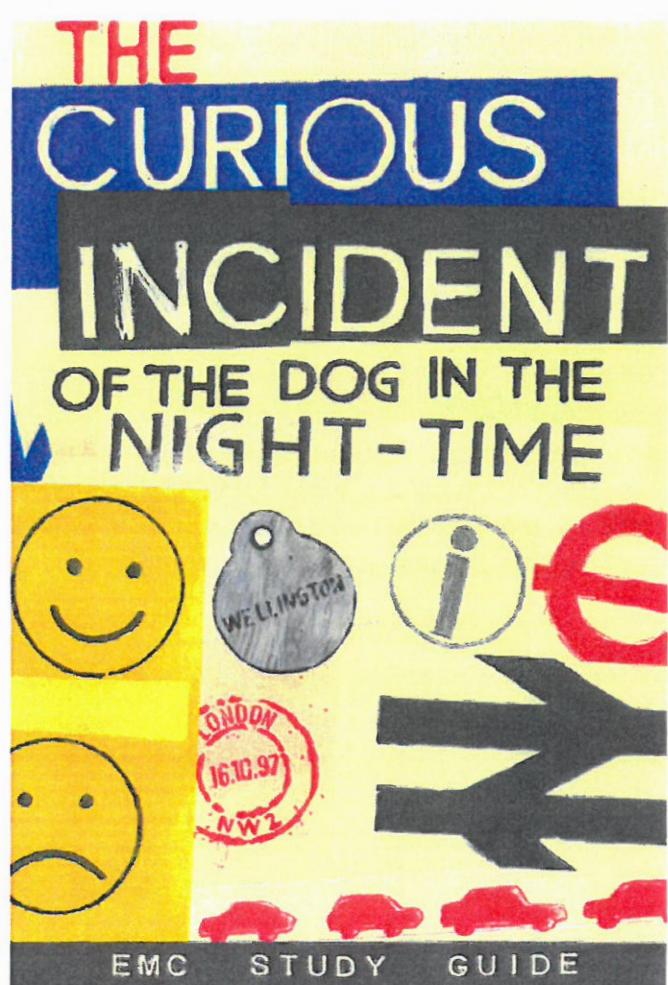


The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time: An EMC Study Guide



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Structure/Composition

You've now read Mark Haddon's novel The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time.

Look at some of the ingredients from the novel listed below. Decide the order of which you find them in the story about Christopher Boone. Make sure to give examples from the novel to substantiate your analysis of the composition of the book.

- A journey
- A problem that sets the story going
- A complication
- A resolution – some sort of solution for the problem (could be happy, sad, surprising, thought provoking and so on)
- A further complication
- Introducing the characters and settings
- Climax – the highest moment of drama or tension
- A discovery
- An investigation

Looking back - Chapters 2-53

Writing task

First person narrator

One of the advantages of using a first person narrator is that the reader sees the world from someone else's point of view.

- With a partner, choose an event from the novel so far and re-write it from the point of view of one of the other characters.
- Talk about what is gained and what is lost when you tell the story from this new point of view. For example, one effect of having Christopher tell the story is that we can understand some of his behaviour because he explains his reasons, such as why he starts groaning.
- As a class, talk about what sense you have so far of the way Christopher sees the world.

Discussing structure

Alternating chapters

You may have noticed that the chapters alternate between what is happening to Christopher in the story in the present and information about him, or memories of the past.

- Talk about what you have learnt about Christopher from the chapters that are not directly telling the story.
- Talk about why you think Mark Haddon uses this alternating structure, for example:
 - how does it create tension?
 - why is it useful to have background information about Christopher?

Christopher's observation skills

Here are some of the descriptions Christopher gives us of people on his street.

She was wearing boots which looked like army boots and there were 5 bracelets made out of a silver-coloured metal on her wrist and they made a jangling noise.

1

He smelt of body odour and old biscuits and off popcorn which is what you smell of if you haven't washed for a very long time ...

2

Mrs Alexander was wearing jeans and training shoes which old people don't normally wear. And there was mud on the jeans. And the trainers were New Balance trainers. And the laces were red.

3

- Talk about what you notice about Christopher's descriptions and his observation skills. You could talk about some of the questions that follow.
 - What is included and what is left out of his descriptions of people? Why is this?
 - How many different senses are used in the descriptions? What is the effect of this on the reader?

