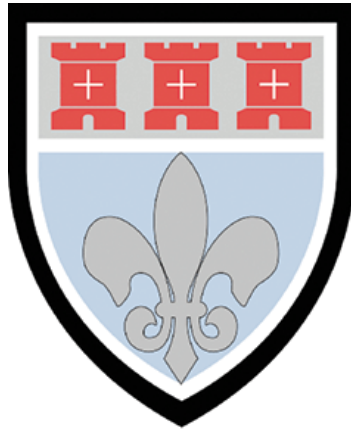


Revision Guide

GCSE English Literature



The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Simon Stephens



How to use this revision guide:

- Read the information carefully and use it to create flash cards and quiz questions to test yourself on the knowledge of the play.
- Complete the analysis section of the tables where they are blank
- At the end of the revision guide are possible essay questions. Planning and/or writing these essays is excellent revision.

Characters

The action in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* revolves around the [protagonist](#) Christopher Boone. Initially, the audience watches him interact with Mrs Shears (the owner of Wellington the dog), his teacher, Siobhan, and his father, Ed. Once Christopher begins his investigation into the murder of Wellington he comes into contact with Mrs Alexander, his elderly neighbour, and as his story moves to London he makes contact with Judy, his mother whom he thought was dead, and her boyfriend, Roger who was married to Mrs Shears.

Christopher meets a number of minor characters along the way including 'Man with Socks', 'Punk Girl', a number of policemen, Reverend Peters and his head teacher, Mrs Gascoyne.

Main characters

- Christopher Boone
- Ed Boone
- Judy Boone

Secondary characters

- Siobhan
- Roger Shears
- Mrs Alexander

Minor characters

- Mrs Shears
- Reverend Peters
- Mrs Gascoyne

Christopher Boone



Christopher finds the world around him confusing

Christopher Boone is a **very talented 15 year old**.

Christopher **finds people confusing** and notices the tiniest details about the world around him that most people would ignore.

He and his father Ed are very similar in that they are both quite **stubborn** and **determined**. The unique behaviours he presents could suggest that he is on the autistic spectrum, it is important to realise however that this is never mentioned directly in the play.

The audience watch as Christopher investigates the killing of Wellington the dog, then travels to London to find his mother and finally takes his Maths A-level. During the course of his journey he learns that he can achieve anything that he puts his mind to.

	How is Christopher like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Finds people confusing	In some of his interactions with other characters, Christopher shows that he can find people difficult to understand. For example, when the police officer is asking him lots of questions and he responds by groaning. He is aware of this issue and writes it in his journal.	<i>"I find people confusing. This is for two main reasons. The first main reason is that people do a lot of talking without using any words"..."The second main reason is that people often talk using metaphors."</i>	This shows that Christopher struggles to understand facial expressions which can impact how he interacts with people. It also shows that he cannot understand metaphors or abstract ideas like 'I am going to seriously lose my rag' because he takes things very literally.
Talented	Christopher continuously shows that he has a great understanding of very complicated astrological and mathematical ideas . For example he explains why the sky is dark at night to a confused Ed.	<i>"The stars were all rushing away from one another after the Big Bang and the further the stars were moving away from us the faster they were moving, some of them nearly as fast as the speed of light, which was why their light never reached us."</i>	
Determined	Christopher's continued determination helps him get to London by himself and helps him to take and pass his Maths A-level , even though he is only 15.	<i>"I am going to get an A* grade. And that is why I have to go back to Swindon. Except I can't see father. So I have to go back to Swindon with you."</i>	

Social context

Christopher often behaves in a way that some people might consider unacceptable. However, could it be that Stephens uses Christopher to make the audience question their own ideas about what is 'normal' behaviour?

By the end of the play, the audience realises that Christopher, despite his behaviour is a human being just like them, with the same hopes and fears and that there is **no definition of 'normal'**.

Example Q& A

Extract:

CHRISTOPHER:

I see everything. Most other people are lazy. They never look at everything. They do what is called glancing, which is the same word for bumping off something and carrying on in almost the same direction. And the information in their head is really simple...

But if I am sitting looking out of the window of a train into the countryside I notice everything. Like...

As he talks he raps out a nervous rhythm with his hand.

1. There are nineteen cows in the field. Fifteen of which are black and white and four of which are brown and white
2. There is a village in the distance, which has 31 visible houses
3. There are ridges in the field
4. There is a plastic bag from Asda
5. There is Coca Cola
6. There is the snail

Q. Looking at this extract from the play - how does Simon Stephens present Christopher?

How to analyse the quotation

- **"I see everything. Most other people are lazy."** - Christopher knows that he is different from other people, he sees this as a strength as do the audience. Here he explains that he is a great observer and can see things that others do not.
- **"As he talks he raps out a nervous rhythm with his hand."** - Christopher becomes agitated at times at this stage in the play - this could indicate that he is excited about what he is telling the audience, or it could be an indication that he needs the toilet very badly! He wets himself shortly after this section of speech.
- **"There are nineteen cows in the field."** - This is one of a number of clear indications that Christopher can absorb detailed information about the world around him that most other people would miss.

