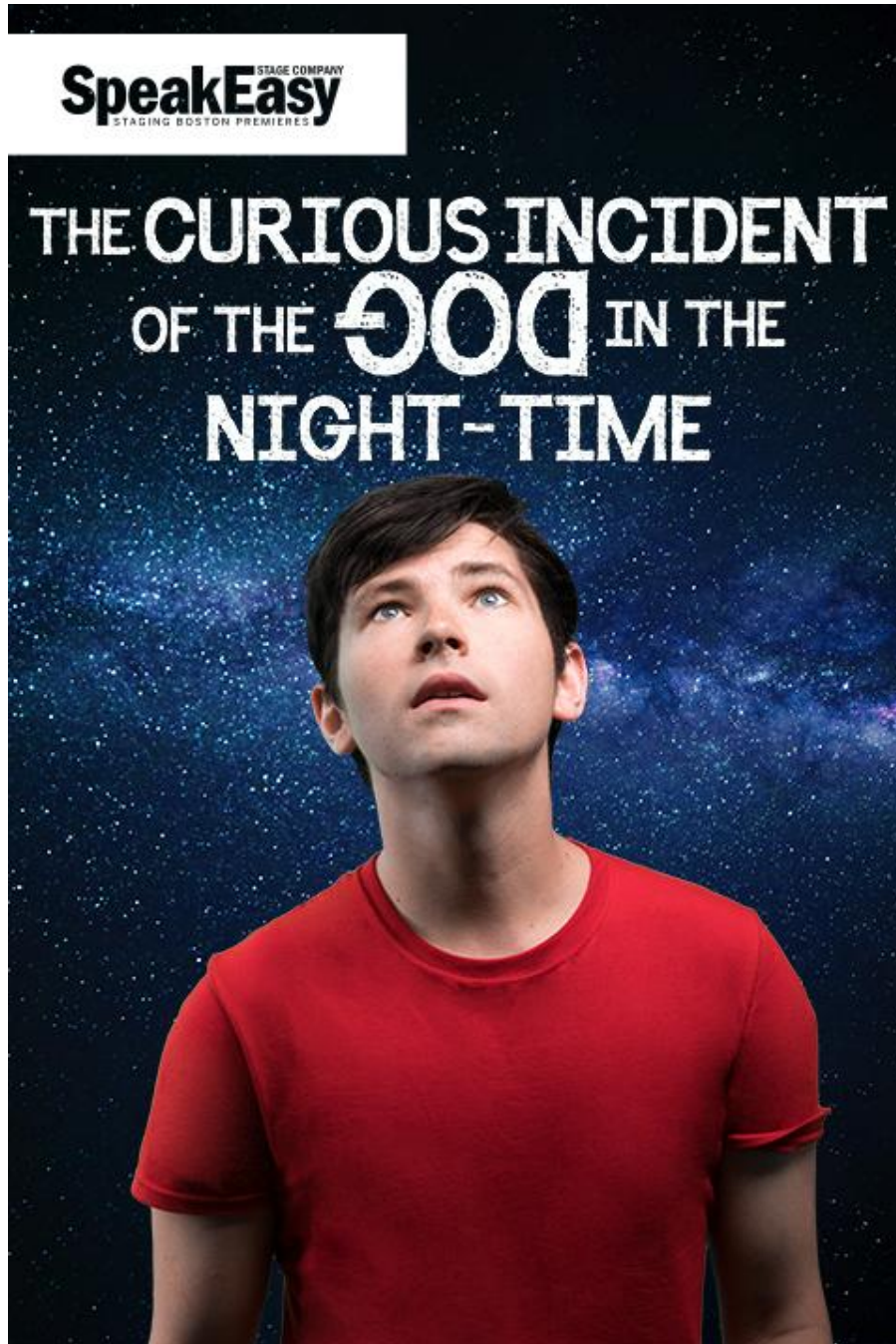


SpeakEasy Connects Curriculum Guide



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About Your Visit

We are so happy to have you and your students join us for SpeakEasy's production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*. A visit to the theater has the potential to be a life-changing experience, as well as an opportunity for a unique kind of learning. It can touch the imagination, arouse curiosity, or fire an artistic impulse. Theatre can also be an exceptional resource linking so many areas of knowledge: history, geography, language, citizenship, and much more. The aim of this resource is to provide advice and suggestions to support your visit to the theater so that it is enjoyable and beneficial. Before your visit, it would be helpful to discuss the following with your students:

How is seeing a play or musical different from going to the movies?

