Welcome

This guide was created for teachers and students. It contains an overview of the play's story, as well as informative resources and activities for teachers and students. The guide aims to provide background knowledge and critical perspectives on the play that will yield fruitful discussion and foster an understanding and appreciation of the theatre arts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the guide, please contact our group sales representative at 604.687.5315 ext 253 or groups@artsclub.com.

This study guide was written by Kerri Lee.

About the Arts Club Theatre Company

The Arts Club of Vancouver was founded in 1958 as a private club for artists, musicians, and actors. It became the Arts Club Theatre in 1964 when the company opened its first stage in a converted gospel hall at Seymour and Davie Streets.

Now in its 55th season of producing professional live theatre in Vancouver, the Arts Club Theatre Company is a non-profit charitable organization that operates three theatres: the Granville Island Stage, the Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage, and the Goldcorp Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre. Its popular productions range from musicals and contemporary comedies to new works and classics.

Learn more about the Arts Club Theatre Company at artsclub.com

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Learning objectives

After viewing *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and working through the following activities, students will:

- Identify how real-world topics and conflicts can drive story.
- Be able to engage critically with the process of theatrical adaptation.
- Explore the ways in which theatre represents and exposes different perspectives.

Connections to New BC Curriculum

Drama (8–12)

*Big Ideas*

- Arts often challenge the status quo and open us to new perspectives and experiences.
- Drama uses a unique sensory language for creating and communicating.
- Identity is explored, expressed, and impacted through arts experiences.
- The arts provide opportunities to gain insight into the perspectives and experiences of people from a variety of times, places, and cultures.

*Curriculum Connections*

- Reflect on dramatic works and make connections to other experiences.
- Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through arts activities and experiences, and explore the ways in which drama impacts cultures and society.
- Describe, interpret, and evaluate how performers and playwrights use dramatic structures, elements, and techniques to create and communicate ideas.

English/Creative Writing (8–12)

*Big Ideas*

- Exploring stories and other texts help us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world, deepening our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world.
- Texts are socially, culturally, geographically, and historically constructed

*Curriculum Connections*

- Recognize and appreciate how different forms, formats, structures, and features of texts enhance and shape meaning and impact.
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world.
- Experiment with genres, forms, or styles of creative and communicative texts.
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to analyze ideas within, between and beyond texts.
Summary

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is a play based on the novel by Mark Haddon. The play follows the journey of an exceptional teenager named Christopher, from Swindon, England. Christopher has a unique perspective on the world and is fascinated by mathematical concepts and the universe. He thinks very logically, he likes the colour red, and he does not like to interact with strangers nor be touched by anyone. The play opens with Christopher discovering his neighbour Mrs. Shears’ dog, Wellington, lying dead in the yard. Christopher decides to solve the mystery of Wellington’s murder, even though his father has explicitly forbidden him. Christopher’s supportive teacher, Siobhan, assists him in writing and telling his story, and through interviews and interactions with his neighbours along with his logic and reasoning skills, Christopher’s detective work leads him to uncover several key secrets about his own life.

Mark Haddon – Author

Mark Haddon was born in Northampton in 1962. He holds degrees from Oxford University (1981) and Edinburgh University (M.Sc. in English Literature). Mark’s experiences include working with children and adults with cognitive and physical disabilities, and illustrating for a variety of magazines and cartoons such as *New Statesman, The Spectator, Private Eye, the Sunday Telegraph*, and *The Guardian*. Mark has also written and illustrated books and picture books for children (the ‘Agent Z’ and ‘Baby Dinosaurs’ series), published a book of poetry (*The Talking Horse and the Sad Girl and the Village Under the Sea, 2005*), as well as working on television projects. His novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, was published in 2003 and was very successfully received, winning several awards such as the Boeke Prize (joint winner, 2004), Whitbread Book of the Year award (2003), Guardian Children’s Fiction Prize (2003), Costa Book of the Year (2003), and Waverton Good Read Award (2003).