Ed Boone



Ed and Christopher have a loving but at times tense relationship. Ed has some very good traits, he is very **patient and caring** with Christopher and, like his son, he shows **stubborn determination** when the school initially won't allow Christopher to take his Maths A-level. However, on occasions Ed loses his temper with Christopher - in one scene he and Christopher actually have a fight. As Christopher investigates the murder of Wellington the dog, he and the audience discover two disturbing truths about Ed - that he lied to Christopher about his mother's death and that he killed Wellington.

These revelations cause a complete breakdown in Ed and Christopher's relationship - **it is not until the end of the play that Christopher begins to trust him again.**

	How is Ed like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Determined	Ed shows his determination when he stubbornly fighters for Christopher to do his Maths A-level in school.	<i>Mrs Gascoyne: "Mr Boone, nobody has ever taken an A-level in the school before." Ed: "He can be the first then." Mrs Gascoyne: "I don't know if we have the facilities in the school to allow him to do that." Ed: "Then get the facilities."</i>	Ed shows that he will not take 'no' for an answer from the head teacher Mrs Gascoyne. Ed is determined to get the best for his son in the same way Christopher is determined to go to London and later take his A-level.
Caring and patient	Ed is frequently caring and patient with Christopher, he puts up with Christopher's sometimes unusual habits and behaviours.	<i>Ed: "Christopher, do you understand that I love you?" Ed holds his right hand up and spreads his fingers out in a fan. Christopher does the same with his left hand. They make their fingers and thumbs touch each other.</i>	
Fiery tempered	Ed shows on a number of occasions that he has a fiery temper, hitting Christopher is an example of this.	<i>Ed: "I ask you to do one thing for me, Christopher. One thing." Christopher: "I didn't want to talk to Mrs Alexander. It was Mrs Alexander who..." Ed grabs Christopher's arm. Christopher screams. They fight each other. Ed shakes Christopher hard with both hands. Christopher falls unconscious for a few seconds. Ed stands above him.</i>	

Social context

Ed sometimes gets frustrated with Christopher and loses his temper. At one stage this results in an actual fight.

However, Stephens wants us to see that this is not because of Christopher's unique behaviours. Living with people and parenting in general can be very challenging.

In fact, Ed doesn't see Christopher's conduct as strange - as Judy says, he just 'gets on with it' and tries to help him get through day to day challenges like any good parent would.

Example Q&A

Extract

ED:

I'll do you a deal. Five minutes OK? That's all.

He sets the timer for five minutes. It starts ticking.

Christopher, look Things can't go on like this. I don't know about you, but this...this just hurts too much. You being in the house but refusing to talk to me. You have to learn to trust me...And I don't care how long it takes...if it's a minute one day and two minutes the next and three minutes the next and it takes years I don't care. Because this is important. This is more important than anything else.

Question. - What does this extract tell us about Ed and his relationship with Christopher?

How to analyse the quotation

- **"I'll do you a deal. Five minutes OK? That's all."** - The fact that Ed gives timings shows a deep understanding of Christopher, Ed knows that he likes to be given time frames for things.
- **"I don't know about you, but this....this just hurts too much."** - This shows that he cares intensely about Christopher and that the pain of not getting along with him is unbearable.
- **"This is more important than anything else."** - Ed clearly values his relationship with Christopher above all things. This might not be true of his mother, Judy.

How to use this in an essay

This extract reveals a lot about Ed and his relationship with Christopher. When Ed says **'I'll do you a deal. Five minutes OK? That's all.'** He shows that he knows and understands Christopher incredibly well. Christopher likes to be given time frames and his father does this here to try to regain his trust. Ed also reveals how deeply he cares about Christopher when he says **'I don't know about you, but this....this just hurts too much'**, the pause in the line and the repetition of 'this' indicates that Ed is at the point of breaking down emotionally because he is so upset about the situation between himself and Christopher. This is made more devastating when Ed states 'I don't know about you', Christopher does not deal with emotion in the same way as other people, and so Ed genuinely is unsure about how his son feels at this stage. This makes the audience feel sympathy for Ed. Finally, Ed asserts that **'This is more important than anything else'** referring to his relationship with Christopher. Ed puts his relationship with Christopher before even his own happiness, you could argue that Judy, his mother, does not always do the same.

	How is Judy like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Honest	Judy is honest in the letters she writes explaining her feelings and failures to Christopher.	<i>"I'm not like your father. Your father is a much more patient person. He just gets on with things and if things upset him he doesn't let it show."</i>	It must be hard for Judy to be this honest - she admits failure, in her lack of patience and openly explains to Christopher why she left. Ed avoids being this honest with Christopher until the end of the play. She clearly knows herself well too, like Christopher does
Romantic	Judy reveals that she has an active and romantic imagination -the audience discover this as she describes how her life could have been in a flashback sequence.	<i>"If I hadn't married your father I think I'd be living in a little farm house in the South of France with someone called Jean. And he'd be, ooh, a local handyman."</i>	
Struggles to cope with Christopher	In another reflection of her honesty Judy admits that she found it hard to cope with Christopher at times. She describes how she felt after an argument with Christopher resulted in her having broken toes.	<i>"And I remember looking at the two of you and seeing you together and thinking how you were really different with him. Much calmer..... And it made me so sad because it was like you didn't need me at all."</i>	

Social context

- Judy is not like Ed. She struggles with Christopher's behaviour whilst he copes with it.
 - She mentions the time they went to the department store and Christopher had an episode - she could not help him and found the whole incident very upsetting.
- She also hints that she would like an easier more 'normal' life, presumably without Christopher.
 - This is very sad but Stephens does not make Judy the villain, the audience can sympathise with her as she still loves Christopher dearly.