First of all, it's LIVE! Each performance is unique and different, whereas a movie will always stay the same. Since it's live, there is a relationship between the actors and the audience. The actors can see and hear you and feed off of your energy!

What is acceptable behavior at the theater?

Theatre is a unique art form since it requires collaboration between the audience and the performers. As an audience member, you can do your part by:

- Refraining from talking during the performance so others are not distracted.
- Turning **off** cell phones or other electronic devices. A text message alert can distract an actor from their performance!
- Responding to the actors and actions in a respectful manner. Clap if you like something you see and go ahead and laugh at the funny moments—the actors feed off of this energy! It lets them know you are enjoying yourself and the performance.

About *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*

Adapted from Mark Haddon's novel of the same name, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* is a play adapted by Simon Stephens that premiered at the Royal National Theatre in London in 2012. The story is told from the point of view of Christopher Boone, whose condition is never mentioned, but heavily implied to have Asperger Syndrome, high-functioning autism, or savant syndrome. However, when Mark Haddon wrote of the novel in 2009, he said that "*Curious Incident* is not a book about Asperger's...if anything it's a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising and revealing way."

Haddon's best known work is *Curious Incident*, for which he has won numerous accolades including the Guardian Prize and the Commonwealth Writers Prize. Simon Stephens' adaptation re-works Haddon's novel in several ways. Most significantly, he uses a "play-within-a-play" structure by presenting the story as Christopher's own writing, rather than a first-person narrative found in the book. Additionally, the play features approximately thirty characters portrayed by less than a dozen actors. The play was highly praised in both the West End and on Broadway and later went on to win a Tony Award for Best New Play. SpeakEasy Stage Company is proud to present the Boston-area premiere of this vital, contemporary story.

Synopsis

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time focuses on Christopher Boone, a 15-year old mathematic genius with signs of autism spectrum disorder. Christopher lives with his father in Swindon, England, about 75 miles west of London. One night, Christopher discovers that his neighbor Mrs. Shears' dog, Wellington, has been killed with a pitchfork. Upset by this incident, Christopher, who doesn't like to be touched, strikes a police officer who tries to pull him away from the dog. Christopher is arrested and questioned about Wellington's death, but eventually released into his father's custody. Although his father tells him to keep his nose out of other people's business, Christopher decides to find out who killed Wellington.

Ignoring repeated warnings from his father, Christopher chronicles his investigation in a book, as part of a school assignment. Christopher overcomes his fear of strangers by going door to door, interviewing neighbors to whom he has never spoken before. Eventually, he talks to one of his neighbors, Mrs. Alexander. Mrs. Alexander reveals to Christopher that his mother and Mr. Shears had an affair before his mother passed away.

Not long after, Christopher's father discovers his book, becomes furious, and confiscates it. Christopher searches for the book among his father's belongings and uncovers a series of letters, addressed to him from his supposedly dead mother. Once Christopher realizes his father lied to him about his mother's death, he feels sick and passes out in his bedroom. His father finds him and realizes what has happened and apologizes, explaining that he acted out of desire to protect Christopher from the knowledge of his mother's abandonment of the family. He also admits to killing Wellington after an argument with Mrs. Shears.

Terrified by the news of his father as a murderer, Christopher sneaks out of the house and travels to London to live with his mother. During a harrowing journey, he copes with and overcomes the social fears and limitations of his condition, dodges police, and almost gets hit by a train. His arrival at his mother's flat comes as a total surprise to her, as she had no idea that Christopher's father had been withholding her letters. Christopher settles in for a time at his mother and Mr. Shear's flat, but friction caused by his presence shortly results in his mother's decision to leave Mr. Shears and return to Swindon.

Christopher moves into a new apartment with his mother and slowly allows his father back into his life. When Christopher's pet rat Toby dies, Christopher's father gives Christopher a puppy. At school, Christopher sits for his A-level math exam and receives an A grade, the best possible score. The play ends with Christopher planning to take more A-level exams in physics and further math, and then plans to get a first class honors degree and become a scientist. He knows that all of this is possible because he solved the mystery of Wellington's murder, was brave enough to go to London alone to find his mother, and wrote the book that we have read.