Simon Stephens – Playwright (Stage Adaptation)

Simon Stephens is one of Britain’s best known playwrights, having written several well-known plays and adaptations for the stage, radio, and screen. He was born in Stockport, England, and trained as a teacher while continuing to write. He is an Associate at the Lyric, Hammersmith, and Royal Court. His many plays include *Song from Far Away, Heisenberg, Birdland, Blindsided, Three Kingdoms, Wastwater, Punk Rock, Seawall, Motortown, Country Music, Christmas, Herons*, and *Bluebird*. Additionally, he has written English language versions of John Fosse’s *I Am the Wind*, and Anton Chechov’s *The Cherry Orchard*. His work has won many awards, including the 2001 Pearson Award for best New Play (*Port*), 2005 Olivier Award for Best New Play (*On the Shore of the Wide World*), and the 2015 Tony Award for Best Play for his adaptation of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. 
**Characters**

**Christopher:** A 15-year-old boy living in Swindon, England, with his father. An exceptionally strong math student, Christopher appears to have autism-spectrum disorder.

**Siobhan:** Christopher’s teacher/mentor, who reads from his book throughout the play, thus narrating events as they ensue.

**Ed:** Christopher’s father, a boiler engineer separated from his wife.

**Judy:** Christopher’s mother, living separately from Christopher and his father.

**Mrs. Shears:** Christopher’s neighbour, whose dog has been killed.

**Mrs. Alexander:** An elderly woman who lives near Christopher.

**Mr. Shears (Roger):** Mrs. Shears’ estranged husband, now living with Judy in London.

**Reverend Peters:** A priest and teacher at Christopher’s school.

**Uncle Terry:** Christopher’s uncle.

**Mrs. Gascoyne:** An administrator at Christopher’s school.

**Other minor characters include:**

- Posh Woman
- Woman on Train
- Woman on Heath
- Shopkeeper
- Duty Sergeant
- Man behind Counter
- Man with Socks
- Man on Phone
- Number 40
- London Policeman
- London Transport Policeman
- Lady in Street
- Punk Girl
- Station Policeman
- Station Guard
Discussion Questions

These questions can be used as writing prompts, as well as prompts for small-group and large-group discussions.

Pre-show discussion questions:

The following questions have been included to spark discussions and to get students thinking about what they might experience prior to viewing the production.

- Have you seen any live performances on stage before? What are your expectations about what you will see on stage in this production?
- What do you already know about the play, including the plot, production elements (such as lighting, sound, costumes, and sets) and the characters? How do you anticipate that these elements will come together in the play?
- If you have read the book, how do you think it might be adapted for this stage production? What challenges might need to be addressed to present the story on stage?
- What technical elements do you anticipate seeing in the production? How do you think these elements will affect the audience’s experience of the play?
- Look at the poster for this production (you can find the image on the title page of this document). Based on what you see, what do you anticipate about the production? Think about the images and graphics that are on the poster, as well as the colours and the way in which the person is positioned. What can we infer about the character who is featured on the poster?

Post-show discussion questions:

The following questions are ideal for engaging students in reflection and exploration of the major themes, characters, and other elements of the production.

- What ideas or themes did the play make you think about?
- What is unique about the way in which Christopher views the world? How is this similar and/or different to the ways in which you view the world?
- In the play, Christopher says that he does not tell lies. Why is the idea of truth so central to Christopher’s narration?
- What did you notice about the ways in which each character communicated with one other?
- What did you notice about the ways in which the characters displayed their emotions?
- What is the effect of Siobhan’s narration in the play?
- If you have read the novel on which the play is based (The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon), what similarities and differences did you notice between the novel and the play?
- What did you think about the technical elements of the production: which elements stood out to you the most, and why? What effects did this have on your understanding of the play?
- In your opinion, why do you think that the playwright chose to end the play with Christopher asking the question, “Does that mean I can do anything?”
- What do you think the future holds for Christopher?
- Imagine that you could meet with members of the cast, crew, artistic team, or production team. What questions would you ask them about the choices and elements in the production?
Activity One: Communication and Intentions

(Recommended for use with Drama and Language Arts classes)

**Rationale:** One of the themes in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is communication. Each of the characters have different ways in which they communicate, and this affects how they interact with one another, and how they respond in certain situations. When actors prepare for a play, they work closely with the director and the script to figure out what each character is feeling and thinking, and what their intentions are. This helps them to determine how to say their lines and portray the character on stage.

**Key questions:** How are strong emotions communicated in the play? How does each character express their emotions and intentions? What verbal and physical forms of communication do we use in everyday life, and how is this translated when we act on stage?

**Instructions:** In this activity, students will work closely with the script to analyze communication and intentions within the characters of the play, and explore how this can be portrayed in a scene.