Question & Answer

Extract:

JUDY:

I used to have dreams that everything would get better. Do you remember that you used to say that you wanted to be an astronaut? Well I used to have dreams that you were an astronaut and you were on television and I thought that's my son. I wonder what it is you want to be now. Has it changed? Are you still doing maths? I hope you are.

Loads and loads of love, Mother.

Q. What does the extract reveal about Judy's personality?

How to analyse the quotation

- **"I used to have dreams that everything would get better."** - The use of the past tense shows that she now knows that things will not get better. She has given up hope.
- **"I used to have dreams that you were an astronaut and you were on television and I thought that's my son."** - Again the past tense shows that she no longer has these dreams for her son, has she realised that Christopher will not achieve such things?
- **"Are you still doing maths?"** - This reveals that she no longer knows Christopher well, she doesn't know what his day to day life is like.

How to use this in an essay

This extract reveals a tragic side to Judy. As she states, her hopes for a better future for herself and the family have gone, **'I used to have dreams that everything would get better.'** The use of the past tense shows that she has lost her positive outlook. This is emphasised by, **'I used to have dreams that you were an astronaut and you were on television and I thought that's my son.'** Again, the past tense shows that Judy no longer has these dreams but more upsettingly this refers to her hopes for Christopher. The audience can imply that she has given up on having high hopes for Christopher perhaps due to his behaviour - this is a very honest but sad thing for a mother to admit. Finally when Judy says **'Are you still doing maths?'**, she is revealing how little she knows about Christopher now that she has moved out of the family home, again this would make the audience see Judy as a tragic figure. Write two more paragraphs of your own:

Siobhan



Siobhan is Christopher's teacher. Christopher talks to her about his problems and she reads the note book in which Christopher records his investigation and writes his stories. She is very **encouraging** and gives him advice about what he should and shouldn't do.

She acts as an interesting **dramatic device** as sometimes she can narrate a scene as she reads from Christopher's book, other times she can appear as a **calming** voice in Christopher's head to guide him through a difficult situation.

	How is Siobhan like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Encouraging	Siobhan offers Christopher encouragement as he is writing his book.	<i>"But you can still be very proud because what you've written so far is just, well it's great."</i>	We see that Siobhan is a very encouraging teacher and wants Christopher to feel proud of his achievements. She eventually encourages him to turn his book into a play to perform at school.
Calming	When Christopher is trying to navigate the London Underground Siobhan appears as a calming voice in Christopher's head, helping him to cope with the challenge.	<i>"In your head imagine a big red line across the floor. It starts at your feet and goes through the tunnel. And walk along the line. And count the rhythm in your head because that helps doesn't it?"</i>	
Dramatic device	Siobhan acts as a dramatic device - she is a narrator or a voice in Christopher's head . This means that the action can move location and time rapidly and fluidly. Sometimes she can also be Christopher's voice as she reads from his book.	<i>"Sometimes when I want to be on my own I get into the airing cupboard and slide in beside the boiler and pull the door closed behind me and sit there and think for hours and it makes me feel very calm."</i>	

Write two more paragraphs of your own:

Roger Shears



Roger Shears becomes the prime suspect in Christopher's investigation of the murder of Wellington the dog. He is the only person Christopher can think of that might not like Mrs Shears, as they are divorced. The audience meets Roger when Christopher goes to London to find his mother. During Christopher's stay at their flat he is initially reluctantly accommodating but increasingly **loses his patience** with him, becoming more and more **sarcastic** and eventually **loses his temper** with Christopher.

	How is Roger like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Lacks understanding	Roger can be quite sarcastic about the way Judy looks after Christopher. He lacks understanding of Christopher's behaviour.	<i>"A gold star. Well that's very original I have to say."</i>	Roger shows a lack of understanding of Christopher's behaviour and does not appreciate that he needs encouragement to eat at this point in the play. Although strategies like this seem childish, they might help Christopher.
Short tempered	At first Roger accommodates Christopher when he arrives at the flat but eventually he grows tired of the strain he puts on his relationship with Judy which results in him aggressively grabbing Christopher .	<i>"You think you're so clever don't you? Don't you ever, ever think about other people for one second, eh? Well I bet you're really pleased with yourself now aren't you?"</i>	