Characters

CHRISTOPHER BOONE (ELIOTT PURCELL*)



Christopher is 15 years old with a unique perspective on the world. He notices things in minute detail, doesn't like to be touched by anyone, and relates more easily to animals. Christopher is also a skilled mathematician.

JUDY BOONE (LAURA LATREILLE*)



Christopher remembers his mom [Judy] on the beach swimming, diving, and persuading him to paddle in the waves. Judy found it difficult to cope with Christopher's condition and felt isolated in the home and in her marriage.

SIOBHAN (JACKIE DAVIS*)



Siobhan is Christopher's teacher and the narrator. She encourages Christopher to write a book about his investigation, which she reads to the audience.

MRS. SHEARS (CHRISTINE POWER)



Mrs. Shears is Christopher's next-door neighbor and the owner of the dead dog, Wellington. She's divorced from her husband, Mr. Shears. Mrs. Shears had at one time been close to Christopher's father.

ED BOONE (CRAIG MATHERS*)



Ed is a single father who lives with his son Christopher. Ed loves Christopher and encourages him to excel in math. Sometimes, however, Ed gets frustrated when he doesn't know how to handle his son's behavior. Ed demands that Christopher halt his investigation of a dead dog named Wellington.

MR. ROGER SHEARS (TIM HACKNEY)



Roger is Mrs. Shears' ex-husband. When Christopher starts investigating Wellington's death, Mr. Shears becomes 'Prime Suspect.'

Characters

MRS. ALEXANDER/POSH LADY (CHERYL MCMAHON*)



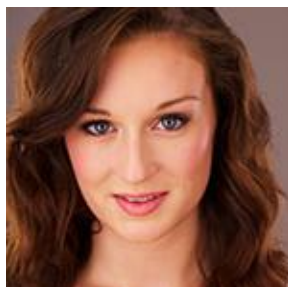
POLICEMAN 1/MR. THOMPSON/MAN WITH SOCKS (ALEJANDRO SIMOES)



REVEREND PETERS/STATION POLICEMAN (DAMON SINGLETARY)



NO.40/INFORMATION/PUNK GIRL (GIGI WATSON)



*Denotes Equity

Setting

Christopher is from a small, post-industrial town called Swindon. In 1840, the Great Western Railway built a village in Swindon to house the workers who repaired trains. Swindon quickly developed into a bustling locomotive town, and was a hub for ironworkers and travelers throughout the 20th century. However, when the Great Western Railway sold its stocks to British Rail (the new, nationalized railways), Swindon lost much of its business and entered a period of decline.

Today, it is a peaceful, quaint town filled with about 200,000 residents, mostly middle-class. There are plenty of pubs, shops, and attractions in the town center, but the suburbs are very quiet. Like most small towns, many of the people who are born there never leave. It takes about an hour to travel from Swindon (Signal Point Station) to London (Paddington Station) by train.



