescence provide the substance for “YA fiction. These issues are treated seriously (even if they are sometimes presented in a comic or unrealistic way). Because YA fiction is aimed at this specific age group, the narratives are typically **direct, fast moving and plot-driven**. This means that YA books will usually not include lengthy monologues about psychological issues or descriptive passages about landscapes and weather. They will very rarely, if ever, be patient meditations, and will instead present narratives driven by conflict, crises and turmoil (again, these can vary in extremity from teen heartbreak to apocalyptic wars). **The tone and language** used in YA fiction is also important. It should speak to the intended audience, not *about* it. YA stories are often first-person narratives, or are told from a close third person perspective. The narrative voice in YA fiction should be, and usually is, the voice of its intended audience.

**Famous examples of YA fiction:**

- The novels of John Green, e.g. *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012). Many of Green’s books have been adapted for the cinema.
- *The Hunger Games* (2008–2010) novels by Suzanne Collins. The novels are strongly influenced by the classic Japanese dystopian thriller *Battle Royale* (1999).
- *Ender’s Game* by Orson Scott Card (1985) is a YA novel which is genuine SF and also presents a dystopian future society in which children are trained from a very young age to fight wars against an alien species. Card’s novel is not intentionally a work of YA fiction – it was written and published long before the marketing concept had been developed.
- J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter books* (1997–2007)
- Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight books* (2005–2008)

## 4. CRITICAL RECEPTION

### SUMMARY

*The Giver* has had a complicated reception. It has been among the most popular and widely-read YA books in America, but it is also one of the “most challenged”.

*The Giver* has an interesting critical history. The book has been extremely successful commercially and has won many literary prizes and awards. Critics respected and praised it, **readers love it**, schools all across America and around the world have used it in the classroom, and it was popular enough to inspire three sequels and a film.

Ambiguous  
reception

And yet it is one of the “most challenged” books in the USA, from its publication<sup>33</sup> until well into the 21st century<sup>34</sup>. This means that **it has been the subject of attempts to have it removed from schools and libraries**. Many efforts have been made to stop teachers from using it in the classroom.

### Praise and accolades

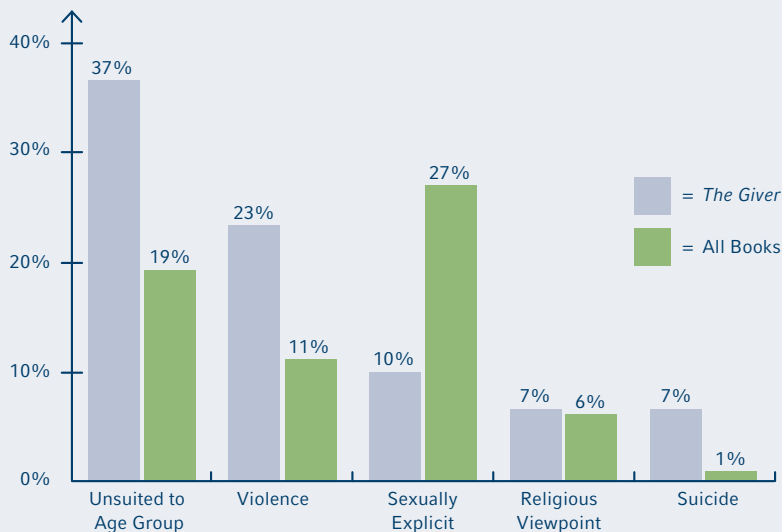
Nearly 20 years after its publication, *The Giver* was still one of the **most popular children’s books in the USA**<sup>35</sup>. It has sold over 10 million copies worldwide, and its success was prolonged by three sequels which followed in later years (*Gathering Blue* 2000, *Messenger* 2004 and *Son* 2012).