After reading Chapter 107

Sherlock Holmes and the curious incident

Christopher loves Sherlock Holmes, one of the most famous fictional detectives. Holmes was created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and first appeared in a short novel called *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887. The title of this book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* comes from a Sherlock Holmes short story called 'The Silver Blaze'.

- Read the extracts below which are all taken from Sherlock Holmes stories.
- Discuss what you can tell about Sherlock Holmes from these four extracts and whether he has anything in common with Christopher. Then talk about why you think Christopher might enjoy stories about this detective.

Sherlock Holmes explains how he was able to guess, just by looking at someone, that they had been to China:

'The fish that you have tattooed above your right wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks, and have even contributed to the literature on the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch chain, the matter becomes even more simple.'

The Red-Headed League

1

'My dear Watson,' said he [Holmes], 'I cannot agree with those who rank modesty among the virtues. To the logician all things should be seen exactly as they are, and to underestimate one's self is as much a departure from truth as to exaggerate one's own powers.'

The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter

2

It was not that he [Holmes] felt anything akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind.

A Scandal in Bohemia

3

Holmes, who loathed every form of society ... remained in our lodgings in Baker Street, buried among his old books ...

A Scandal in Bohemia

4

Looking back - Chapters 59-139

Talking about language and style

Connective detective

- As a class, remind yourselves what a 'connective' is.

One type of connective is the 'causal connective'. This is a word or phrase which links causes and effects. Causal connectives are usually used in sentences explaining why something happened. Examples of causal connectives are:

because	so that	as a result
it follows that	since	for
consequently	therefore	which means that

- Count how many causal connectives you can spot in Chapter 59.
- Talk about why you think Mark Haddon uses so many causal connectives when writing in the character of Christopher, using evidence from the text to back up your view. Start by talking about whether or not you agree with the following statements.

The causal connectives show that Christopher thinks in a logical way, always looking for connections between causes and effects. 1

The use of causal connectives doesn't have anything to do with Christopher's character – it's just Mark Haddon's writing style. 2

To Christopher the world is a chaotic and confusing place. His use of causal connectives shows that he has to work harder than most people to make sense of things and explain them to himself. 3

Christopher doesn't have a wide vocabulary. 4

Mark Haddon wants us to see things from the point of view of someone with Asperger Syndrome, so he has Christopher explain his thought processes, which are often unusual. 5

Christopher is a typical teenager, always wanting to know why things happen. 6

Discussing character

Father

- Look at the statements about Father below. Put them in rank order with the one you most strongly agree with at the top.

Most people would find Christopher difficult to deal with but Father copes brilliantly. 1

Father is not very good at being a parent. He should be more patient with Christopher because he knows how difficult things are for him. He should certainly never grab him, shout at him or hit him. 2

Father obviously understands his son very well. 3

Father just loses his temper sometimes because the situation is very stressful, especially after Mother leaves. 4

Father really loves Christopher. 5

Father doesn't really understand how Christopher's mind works. 6

Most parents and children lose their tempers with each other sometimes. Christopher and his father are no different from anyone else. 7

Father is generally good at dealing with Christopher but the way he lied about Mother being dead, that was really awful. 8

I understand why Father lied to Christopher and told him Mother was dead. 9

I think Christopher would be better off away from Father, in an institution, with staff who are trained to look after people like him. 10

- Write your own statement expressing your opinion of Father, or choose one of the statements above if it sums up your opinion.
- Compare your statement with those of others in the class. Is the class mainly in agreement, or are there a lot of differences of opinion? Why do you think this is?

The discovery - Chapters 149-173



READING ON... Chapter 149

After reading Chapter 149

A conversation with Siobhan

- If you did the activity on Chapter 127 (page 35 of the study guide), remind yourselves of the role-play prediction you made about the conversation between Siobhan and Christopher when she asks him about the bruise on his face.
- Talk about how Mark Haddon chose to write the conversation. Do you agree with the way he presented the characters?

Building up tension – storyboard activity

- In groups, talk about which moments in the chapter you found tense and why.