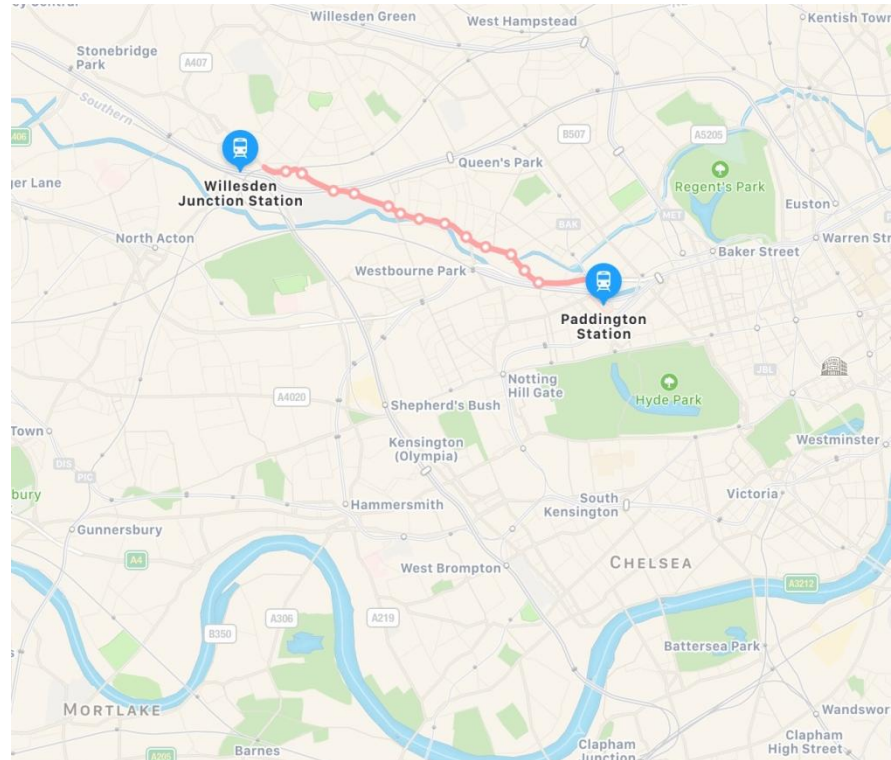
London is home to almost 9 million people (about 45 times the population of Swindon), so when Christopher arrives in London, it is likely that he has never seen this many people in one place before. London is one of the biggest cities in the world. Even though the public transit system is hyper-efficient, it can be confusing to figure out which line you need, especially without a smart phone.

When Christopher arrives at Paddington Station, he is overwhelmed by all the sights and sounds. Paddington Station connects the British Rail (like Amtrak) to the London Underground, and it is about the size of a shopping mall.



Setting

Right: Christopher's path
from Paddington to
Willesden Junction



Below: The London
Underground Map (also
known as “The Tube”)



A-Level Maths

What are A-Level Exams?

AS and A-levels are the traditional qualifications offered by schools and colleges for 16-19 year olds in the United Kingdom. They are highly valued by universities and employers and focus on academic subjects, although some are work-related.

AS-Levels can be taken as a stand-alone qualification, or as the first part of an A-Level course. AS levels are completed at the end of Year 12 (junior year equivalent). A2 exams and coursework are added on to an AS-Level at the end of Year 13 (senior year equivalent), bringing it up to A-Level standard.

Who takes A-Level Exams?

Students who hope to attend university take A-Level Exams to qualify for university admission. In the United Kingdom, you must apply to a specific degree program, so your A-Level scores become a direct indicator of your capability in your future course of study.

AS and A-Level courses are studied after age 16. Up until age 16, students work towards their “GCSE,” or General Certificate of Secondary Education. Unlike a high school diploma in the US, the GCSE does not qualify you for any level of university study.

How are A-Level Exams graded?

A-Level Exam results are denoted by a score of A*, A, B, C, D, or E. Only about 7% of students who take an A-Level score an A* (after 2 years of preparation).

Universities make “conditional offers” of admission that are dependent on what grade you get on the A-Level exams at the end of Year 13.

What are A-Level Exams equivalent to in the US?

The subjects offered are comparable to International Baccalaureate courses. In America, the most comparable level is an AP exam or an SAT II Subject Test. The difference is that, in the United Kingdom, the A-Levels are the only “college admission” exams; there is no SAT or ACT, so the score you receive on an A-Level is a much bigger deal.

The A-Level exams are more difficult than an AP exam in the US. Someone who scored a 5 on an AP exam may only get 70% of the questions correct on an A-Level exam. This makes sense, because UK students only study 3-4 subjects for the final 2 years of their schooling in preparation for the A-Levels.

How does this relate to the play?

Once you understand what an “A-Level” exam is, it makes Christopher’s achievement that much more impressive. He takes his first A-Level at age 15, which is 2-3 years before the average student. Not only this, but he scores an A*, which is nearly impossible for the average student. In the United States education system, this would be about the equivalent of Christopher scoring a 5 on an AP Calculus exam at age 14.

Autism and Neurodiversity

What is AUTISM?

“Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the name for a group of developmental disorders. ASD includes a wide range, “a spectrum” of symptoms, skills, and levels of disability.” Whereas some people are mildly impaired by their symptoms, others are severely disabled.