See chapter 3.1,  
p. 23

33 <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/100-most-frequently-challenged-books-1990%E2%80%931999>

34 <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/top-100-bannedchallenged-books-2000-2009>

35 <http://blogs.sij.com/afuse8production/2012/07/07/top-100-chapter-book-poll-results/>

TOP FIVE REASONS *THE GIVER* HAS BEEN CHALLENGED<sup>47</sup>

Sameness, the irony here is almost too perfect – **removing choice and freedom in order to protect.**

The accusations made about *The Giver* are primarily concerned with **suicide and euthanasia**.<sup>48</sup> The infographic from OIF shows the reasons given for challenging *The Giver*:

The specific complaints are that Rosemary’s request to be “released” is equivalent to a demand for suicide, and that the killing or

Dark topics not  
condemned  
strongly enough

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif>

<sup>48</sup> Suicide is the act of taking one’s own life, and euthanasia is “the practice of killing without pain a person who is suffering from a disease that cannot be cured”. See *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*.

## 5. MATERIALS

### Lowry on Science Fiction and *The Giver*

In this interview Lois Lowry is asked about a number of topics and books she has written. Her comments about the relationship between *The Giver* and science fiction are interesting – her attitude to this genre and the way she uses it is quite defiant and stubborn:

*"The Giver*, if I remember correctly, was published in 1993. It was different from my previous books and I knew that when I was writing it. I've never liked science fiction so I never thought of it as science fiction, although some people who like to use categories have put it in that category. But what it is is a book set in a future time. And for me it was like writing realistic fiction. I created a place, created a character – he's a boy about to be 12 – and here's where he lives and here's what it's like. And because it's in the future, it's very different from our contemporary way of life – but not in a sense of technology. I didn't deal with any of that – just in the way it's evolved into a place with a complicated set of rules, all of which are designed to make the world in which he lives very safe and very comfortable."<sup>50</sup>

### The film adaptation: *The Giver*

The film adaptation (in German *Hüter der Erinnerung*, 2014) is available on DVD, Blu-Ray and on video streaming platforms like Amazon Prime or Maxdome.

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50 <http://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/lowry/transcript#thegiver>

For more information about this film and a discussion of how it can be compared to and used with the book, see chapter 3.7 Interpretations in this study guide (p. 105).

The DVD of the film has a few special features which are also interesting and relevant for anyone studying the novel. The details of these special features are also discussed in Chapter 3.7 (p. 105).

### **Taylor Swift on *The Giver* and her role in the film**

The country-pop megastar was cast as The Giver's dead daughter Rosemary, the former apprentice Receiver of Memories. Her role in the film attracted a huge amount of attention – she was at the time without question one of the two or three biggest pop stars in the world. Interestingly, she had actually read the book while at school and says of it “it blew my mind”. Here are links to a YouTube video (Taylor Swift – *The Giver* Press Conference) and an article from the UK newspaper *The Daily Telegraph*.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHJ5TBvB6YM>
- <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/11033049/Taylor-Swift-The-Giver-celebrates-what-I-hold-dear.html>
- [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/michael-gerson-lois-lowrys-the-giver-is-a-serious-summertime-movie/2014/07/17/8390d6cc-0de6-11e4-8341-b8072b1e7348\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.81310626ffe7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/michael-gerson-lois-lowrys-the-giver-is-a-serious-summertime-movie/2014/07/17/8390d6cc-0de6-11e4-8341-b8072b1e7348_story.html?utm_term=.81310626ffe7)

Reactions to  
the film

## 6. SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Die Zahl der Sternchen bezeichnet das Anforderungsniveau der jeweiligen Aufgabe.

### Task 1: \*\*

*The Giver* has been challenged many times by parents, teachers, librarians and other individuals. Here are brief summaries of four challenges. Choose one and write a defence of the book, addressing the concerns in the challenge.

1. 1994/California: Four parents complained violent and sexual passages were inappropriate at Bonita United School District in La Verne and San Dimas and the book was temporarily banned.
2. 1999/Florida: Challenged but retained at Lake Butler public middle school after a parent complained of infanticide and sexual awakening discussed in the book.
3. 2003/Missouri: Challenged in Blue Springs after parents called the book "lewd" and "twisted" and "pleaded for it to be tossed out of the district". After a review by two committees and a recommended retention the controversy continued.