

The Story

Jonas lives with his parents and his younger sister, Lily, in a world without hunger, violence, or conflict. Everything in the community is carefully designed for serenity and comfort. Each family unit has two parents and no more than two children; old people are cared for in a separate facility; appropriate careers are assigned by a committee of elders who carefully assess each person's abilities.

As the time nears for the annual Ceremony of 12, Jonas and his friends Asher and Fiona look forward to receiving their life assignments. Jonas is surprised to be singled out as the community's Receiver of Memory. Every day he is to report to the Giver, an Elder who holds a special place of honor in the community. The Giver begins to share with Jonas the wealth of memories and knowledge he carries, and Jonas starts to glimpse a world beyond the confines of his community, beyond the here and now. As he learns about the choices that are no longer available to him—or to anyone else—Jonas begins to question the price the community has paid for its placid existence.

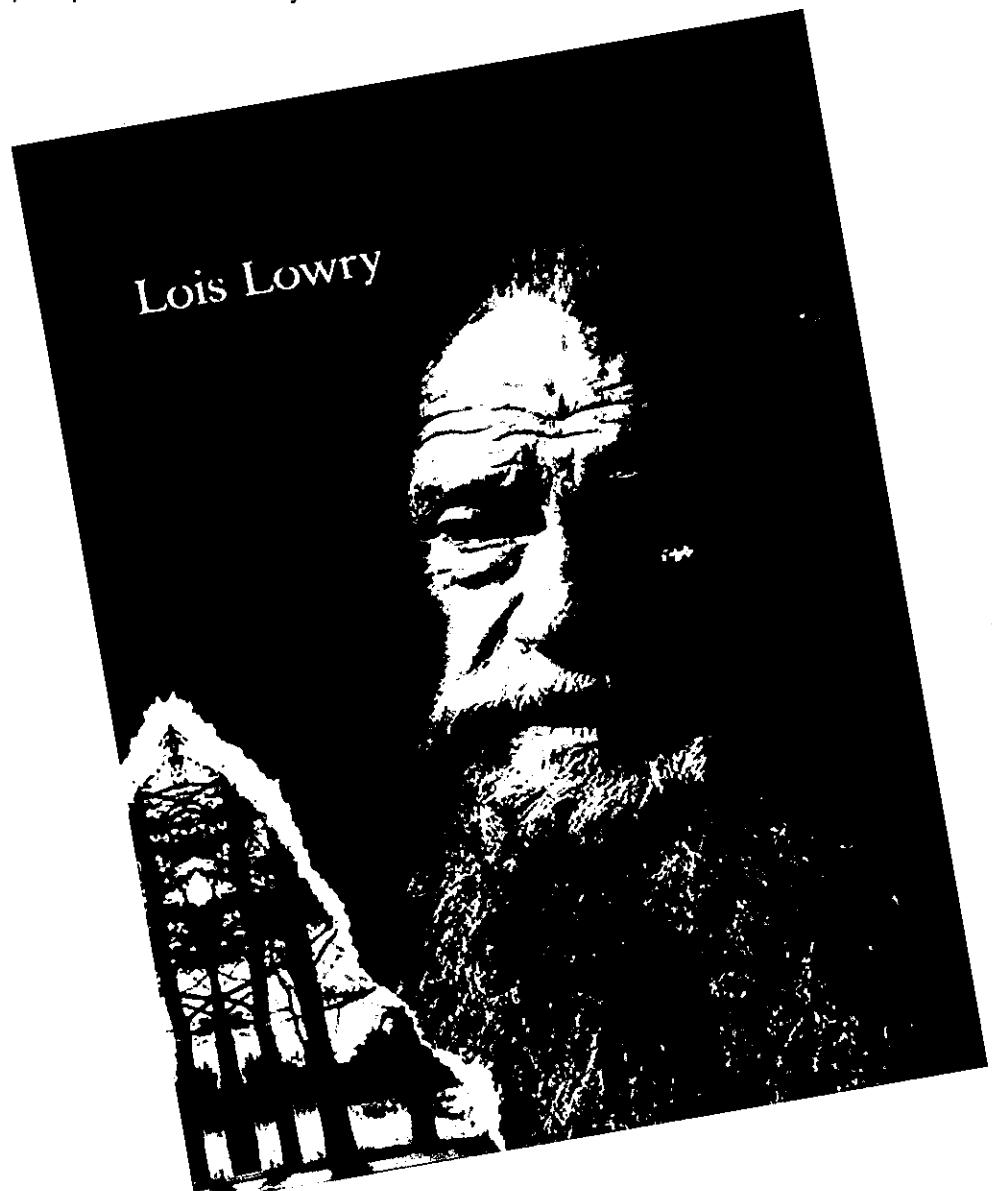
“an Elsewhere from which it came”