Symptoms (may include):

- Delay in language development
- Repetitive and routine behaviors
- Difficulty making eye contact
- Sensory problems
- Difficulty interpreting facial expressions
- Problems with expressing emotions
- Difficulty interacting with peers
- Sleep problems

Strengths (may include):

- Above-average intelligence
- Ability to learn things in detail and remember information for long periods of time
- Strong visual and auditory learning skills
- Excellence in math, science, music, or art

Some facts about autism

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates autism’s prevalence as 1 in 68 children in the United States. This includes 1 in 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls.
- Each year, an estimated 50,000 teens with autism become adults, and lose school-based autism services
- Around one third of people with autism remain nonverbal.
- Around one third of people with autism have an intellectual disability.
- Certain medical and mental health issues frequently accompany autism. They include gastrointestinal (GI) disorders, seizures, sleep disturbances, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety and phobias.

What Role Does Autism play in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*?

Although *Curious Incident* is not solely a story about autism, it is a factor that plays a significant role in Christopher’s interactions with the world. In some ways, Christopher can be viewed as having “high-functioning” autism –he possesses above-average intelligence, can remember things in great detail, and highly excels in math. However, he also struggles with behavioral difficulties, sensory-overload, and social interactions, making his daily life difficult.

Autism and Neurodiversity

What is NEURODIVERSITY?

Short for “neurological diversity,” it refers to the diversity of human brains and minds.

Supporters of neurodiversity celebrate all kinds of minds. They recognize that there is not just one right way to think and perceive the world. The **neurodiversity movement** works toward a world where people’s brain differences are seen as valuable rather than as things to be fixed. Proponents of neurodiversity want to make it easier for people of all neurotypes to contribute to the world as they are, rather than forcing them to attempt to appear or think more typically.

One of the biggest promoters of neurodiversity is the autism rights movement. Members of this movement help develop support systems that allow people to live their lives as they are without conforming to societal expectations of what is normal, or **neurotypical**.

What does NEUROTYPICAL mean?

A person is neurotypical (or NT) if their brain works “normally,” according to societal standards. Neurotypical often signifies people who do not have disabilities.

What are some examples of what neurodiversity looks like?

- A family with at least one autistic member as well as a non-autistic member.
- A classroom with students that are neurotypical, autistic, and have ADHD would be considered a neurodiverse classroom.

How did the neurodiversity movement change the way some people view people with autism and other mental disorders?

The neurodiversity movement challenged prevailing views about mental disabilities. Rather than view conditions such as autism and ADHD as disorders or deficits, neurodiversity proponents argue that society should put their efforts toward accommodating these individuals rather than “cure” them or force them to behave “normally.”

Questions to Consider:

How might someone who promotes neurodiversity view Christopher and the world he lives in?

How might a scientific researcher working to cure autism view Christopher?

What is a Sensory-Friendly Performance?

On November 19, 2017, SpeakEasy Stage Company will be offering a sensory-friendly performance of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*. This performance will accommodate audience members with autism spectrum disorder or other sensory-input issues.

SpeakEasy Stage Company is dedicated to not only telling stories about a wide range of people on stage, but also to bringing a wide range of people to watch these stories from the audience. By offering this performance, SpeakEasy Stage Company is able to make the story of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* more accessible to the Boston community.

What, exactly, makes this performance “sensory-friendly”?

- The lighting in the audience will never go completely dark –it will stay dimmed.
- The volume for this performance will be lowered.
- A quiet relaxation area will be made available to those who need to take a break from the show.
- Additional trained ushers and volunteers will be made available to those with needs.
- The use of electronic devices such as smart phones and tablets will be permitted.
- Audience members are encouraged to leave their seats and move around as needed.
- The audience is not expected to remain quiet during this performance –this will be a judgment-free zone.

Q. Who should attend this performance?

A. This performance caters to people of any age with sensory-input issues, their families, as well as their caretakers. Alterations will be made to the theater to foster a judgment-free zone.

Q. Can anyone attend this performance?

A. Anyone is welcome to attend, however SpeakEasy Stage Company strongly encourages patrons to familiarize themselves with all expectations and show modifications in order to foster a welcoming environment for the entire audience.

Q. What changes will you make to the script for this performance?

A. The script will not be altered. It is important that SpeakEasy maintains the integrity of the show so audience members can see the same show as the rest of the community.

