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# Book Club in a Box

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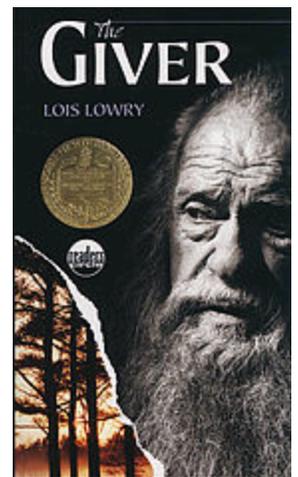
# THE GIVER

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## About the Book

Jonas's world is perfect. Everything is under control. There is no war or fear of pain. There are no choices. Every person is assigned a role in the community. When Jonas turns 12 he is singled out to receive special training from The Giver. The Giver alone holds the memories of the true pain and pleasure of life. Now, it is time for Jonas to receive the truth. There is no turning back.

-Laurel Leaf



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## About the Author

Lois Lowry has written more than 20 books for young readers and received many citations and awards, including Newbery Medals for her novels *Number the Stars* (1989) and *The Giver* (1993). Lowry was born in Hawaii and lived in New York, Pennsylvania and Tokyo, Japan before settling in New York for high school. She attended Brown University, but dropped out to get married and start a family. The mother of four children, she

completed her college education in Maine and worked as a writer and photographer. Since the 1970s she has published novels known for expressing realistic life experiences, including the trilogy *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue* and *Messenger* and the *Anastasia Krupnik* series of books. Some of her other books are *A Summer to Die* (1977), *Autumn Street* (1979) and *Rabble Starkey* (1987). She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. -www.who2.com

## Q & A with Lois Lowry

### ***Do you have pets?***

I have always loved dogs. So do my kids and grand-kids. I have lots of grand-dogs, including one that is the tiniest dog you can imagine, a toy chihuahua named Penny Lane who can ride around in my daughter's pocket with her head sticking out. One of my books (*Stay! Keeper's Story*) is about a dog who writes poetry (but it is pretty awful poetry).

### ***Do you have children?***

I had four wonderful children who grew up to be four wonderful adults. One of them, sadly, was killed in a plane crash in 1995.

### ***Grandchildren?***

Four: three boys and a girl.

### ***How do you get your ideas?***

This is the question I am asked more than any other question. Cab drivers ask me, and kids ask me, and my dentist asks me, usually when my mouth is wide open and he has his hands inside it. The problem is that there isn't any easy answer. I wish I could give you the name of a mail-order place where you could send for ideas. But ideas come from your imagination. If you are a writer you are also an observant person. All writers are. And when you observe something, your imagination begins to play. Suppose you see a child crying, in an airport. No big deal. But if you are a writer, you start to think: what if that child is being kidnapped? Or: I wonder if that child is in pain; maybe he has appendicitis, and his parents don't know it. And then you get on your flight, and you never see the crying child again, but the ideas stay there, in your imagination....

### ***How do you think of titles for your books?***

I always think of the title last. I re-read the book after I have written it and I think: what is this book about? Then I try to think of a short phrase that will convey something of that. Sometimes I

actually find the phrase within the book. That's where the title of *Number the Stars* came from.

### ***What happened at the end of THE GIVER?***

I made the ending ambiguous on purpose. "Ambiguous" means that it can have different explanations. I like to leave it that way so that each reader can use his or her imagination and decide what is happening. But I do think it is a happy ending.

### ***Yes, I understand all that, but please would you tell me what really happened?***

No. Cut it out.

### ***Who is the guy on the cover of THE GIVER? I read that you took his photograph.***

He was a painter named [Carl Nelson](#). I photographed him when he was in his eighties and still painting wonderful paintings - mostly of flowers. He had a fabulous garden. Later he became blind. But he said, then, that he could still see flowers in his memory. Doesn't that make you think of *The Giver*? Carl Nelson has been dead now for a number of years, but I'm glad his photograph makes people know about him and his work.

### ***How about a sequel to THE GIVER?***

The book called *Gathering Blue* is not a sequel, but it is a companion book to *The Giver*: set in the same future time, but in a different place. And now there is a third book, called *Messenger*, which uses characters (including Jonas!) from the first two books. The three books together form a trilogy, and I hope the third book answers some of the questions that were left in your mind after the first two. (Of course, it will raise new questions, too, because that's what good books are supposed to do!).

**Is there going to be a movie of THE GIVER?**

The movie of THE GIVER is in its early stages. The company called Walden Media...which made HOLES...is working on it. And Jeff Bridges is involved. (In Hollywood, they say, "attached." Jeff Bridges is attached. But that makes me think he is dangling there from a paper clip or a safety pin.)