The Giver is a novel by Lois Lowry, who has written more than 30 books for children. Two of her novels have won the prestigious Newbery Medal for distinguished contributions to American literature for children: *Number the Stars* (1990), a work of historical fiction about the Holocaust, and *The Giver* (1994). Lowry is known for offering young readers the opportunity to confront challenging subject matter, including racism, terminal illness, and death.

Although her novels are not autobiographical, like most authors Lowry has incorporated her own life experiences into her works in different ways. In her 1994 speech accepting the Newbery Medal for *The Giver*, she discussed how certain elements of the book may have been inspired by various experiences in her life. She referred to a passage from the book in which Jonas begins to look more deeply into his own life as he learns of a past that he never knew existed:

“... Now he saw the familiar wide river beside the path differently. He saw all of the light and color and history it contained and carried in its slow-moving water; and he knew that there was an Elsewhere from which it came, and an Elsewhere to which it was going.”

Lois Lowry's father was an Army dentist. From the age of 11 to 13, Lois lived in Tokyo, Japan, in a small, enclosed community of Americans. As foreigners in a strange land, her family found the familiarity of this self-contained environment comfortable and safe. But young Lois was intrigued by the exotic sights and sounds and smells of the surrounding city. She would sneak away and ride her bicycle through the busy streets filled with noisy street vendors and bright colors and strange music. Perhaps these experiences contributed to the creation of Jonas's quiet, safe community and its perception of the world beyond.



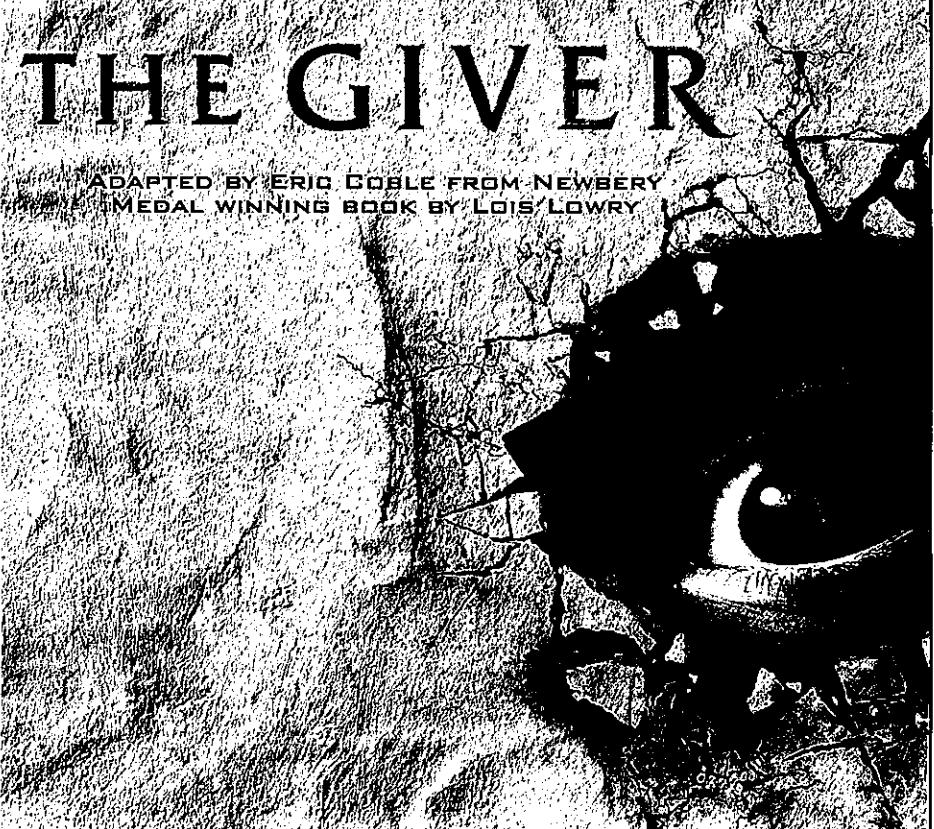
INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