**Step 1: Warm-Up.** Ask students to communicate specific emotions through their body language. For example, *disgust, fear, joy, bashful, nervous, excited, exhausted, etc.* Remind students to think about their posture, their movements, and the way in which they interact with others. Have students practice displaying these emotions first without using words, then introducing sounds (sighing, vocalizations, noises), and then with the addition of words.

To help students practice intention and communication, ask them to choose one phrase and experiment with the relationship between the delivery of the phrase (*how* they are saying the line) and the intention of the phrase (*what* message they are trying to send; what the line really means). Have students experiment with a single phrase and challenge them to say the same phrase with at least three different meanings. An example of how students might approach this activity is highlighted below (the emphasis is placed on the italicized word).

```
I said I wanted a cookie for dessert!
I said I wanted a cookie for dessert!
I said I wanted a cookie for dessert!
I said I said I wanted a cookie for dessert!
I said I said I wanted a cookie for dessert!
I said I said I wanted a cookie for dessert!
```

Students can alter the volume, speed, and intensity, depending on the intention behind the line.
Here are some lines from the play that students can use. How many different intentions and emotions can they find for each line?

- Get away from my dog.
- I’m going to seriously lose my rag.
- I had to get out of the house.
- Judy, look, I’m sorry OK.
- Now is not the time.

**Step 2: Working with the script.** The following pages include excerpts from the play, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

Have students use what they worked on in the warm-up activity and Step 1 and apply it to the following excerpts from the script. Students can annotate the script and go line-by-line, adding in what each character might be feeling (*frustrated, confused, genuine, annoyed, angry, curious, questioning*) as well as underlining words they might want to stress or emphasize, and adding in any other notes that will help them communicate the character’s emotions and intentions in the scene.

[Excerpt 1]

**Ed:** I’m afraid you won’t be seeing your mother for a while.

**Christopher:** Why not?

**Ed:** Your mother has had to go into hospital.

**Christopher:** Can we visit her?

**Ed:** No.

**Christopher:** Why can’t we?

**Ed:** She needs rest. She needs to be on her own.

**Christopher:** Is it a psychiatric hospital?

**Ed:** No. It’s an ordinary hospital. She has a problem... a problem with her heart.

**Christopher:** We will need to take food to her.

**Ed:** I’ll take some to her during the day when you’re at school and I’ll give it to the doctors and they can give it to your mum, OK?

**Christopher:** But you can’t cook.

**Ed:** Christopher. Look. I’ll buy some ready-made stuff from Marks & Spencer and take those in. She likes those.

**Christopher:** I’ll make her a get-well card. If I make her a get-well card will you take it in for her tomorrow?
[Excerpt 2] Remember: in this scene, Siobhan is reading from Christopher’s journal. How might that affect the way in which she says her lines and acts in this scene?

Siobhan: And I remember looking at the two of you and seeing you together and thinking how you were really different with him. Much calmer.

Judy: And it made me so sad because it was like you didn’t need me at all.

Siobhan: And I think then I realised you and your father were probably better off if I wasn’t living in the house.

Judy: And Roger asked me if I wanted to come with him.

Siobhan: And it broke my heart but eventually I decided it would be better for all of us if I went.

Judy: And so I said yes.

Siobhan: And I meant to say goodbye.

Judy: But when I rang your father he said I couldn’t – He was really angry. He said I couldn’t –

Siobhan: He said I couldn’t talk to you.

Judy: And I didn’t know what to do.

Siobhan: He said I was being selfish and that I was never to set foot inside the house again.

Judy: And so I haven’t.

Siobhan: I wonder if you can understand any of this. I know it will be difficult for you.

Judy: I thought what I was doing was the best for all of us. I hope it is.

Siobhan: Christopher I never meant to hurt you.

Consolidation/Debrief

Discussion questions/writing prompts:

- What was your process in identifying the character's intentions and emotions? Did you change any of your annotations during the process?
- How did this exercise change or deepen your understanding of the characters in the play?

Ideas for variations/extensions:

- Add a focus on theatre production: how do production elements contribute to the portrayal of the themes of communication and intentions on stage? Think about the sets, lights, costumes, sound, and music design.
Have students do a cold read (a reading of the script without in depth preparation) first, and then give them time to analyse and annotate the script. Discuss the differences they noticed between their first read and the reading following the activity.

