

# THE CURIOUS INCIDENT

OF THE DOG IN  
THE NIGHT-TIME



## AUDIENCE GUIDE

### BRIEF SYNOPSIS:

15-year-old Christopher has an extraordinary brain: He is exceptional at mathematics but ill-equipped to interpret everyday life. He has never ventured alone beyond the end of his road, he detests being touched, and he distrusts strangers. Now it is 7 minutes after midnight, and Christopher stands beside his neighbor's dead dog, Wellington, who has been speared with a garden fork. Finding himself under suspicion, Christopher is determined to solve the mystery of who murdered Wellington, and he carefully records each fact of the crime. His detective work, forbidden by his father, takes him on a thrilling journey that upturns his world.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**SIMON STEPHENS** began his theatrical career in the literary department of the Royal Court Theatre, where he ran its Young Writers' Programme. His plays for theatre include: *Bluebird*, *Hérons*, *Port*, *One Minute*, *Christmas*, *Country Music*, *On the Shore of the Wide World*, *Motortown*, *Pornography*, *Harper Regan*, *Sea Wall*, *Heaven*, *Punk Rock*, *The Trial of Ubu*, *A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky*, *Marine Parade*, *T5*, *Wastwater*, *Morning*, an adaptation of *A Doll's House*, an adaptation of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *Blindsided*, and *Birdland*. His radio plays include *Five Letters Home to Elizabeth* and *Digging*. His screenwriting includes an adaptation of *Motortown* for Film4, the two-part serial *Dive* for Granada/BBC, and a short film adaptation of *Pornography* for Channel 4's 'Coming Up' series. Awards include the Pearson Award for Best New Play, 2001, for *Port*; Olivier Award for Best New Play for *On the Shore of the Wide World*, 2005; and for *Motortown* German critics in Theater Heute's annual poll voted him Best Foreign Playwright, 2007. His adaptation of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* won the 2015 Tony Award for Best Play.

**MARK HADDON** was born in Northampton in 1962. He graduated from Oxford University in 1981, returning later to study for an M.Sc. in English Literature at Edinburgh University. He then undertook a variety of jobs, including work with children and adults with mental and physical disabilities. He also worked as an illustrator for magazines and a cartoonist for *New Statesman*, *The Spectator*, *Private Eye*, *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Guardian* (for which he co-wrote a cartoon strip). His first book for children, *Gilbert's Gobstopper*, appeared in 1987 and was followed by many other books and picture books for children, many of which he also illustrated. These include the 'Agent Z' series and the 'Baby Dinosaurs' series. From 1996 he also worked on television projects, and created and wrote several episodes for *Microsoap*, winning two BAFTAs and a Royal Television Society Award for this work. In 2003 his novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, was published and has been hugely successful. It is the first book to have been published simultaneously in two imprints - one for children and one for adults. It has won a string of prestigious awards, including the 2003 Whitbread Book of the Year. His second novel, *A Spot of Bother*, was published in 2006 and shortlisted for the 2006 Costa Novel Award. His first book of poetry, *The Talking Horse and the Sad Girl and the Village Under the Sea*, was published in 2005. His latest books include the novels *Boom!* (2009), *The Red House* (2012) and *The Pier Falls* (2016). Mark Haddon teaches creative writing for the Arvon Foundation and Oxford University.

## **CHARACTER PROFILES — SPOILER ALERT** *Created by Repertory Theatre of St. Louis*

**CHRISTOPHER BOONE** is a 15-year-old amateur detective investigating the murder of his neighbor's dog, Wellington, in order to clear his own name and discover the truth.

Christopher's father, **ED BOONE**, wishes for Christopher to stop his detective work, fearing that he will get into more trouble.

**SIOBHAN**, Christopher's teacher, helps him understand how to navigate the world around him. She also acts as the narrator for Christopher's mystery novel about Wellington's murder.

**MRS. SHEARS** is the owner of Wellington, the dog at the heart of Christopher's murder mystery. She and Ed have a complicated relationship as well.

**JUDY**, Christopher's mother, died before the murder of Wellington. During the course of his investigation, Christopher discovers secrets about her that he never knew before.

**ROGER SHEARS**, Mrs. Shears' husband, disappeared many years ago and becomes Christopher's prime suspect in the case of Wellington's murder.

