

## The Past and the Memories

*“Memory is not just the imprint of the past upon us; it is the keeper of what is meaningful for our deepest hopes and fears.” Rollo May. How does this quote relate to the significance of memory in *The Giver*? How are books and memory connected?*

What is memory? Rollo May defined memory as, “not just the imprint of the past upon us; it is the keeper of what is meaningful for our deepest hopes and fears.” Memories are a safeguard of the best and worst happenings in a person’s lifetime. The mind tends to hold onto past experiences that had the biggest impact on us, because of the experience and emotion we experience. This is on display with the characters in Lois Lowry’s: *The Giver*. With Jonas as the Receiver, he has the privilege to experience and hold memories of a world before *sameness*, and is able to think for himself which greatly affects his position and character in this novel. Over time, Jonas grows to learn that the knowledge of memories can be pleasurable and horrifying.

Memories have the power to prevent future mistakes, yet societies seem to fail often when given the chance to not repeat the past. The government in *The Giver* preserves memory for only one person, so that they can keep their community of sameness. They only use the memories for wisdom to keep their society running, so that they don’t repeat any past errors that could change their world. The Giver explains this to Jonas, “Sometimes I wish they’d ask for my

wisdom more often-there are so many things I could tell them; things I wish they would change. But they don't want change.”(p130) The Giver clarifies how their government limits knowledge of memory to prevent change. The author's reference to “change” portrays the novel's dystopian world in an unchangeable manner. In our world, we learn from our mistakes, yet in *The Giver*, they use memory to learn from the past mistakes to actively make decisions about the future to keep their society perfectly balanced with no errors. The Giver follows this by saying, “If you get away, if you get beyond, if you get to Elsewhere, it will mean that the community has to bear the burden themselves, of the memories you have been holding for them.”(194) When a keeper of memory, called a Receiver, dies or leaves the community, all of his or her memories are released to the community. The government believes that no memories are better than all memories, so they restrict the access of memories to prevent a wave of panic and chaos caused by them to keep and maintain a stable, safe life. Lowry emphasizes memory's preciousness and power to help build the climax when Jonas realizes memory's high value in life which has been stripped away from everybody in his community.

Knowledge can be powerful, and those in control often restrict access to real news and information, in a bid to maintain their regime. In *The Giver*, the limit of memories and access to books in the community alludes to the knowledge they both can contain. When Jonas entered the Givers annex room, one of the first items he recognizes is the the shelves of books. For example, “Jonas stared at them. He couldn't imagine what the thousand of pages contained. Could there be rules beyond the rules that governed their community? Could there be more descriptions of offices and factories and committees?”(p94) Jonas has the mood of curiosity as his mind lingers to each book, totally dumbfounded of what truly lies inside of them all. Books contain the history

of people's thoughts, actions, and conflicts; and because such history has been eliminated from the knowledge of the members of the community, this proves how Jonas is lost in his community's rules and instructions. This matters because Jonas should be governed by his own experiences and free will, rather than be lost in a myriad of bylaws. This idea is expanded when Jonas says, "There were the necessary reference volumes that each household contained: a dictionary, and the thick community volume which contained descriptions of every office, factory, building, and committee." (p94) These limits create the conflict of Jonas's knowledge towards books that his community has never experienced before, despite being raised in the highly controlled community, has come to value freedom and choice over contentment and ease with memories that the rest of the community members do not have. This reveals how the knowledge from the books is kept from others in the community in order to maintain peace and contentment. The behavior of the government's choices shows a dark and possessive mood whereby a dystopian community has eliminated many memories and books of the past to maintain their peace and contentment.

An important theme in *The Giver* spearheads the notion that, without personal memories, a person is not really an individual at all. Lois Lowry points out that when others are unable to experience pain, their individuality is devalued. Memories are so vital because they oftentimes include pain, and pain is an individual reaction. The Giver describes this to Jonas when he says, "Before my time, before the previous time, back and back and back. We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with difference. We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others." (p95) The Giver tells Jonas the freedom of being an individual in the past before their decision of turning to sameness, to prevent any divergence in their citizens.

Memories develop Jonas's character throughout the overall plot because they give him an expanded knowledge to individuality which no one else in his community has; and when Jonas tries to show Asher color, or how he explains to Lily how elephants were once alive, or testing his parents about love all result in Jonas learning how there is no true happiness without memories. Jonas questions the Giver by asking, "How could someone not fit in? The community was so meticulously ordered, the choices so carefully made."(p48) The words "meticulously ordered" portrays a very brooding emotion how Jonas describes his serious community. This structure how the community is built leaves Jonas active to make his own personal opinions about his dystopian world and if he should speak up. We have a moral obligation to realize our potential, and contribute to society, as well as to our own happiness. Jonas realizes the obligation to contribute love and potential to one's community by giving everyone memories and an insight to what their society could be; leaving a choice that they have to actively make themselves.

Lois Lowry connects books, memories, and individuality to help Jonas think more clearly for himself instead of letting the government tell him who's he supposed to be. With the help of memories and books, Jonas is now finding freedom in thinking for himself. The more Jonas learns about having choices, and the dreadful memories of the past, the more he wants to escape. He knows that the community and each person's life will benefit if only they would — or could — reclaim their individuality. Jonas realizes that his life would no longer be worth living if he were to continue living in the community as is. To save the people in the community from their own senseless inhumanity, Jonas, an extremely courageous and brave character, risks his life. Memory and books is what helps develop our characters individuality and uniqueness, but if that is taken away from our world then the human race wouldn't continue to progress, but would be

stuck at one stage. Evolution would never occur as the mind wouldn't evolve and grow to develop or sustain thought or ideas, and our world would turn into the one in *The Giver*.