Q. Will any other accommodations be provided to audience members prone to nervousness or anxious feelings?

A. Yes! Ushers will also have free fidgets and earplugs available upon request.

Q. Can people leave the theater during the show? Can we come back after leaving?

A. Yes, audience members can leave their seats at any time. Staff will be on hand to direct them wherever needed.

Pre-Show Activities

HIGH SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITY 1

YOUR TASK: Christopher is a unique narrator in the novel and in the stage production. He doesn't lie and he takes care to mention all of the small nuances and details he notices or experiences. Look at the selection below where Christopher describes an event and use his direct, honest tone and attention to detail to describe events of your own life. Choose a small section of your day and describe it the way Christopher Boone would.

Take a careful look at the section below where Christopher describes looking for his book:

"Then I looked in his clothes cupboard. In the bottom of the cupboard was a large plastic toolbox which was full of tools for doing-it-yourself but I could see these without opening the box because it was made out of transparent grey plastic. Then I saw that there was another box underneath the toolbox.

So I lifted the toolbox out of the cupboard.

The other box was an old cardboard box that is called a shirt box because people used to put shirts in them." - pg 38

What small part of your day will you describe?

List here all of the tasks, items, thoughts, places and people that you'll write about — be sure to note everything like Christopher would:

Utilizing Christopher's voice as a character, write how he would describe your experience on the back of this paper. Don't worry about conforming to all the rules of grammar and run-on sentences — be creative. Christopher sometimes gets so lost in his descriptions that they grow larger than the usual sentence length. When you're finished, share your descriptions of the events with your class to hear how others have used Christopher's style to tell their own stories.

Pre-Show Activities

HIGH SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITY 2

YOUR TASK: In the play, Christopher and his teacher Siobhan talk about metaphors. She says, “The word metaphor means carrying something from one place to another and it is when you describe something by using a word for something that isn’t.” Explore the list of metaphors below. Use one of the metaphors as the title of a story you’ll write using the meaning of the metaphor as your theme.

A House of Cards
Actions Speak Louder than Words
Apple of Her Eye
Assignment Was a Breeze
Icing on the Cake
Life is a Roller Coaster
Lost in a Sea of Faces

Music to My Ears
Off the Hook
Pulling Your Leg
Skeleton in the Cupboard
Time is Money
Turn Over a New Leaf
We Had a Pig of a Day

Select one of the metaphors that appeals to you: _____

What does this metaphor mean? _____

Now use your writing skills to create a story that uses the metaphor above as its main idea. Use the original metaphor as the title and create an original story that illustrates the meaning of the metaphor you selected. What will your story be about?

Now that you’ve outlined what the story will be about, write the story. Share your work with others in the class. Read the story to them without saying the title and see if they can guess the metaphor that was the basis for your story. Listen to your classmate’s story as well. Share your stories with the class.

Post-Show Discussion Questions

Christopher's Parents

Christopher's parents, with their affairs, their arguments, and their passionate rages, are clearly in the grip of emotions they themselves can't fully understand or control. How does this state relate to Christopher's incomprehension of the passions that drive other people?

Christopher's parents interact with him in two very different ways. Which way do you think is better for Christopher? Which way is better for his parents? **OR** Compare and contrast the attitudes and strategies Christopher's parents have in interacting with him.

Given Christopher's aversion to being touched, can he experience his parent's love for him, or can he only understand it as a fact, because they tell him they love him? Is there any evidence in the play that he experiences a sense of attachment to other people?

Do you like Christopher? What about his father? And his mother? Are they good people? Do you sympathize with them when they behave unskillfully, or blame them for their shortcomings?

After the play ends, what do you think will happen in Christopher's relationship with his father?

General Questions / Self Reflect

What can we learn from Christopher's affection for animals? Why is he able to connect with them more easily than he can with human beings?

Christopher says he doesn't understand lies, and that he cannot lie. Does the play support that idea? Why is lying such an alien concept to him? Why do "normal" human beings in the play, such as Christopher's parents, and most of us, find lies so indispensable? Why is the idea of truth so central to Christopher's narration?

What challenges does *The Curious Incident* present to the ways we usually think and talk about characters in plays? How does it force us to reexamine our normal ideas about love and desire, which are often the driving forces in drama? By seeing the world through Christopher's eyes, what do we discover about ourselves?

How does the play help us understand, at least in part, something we might otherwise never understand?

