

## INTRODUCTION

This is an excerpt from a novel told by a somewhat unusual 15-year-old boy. He lives with his father in Southern England and describes himself as "a mathematician with some behavioural difficulties".

English author Mark Haddon (b. 1962) is a writer and illustrator of children's books. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is his first novel intended for an adult audience and has won him several awards.

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

MARK HADDON, 2003

'capital city' hovedstad  
prime number primtal

**M**y name is Christopher John Francis Boone. I know all the countries of the world and their capital cities and every prime number up to 7,057.

Eight years ago, when I first met [my teacher] Siobhan, she showed me this picture

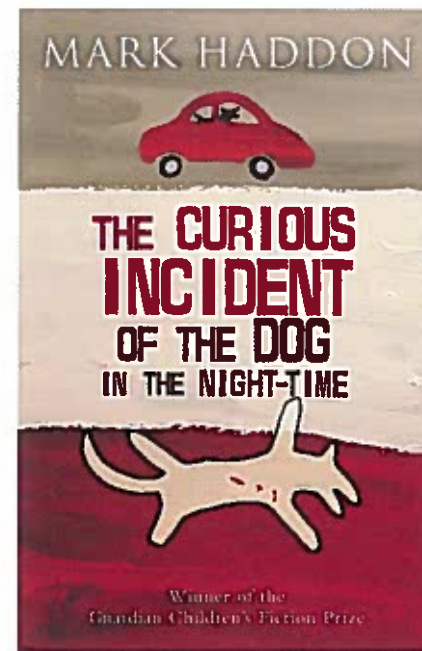


and I knew that it meant "sad", which is what I felt when I found the [neighbour's] dead dog.

Then she showed me this picture



and I knew that it meant "happy", like when I'm reading about the Apollo space missions, or when I am still awake at 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. in the morning and I can walk up and down the street and pretend that I am the only person in the whole world.



Then she drew some other pictures



but I was unable to say what these meant.

I got Siobhan to draw lots of these faces and then write down next to them exactly what they meant. I kept the piece of paper in my pocket and took it out when I didn't understand what someone was saying. But it was very difficult to decide which of the diagrams was most like the face they were making because people's faces move very quickly.

When I told Siobhan that I was doing this, she got out a pencil and another piece of paper and said it probably made people feel very



and then she laughed. So I tore the original piece of paper up and threw it away. And Siobhan apologized. And now if I don't know what someone is saying, I ask them what they mean or I walk away.

I used to think that Mother and Father might get divorced. That was because they had lots of arguments and sometimes they hated each other. This was because of the stress of looking after someone who has Behavioural Problems like I have. I used to have lots of Behavioural Problems, but I don't have so many now because I'm more grown up and I can take decisions for myself and do things on

be'havioural adfards

my own like going out of the house and buying things at the shop at the end of the road. These are some of my Behavioural Problems

- A. Not talking to people for a long time<sup>1</sup>
- B. Not eating or drinking anything for a long time<sup>2</sup>
- C. Not liking being touched
- D. Screaming when I am angry or confused
- E. Not liking being in really small places with other people
- F. Smashing things when I am angry or confused
- G. Groaning
- H. Not liking yellow things or brown things and refusing to touch yellow things or brown things
- I. Refusing to use my toothbrush if anyone else has touched it
- J. Not eating food if different sorts of food are touching each other
- K. Not noticing that people are angry with me
- L. Not smiling
- M. Saying things that other people think are rude<sup>3</sup>
- N. Doing stupid things<sup>4</sup>
- O. Hitting other people
- P. Hating France
- Q. Driving Mother's car<sup>5</sup>
- R. Getting cross when someone has moved the furniture<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes these things would make Mother and Father really angry and they would shout at me or they would shout at each other. Sometimes Father would say, "Christopher, if you do not behave I swear I shall knock the living daylight out of you," or Mother would say, "Jesus, Christopher, I am seriously considering putting you in a home" [...].