Exploring...

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In 1979 Lowry interviewed the painter Carl Nelson, and she was taken with the artist's vivid capacity for understanding and appreciating color. Years later, when she learned that he had become blind, she wondered what it was like for him to lose the colors about which he was so impassioned. It may be that this experience was the seed for creating a world without color in *The Giver*. (Lowry's own photograph of Nelson is the face seen on the cover of most editions of the novel.)

Dealing with her own aged father's loss of memory may have caused Lowry to wonder about a world with no memories. The author's own memories include how she and her college friends had shunned a girl who was different. What did Lowry miss by not being that girl's friend, by not appreciating and even celebrating differences? Such thoughts may have suggested the sacrifices necessary to create a world without differences, a world of sameness. Attending her son's wedding in Germany and thinking of the union of good wishes expressed in the confusion of different languages may have inspired the author to think of the interconnectedness of all people.

Lois Lowry has often been criticized for her subject material. Should children be exposed to such topics? Is it safe? In her 1994 Newbery Medal speech, the author addressed this issue:

“... I remember once again how comfortable, familiar, and safe my parents had sought to make my childhood by shielding me from Elsewhere. But I remember, too, that my response had been to open the gate again and again. My instinct had been a child's attempt to see for myself what lay beyond the wall....

“The man that I named the Giver passed along to the boy knowledge, history, memories, color, pain, laughter, love, and truth. Every time you place a book in the hands of a child, you do the same thing. It is very risky. But each time a child opens a book, he pushes open the gate that separates him from Elsewhere. It gives him choices. It gives him freedom.”



The Giver on stage at the IRT

Bringing Lois Lowry's book *The Giver* to life "provides big challenges for the design team in the Upperstage Theatre," says lighting designer Betsy Cooprider-Bernstein. "But it also offers a rich landscape for stretching our imaginations!"

Director Richard J Roberts agrees. "When the stage direction tells us, 'He throws the apple, and mid-air it changes color'—that can be seen as a hard problem to solve or an exciting opportunity to create. How do we

make these 'magical' things happen? How do we create a big stack of movie-sized special effects on a theatre-sized budget? The designers and I have had a lot of fun dreaming up various ways to accomplish these kinds of moments, and I'm sure as we go into rehearsal that the actors

will have their own ideas, as well. This kind of collaboration is, for me, the most thrilling, fulfilling way to make theatre."