Activity Two: Ensemble Work and Movement in Storytelling

(Recommended for use with Drama classes)

Rationale: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time features many actors on stage that work as an ensemble to portray the events that Christopher experiences and describes in his book. Each ensemble actor portrays several different characters in the play, and in certain scenes, they speak and move together to create a specific mood, energy, emotion, or setting. They use overlapping text, sounds, volume, and movements to create the scene and tell the story as a group.

Key questions: What effects did the ensemble work and movement have on the play, in terms of understanding the situations and the events from Christopher’s perspective? As an audience member, what feelings or emotions were evoked as a result of the ensemble work? How did this impact our understanding of Christopher’s journey?

Instructions: In this activity, students will work collaboratively in groups to experiment with ensemble reading, voice work, and movement. They will experience the collaborative and creative process by brainstorming their own group scene within a general theme, and applying their knowledge of dramatic elements (for example, **voice techniques**: articulation, volume, projection, breath control; **movement techniques**: blocking, movement, body, space, time, dynamics, relationship; and **characterization techniques**: visualization, role play, and improvisation).

Pre-Activity: As a warm-up, select a short text or a poem of any genre. Have students first read over the text independently, and then split the class up into three groups. Have one group focus on voice techniques, the second group on movement techniques, and the third on characterization techniques. Challenge each group to interpret and present the text or poem from the focus they have been assigned. As a final challenge, students can incorporate elements of all three techniques.

Part 1: Have students brainstorm relevant themes that they would like to explore in their ensemble performance. This could be a theme related to the Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (for instance, Christopher’s journey on the train and in the streets of London to find his mother), or other relevant themes such as bullying, identity, newcomers to Canada, relationships, adolescence, mental health, equity, inclusivity, and family. Prompting questions: What is an issue/theme that we feel passionate about? From here, how can we use the group/ensemble technique to represent, highlight, or evoke a message about our theme to the audience? What did we see in the Curious Incident performance that inspires us? What are the key points/messages that we would like to convey in the piece?

Part 2: Students will be given time to rehearse their collaborative pieces, while incorporating all of the elements that they brainstormed in part 1. Students should keep in mind the following techniques: **voice techniques**: articulation, projection, volume, breath control, overlapping speech; **movement**
Techniques: blocking, movement, body, space, time, dynamics, relationship; characterization techniques: visualization, role play, and improvisation.

Part 3: Groups will present their collaborative pieces for the class.

Consolidation/Debrief

After all groups have presented, the class can engage in a class discussion and/or reflective writing. Discussion questions/writing prompts:

- What was the most challenging part about this activity?
- How did your group incorporate previous experiences with the theme into your piece?
- Reflect on the process and the steps that your group took to arrive at your presentation.
- What would you add/change to your piece?
- What part of your piece do you think is the most powerful, and why?
- Do you think the piece would have the same effect if there was only one person in the scene? Why or why not?
- Reflect on your experience viewing an ensemble piece as an audience member, and participating in the creation and performance of an ensemble piece. Did anything surprise you? What was the most significant moment in your learning?
- Is there a “right” or a “wrong” way to compose/perform an ensemble piece? Explain.

Ideas for variations/extensions:

- Music can be incorporated and/or become the focus. Key questions: What effect did the addition of music have on your ensemble piece? How did you choose the music and in what parts did you add music?
- The teacher and/or students may use a pre-existing piece as a base. For example:
  - Poetry (using a poem or a segment of a poem for a collaborative ensemble piece)
  - A segment of a novel
  - Lyrics from a song
  - A work of creative writing from a student
  - A work of visual art
  - Dialogue from a play
- This activity can be extended over several classes, especially if the teacher would like to emphasize the rehearsal/workshopping process (drafts, performing, giving/receiving feedback, re-writing, and collaborating).
- After presenting, pair two groups together and challenge them to work together to create an ensemble scene with even more individuals.
Sources

Curriculum Documents:

BC Arts Education Curriculum documents (K–9):

BC Drama Curriculum documents (10–12)

BC English Language Arts Curriculum documents (K–9)

BC English Language Arts Curriculum documents (10–12)

About the author and playwright
https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/mark-haddon

Images

Mark Haddon: https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1050.Mark_Haddon

Simon Stephens: http://www.inkpellet.co.uk/2016/05/a-day-in-the-life-of-simon-stephens/

Script