One of the techniques Mark Haddon uses to build tension is to switch the focus of attention from Christopher to his father. This interrupts the action and creates suspense about what will happen next. For example:

- Christopher sees the shirt box. His book is in it. He wonders whether or not to take the book. This is interrupted by Father shutting the van door outside. (*The reader wonders whether Christopher is going to be caught and get into trouble for being in his father's room.*)
- Christopher sees an envelope addressed to him in the box. He thinks it might be addressed in Mother's handwriting. This is interrupted by Father opening the front door. (*The reader thinks, 'Come on! I want to know what's inside the envelope!'*)

This technique of switching focus to slow down the action and create suspense is often used in films or on television.

- Choose the part of the chapter that was most tense for you. You will need a section about two pages long.
- Storyboard this section of the chapter to show how you would film it, creating tension by switching between different parts of the action. For example, for the section above, your first shot might be the inside of the box as Christopher looks inside to see his book. The next shot might be outside the house with Father climbing out of the van and shutting the door. To help you set out your ideas you could use the storyboard template on page 40 of the study guide, photocopied to A3. Remember to number each shot to show what order they should go in.

THE DISCOVERY

CHAPTERS 149-173

On screen

Sound

On screen

Sound

On screen

Sound

On screen

Sound

What you see on screen

Sound (music, dialogue, sound effects)

On screen

Sound

Looking back - Chapters 179-227

First person narrator

- Talk about how the use of the first person narrator keeps the interest of the reader in this section. You could think about the following questions.
 - Does the use of the first person make the story seem more realistic? How?
 - Does the use of the first person make you care more about what happens to Christopher? Why?
 - Does the use of the first person give you a new perspective on ordinary things, such as catching a train? How?

Speaking and listening activities

Should Christopher live with Mother or Father?

As a class you are going to prepare and take part in a hearing to decide whether Christopher should live with Mother or Father.

- Split the class into six groups. Each group is going to prepare a contribution to the hearing from one of the people listed in the table below.

People involved	Interests
A social worker, representing Christopher	Not very interested in what is good for the parents. Christopher's needs are most important.
Siobhan, Christopher's teacher	Likely to be mainly concerned for Christopher but has seen Father do a good job in caring for his son.
Mr Jeavons, the school psychologist	Considers what would be best for Christopher's mental health. Will explain the need for a child with Asperger to have stability.
A lawyer representing Mother	Will put the case for Mother to have full custody as strongly as possible.
A lawyer representing Father	Will put the case for Father to have full custody as strongly as possible.
Mrs Alexander, a concerned neighbour	Probably the closest thing Christopher has to a friend. Hasn't had a good impression of Father.

- Each group should prepare a one-minute contribution. Support your opinions with evidence taken from the novel. You need to take into account practical considerations, such as suitable accommodation and arrangements for education, as well as emotional considerations.
- After all six contributions, take a vote on whether you think Christopher should live with his mother or his father, or whether they should have joint custody.

After reading

The title of the book

The title, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, is taken from a Sherlock Holmes story called 'Silver Blaze'. In this story a valuable race-horse has been stolen from its stable. The police suspect either a band of gypsies who were camping nearby, or a stranger who visited the stable the day before. Sherlock Holmes disagrees with the police inspector who asks:

'Is there any other point to which you would draw my attention?'
 'To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.'
 'The dog did nothing in the night-time.'
 'That was the curious incident,' remarked Sherlock Holmes.

- Can you work out why this might be an important clue in the story? (Answer at the bottom of the page.)

It is typical of Sherlock Holmes that he is the only person who realises the significance of this fact. This is because, like Christopher, he is very observant, and very logical.

- Talk about why Mark Haddon might have chosen this title for the novel, and whether you think it is a good title.

Should the title be changed?

Many people have criticised the title *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Some people say it is too long, with one reviewer saying it was 'a mouthful'. Others say that it doesn't sound very interesting, or that they can never remember it.

- Work in pairs. One of you will role-play Mark Haddon and the other will play his literary agent (the person responsible for trying to get the book published).
- Before you start, the person role-playing Mark Haddon should think of all the reasons why he might have chosen this title for the novel. The person playing the agent should think of at least one alternative title and some of the reasons people, including publishers, booksellers and readers, might not like the original title.
- Role-play a conversation in which Mark Haddon and his agent talk about whether the title should be changed before the novel is sent off to various publishers to try to persuade them to take it on.