Christopher says he finds people confusing. Why do you think this is so? Do you sometimes find people confusing? Did you use to find people confusing?

What about Christopher's character and personality do you think makes him enjoy detective work so much? Why do you think Christopher keeps doing his detective work after his father demands that he stop?

Post-Show Discussion Questions

General Questions / Self Reflect (cont.)

Christopher's journey to London underscores the difficulties he has being on his own, and the real disadvantages of his condition in terms of being in the world. What is most frightening, disturbing, or moving about this part of the play?

Share your favorite part from the play and describe its significance. Which scenes are comical in this novel, and why are they funny? Do these same situations also stimulate other feelings? (e.g. sadness, empathy)?

What do you think the future holds for Christopher? Will he reach his goals? Why and why not?

Why do you think the playwright chose to end the play with Christopher's questions: "Does that mean I can do anything?"

Stage Production

Scenic and lighting design was an integral part of this production. How effective was the lighting and scenic design in *The Curious Incident*? How did it enhance or detract from your experience of the play?

This production features a generous amount of nonrealistic movement by the actors. How did this element enhance or distract from your experience of the play? How did it enhance or detract from the storytelling?

How do you think the stylized movements of the cast and the technical elements helped you experience the world as Christopher does?

Lighter Questions

For Christopher, a "good day" is seeing four red cars in a row. What makes a "good day" for you?

Throughout the play, Christopher uses phrases and routines to help him accomplish things. What are some of the phrases and routines that help you get through your days?

More Autism Resources

THEATRE DEVELOPMENT FUND - AUTISM THEATRE INITIATIVE

<https://www.tdf.org/nyc/40/Autism-Theatre-Initiative>

On October 2, 2011, TDF launched the Autism Theatre Initiative (ATI) with Disney's landmark musical *The Lion King*, the first ever autism-friendly performance of a Broadway show. This performance which made theatre accessible to children and adults on the autism spectrum as well as their families was so successful that the Autism Theatre Initiative has continued to present many autism-friendly performances on Broadway since then including *Mary Poppins*, *Spider-Man*, *Wicked*, *Matilda*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Aladdin*, and more. TDF's ATI performance of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* was the first autism-friendly performance of a non-musical in Broadway history.

UNIFIED THEATER

<http://www.unifiedtheater.org/>

Unified Theater dissolves typical barriers between youth through transformative, school based performing arts programming. At Unified Theater, young people with and without disabilities, of all backgrounds, come together as equals to put on a production. The production is entirely organized, written, and directed by the students themselves.

AUTISM ASSOCIATIONS & FOUNDATIONS

www.nationalautismresources.com

www.autism.com

www.gershexperience.com

www.autismweb.com

www.nationalautismassociation.org

www.ahany.org

www.angelfishfoundationinc.org

www.autismhwy.com

www.friendshipcircle.com

www.disabilityscoop.com

www.autismbeacon.com

www.autism-society.org

www.autism.healingthresholds.com

www.yai.org

Day-Of Information for Your Visit

LOCATION

The Stanford Calderwood Pavilion at the Boston Center for the Arts
527 Tremont Street
Boston MA 02116

TIME: 10AM

Please plan to arrive between 9:30am and 9:45am.
The show runs about 2 hours and 35 minutes with one intermission.

TALKBACK

After the performance there will be a post-show discussion/ Q&A with the actors from the show. We invite you and your group to join us; please inform us if you plan to attend. The entire event with talkback will end at approximately 1:30pm.

MORE INFORMATION

There are a few pieces of information that we wanted to pass along to you to share with your students and faculty about the performance:

- In order to start the performance promptly at 10AM, we ask that your group plan to arrive at the theatre between 9:30am and 9:45am. This will ensure that we can get everyone seated and settled before the performance can begin. Unfortunately, your group will not be permitted into the theater before 9:30AM.
- Your buses will not be able to park in front of the theater during the performance. Please have the buses unload in front of the theater, and then park in front of the Christian Science Museum on Massachusetts Ave. There is parking for multiple buses.
- Seating will be pre-assigned by school; we ask that when your group is called to be seated that the teacher be present at the front of the group, with chaperones dispersed throughout to ensure a respectful and attentive audience.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Rhoda Bernard, Managing Director of the Berklee Institute for Arts Education and Special Needs