Mrs Alexander

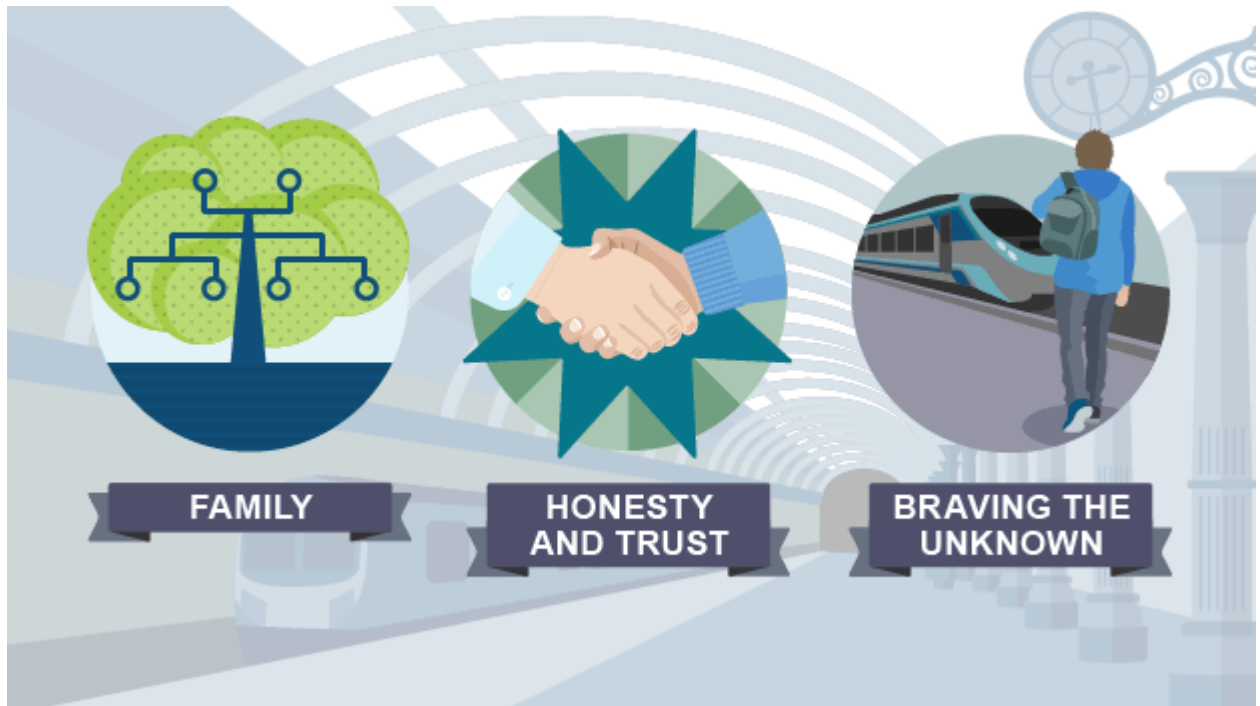


Mrs Alexander is an elderly lady who lives on Christopher's street. He sees her as a stranger and visits her during the course of his investigation.

She is **kind** and welcoming whenever she sees Christopher but the audience might see her as a **gossip** when she reveals to Christopher that his mother had an affair with Mr Shears.

	How is Mrs Alexander like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Kind	Mrs Alexander is very welcoming and kind when Christopher first visits her during his investigation.	<i>"I'm afraid marzipan is yellow too. Perhaps I should bring out some biscuits instead. Do you like biscuits?"</i>	Mrs Alexander kindly tries to accommodate Christopher by offering him biscuits when she discovers he doesn't like the colour yellow and so won't eat Battenberg cake. It is likely that she is so kind because she is lonely and will do anything to get a visitor to stay.
Gossip	Mrs Alexander is at first reluctant to discuss Mr Shears with Christopher but eventually she discusses his mother's affair directly with him . This could be seen as gossiping.	<i>"I am going to say something to you and you must promise not to tell your father that I told you this."</i>	

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (play)- Themes



Here are three main themes of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*:

- family
- honesty and trust
- braving the unknown

Simon Stephens explores these themes during the course of the play.

Family is at the heart of the play, and through Christopher's relationships with his mother and father, Stephens explores the idea of what makes a parent and what family means. The challenges of living with other people are also shown as Christopher moves from his father's house to his mother's.

Honesty and trust is another key theme, all the characters at different points are either dishonest with others or with themselves.

Finally, the theme of **braving the unknown** is largely explored through Christopher and his experiences in the world.

Family



The Curious incident of the Dog in the Night-Time can be considered a family drama. The idea of family and what it means is explored throughout the play. Christopher comes from a family that has fallen apart. He has to deal with the impact this has on his life and the lives of his mother and father. The idea of what makes a parent is further explored through Ed and Judy. Ed can be bad tempered but is there for Christopher when it matters most. Judy leaves home but that doesn't mean she doesn't love her son. Christopher lives with his father and then his mother and Mr Shears, and the challenges of living with other people are explored through these situations.

The play explores the importance of family, its impact and its nature.

How is the theme of family shown in the play?

