Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

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Plot

- Christopher Boone, 15, lives in Swindon with his father, Ed. He is brilliant at maths but finds people, noise and being touched very hard. He finds his neighbour Mrs Shears's dog, Wellington, killed with a garden fork, and decides to investigate, like his hero Sherlock Holmes.
- His teacher Siobhan encourages him to write about it, and his book becomes the play: she often reads his words aloud.
- Ed has told Christopher that his mother, Judy, died. Christopher finds letters from her hidden in his father's room, and learns she is alive, living in London with Mr Shears. Ed then admits that he killed Wellington after a row with Mrs Shears.
- No longer able to trust his father, Christopher travels alone by train to London, a terrifying journey. He moves in with his mother, then returns to Swindon to sit his A level Maths, and gets an A*. Ed gives him a puppy to start rebuilding trust.

Characters

- Christopher: honest, logical and determined. He sees the world differently from most people, and the play shows his point of view from the inside. It never gives him a label.
- Ed: loving but quick-tempered; he lies to protect Christopher and himself.
- Judy: loving but found looking after Christopher very hard, and left.
- Siobhan: patient and kind; she narrates, guides Christopher and helps him make sense of other people.

Themes and context

- Truth and lies, trust, family, independence and courage, and difference: how Christopher's way of seeing the world is shown as valuable as well as difficult.

- Mark Haddon's novel came out in 2003. Simon Stephens adapted it for the National Theatre in 2012.

Form and staging

- It is **non-naturalistic**: the original production used a grid-like set, lighting, projections and **physical theatre** to show Christopher's thoughts, the maths in his head and how overwhelming places such as the station feel.
- It is a **play within a play**: in the second half, Christopher's story is being put on as a school play, so the characters talk about how to stage it.
- Siobhan's narration and Christopher's direct address show events through his eyes.

Key terms

Non-naturalistic	Staging that doesn't try to look like real life, using symbols, movement and effects.
Physical theatre	Telling a story through movement and bodies as well as words.
Play within a play	A play performed or discussed inside another play.
Narrator	A character who tells the story to the audience.
Adaptation	A new version of a work in a different form, such as a novel made into a play.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Where does Christopher live?
2. What is Christopher investigating?
3. Which detective does Christopher admire?
4. What does Christopher find in his father's room?
5. Who killed Wellington?
6. Who often reads Christopher's words aloud?
7. Where does Christopher's mother live?
8. What exam does Christopher sit?

Answers

1. Swindon
2. Who killed Mrs Shears's dog, Wellington
3. Sherlock Holmes
4. Letters from his mother
5. Ed, Christopher's father
6. Siobhan, his teacher
7. London, with Mr Shears

Your notes

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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