All the other children at my school are stupid. Except I'm not meant to call them stupid, even though this is what they are. I'm meant to say that they have learning difficulties or that they have special needs. But this is stupid because everyone has learning

- 1) Once I didn't talk to anyone for 5 weeks.
- 2) When I was 6, Mother used to get me to drink strawberry-flavoured slimming meals out of a measuring jug and we would have competitions to see how fast I could drink a quarter of a litre.
- 3) People say that you always have to tell the truth. But they do not mean this because you are not allowed to tell old people that they are old and you are not allowed to tell people if they smell funny or if a grown-up has made a fart. And you are not allowed to say "I don't like you" unless that person has been horrible to you.
- 4) Stupid things are things like emptying a jar of peanut butter onto the table in the kitchen and making it level with a knife so it covers all the table right to the edges, or burning things on the gas stove to see what happened to them, like my shoes or silver foil or sugar.
- 5) I only did this once by borrowing the keys when she went into town on the bus, and I hadn't driven a car before and I was 8 years old and 5 months so I drove it into the wall, and the car isn't there anymore because Mother is dead.
- 6) It is permitted to move the chairs and the table in the kitchen because that is different, but it makes me feel dizzy and sick if someone has moved the sofa and the chairs around in the living room or the dining room. Mother used to do this when she did the hoovering, so I made a special plan of where all the furniture was meant to be and did measurements and I put everything back in its proper place afterward and then I felt better. But since Mother died, Father hasn't done any hoovering, so that is OK. And Mrs. Shears did the hoovering once but I did groaning and she shouted at Father and she never did it again.

'strawberry-flavoured' med  
jordbærsmag  
slimming slanke-  
measuring jug målebæger

jar glas  
make 'level' (her) smøre ud  
silver foil solvpapir

dizzy svimmel  
'hoover' (vb.) støvsuge  
'proper' ret

groan stønne, jamre

difficulties because learning to speak French or understanding relativity is difficult and also everyone has special needs, like Father, who has to carry a little packet of artificial sweetening tablets around with him to put in his coffee to stop him from getting fat, or Mrs. Peters, who wears a beige-coloured hearing aid, or Siobhan, who has glasses so thick that they give you a headache if you borrow them, and none of these people are Special Needs, even if they have special needs.

But Siobhan said we have to use those words because people used to call children like the children at school *spaz* and *crip* and *mong*, which were nasty words. But that is stupid too because sometimes the children from the school down the road see us in the street when we're getting off the bus and they shout, "Special Needs! Special Needs!" But I don't take any notice because I don't listen to what other people say and only sticks and stones can break my bones and I have my Swiss Army knife if they hit me and if I kill them it will be self-defence and I won't go to prison.

I am going to prove that I'm not stupid. Next month I'm going to take my A-level in maths and I'm going to get an A grade. No one has ever taken an A-level at our school before, and the headmistress, Mrs. Gascoyne, didn't want me to take it at first. She said they didn't have the facilities to let us sit A-levels. But Father had an argument with Mrs. Gascoyne and he got really cross. Mrs. Gascoyne said they didn't want to treat me differently from everyone else in the school because then everyone would want to be treated differently and it would set a precedent. And I could always do my A-levels later, at 18.

I was sitting in Mrs. Gascoyne's office with Father when she said these things. And Father said, "Christopher is getting a crap enough deal already, don't you think, without you shitting on him from a great height as well. Jesus, this is the one thing he is really good at."

[...] And she said she'd go away and think about it. And the next week she rang Father at home and told him that I could take the A-level and the Reverend Peters would be what is called the invigilator.

And after I've taken A-level maths I am going to take A-level further maths and physics and then I can go to university. There is not a university in our town, which is Swindon, because it is a small place. So we will have to move to another town where there is a university because I don't want to live on my own or in a house with other students. But that will be all right because Father wants to move to a different town as well. He sometimes says things like, "We've got to get out of this town, kiddo." And sometimes he says, "Swindon is the arsehole of the world."

