
The Curious Incident of the Dog at Night Time by Mark Haddon

Booklist Review: The hero of Haddon's debut novel is 15-year-old Christopher Boone, an autistic math genius who has just discovered the dead body of his neighbor's poodle, Wellington. Wellington was killed with a garden fork, and Christopher decides that, like his idol Sherlock Holmes, he's going to find the killer. Wellington's owner, Mrs. Shears, refuses to speak to Christopher about the matter, and his father tells him to stop investigating. But there is another mystery involving Christopher's mother, who died two years ago. So why does Siobhan, Christopher's social worker, react with surprise when Christopher mentions her death? And why does Christopher's father hate Mrs. Shears' estranged husband? The mystery of Wellington's death begins to unveil the answers to questions in his own life, and Christopher, who is unable to grasp even the most basic emotions, struggles with the reality of a startling deception. Narrated by the unusual and endearing Christopher, who alternates between analyzing mathematical equations and astronomy and contemplating the deaths of Wellington and his mother, the novel is both fresh and inventive.

(Reviewed April 1, 2003) -- Kristine Huntley

Publishers Weekly Review: /* Starred Review */ Christopher Boone, the autistic 15-year-old narrator of this revelatory novel, relaxes by groaning and doing math problems in his head, eats red—but not yellow or brown—foods and screams when he is touched. Strange as he may seem, other people are far more of a conundrum to him, for he lacks the intuitive “theory of mind” by which most of us sense what’s going on in other people’s heads. When his neighbor’s poodle is killed and Christopher is falsely accused of the crime, he decides that he will take a page from Sherlock Holmes (one of his favorite characters) and track down the killer. As the mystery leads him to the secrets of his parents’ broken marriage and then into an odyssey to find his place in the world, he must fall back on deductive logic to navigate the emotional complexities of a social world that remains a closed book to him. In the hands of first-time novelist Haddon, Christopher is a fascinating case study and, above all, a sympathetic boy: not closed off, as the stereotype would have it, but too open—overwhelmed by sensations, bereft of the filters through which normal people screen their surroundings. Christopher can only make sense of the chaos of stimuli by imposing arbitrary patterns (“4 yellow cars in a row made it a Black Day, which is a day when I don’t speak to anyone and sit on my own reading books and don’t eat my lunch and Take No Risks”). His literal-minded observations make for a kind of poetic sensibility and a poignant evocation of character. Though Christopher insists, “This will not be a funny book. I cannot tell jokes because I do not understand them,” the novel brims with touching, ironic humor. The result is an eye-opening work in a unique and compelling literary voice. (June 17)
— Staff *(Reviewed April 7, 2003) (Publishers Weekly, vol 250, issue 14, p42)*