

In The Giver, by Lois Lowry, a community's collective memory is restricted to several generations, and due to the generational segregation that occurs, this memory is further stunted. Furthermore, as the members of the oldest generation die, their shared and experiential memories are lost, which serves to continually limit the community's memory to a few generations. Older memories are housed in one elder, who passes them on to a Receiver every generation or two. That person's job is to use those older memories to provide the rest of the elders and community with wisdom. Oddly, though, when a receiver leaves the community, whether he or she dies or travels outside the community to Elsewhere, the old memories he or she has pass back to the general community, and they have no choice but to experience the full force of this knowledge. The Giver's solution to the problem in the story is to murder Jonas. He uses a different term for the deed; he calls it escape. Nevertheless, his plan is to kill the boy and himself, which will return the community to its original state. The community would once again be left without a Receiver and would resemble the community that existed back and back and back.

It seems odd, that The Giver, who professes that the very necessity of memories is to provide humans with wisdom and who is a man then that should possess it, thinks the only solution to a lifeless existence, such as the one experienced by his community, is more death, more "release." Ironically, the community's answer to suffering and even minimal discomfort, is death and so is The Giver's. The book then supports the human need for the concept of death as a means of release from earthy suffering and the hope of Elsewhere, whether its labeled as heaven or whatever, as an alternative plane of existence where life is

better. This book really is about faith. No matter what we may do to ourselves or to our world in the future, if humanity is to survive, it must not destroy faith.

The Giver is overwhelmed by the burden of his responsibilities and the magnitude of the information that he alone knows, and this weariness, along with other motives, drives the Giver to devise a plan to kill Jonas. As Giver, he is taxed with the job of providing the community with wisdom. It is his role to store all the experiences, sensations, and memories from back and back and back and to interpret and apply this knowledge. If his advice is sound, the community benefits, but if he gives bad advice, he must bear the brunt of the consequences. It is an enormous load to carry. It is a load, that when combined with others, forces him to see one solution to his, Jonas', and the community's problems, which is to destroy the Giver-Receiver cycle. He expresses how tired he is to Jonas early in chapter 10. He describes how the previous Giver transmitted all the memories from long ago and explains the need for the Receiver to use this knowledge to gain wisdom and shape the future. Just the thought of it exhausts him. He says he is so "*weighted* with them" (Lowry 78), and using a simile, he equates the heaviness of his responsibilities to a winter pastime. He says, "It's like going downhill through deep snow on a sled ... At first it's exhilarating ... but then the snow accumulates, builds up on the runners, and you slow, you have to push to keep going" (Lowry 78). The construction of the sentence, with its emphasis on the end of the sled ride when the snow, which symbolizes all the information from the past that the Giver carries, piles up, expresses the Giver's tiredness. The excitement of the downhill run is explained with only *one* word -- exhilarations. Obviously the Giver is more than just

a little weary from years and years of carrying this load of responsibility, he is bowed and bent by it; he is ready to break. This exhaustion contributes to his motives for wanting to kill Jonas.

Later in the novel, The Giver's frustration with the instructors and elders of the community is made apparent. The exasperation he feels provides another motive for murdering the boy. Everyone in the community has one-generation memories, but those are not enough to provide the residents with wisdom; centuries of knowledge are necessary for that. Furthermore, the elders of the community do not want to bear the burden of responsibility that comes along with wisdom. The Giver is angry because the teachers, who lack wisdom, only relate to the students strings of meaningless facts, and the elders, after years of not having to be responsible for decisions, have become too comfortable with turning those responsibilities over to the Giver and those who came before him. For example, in chapter 13 when Jonas recalls how his instructors explained the workings of the brain, The Giver replies "bitterly" that, "They know nothing" (Lowry 105). Jonas is shocked by this statement and considers it an "accusation" that is beyond "rude" (Lowry 105). The Giver goes on to explain that, "... without the memories it's all meaningless" (Lowry 105). Finally, when Jonas realizes that he is to become another in the long line of Receivers who will carry the load of centuries of wisdom, The Giver, with a smile that is "oddly harsh," calls this responsibility a "great honor" (Lowry 105). The diction, syntax, and descriptive language in this exchange are telling; words such as meaningless, bitterly, and harsh reveal the Giver's frustration.

He is a man who is fed up with the status quo. He is a man who has had enough. This frustration, combined with his weariness, motivates him to hatch a plan to kill Jonas.