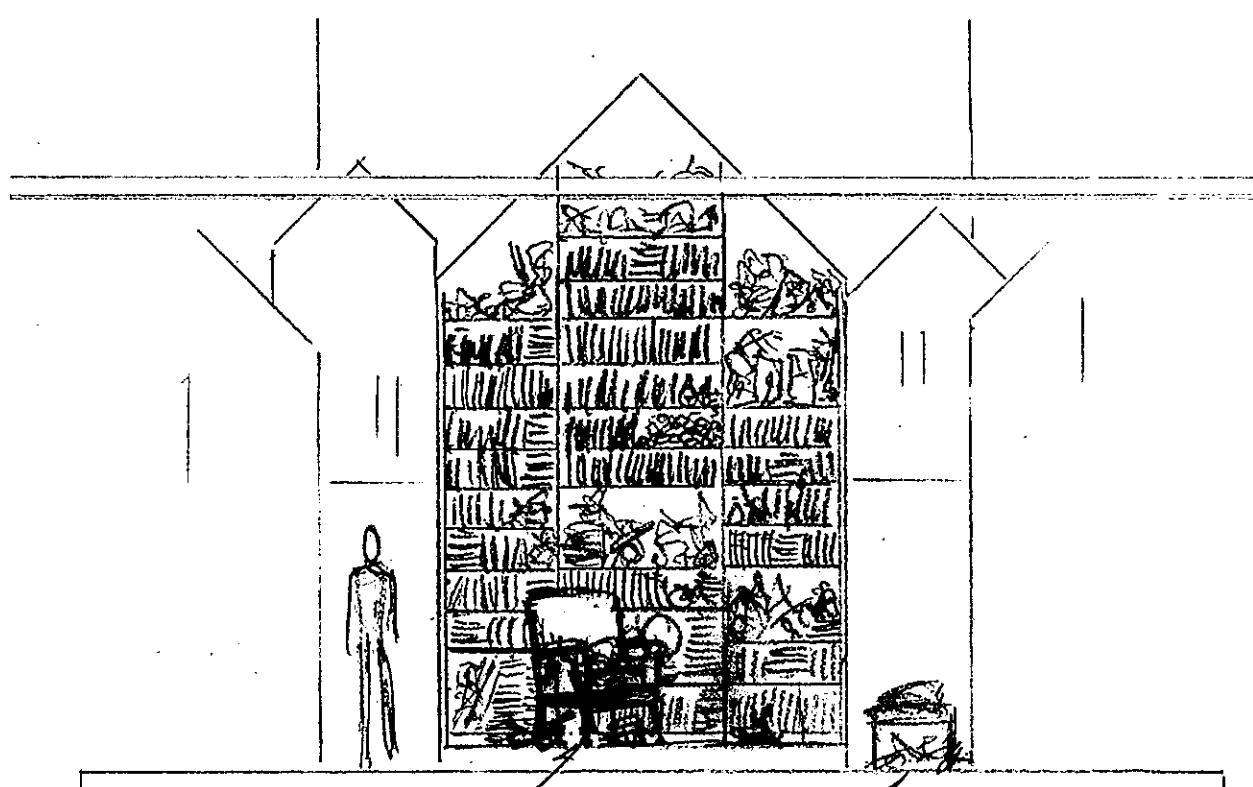


GARRETT MCKENNA
Jonas

art, history and culture, sport and war."

"The costumes for *The Giver* are designed to reflect the unified and stagnant world of this community," comments costume designer Linda Pisano. "There is a lack of anything truly individual in the clothing except some reflection of age. Children of a common age wear identical clothing that enhances the uniformity of their existence. The younger child, Lily, has an ensemble that reflects a slightly younger age group but still defines her as part of this very specific world. The fabrics were selected to represent the mass production of similar and utilitarian fabric styles.

"Ultimately the costumes express a simplicity and commonality that at first glance seem logical and in theory should produce a sense of unity and equality. However, once Jonas begins to see color, he quickly recognizes the lack of appreciation in his community for the differences, unique behaviors, and varying appear-



Scenic sketch by designer James Schumacher.

The design team wanted the play to begin in a world that feels familiar and inviting, if somewhat muted. "The village is a safe place," according to scenic designer James Schumacher, "a place of order and calm; a place

where all know their place and what is expected of them. The world that evolved out of our discussions is clean, ordered, and geometric. It is a world of limited choices: squares and rectangles, circles and triangles, limited materials, limited color. I have used only stained or painted wood and the

fabrics of the carpet. The walls and the floor are covered in the same carpets.