In *The Curious incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* Stephens explores the theme of family through:

- the breakdown of Christopher's family life and the impact that has on each family member
- what living with other people can be like
- the nature of being a parent

	How does Stephens show this?	Evidence	Analysis
Christopher's mother	Through her letters to Christopher we get a sense of how she feels about the breakdown of the family.	<i>"I know you are probably still angry with me. I'm sorry Christopher. But I still love you. I hope you don't stay angry with me for ever."</i>	Judy clearly fears for the relationship she has with Christopher. As she is only able to communicate with him through letters, she does not know if Christopher forgives her for leaving. She assumes that he is still angry with her.
Christopher's father	Ed can lose his temper , especially when Christopher is looking into the past, which he finds very painful.	<i>"Not to mention Mr Shears' name in the house. And not to go asking Mrs Shears, or anyone about who killed that bloody dog. And not to go trespassing on other people's gardens. And to stop this bloody ridiculous detective game."</i>	
Living with other people	Ed can become weary of living with Christopher. Instead of losing his temper he can sound as if he is tired of him.	<i>"Could you please, just, give it a bit of a break, mate. Please."</i>	
Being a parent	Ed and Judy are very different types of parent. They are both 'good' and 'bad' at it at different points of the play. Through their actions, Stephens explores what it means to be a parent.	<i>"I love you very much Christopher. Don't ever forget that. I know I lose my rag occasionally. And I know I shouldn't. But I only do it because I worry about you"</i>	

Question - How does Stephens explore the theme of family in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in The Night-Time*?

Answer.

- Judy is upset at the thought of losing the family connection she has with Christopher because she has left their home.
- Ed becomes upset when Christopher could potentially uncover the truth about how the family fell apart.
- Stephens shows that living with family members can be difficult at times.
- Stephens also shows how important family is to Ed when he speaks to Christopher after they have fallen out.

Stephens shows that family is very important, even though being part of one can have its difficulties.

Write two more paragraphs of your own:

Honesty and trust



Honesty and trust is a key theme in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Each of the main characters has issues of trust and honesty with each other. Ed lies to Christopher about his mother, Christopher lies to Ed about stopping his investigation. When Christopher discovers the truth about his mother and Wellington, he feels he can no longer trust his

father. Christopher's mother, Judy is more honest with her feelings towards Christopher but the audience might initially find it hard to trust her after she walked out on the family.

As well as these issues within his family, Christopher maintains a mistrust of strangers but trusts the advice of his teacher, Siobhan. She has worked with him for a long time and taught him strategies to cope with challenges. During the course of the play, Christopher also learns that he can trust himself to achieve his goals.

How is the theme of honesty and trust shown in the play?

In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Stephens explores the theme of honesty and trust through:

- the lies of Christopher's father, Ed
- the honesty of Christopher's mother, Judy
- the trust issues Christopher has with other characters

	How does Stephens show this?	Evidence	Analysis
Ed's lies	Ed tries to keep the truth about Judy leaving home from Christopher.	<i>"Ed: Christopher, I'm sorry your mother's died. She's had a heart attack. It wasn't expected. Christopher: What kind of heart attack? Ed: I don't know what kind of heart attack. Now isn't the moment Christopher to be asking questions like that."</i>	This is a shocking lie for a father to tell their son. Ed avoids telling the truth so he doesn't have to confront the reality of his marriage breaking down. Ed realises the error of his ways when the truth comes out later and realises that it is important to be honest with people from the outset because it can only be more hurtful if you are not.
Judy's honesty	Judy is honest in her letters to Christopher about her feelings and her own failings. In this sense she is braver than Ed.	<i>"And I remember that night I just cried and cried and cried and your father was really nice about it at first and he made you supper and put you to bed and he said these things happen and it would be OK. But I said I couldn't take it anymore and eventually he got really cross."</i>	
Christopher's trust issues	Christopher separates the people he meets into two categories - friends and	<i>"I began to get nervous because I didn't know her well enough to know whether she</i>	

	strangers. He trusts friends but not strangers. This means he reacts in a way the audience might consider 'different' when talking to people he doesn't know, like Mrs Alexander for example.	<i>was telling the truth about getting orange squash and Battenberg cake. And I thought she might be ringing the police and then I'll get into much more serious trouble because of the caution. So I walked away."</i>	
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Question - How does a lack of honesty and truth in the Boone family affect Christopher?

Answer

- Ed's lack of honesty with Christopher means that Christopher believes his mother has died from a heart attack.
- When Christopher discovers the truth about his mother his world is turned upside down and he becomes very distressed.
- Judy's honesty in her letters means that Christopher feels that he can find her and live with her.
- When Ed realises the importance of telling the truth he can begin to rebuild his relationship with Christopher.

Stephens shows how a lack of honesty and truth can create problems and barriers between family members. He also shows how being honest can help heal these problems.

Write two more paragraphs of your own:

Braving the unknown



Braving the unknown is a theme that plays a big part in Christopher's experiences during the play. He has to be brave and try new things in order to get to the bottom of his investigation of Wellington's death. He also has to be very brave during his journey to London to find his mother, tackling the daunting London Underground by himself. He also has to face the uncertainties of his A-level exam. In getting through all these challenges Christopher grows as a person and learns a lot about himself and his own capabilities. Stephens shows that facing your fears and conquering the unknown is a positive challenge to undertake.

How is the theme of braving the unknown shown in the play?