**MRS. ALEXANDER** is one of Christopher's neighbors who helps him with his investigation and unravels a mystery that Christopher never knew existed.

## **DETAILED SYNOPSIS — SPOILER ALERT** *Created by Repertory Theatre of St. Louis*

As *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* begins, Mrs. Shears' dog, Wellington, has died. He has a gardening fork sticking out of his side. It is standing straight up in the air, indicating that he has been murdered. He is discovered by 15-year-old Christopher Boone, Mrs. Shears' neighbor. Mrs. Shears discovers Christopher standing over the body and calls the police. The scene, as well as much of the rest of the play, is narrated by Siobhan, Christopher's teacher, who is reading from Christopher's retelling of the events.

Mrs. Shears calls the police, who arrive on the scene as Christopher becomes overwhelmed by the murder of Wellington. After a short line of questioning, the policeman attempts to touch Christopher, who screams and hits him. As a result, Christopher is taken to the police station. His father, Ed, arrives after some time to take him home; Christopher explains that he did not kill Wellington, and he is going to investigate to find out who did.

Through Siobhan's narration and a flashback, it is revealed that Christopher's mother, Judy, died two years before. She had a heart attack after becoming sick, and Christopher was not allowed to visit her in the hospital. As Christopher begins his investigation into Wellington's murder, he questions some of his neighbors, who are mostly unhelpful. One neighbor in particular, Mrs. Alexander, is interested in Christopher's investigation, as well as his pet rat, Toby, and invites him inside for cake, but Christopher refuses. He decides that his prime suspect for Wellington's murderer is Mr. Shears, who divorced Mrs. Shears and moved away, and that he must investigate further.

At school, Ed argues with the principal about allowing Christopher to take his A-Level Examinations a few years early. Later, when Christopher explains that his prime suspect is Mr. Shears, his father tells him to stop investigating. Christopher agrees, but then runs into Mrs. Alexander, who reveals that Judy was having an affair with Mr. Shears before he moved away. Christopher remembers a day at the beach with his mom before she died. When Ed finds out that Christopher spoke to Mrs. Alexander, they get into a fight and Ed hits Christopher. He also takes away Christopher's book about Wellington's murder investigation.

The next day, Christopher looks around the house for the book he's been writing. He finds his book in his father's room, along with letters addressed to him from his mother. The letters reveal that his mother is still alive and living in London. Christopher is so overwhelmed that he gets sick all over himself. His father finds him with the letters and cleans him up, struggling to explain himself. When Christopher refuses to talk to him, Ed reveals that he killed Wellington in a fit of rage. The act ends with Christopher deciding that he is no longer safe with his dad and that he is going to go to London and find his mom.

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At the start of Act Two, Siobhan asks Christopher if they can make a play out of his book, but he refuses, saying that acting is like lying and he hates lying. Christopher takes his father's credit card and goes to the train station, where he boards a train to London. Although overwhelmed by the station in London, Christopher is able to successfully find his mother's house in London. She is happy to reunite with him, but shocked to hear that Christopher thought she was dead for so long.

That night, a policeman arrives to make sure that Christopher is safe, stating that his father had sent out a search for him. Christopher says he wants to stay with his mother, who is living with Mr. Shears. In the middle of the night, Ed arrives to take Christopher home, but he doesn't want to leave with his father. During breakfast the next morning, Christopher says he needs to go back home to take his A-Levels. Judy tells him that he won't be able to take his exams this year, which upsets Christopher. Living with his mom and Mr. Shears becomes difficult, leading Mr. Shears to get drunk and attack Christopher. In the middle of the night, Judy takes Christopher and leaves London.

They return on the day Christopher is to take his A-Levels. Exhausted from traveling all night, Christopher finds it hard to concentrate on his exam. Slowly, Christopher begins to repair his relationship with his father. As the play ends, Christopher receives the results of his A-Level Examinations.

## **AUTISM AS IT RELATES TO THIS SHOW:**

Over the years, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has been discussed by some audiences as a show that is "about a person with autism." A fair enough description if you are familiar with the book, which says it is "about a boy with autism" on the cover of some print editions, and even in the Amazon.com description. However, interestingly enough, both the author of the book and the playwright disagree (see the full blog entry by author Mark Haddon on the next page of this guide). And in neither the play nor the book is the word autism or Asperger's ever stated. Given this dynamic, we at Village Theatre wanted to take a moment to share our own views on the topic.