"This ordered world is contrasted with the Giver's room. The room of books is a place of chaos. It is cluttered. It is not safe. The chaos of the Giver's room contains as many different materials as we could find: metal, glass, and plastics; bone, horn, and fur; leather, paper, and fabrics of many kinds. It also contains items that represent the sum of our knowledge: science and

ances of each person, as well as his or her potential for great individual contributions to the collective."

Lighting designer Betsy Cooprider-Bernstein notes how lighting will play an important role in telling the story of *The Giver* "by first revealing the gray, utilitarian set and costumes within an atmosphere of neutralized, artificial-looking light—a world without the sun. As the play progresses, lighting will help the audience see the environment transform as

Jonas does. The world of the play will evolve into a more colorful environment, highlighted with textures, variety in intensity, angles, and increasingly staccato movements."

"The world Lois Lowry creates is very different from ours," says director



MAGGIE WILLIAMS
Fiona & Rosemary



REILLY CROUSE
Asher



FRED MARSHALL
The Giver



Giver

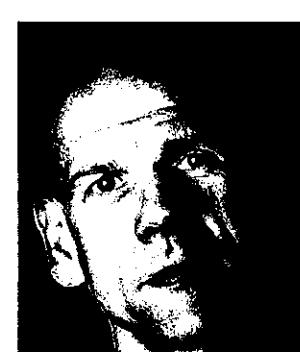
Richard J Roberts, "but the author doesn't explain it to us. Rather, she tells us what happens in the community, and lets us fill in the blanks for ourselves. Because we must work to figure things out as we read, the world we create in our minds is infinitely richer than anything that could be put on paper.

Perhaps it is this act of co-creation with the author that makes reading the book such a fulfilling experience.

"This is why I feel the stage is the perfect place for *The Giver*. Just as Lois Lowry asks her readers, we ask



JENNIFER JOHANSEN
Mother & Chief Elder



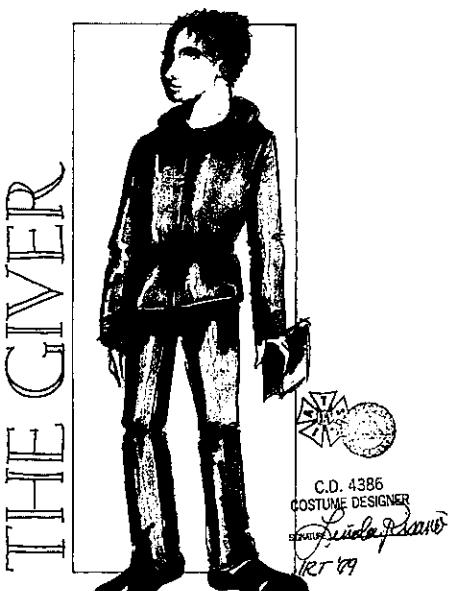
ROBERT K JOHANSEN
Father

our audience to use its imagination to help create the wonders that Jonas experiences. Just as the Giver helps Jonas discover there is a world beyond what he knows, so the theatre offers us infinite opportunities to discover stories, lives, worlds beyond our own."



ANNA MILLER
Lily

Costume renderings for the *Giver* (above) and *Jonas* (below) by designer Linda Pisano.



Jonas

Discussion Questions

Before seeing the play:

Discuss other plays, movies, operas, or ballets you have seen that are adaptations of books you have read. What did you like or dislike about those performed adaptations? What would you have done differently in your adaptation?

Go online and read about other productions of this play in other cities. Remember to use the playwright's name when doing your search. What can you find out about other plays Eric Coble has written? What did reviewers say about other productions of this play? After seeing the IRT's production, write your own review.

After seeing the play:

What do the words utopia and dystopia mean? Should humans strive to create a perfect society? Why or why not? Can perfection be achieved? Discuss the flaws in Jonas's community. When and how does a utopia become dystopia?

