



## [The Giver](#), by Lois Lowry

### In A Nutshell

Lois Lowry published *The Giver* in 1993. At the time, she had already won a Newbery Medal for her earlier novel, *Number the Stars*, in 1990. But, because two is always better than one, she won a second Newberry for *The Giver*. And, because anything intended for young adults that mentions sex or government is often labeled "controversial," it was banned. A lot.

*The Giver* tells the story of a young boy named Jonas living in a highly controlled community some time in the future. The novel fits into a larger genre of cautionary tales called "dystopian literature." A utopia is a society in which everything is perfect, so a dystopia is the opposite: everything has gone wrong. The novel explores Jonas's encounter with memories of "the past," a time much like ours, in which people still had the freedom of choice.

In a way, *The Giver* being banned actually helps it make its point. If you were around in the early nineties, think back to the insane obsession with political correctness. (And if you weren't around, just take our word for it.) All of a sudden, *firemen* were *fire fighters*. People stopped using the word "cripple" to describe those who are physically handicapped. "Merry Christmas" signs weren't put up in schools. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* even changed its famous introduction to say "To boldly go where no *one* has gone before" (it used to be "no man"). *The Giver* can be seen as a reaction to these changes. It might suggest that, actually, we're taking things a *wee bit* too far. (When you read the novel, look out for the "precision of language" piece.)

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Despite the initial controversy, *The Giver* is one of the most popular books for young adults today. Also, it seems to come up even in college-level Philosophy and Political Science classes, and you don't want to be caught out of the loop. So read it.

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## Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 What is it about Jonas's community that seems appealing? At what point are we convinced that, actually, there's something wrong in with their way of life?
- 2 *The Giver* asks whether it's worth sacrificing freedom, choice, and individuality for peace, contentment, and ease. Well ...is it?
- 3 This question is a little more complicated than we just portrayed . Life isn't exactly a black and white choice between pain and freedom or happiness and subjugation. So where do we draw the line? How much freedom can we sacrifice in the name of safety? How much risk do we want to take for the sake of choice?

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