In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in The Night-Time*, Stephens explores the theme of braving the unknown through:

- Christopher trying new things while he is investigating into the dog's death
- Christopher's journey to London and the challenges he faces along the way
- Christopher taking his A-level exam, when he is only 15, and passing it
- showing how much Christopher has grown through these experiences

	How does Stephens do this?	Evidence	Analysis
Christopher's investigation	Christopher has to go and speak to strangers to investigate the dog's death. He sometimes finds this very challenging.	<i>"I don't talk to strangers. But I'm doing detective work."</i>	As Christopher states, he doesn't usually talk to strangers, but he knows that he must if he is to complete his investigation. He bravely speaks to people he doesn't know .
Christopher's journey to London	When Christopher goes to London, buying a ticket and getting on the train is a huge challenge for him to overcome. The different voices of the Ensemble get across how chaotic Christopher finds the experience.	<i>"Voice One: Customers seeking access to the car park please use assistance phone opposite, right of the ticket office. Voice Two: Warning CCTV in operation. Voice Three: Great Western. Voice Five: Cold beers and lagers. Voice Two: CAUTION WET FLOOR."</i>	Having several different voices stating the sights or sounds that Christopher might be experiencing gives the audience a clear idea of how chaotic and difficult this situation must be for him . Until now he has never gone much further than the end of his own street. Christopher perseveres however and completes his journey.
Christopher taking his A-level exam	Exams can be challenging experiences and have an element of the unknown to them. Christopher admirably rises to the challenge of his maths exam despite being very tired at the time of taking it.	<i>"I can see the questions but I can't read the questions because when I look at the words they all seem confused and the wrong way round and mixed up to me."</i>	
How Christopher has grown	By the end of the play Christopher has grown and realises that he is capable of facing any challenge by himself. By braving the unknown he has become a better person.	<i>"Yes. Does that mean I can do anything do you think? Does that mean I can do anything Siobhan? Does that mean I can do anything?"</i> The two look at each other for a while. Lights black.	

Question - How does Christopher brave the unknown during the course of the play?

Answer

- Christopher braves the unknown by questioning the neighbours during his investigation of the murder of Wellington.
- He braves the unknown by facing the truth about his mother and heading to London by himself.
- He takes and passes his maths A-level despite being extremely tired and uncertain of his abilities at that point, and despite being only 15.
- By doing all of these things he achieves a sense of pride and self-confidence. He is ready to face any other challenges the world can throw at him.

Stephens shows that by braving the unknown you can grow and become a stronger person.

Christopher is a great inspiration in this.

Write two more paragraphs of your own:

Use of form - The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (play)

The form is the type of text and genre that the writer chooses to use.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time was originally a novel and has been adapted by Simon Stephens into play form. This version of the text is meant to be seen in performance. The staging of the play is original and contributes massively to how the audience perceive the events and characters on stage.

The play fits into three possible genres - a family drama, a crime mystery and a coming of age story or bildungsroman.

Family drama

Ed

You have to spend more time with me. And I...I have to show to you that you can trust me.
(Ed speaking to Christopher, towards the end of the play)

The play fits into this genre because it tells the story of Christopher Boone and his family. During the play Christopher discovers that his beliefs about his family are wrong and that his father has been keeping the truth from him.

Crime mystery

Christopher

I was doing detective work trying to figure out who killed Wellington.
(Christopher speaking to his dad, Part One.)

The play is a crime mystery because it follows Christopher's investigation of the death of Mrs Shears' dog, Wellington. Despite his father's warnings, Christopher continues his detective work and discovers the truth about his mother.

Bildungsroman

Christopher

I found my mother. I was brave.
(Christopher speaking to Siobhan, towards the end of the play.)

A 'bildungsroman' is a coming of age story in which we follow the main character as they grow up and learn about themselves and the world. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* fits this genre as Christopher uncovers Wellington's murderer, travels to London, passes his A-level Maths exam, at the age of 15 and ultimately learns that he is capable of anything!

How to analyse form

In order to analyse form you must:

- consider what aspect of form you are looking at
- think how Stephens has used this for effect
- think how this could impact the audience

Question - Explain how Stephens uses form to influence the audience

Answer

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is a play and so it is meant to be seen as a performance.

- It is a family drama - the audience learn about Christopher and the issues his family face.
- It is a crime mystery - the audience is intrigued to find out the truth about the killing of the dog, Wellington.
- It can be classed as a bildungsroman because the audience watch as Christopher goes on a journey and grows as a character.

Use of structure in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

Structure is how the writer chooses to order the events of the story they want to tell. Does it follow a traditional beginning, middle and end structure or does it change things around?

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is written in two parts. The first part details Christopher's investigation into the murder of Wellington, whilst the second part deals with his journey to London to find his mother.

This makes it seem very simple on the surface but the structure of the play is complex and interesting:

- it is a play within a play
- it has multiple narrators
- it plays with time and space

Play within a play

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is a play within a play because the audience is actually watching the play that Christopher has written to be performed in his school. Towards the end of the play Christopher is directing the actors in the play.

It was Mother who gave me the milkshake.....You need to shout more loudly at him.