Then, when I've got a degree in maths, or physics, or maths and

arti'ficial sweetening 'tablet  
sodetablet

hearing aid høreapparat

take 'notice (her) tage sig af  
noget

A-level = advanced level  
svarer til studentereksamen  
A grade (svarer til) 12-tal  
head'mistress kvindelig  
skoleinspektør

set a 'precedent skabe  
præcedens, være et eksempel  
som andre vil følge

'reverend pastor

in'vigilator eksamensvagt

Swindon by i Sydengland

physics, I will be able to get a job and earn lots of money and I will be able to pay someone who can look after me and cook my meals and wash my clothes [...].

I like timetables because I like to know when everything is going to happen. [...]

7:20 a.m. Wake up

7:25 a.m. Clean teeth and wash face

7:30 a.m. Give Toby food and water

7:40 a.m. Have breakfast

8:00 a.m. Put school clothes on

8:05 a.m. Pack schoolbag

8:10 a.m. Read book or watch video

8:32 a.m. Catch bus to school

8:43 a.m. Go past tropical fish shop

8:51 a.m. Arrive at school

9:00 a.m. School assembly

9:15 a.m. First morning class

10:30 a.m. Break

10:50 a.m. Art class with Mrs. Peters\*

12:30 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m. First afternoon class

2:15 p.m. Second afternoon class

3:30 p.m. Catch school bus home

3:49 p.m. Get off school bus at home

3:50 p.m. Have juice and snack

3:55 p.m. Give Toby food and water

4:00 p.m. Take Toby out of his cage

4:18 p.m. Put Toby into his cage

4:20 p.m. Watch television or video

5:00 p.m. Read a book

6:00 p.m. Have tea

6:30 p.m. Watch television or a video

7:00 p.m. Do maths practice

8:00 p.m. Have a bath

8:15 p.m. Get changed into pyjamas

8:20 p.m. Play computer games

9:00 p.m. Watch television or a video

9:20 p.m. Have juice and a snack

9:30 p.m. Go to bed

And at the weekend I make up my own timetable and I write it down on a piece of cardboard and I put it up on the wall. And it says things like *Feed Toby* or *Do maths* or *Go to the shop to buy sweets*.

\*) In the art class we do art, but in the first morning class and the first afternoon class and the second afternoon class we do lots of different things like *Reading and Tests* and *Social Skills* and *Looking after Animals* and *What We Did at the Weekend* and *Writing and Maths* and *Stranger Danger* and *Money* and *Personal Hygiene*.

And that is one of the [...] reasons why I don't like France, because when people are on holiday they don't have a timetable and I had to get Mother and Father to tell me every morning exactly what we were going to do that day to make me feel better. [...]

[In] one of my favourite dreams [...] nearly everyone on the earth is dead because they have caught a virus. But it's not like a normal virus. It's like a computer virus. And people catch it because of the meaning of something an infected person says and the meaning of what they do with their faces when they say it, which means that people can also get it from watching an infected person on television, which means that it spreads around the world really quickly.

And when people get the virus they just sit on the sofa and do nothing and they don't eat or drink and so they die. But sometimes I have different versions of the dream, like when you can see two versions of a film, the ordinary one and the director's cut, like *Blade Runner*. And in some versions of the dream the virus makes them crash their cars or walk into the sea and drown, or jump into rivers, and I think that this version is better because then there aren't bodies of dead people everywhere.

And eventually there is no one left in the world except people who don't look at other people's faces and who don't know what these pictures mean



and these people are all special people like me. And they like being on their own and I hardly ever see them because they are like okapi in the jungle in the Congo, which are a kind of antelope and very shy and rare.

And I can go anywhere in the world and I know that no one is going to talk to me or touch me or ask me a question. But if I don't want to go anywhere I don't have to, and I can stay at home and [...] play computer games for a whole week, or I can just sit in the corner of the room and rub a £1 coin back and forward over the ripple shapes on the surface of the radiator. And I wouldn't have to go to France.

And I go out of Father's house and I walk down the street, and it is very quiet even though it is the middle of the day and I can't hear any noise except birds singing and wind and sometimes buildings falling down in the distance, and if I stand very close to traffic lights I can hear a little click as the colours change. [...]