(Answer: The horse must have been taken by someone the dog knew. If a stranger had broken into the stables, the dog would have barked.)

AFTER READING

Looking at language - Christopher's voice (2)

Usually when we talk about 'voice' we mean the noise that a person makes when they speak or sing. 'Voice' in a novel or a poem means the way a writer, or a character created by the writer, expresses themselves. This can include the language they use, the attitudes they have and the 'tone' (for example sarcastic or sad). The voice in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* is Christopher's voice, but of course he is not a real person. So how does Mark Haddon make us believe in Christopher's voice?

In an interview, Mark Haddon said:

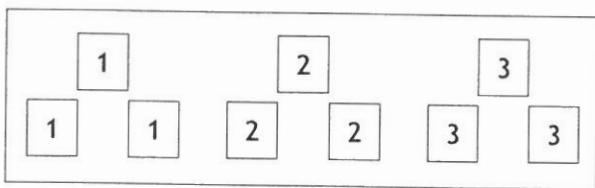
What I started with was the image of a dog with a gardening fork in it. Then I got Christopher's toneless voice.

This 'toneless voice' is typical of someone with Asperger Syndrome. In real life this means that the voice of someone with Asperger Syndrome can sound monotonous – in other words their feelings are not expressed in their voice.

Jigsaw investigation

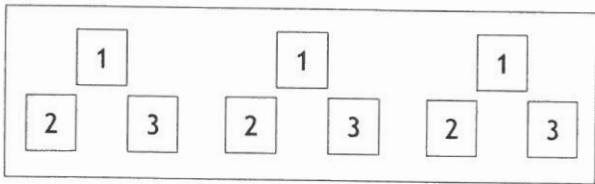
- Look again at the section from Chapter 53, when Father tells Christopher his mother has died of a heart attack (from 'Father said he didn't know what kind of heart attack' to 'and I beat her 247 points to 134').
- Try reading it aloud in different tones of voice, for example passionately, angrily, sadly, unemotionally. Which best suits the way it is written? Why?
- Now investigate the text more closely by following the steps below.

You are going to start in 'expert' groups of three, researching one aspect of the text (see page 61 of the study guide). When you have become an expert in this area you are going to move into new 'sharing' groups of three, joining people who have researched two other aspects. You are then going to teach the other people in this sharing group what you have learned in your expert group. If the number of people in your class doesn't divide by three, one or two of the expert groups could contain four people, with two of the people going together when feeding back to their 'sharing' group. The diagram below will help you to see how this activity will work.



Stage 1: Expert groups

Group members work together. Each group researches a different aspect of the text.



Stage 2: Sharing groups

Each person feeds back from their expert point of view so that all three aspects are covered in each group.

Expert groups

- Start in groups of three people. This is your expert group. Each three is going to investigate one aspect of the extract. Your teacher will tell you which aspect to focus on from the following list.
 - **Connectives:** make a list of all the connectives you can spot in the extract. Talk about what you notice, for example whether there is much variety or whether you notice any repetition. Now think about how Haddon has used connectives to help create Christopher's 'voice'.
 - **Types of sentences:** there are four main types of sentences – statements, exclamations, questions and commands. Make sure you know what each of these is. Now look at the extract. Talk about whether Haddon uses a variety of sentence types for Christopher and then think about how he has used sentence types to help create Christopher's 'voice'.
 - **Attitudes and feelings:** talk about what kinds of things Christopher tells the reader, for example, facts, feelings, scientific information, memories, details about other people. Then talk about how this helps create Christopher's 'voice'.
- As you come up with ideas, make a note of them. You will all need to do this as you are going to join a new group to teach them about your aspect of the text.

Sharing groups

- Form new groups of three containing one person who has studied each aspect of the text. Take it in turns to explain what you found out about the text.
- When you have finished, work together as a group to write a paragraph explaining how Mark Haddon gives Christopher a voice. You could use the sentence starters suggested here to help you.

The way Mark Haddon uses ... makes Christopher's voice sound ...

By using ... the writer gives the impression that ...

When Christopher ... the reader thinks ...

Another way Haddon creates a realistic voice for Christopher is by ...

The use of ... helps the reader to imagine ...