(Christopher speaking to his mother and Mr Shears, Part Two.)

What is the effect of this?

This means that the play the audience is watching can be very creative with narrative voice, use of time and use of space and reality. As this is a play and not 'reality' anything can happen. This gives Stephens and the director of the play lots of creative freedom.

Multiple narrators

Christopher's story is narrated by a number of different voices - his own, Siobhan, who is reading his book and at points, the Ensemble.

What is the effect of this?

This helps to give the audience a sense of how chaotic and detailed the world can seem in Christopher's mind. One minute the audience can be hearing about an event from Christopher's perspective - then Siobhan can enter the scene to take over narration. When Christopher looks out of the train window, five voices from the Ensemble tell the audience about details he notices. A person without Christopher's mind might only notice one of those things. It helps the audience understand him better.

Time and space

Often in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, the chronology of events is mixed up. The action leaps from the present to the past regularly, and without warning. The same can be said of space or location. Christopher can go from a train, to outside a flat, to outer space, at any point.

What is the effect of this?

This makes the events of the play seem fluid and unreal. This again helps the audience get a grasp of what life must be like for Christopher. Interactions with people are confusing to him and when the action jumps around in space and time the audience appreciate this more.

Use of language in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

As *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is a play, the language can be split into dialogue and stage directions.

The dialogue is fast moving and realistic and adds the following to the characters:

- personality
- motivations
- moves the action forward (pace)

The stage directions tell the actors what to do on stage or how to say their lines. In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* the stage directions are simple and focus on actions - where actors should stand and what they should do.

When analysing the language Stephens uses, you could use this structure:

- what are the ideas Stephens is trying to get across?
- how has he chosen particular words to reflect this?
- what effect does this have on the audience?

Evidence and explanation of the language used

	How	Why	Effect
Character personality	Christopher sees the world in a very precise and detailed way. <i>"Then I went up to my bedroom and turned on my bedroom light and played six games of Tetris and got to level 38 which is my fourth best ever score."</i>	When the characters speak they reveal information about themselves. This helps the audience to understand their personalities. This is particularly important with Christopher who has an unusual personality.	This helps the audience realise that Christopher remembers details that anybody else might ignore. At times this infuriates the other characters that interact with him but as the audience get to know him it becomes endearing.
Character motivation	Ed, Christopher's dad reveals when he is lying through his dialogue <i>"No. It's an ordinary hospital. She has a problem.....a problem with her heart."</i>	It is important that the audience pick up on what the characters are thinking. It helps them to get a better grasp on their motivations.	The pause in this line highlights that his father is lying about the whereabouts of Christopher's mother. At this point the audience can only guess what motivated his father to say this, this engages the audience further.
Moving the action forward	Christopher often states very plainly what he is going to do <i>"I've decided I'm going to find out who killed Wellington"</i> .	Christopher speaking in such a plain manner is an effective dramatic device. It helps to move the action forward and keeps the audience informed and engaged.	The audience know exactly what is driving the plot forward at any moment in time, be it looking for Wellington's killer or Christopher's quest to live with his mother.

How to analyse language

In order to analyse language you should:

- Choose a section from the text to analyse and then select a quote from it. Make sure that it is relevant to the question and the point you want to make.
- Consider how the quote reflects character/theme/context.
- Explore in detail the impact specific words or phrases have upon the audience.
- Evaluate how effective the author's choice of language is.

Question - How does Stephens use language to illustrate the characters' personalities?

Answer

Consider the conversation between Christopher and his father in Part One.

CHRISTOPHER:

(1) I could see the Milky Way as we drove towards the town centre.

ED:

(2) Could you?

CHRISTOPHER:

Some people think the Milky Way is a long line of stars, but it isn't. **(3) Our galaxy is a huge disc of stars of millions of light years across** and the solar system is somewhere near the outer edge of the disc.

ED:

(2) Is that right?

- **(1) "I could see the Milky Way"** - This reveals that Christopher notices things that other people don't, he is very observant.
- **(2) "Could you?" "Is that right?"** - Ed is showing his patience here. He can lose his temper with Christopher but at this point he is listening carefully to him. He takes good care of Christopher.
- **(3) "Our galaxy is a huge disc of stars of millions of light years across"** - Not only does Christopher notice things that other people don't - he is very knowledgeable about certain things, especially space and maths.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time - Dramatisation

Introduction and overview

Reading a novel is something that you would usually do on your own - watching a play in the theatre is very much a shared experience. An audience is made up of different sorts of people, all of whom will have different reactions to what they are seeing and hearing. We all react differently to what's in a novel too but not usually all at the same time.

Another key difference is that a novel could be compared to a finished building whereas the script for a play is more like the foundations for a building. The words will be built on and developed by a director and the actors and this will be further enhanced by costumes, lighting, scenery and a whole host of technical and artistic choices. These will have an influence on how the audience reacts to the play.

The three key areas we are going to look at are:

- casting choices
- performance choices
- staging choices

As the idea of dramatisation is all about **getting the play off the page and onto the stage**, there are several clips to watch and think about to help you understand the process

Casting choices

One of the first and probably most important jobs for the director of a play is to choose a cast. Choices that are made will heavily depend on the look and feel that the director wants for the production of the play.