And then I find someone's car keys and I get into their car and I drive, and it doesn't matter if I bump into things and I drive to the sea, and I park the car and I get out and there is rain pouring down.

school assembly (svarer til)  
morgensamling

\*cardboard pap, karton

skill færdighed, kompetence

infected smittet

*Blade Runner* amerikansk  
science fiction film fra 1982

ripple bolge-



lighthouse fyrstårn  
point landtange

surf (sb.) brænding

in case hvis

ruler lineal

Gobi Aloo Sag indisk ret med  
blomkål, kartofler og spinat

And I take an ice cream from a shop and eat it. And then I walk down to the beach. And the beach is covered in sand and big rocks and there is a lighthouse on a point but the light is not on because the lighthouse keeper is dead.

And I stand in the surf and it comes up and over my shoes. And I don't go swimming in case there are sharks. And I stand and look at the horizon and I take out my long metal ruler and I hold it up against the line between the sea and the sky and I demonstrate that the line is a curve and the earth is round. And the way the surf comes up and over my shoes and then goes down again is in a rhythm, like music or drumming.

And then I get some dry clothes from the house of a family who are dead. And I go home to Father's house, except it's not Father's house anymore, it's mine. And I make myself some Gobi Aloo Sag with red food colouring in it and some strawberry milk shake for a drink, and then I watch a video about the solar system and I play some computer games and I go to bed.

And then the dream is finished and I am happy.

## Comprehension



1. What do we learn about Christopher's family, the type of school that he attends, his spare time activities and his plans for the future?
2. Why does he go to a special school? List all the things about him that may explain this, as well as everything else that makes him unusual.
3. At the beginning of the excerpt, what is the difference between the smileys (or emoticons) that Christopher understands and the ones he does not understand? Also, explain why Siobhan laughs at the end of this section and then apologises, p. 247, ll. 9-13.
4. What is Christopher's dream (or ideal) world like?

## Analysis and interpretation



1. What does Christopher's ideal world tell us about him? What kind of personality and problems might someone have or what experiences might they have had to make them wish for such a world?
2. What overall terms would you use to describe Christopher's personality, behaviour and social interaction? What mental disorder might he suffer from?
3. What graphic elements does Christopher use that we normally do not see in stories? What does this have to do with his condition and way of thinking?
4. What are the effects of the story being told from Christopher's point of view? For instance, what information and descriptions do we get – or not get?
5. Although Christopher's social skills are limited, he is sometimes very perceptive when it comes to other people's behaviour. In what way is this evident when he tells us about the terms used for the pupils at his school, p. 248, l. 28 - p. 249, l. 14?
6. Why does his father think that "Christopher is getting a crap enough deal already", p. 249, ll. 28-29, at school?

## Parallels



How are Christopher's mental health problems fundamentally different from most of the problems we have seen in this chapter so far? For instance, consider the duration of Christopher's problems and the way they have influenced his life.

## Writing



1. Brainstorm in class: How do personal letters differ from more formal ones in terms of layout, salutations, greetings and vocabulary? For a little help, see the writing exercise on p. 245.
2. Imagine that Christopher is moving to London with his father in order to start university and that Siobhan wants to tell Christopher's new mentor and teacher, Professor Jacobs, about the student he will soon meet.
3. Write Siobhan's letter to Professor Jacobs. In it she introduces herself, describes some of Christopher's strong and weak points and gives the professor advice on how to treat and help his new student.

## Observation



1. In the third section of Mark Haddon's text, p. 248, l. 28 - p. 250, l. 3,
  - A. determine what tenses are used (the present, the past, the present perfect or constructions that indicate the future, e.g. with *will* or *going to*)
  - B. explain the use of tenses in each paragraph.
2. In the first section, p. 246, l. 1 - p. 247, l. 13,
  - A. find sentences in which the present participle (or *ing*-form) is used
  - B. explain why this form is used in each case.

## Dictation



1. Do you remember what the following punctuation marks are called?

. , - ( ) ! ? : ; / [...]

2. From the text, choose 1-3 paragraphs with relatively few names and difficult words.
3. Read the paragraphs (incl. punctuation) slowly and with lots of pauses to a classmate, who writes them down and then checks them by comparing them to the ones in this book.
4. Switch roles.

If you are not sure how to pronounce a word, look it up in an online dictionary with sound.