Discuss whether we live in a world that celebrates sameness or differences. During your discussion factor in the past and the present, theory and reality, industrial nations and third world countries.

What is a rite of passage? What are some typical rites of passage? With each rite of passage, what do you believe you gain or lose? In what ways have rites of passage changed from generation to generation?

The hero in *The Giver* is a 12-year-old boy, a reminder that children are capable of achieving great feats and motivating change. In groups discuss other young literary heroes. What makes these characters so appealing? What lessons can we take away from their stories? Name some real life boys and girls who have made a difference in their local and national communities. What inner qualities make a person become a hero?

In the play the Giver says to Jonas, "I have great honor. So will you. But you will find that that is not the same as power." What does this statement mean? Is either power or honor better than the other? There are many famous people (actors, musicians, dancers, athletes, celebrities) who might be said to have great honor. How have different people used such honor to wield power—to influence the world (in good or bad ways)?

Art often imitates life. Sometimes life imitates art. What in *The Giver* captures a true picture of your life? Consider such things as family, friendships, education, professions, social courtesies, and attitudes. What in *The Giver* is different from your life? What can we learn from both the similarities and the differences?

What happens to Jonas and Gabe at the end of the story? What is "Elsewhere"?

How did what you saw on stage compare to the images you created in your mind when you read the book? Was the storytelling clear, compelling, and entertaining? Why or why not?

Resources

Films:

Gattaca (1997) *Dream Parlor* (1999)
Aeon Flux (2005) *The Island* (2005)
The Utopian Society (2003)
Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow (2004)

Write about ...

What are people willing to give up in the search for security? What are people willing to give up in the search for freedom? Cite cultural, historical, and personal examples.

How you would feel if you discovered that someone or something important in your life wasn't what you thought it was. What would happen if your perception of your life was shattered?

Are memories important to your family? Who is the memory keeper in your family? Why is this person the keeper of your family's memory? How and when does this person share those memories? Who in your family do you believe is the receiver?

Along with *The Giver*, the IRT has produced a number of plays that are adaptations of popular literary works such as *Huckleberry Finn*, *Crime and Punishment*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Great Expectations*, and later this season *Around the World in 80 Days*. Think about a novel or short story that you have read lately and tell us why you believe it would be good to adapt into a play. Share with us the major messages of the story that would be appealing to a diverse audience. Share with us how you might present the production. Choose a favorite part of the book and write your own stage adaptation of that section.

In *The Giver*, each person is assigned a career based on the evaluation of an outside committee. Write a poem on the theme of what others see in you versus how you see yourself.

An actor builds his or her character from three things: what the character says; what the character does; what others say about the character. Often, an actor will create an inner monologue to fill out a moment. Select a character and write an inner monologue for one of his or her high emotional moments. For example: What is Fiona thinking after she gets her assignment of Caretaker for the Old? What is Jonas feeling when his name is skipped during the Ceremony of Twelve?

Resources

Websites:

<http://www.quia.com/rr/38952.html>
a trivia game based on the book *The Giver*
<http://www.loislowry.com/>
the author's official website
http://www.loislowry.com/pdf/Newbery_Award.pdf
Lois Lowry's Newbery Award acceptance speech

Books:

For Younger Readers:

Gossamer by Lois Lowry
A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle
The Chronicles of Narnia books by C. S. Lewis
The Golden Compass, *The Subtle Knife*, &
The Amber Spyglass by Philip Pullman
The Pigman by Paul Zindel
Lord of the Flies by William Golding
The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier
Uglies, Pretties, Specials by Scott Westfeld

For Older Readers:

Animal Farm by George Orwell
1984 by George Orwell
Brave New World by Aldous Huxley
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury
Anthem by Ayn Rand
Walden Two by B.F. Skinner
Living Walden Two by Hilde Kuhlmann

Activities

Before seeing the play:

If you have read the book *The Giver*, try imagining how parts of the story might be presented on the stage. In class or with friends, assemble a director and a design team—scenery, costume, lighting, and sound designers—and create your own "look" for the play. Take a section of the story that you all enjoyed the most, draw it, stage it, and present your concept to the class or your parents.