Ensemble cast

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time uses an ensemble cast.

Ensemble cast

- This means that the actors are on stage as a group, sometimes all at once.
- They might perform multiple parts or roles
 - for example the actor who plays Roger Shears could also be an extra on the train or the actor that plays Reverend Peters could also play a policeman.
 - This means that actors have to quickly switch between different characters, this can be very difficult - one role might require the actor to be sensible and quiet, the other might require the actor to be suddenly loud and very energetic.
- Actors might also move set pieces on and off stage like a stage crew might ordinarily do.

Have a look at the following clip.

- What challenges might face an actor who has to play multiple roles?
- What does it add to the production having an ensemble cast?
- Which actors never change role? Why do you think this is?

Performance choices

Once the play has been cast and rehearsals begin, the director and the actors will develop further thoughts about the characters and how they should be presented.

The text of the play and Stephens' choice of language will provide the biggest indication of how to make these choices.

Typically actors will look closely at the text to see:

- what the character says about her/himself
- what the character says about other characters
- what other characters say about her/him

This evidence from the text will help actors to make initial choices about the way their character will develop.

- There will be discussions about a character's motivation and why a character behaves in the way that they do.
- Reaction to other characters and interaction between them is important and this will be explored in rehearsals, workshops, discussions and further investigation of the text.
- The director will also consider themes in the play and may wish to emphasise some and pay less attention to others.
 - This will further affect decisions about performance and the particular way that the production will interpret the play.

To help stage The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time the theatre company Frantic Assembly used physical theatre to help communicate the motivation or hidden emotions of the characters on stage. For example, during the scene when Christopher visits the train station, the script just lists a series of random phrases:

Voice five

Cold beers and lagers

Voice two

CAUTION WET FLOOR

Voice four

Your 50p will keep a premature baby alive for 1.8 seconds

- It was up to Frantic Assembly to translate how this would look on the stage.
- In order to reflect the sense of chaos in Christopher's head the ensemble cast performed a complicated routine a lot like a dance in time to the random phrases.
- This helped the audience to understand how Christopher felt during this experience.

Staging Choices

The staging challenges for a production that's in two parts and has no distinct scenes are huge. This must have been especially difficult when the production was moved from being performed 'in the round' (the audience would sit all around with the stage at the centre) at the Cottesloe Theatre to the proscenium arch stage (where the audience face the stage and look into it) at the Apollo Theatre.

Possible Essay Questions

1. How and why does Christopher change in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

Write about:

- how Christopher responds to his family and to the events in the play
- how Stephens presents Christopher by the ways he writes.

2. How does Stephens present Christopher's father as a parent?

Write about:

- what Christopher's father says and does and the difficulties he has to deal with
- how Stephens presents Christopher's father.

3. How does Stephens present Christopher's mother as a parent?

Write about:

- what Christopher's mother says and does and the difficulties she has to deal with
- how Stephens presents Christopher's mother.

4. How does Stephens present the ways Christopher deals with loss?

Write about:

- how Christopher deals with loss
- how Stephens presents Christopher's attitudes and feelings.

5. Do you think Siobhan is an important character in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

Write about:

- how Stephens presents the character of Siobhan
- how Stephens uses Siobhan to present ideas about people and society.

6. How does Stephens explore truth and deception in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

Write about:

- the ideas about truth and deception in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- how Stephens presents these ideas by the ways he writes.

7. How does Stephens present society's treatment of Christopher in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

Write about:

- the ideas about how Christopher is treated by society
- how Stephens presents these ideas by the ways he writes.

8. How does Stephens explore self-discovery in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

Write about:

- the ideas about self-discovery in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- how Stephens presents these ideas by the ways he writes.

9. How does Stephens explore rejection and loss in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

Write about:

- the ideas about rejection and loss in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- how Stephens presents these ideas by the ways he writes.

10. How does Stephens explore the idea of family in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

Write about:

- the ideas about family in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- how Stephens presents these ideas by the ways he writes.

11. How does Stephens explore the idea of love in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

Write about:

- the ideas about love in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- how Stephens presents these ideas by the ways he writes.

12. How does Stephens explore the idea of achievement in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

Write about:

- the ideas about achievement in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- how Stephens presents these ideas by the ways he writes.

13. How does Stephens present love?

Write about:

- What do characters say and do and the difficulties they face
- How Stephens presents Christopher's attitudes and feelings

14. How does Stephens explore the idea of fear?

Write about:

- How characters deal with fear
- How Stephens presents Christopher's attitudes and feelings

15. "Mark Haddon presents family as an obstacle to overcome." How do you respond to this view of 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime'?

Write about:

- How family life is presented in the novel
- How the challenges of family life are resolved

16. "Christopher is better off staying dependent and sheltered as he finds the outside world challenging." How far do you agree with this statement?

Write about:

- What challenges does Christopher face in life
- How does he face up to these challenges

17. How does Stephens use science and maths to explore Christopher's character?

Write about:

- Christopher's interest in science and maths
- How this is used in the play to reflect characteristics of Christopher