**What was it like to win the Newbery Medal? What does the real medal look like?**

The Newbery Medal looks just the way it does on the book cover. Except it is real metal, of course - bronze - and fairly large - about four times as large as a quarter. And heavy. If they weren't so heavy I could have my two Newbery Medals made into earrings!

**How do you choose names for your characters?**

Sometimes I take the names of kids who write to me. I use a first name from one and a last name from another. Here's a funny way to create names, incidentally: use the name of your pet combined with the name of the street you live on. My daughter could create Penny Laguna that way. My son could create Amelia Bowdoin. And a friend of mine came up with Petunia Sunset!

**What is your favorite book?**

Two of my favorites of my own books are Rabble Starkey and Autumn Street.

**What was your favorite book as a child?**

I had a lot of favorite books when I was young but I think my all-time MOST favorite was "[The Yearling](#)" by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. By clicking on the title you can see the actual copy I had as a child, with its beautiful illustrations by N.C. Wyeth. I also loved "Indian Captive" by Lois Lenski (partly because the author/illustrator had the same name I did), and "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" by Betty Smith.

**Do any of your books come from your own life?**

Autumn Street, A Summer to Die, and Looking Back are all autobiographical. Looking Back has a lot of photographs from my own life. It is non-fiction. The other two are fictionalized—that means they were made into stories.

**How long does it take you to write a book?**

Usually it takes me about six months to finish a book. Then it goes to the publisher. Usually they will ask me to do some revisions. Sometimes I whimper and whine and say, "Do I have to?" They are stern and say "Yes, you have to," because they know that revising makes a book better. The process of revision adds about another month to the process.

**How can I get to be a writer?**

Read a lot. I mean really a LOT. And when you're reading, think about how the author did things. How did the author create a character who is interesting? Read the first paragraph of Anastasia Krupnik or the first two pages of Gooney Bird Greene and see if you can figure out how I created those two characters. Think about: how did the author create suspense? Read the last sentence, for example, in Chapter 12 of Number the Stars, or the last sentence in Chapter 1 in Gathering Blue. What do those sentences accomplish?

**If I become an author, will I get rich?**

No. If that is your goal, you should think about becoming an orthodontist.

**Other Works by Lois Lowry:**

Gathering Blue

The Messenger

Anastasia Krupnik (series)

Number the Stars

## Discussion Questions

1. In *The Giver*, each family has two parents, a son, and a daughter. The relationships are not biological but are developed through observation and a careful handling of personality. In our own society, the makeup of family is under discussion. How are families defined? Are families the foundations of a society, or are they continually open for new definitions?
2. In Jonas's community, every person and his or her experience are precisely the same. The climate is controlled, and competition has been eliminated in favor of a community in which everyone works only for the common good. What advantages might "Sameness" yield for contemporary communities? Is the loss of diversity worthwhile?
3. Underneath the placid calm of Jonas's society lies a very orderly and inexorable system of euthanasia, practiced on the very young who do not conform, the elderly, and those whose errors threaten the stability of the community. What are the disadvantages and benefits of a community that accepts such a vision of euthanasia?
4. Why is the relationship between Jonas and The Giver dangerous, and what does this danger suggest about the nature of love?
5. The ending of *The Giver* may be interpreted in two very different ways. Perhaps Jonas is remembering his Christmas memory—one of the most beautiful that The Giver transmitted to him—as he and Gabriel are freezing to death, falling into a dreamlike coma in the snow. Or perhaps Jonas does hear music and, with his special vision, is able to perceive the warm house where people are waiting to greet him. In her acceptance speech for the Newbery Medal, Lois Lowry mentioned both possibilities but would not choose one as correct. What evidence supports each interpretation?
6. There are groups in the United States today that actively seek to maintain an identity outside the mainstream culture: the Amish, the Mennonites, Native American tribes, and the Hasidic Jewish community. What benefits do these groups expect from defining themselves as "other"? What are the disadvantages? How does the mainstream culture put pressure on such groups?
7. Lois Lowry helps create an alternate world by having the community use words in a special way. Though that world stresses what it calls "precision of language," in fact it is built upon language that is not precise but deliberately clouds meaning. What is the danger of such misleading language?
8. Examine the ways in which Jonas's community uses euphemism to distance itself from the reality of "Release." How does our own society use euphemism to distance us from such realities as aging and death, bodily functions, and political activities? What are the benefits and disadvantages of such uses of language?