Research the process of adaptation. What steps does a writer go through to create his or her own work based on another person's work? Is the original work in public domain? What is a copyright? How do you obtain the rights? How do you submit your work to publishers of plays? Where can you go for new play development?

After seeing the play:

Although *The Giver* has been chosen by many school systems to be part of the curriculum, it has also been challenged. Find more on banned books and intellectual freedom at <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/intfreedom/censorshipfirstamendmentissues/index.cfm>. Imagine that your rights to read the book and/or to see the play were being challenged. Prepare a defense for *The Giver* and present your case to your class. This article at <http://www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/news/pressreleases2007/january2007/edwards07.cfm> offers information that may be useful in your presentation. Why is it important that citizens have the right to challenge books they feel are inappropriate? Why is it important for those who disagree with that opinion to speak up in defense of such books?

What is civil disobedience? How do the choices of Jonas and the Giver relate to this concept? What has the world gained and lost from dissension? Research famous dissenters of the past and present. How have their actions been a force for improvement and/or destruction in the world?

Improvisation: "Dreams and Nightmares"

Divide into groups of four to five people. Each person shares a dream or nightmare; then each group chooses one to dramatize. Cast the characters, decide on props or use pantomime, rehearse, and perform. This exercise is more fun using imagery and metaphor. Example: Instead of someone saying, "I am hungry," you might have an actor who plays talking food; or a character might say, "Oh no, I'm a hotdog with chili sauce!"

In *The Giver*, Asher struggles with word usage in a community that attempts to be very precise with language. As a group, make a list of commonly misused words and phrases. Do some research on the subject. There are hundreds of books and websites. Here are a few just to get you started.

<http://www.sourceaid.com/reference/pdf/misused-words.pdf>
<http://wsuonline.weber.edu/wrh/words.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_commonly_misused_English_words

New York Times Dictionary of Misunderstood, Misused, & Mispronounced Words by Laurence Urdang
100 Words Almost Everyone Confuses and Misuses (The 100 Words) by Editors of the American Heritage Dictionaries

Write your own play and enter it in the IRT's *Young Playwrights in Process* competition (YPiP). For details, visit the IRT website at www.irtlive.com. Submission deadline is December 1, 2009.

Author Lois Lowry

Lois Lowry is a prize-winning author of more than 30 books for children. Born Lois Hammersberg in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1937, she was the daughter of an Army dentist, and her family moved frequently. Lois grew up in Carlisle, Pennsylvania; Tokyo, Japan; and New York City. She has written, "From the time I was eight or nine, I wanted to be a writer. Writing was what I liked best in school; it was what I did best in school."

"I was a solitary child, born the middle of three, who lived in the world of books and my own imagination. There are some children, and I was this kind of child, who are introverts and love to read—who prefer to curl up with a book than to hang out with friends or play at the ball field. Children like that begin to develop a feeling for language and for story. And that was true for me—that's how I became a writer."

After studying for two years at Brown University, Lois married Donald Lowry, a Navy officer, and found herself once again on the move. The couple (and eventually their four children) lived in California, Connecticut, Florida, South Carolina, Massachusetts, and Maine, where they finally settled after Donald left the Navy and became a lawyer. As her children grew, Lowry found time to return to school at the University of Maine, earning her B.A. in English literature and then pursuing graduate studies.

Lowry's work as a freelance journalist and photographer caught the attention of an editor at Houghton Mifflin Publishing, who suggested she write a children's book. *A Summer to Die* is a fictionalized account of the early death of Lowry's sister. The book was published in 1977, the same year Lowry and her husband divorced.