It is not our goal with this production to put a face on what it looks like to be an autistic individual, because we understand that no two people experience autism the same way. Dr. Stephen Shore famously said it quite simply: "If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism."

What we want to do with this show is honor and celebrate the distinctive and fascinating character of Christopher and the way he views the world. We believe that, in addition to how we are born, our life experiences shape and mold us into who we are. This show is much more about the life Christopher has lived than the way he was born. We are not labeling him as "autistic." He is, quite simply: Christopher.

Christopher's character was written to be relatable and familiar to all of us – while also being special and wholly original in his world. As we all are. As author Mark Haddon said in his blog post, "If anything it's a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising and revealing way. It's as much a novel about us as it is about Christopher."

With that being said, we also understand the responsibility we take on when we put a character on stage that has been identified as an autistic person by members of our audience. We have partnered with local organization Sensory Access, and they are helping us to take extra steps to ensure that our production is respectful and authentic, both to Christopher's character and the world.

We hope this powerful show touches you, and that you fall in love with Christopher's character as much as we have. He has quite an adventure to share!

## **"ASPERGER'S & AUTISM" BLOG POST FROM MARK HADDON (2009):**

Unsurprisingly, I'm often asked to talk about Asperger's and autism or to become involved with organisations who work on behalf of people with Asperger's and autism, many of whom do wonderful work. But I always decline, for two reasons:

1) I know very little about the subject. I did no research for *Curious Incident* (other than photographing the interiors of Swindon and Paddington stations). I'd read Oliver Sacks's essay about Temple Grandin and a handful of newspaper and magazine articles about, or by, people with Asperger's and autism. I deliberately didn't add to this list. Imagination always trumps research. I thought that if I could make Christopher real to me then he'd be real to readers. I gave him some rules to live by and some character traits and opinions, all of which I borrowed from people I know, none of whom would be labelled as having a disability. Judging by the reaction, it seems to have worked.

2) *Curious Incident* is not a book about Asperger's. It's a novel whose central character describes himself as 'a mathematician with some behavioural difficulties.' Indeed he never uses the words "Asperger's" or "autism" (I slightly regret that fact that the word "Asperger's" was used on the cover). If anything it's a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising and revealing way. It's as much a novel about us as it is about Christopher.

Labels say nothing about a person. They say only how the rest of us categorise that person. Good literature is always about peeling labels off. And treating real people with dignity is always about peeling the labels off. A diagnosis may lead to practical help. But genuinely understanding another human being involves talking and listening to them and finding out what makes them an individual, not what makes them part of a group.

I passionately believe this and I've said it repeatedly in many different forms. To become a spokesperson for those with Asperger's or autism, or to present myself as some kind of expert in the field, would completely undermine this, and make me look like a fool into the bargain. I would much rather spend my time writing more novels, standing up for difference and trying to understand outsiders who see the world in surprising and revealing ways.

### **VOCABULARY & TERMS** *Created by Repertory Theatre of St. Louis*

**ANEURYSM:** A weakness in a blood vessel in the brain that balloons and fills with blood.

**BUBONIC PLAGUE:** Also called "black death," it is a rare but serious bacterial infection that's transmitted by fleas and often carried by animals or vermin, such as rats.

**A-LEVEL EXAMINATION/ "A-LEVELS":** A set of subject-based tests taken in the United Kingdom at the end of high school (around ages 17 or 18). They are used by colleges to determine admittance, like the ACT or SAT here.

**ANEMIC:** Describing those who suffer from anemia, or a shortage of red blood cells. This shortage can cause weakness and dizziness, among other symptoms.

**DOUBLE BLUFF:** The act of tricking someone by telling them the truth when you know they will think you are lying to them, resulting in them mistrusting the truth.

**RED MIST:** A fit of extreme anger that clouds a person's judgment.

**QUID/POUND:** The currency in Britain.

**JESUS WEPT:** An expletive used to express mild disbelief.

**BISCUITS:** Cookies.

**BOLLOCKS:** Nonsense.

**MOBILE:** Cell phone.

**TUBE:** The London subway system.

**ICED LOLLY:** Popsicle.