The first true glimpse of The Giver's plan to kill Jonas comes in chapter 18, more than three quarters of the way through the book, when The Giver realizes that death, or release, as the community calls it, may be the answer to everyone's suffering, including his present anguish, the pain that Jonas will inherit when he completes the training, and the lifeless existence the community endures. The Giver-Receiver tradition that the community has created and perpetuated ensures a grim future, and the Giver sees only one solution; the cycle must be broken. Jonas' curiosity about the previous Receiver results in a conversation that centers on the topic of release. This focus provides the Giver with the seed of the idea to end the cycle, and he hints at his tentative plan. Jonas asks about his predecessor, and the Giver, in replying, reveals that he was notified that the previous Receiver, Rosemary, had requested release and that he never saw her again. As The Giver relates the story, Jonas sees the visible signs of the pain its telling produces. The narrator says, "It was obvious that it saddened The Giver very deeply" (Lowry 143). Furthermore, as the exchange progresses and Jonas asks what would happen if he were to leave the community for any reason, The Giver, in the midst of explaining the consequences such an action would cause, begins to suggest a plan. Though he does not complete the thought, he does offer clues that the plan involves his harming Jonas. Lowry writes:

"I suppose," he said slowly, "that I could -- ... If you floated off in the river, I suppose I could help the whole community the way I've helped

you. ... I'm glad you're a good swimmer, Jonas. But stay away from the river." He laughed a little, but the laughter was not lighthearted. His thoughts seemed to be elsewhere, and his eyes were troubled. (145)

At first glance, it seems what The Giver says suggests that his intentions are obvious; he is going to help Jonas escape and help the community deal with that loss.

However, the narrator's additions suggest a more sinister plan. His laughter is described as "not lighthearted," and his eyes are "troubled." The Giver clearly intends to harm Jonas, not help him.

Later in the book, the plan to kill Jonas is revealed. The boy believes that he will escape with The Giver's help and strike out for Elsewhere on his own; however, The Giver, with his vast storehouse of memories, knows what awaits the boy. He knows Jonas cannot possibly survive on his own. Furthermore, he does truly care about the boy and would not willingly send him to a painful and prolonged death. He was overwhelmed by the death of Rosemary, his daughter, and would not want to endure that pain again. The only way out of their situation is for The Giver to kill Jonas. The narrator provides the details for the plan, revealing that "The Giver would transfer every memory of courage and strength that he could to Jonas (because) [h]e would need those to help him find ... Elsewhere..." (Lowry 185). The proof of The Giver's intent is not so much in what will be provided, certainly courage and strength would be valuable to an escapee, but given that The Giver would know what sort of world awaits the boy, it would make sense for him to pass along specific survival skills, too. Yet, he doesn't. Additionally, The Giver is in control of the entire escape, including plans to drive Jonas out of the community, but the narrator does

not explain how far The Giver plans to drive or where he plans to drop the boy off. Also, according to the plan, upon The Giver's returning, he would "... immediately begin the Ceremony of Loss" (Lowry 161). The key word here is immediately. If he wanted an escape plan to succeed, to seem genuine, he would allow some time for the community to search for the boy. He doesn't want to create that illusion, though. Every element of the plan suggests that The Giver intends to kill Jonas.

Many would argue the idea that The Giver, who is a caring and wise man, would murder his successor is preposterous, but the strongest proof against them is that there is no conclusive evidence in the book that Elsewhere is a physical place. Rather, it is far more likely that Elsewhere is nothing more than another moniker for a different reality that is devoid of suffering – another Heaven, another Nirvana, another Valhalla, another ever-after, etcetera. The Giver, in devising a plan to end The Giver-Receiver cycle, knew that Release was the only real escape to Elsewhere. He had to kill Jonas. Early in the book, Jonas asks why such things as snow and sleds don't exist anymore. The Giver explains that weather was controlled to ensure crop production, that the landscape was flattened to facilitate transport of goods, that injury and suffering were eradicated so that people could be happy. Everything is made equal. The Giver calls it "Sameness" (Lowry 84). The name "Sameness" does not allow for the possibility of variances; if it did, it would not be called "Sameness," which suggests that the entire physical world has been subjected to this equalization. There cannot be a physical Elsewhere. Furthermore, Jonas repeatedly "feels" that there is a somewhere else, which suggests a non-physical otherworld rather than a tangible someplace.

Heaven, in its various forms, is a universal concept, but as this book suggests, man's efforts to create such a place would fall far short of any sort of Wonderland. In fact, it would be boring and monotonous. In a word, it would be lifeless. That's precisely why The Giver, who knows exactly what price has been paid for such a world, wants to end everyone's suffering. The only way he sees to do this is to end The Giver-Receiver cycle. He has to die, and in order to be sure he succeeds in ending the cycle, he has to ensure that Jonas dies. He has to murder him. So The Giver is no hero. This is a cautionary tale. In the future, when humans are able to master and manipulate so much of the world around them, our only saving grace will be faith. Like Jonas, we must believe and feel that Elsewhere is somewhere out there; otherwise, we will see murder and suicide as the only solutions to our earthly pains and suffering. Otherwise we will all become The Giver.

Works Cited

Lowry, Lois. The Giver. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.