"My books have varied in content and in style," says Lowry. "Yet it seems to me that all of them deal, essentially, with the same general theme: the importance of human connections." *Number the Stars*, winner of the Newbery Medal in 1990, is a work of historical fiction about the Holocaust. In the book, ten-year-old Annemarie and her family risk their lives to protect Annemarie's Jewish best friend.

Lowry was awarded a second Newbery Medal in 1994 for *The Giver*, which the author says is about "the

vital need for humans to be aware of their interdependence, not only with each other, but with the world and its environment." Subsequently she has written two related books, creating a trilogy. *Gathering Blue* (2000)



Lois Lowry with her dog, Alfie

tells the story of Kira, an orphaned girl with a twisted leg in a society that chooses to leave the disabled exposed to die in the fields. *Messenger* (2004) features characters from both previous novels and ties them to the story of Matty, who delivers messages through the dark forest surrounding his village.

Lowry's other works include a series of nine novels about Anastasia Krupnik—a girl "just trying to grow up"—and four novels about Anastasia's younger brother Sam. "I use the *Anastasia* books to make myself laugh and to lighten up between serious books," says the author. "But I also use them to deal with serious topics in a different way, disguised by humor." Lowry's more recent *Gooney Bird* series focuses on creativity and story-telling.

"I think it is my own children, all of them grown now, who have caused me to expand my view," says Lowry. "One of my sons was a fighter pilot in the United States Air Force; as a mother during the Gulf War, I was newly stunned into fear for the world and a heightened awareness of the necessity to find a way to end conflict. One of my daughters has become disabled as a result of the disease of the central nervous system; through her, I have a new and passionate awareness of the importance of human connections that transcend physical differences."

"And I have grandchildren now. For them, I feel a greater urgency to do what I can to convey the knowledge that we live intertwined on this planet and that our future as human beings depends upon our caring more, and doing more, for one another."

Playwright Eric Coble

Eric Coble was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, and grew up on Navajo and Ute reservations in New Mexico and Colorado. He earned his B.A. in English from Fort Lewis College in Colorado and his M.F.A. in acting from Ohio University. His play *Bright Ideas* was produced off-Broadway; other works include *Natural Selection*, *The Dead Guy*, *Virtual Devotion*, *Cinderella Confidential*, and *Pecos Bill and the Ghost Stampede*. His plays have been produced throughout the United States and on four continents.

The IRT's artistic director Janet Allen notes, "There is a wonderful trend at work in today's theatre community for successful playwrights in the adult field to create artistically satisfying adaptations of excellent pieces of youth fiction. Eric Coble's stage adaptation of *The Giver* is a case in point. Eric's own reputation in the theatre community as a savvy and exciting writer brings excellent cachet to this striking piece of youth theatre. His play requires theatres producing it to think beyond the realm of traditional children's theatre."



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

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www.irtlive.com

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Steven Stolen, Managing Director

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Study Guide edited by Richard J Roberts & Milicent Wright
Contributors: Pat Bebee, Katie Norton

UPCOMING STUDENT MATINEES

St. Vincent Health presents *A Christmas Carol*
M-F, November 18-25; T-F, December 1-18

Love Letters • January 12, 13

Romeo and Juliet • T-F, January 21–February 26

Pretty Fire • February 11, 18, 19

The Year of Magical Thinking • February 23

After Paul McCartney • February 26, March 12

Becky's New Car • March 31

Around the World in 80 Days • May 6, 11, 12

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Going to the Theatre

You, the audience, are one of the most important parts of any performance. The theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:

- Leave CD players, mp3 players, cameras, cell phones, beepers, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home.
- You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text message during the show.
- Food and drink must stay in the lobby.
- The house lights going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is beginning.
- Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. You may think they can't hear you, but they can.
- Remain in your seat during the play. If you need to use the restroom, do so before or after the show.
- Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.
- Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue, and look at the set, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.
- Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.
- Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call because this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to show your appreciation for a job well done and gives the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.