

THE GIVER

ADAPTED BY ERIC COBLE
FROM THE BOOK BY LOIS LOWRY

Directed by Marti Gobel

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BROWN
THEATRE

AUDIENCE
ENGAGEMENT
GUIDE

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THE GIVER

ADAPTED BY ERIC COBLE
FROM THE BOOK BY LOIS LOWRY

Cover photo: Jacob Leon; by Shawn Poynter



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Associate Artistic Director/Assistant Professor

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Managing Director

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Production Manager

SUSAN L. McMILLAN

Dramaturg

GINA M. DI SALVO

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HANA SHERMAN

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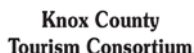
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FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Welcome to the Clarence Brown Theatre! I could not be happier that we are able to gather to embark on this journey into the world of *The Giver*, a play adapted by Eric Coble from Lois Lowry's popular novel. We have the privilege of delving into a narrative that resonates deeply with the human spirit. *The Giver* explores a world that challenges us to question what it means to be human. In this journey, we will witness the power of memories, the weight of choices, and the undeniable resilience of the human soul.



Eric Coble's adaptation brilliantly captures the essence of the original work, bringing to life a story that is as relevant today as it was when it was first released. Since the first time I read *Brave New World*, I have been drawn to dystopian fiction. With *The Giver* we find a different kind of dystopian world. One where the society knows no hunger, no poverty, no war. They have given up their memories and their ability to make choices, but at what cost? Their world is one without color, without passion, and without love. The story asks questions about the cost of conformity and individuality.

As the lights dim and the curtains rise, I hope you experience a sense of being part of a community. One that allows the story to ask questions of us, that challenges us, that creates an opportunity to engage. Experiencing events as a collective, allowing the give and take that is the actor/audience relationship is why we come to the theatre. It is my hope that you double down on that sense of community and strike up a conversation with the person next to you about today's performance.

Thank you for gracing us with your presence here at the CBT. I invite you to surrender to the magic of *The Giver*. May this story captivate your heart and mind, leaving you with as many questions as answers.

Enjoy the show!

We recognize and value diversity in all forms, including age, ethnicity, family structure, gender identity, national origin, race religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, and veteran status.

We believe inclusivity and diversity in our workplace should reflect the increasing multicultural and global society in which we live. We seek to foster excellent creative research, scholarship and professional practice by creating a welcoming environment, ethical recruitment practices, and a diverse student body who will have lives of awareness and understanding through their creative research, teaching, practicing and advocating for others in a diverse world.

Detailed information on our DEI initiatives can be found here:

<https://theatre.utk.edu/diversity-inclusion/>

THE CHARACTERS



JASMINE R. HANDY

JONAS - An Eleven who is experiencing changes. He is Number 19 in his age group.



DREW DRAKE

FATHER - Jonas and Lily's father who works as a Nurturer caring for infants at the Nursing Center.



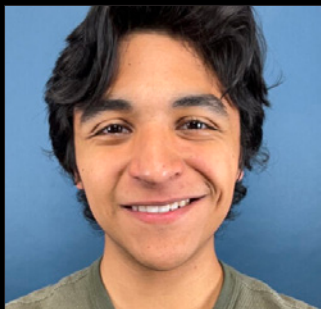
RACHEL DARDEN

MOTHER - Jonas and Lily's mother who works in Law and Justice.



ALLISON BUNCH

LILY - A Seven and Jonas's younger sister.



JACOB LEON

ASHER - An Eleven and Jonas's best friend. He has a tendency to mix up words and speech. He is Number 18 in his age group.



JENNA MITCHELL

FIONA - An Eleven and friend of Jonas and Asher. She is Number 20 in her age group.



YASHASHVI CHOUDHARY

ROSEMARY - The previous receiver before Jonas.



CAROL MAYO JENKINS

LARISSA - An old woman who lives in the House of the Old. She has a sense of humor and senses how things are actually done.



TARAH FLANAGAN

THE CHIEF ELDER - Leader of the Committee of Elders who also conducts ceremonies for the Community.



DAVID CECSARINI

THE GIVER - An old man who holds all of the Community's historical and present memories. A member of the Committee of Elders.





Photo: Betsy Molnar

ABOUT THE PLAY

The Giver is based on the 1993 novel by Lois Lowry. The novel was adapted for the theatre by playwright Eric Coble and premiered at Oregon Children's Theatre in 2005. Coble's notable plays are *Bright Ideas* (2001), a darkly comedic take on the competitive world of parenting, and *The Velocity of Autumn* (2014), an exploration of family dynamics and aging. Among his most successful and frequently produced plays are biographical-historical works for young audiences, such as his plays on Edgar Allen Poe and Sojourner Truth, and his adaptations of books and stories, such as *The Giver*, *Huck Finn*, and *Sherlock Holmes*.

Many audience members will be familiar with the story of *The Giver* through the original novel or its 2014 film adaptation. *The Giver* takes place in the Community and is governed by Sameness. It has been planned and engineered with a great deal of thought about population replacement, social roles, conflict reduction, and safety. At the time of *The Giver*'s opening scene, Sameness has governed the community for generations and there is no memory of the time before Sameness. To achieve and maintain Sameness, choices and differences are constrained and a set of stringent rules are enforced. It is a world devoid of color, music, and art. Even the weather and the climate are controlled for optimal stability in the Community so that variance is unknown.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Like the Giver, Jonas has the ability to see beyond. In the stage version, we get to experience the surprise of Jonas's moments of seeing beyond alongside him. We also get to experience his reception of the memories. On stage, Sameness is shown through costume, set, lighting, and sound design. Through these same elements of design we also experience how Jonas breaks through Sameness and receives knowledge of another world.

How does Jonas experience beyond on stage?

Jonas's Community practices Precise Language, a prescriptive regulation of written and oral communication. It mirrors the engineered and regulated terms of the society and it is, generally, devoid of affective expression and metaphor, the stuff of poetry and art. Instruction in precise language begins at Three and is enforced through corporal punishment. It is enforced at all levels of society, including at schools and within family homes. Throughout the play, we also witness a very specific vocabulary: Stirrings, Elsewhere, Release. We also see how the characters signal specific meaning to each other within their use of language.

What terms of Precise Language stick out to you?

The Community also has a number of rituals and ceremonies. Greetings and apologies occur throughout the play. Other rituals take place within family dwellings, such as the sharing of feelings and dreams. There are also important ceremonies for the entire Community which are presided over by the Chief Elder. And there ceremonies that only a few inhabitants witness or know about.

What are the rituals and ceremonies you see in the play?

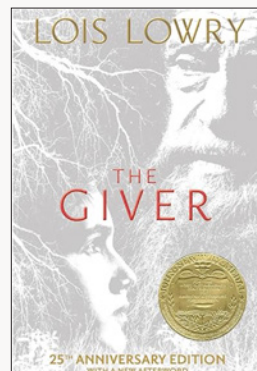


LOIS LOWRY AND THE LEGACY OF THE GIVER



Lois Lowry is an American author of children's literature and young adult fiction novels. She was raised in military communities both in the United States

and abroad. Lowry is best known for the series of books focused on the quirky list-writer Anastasia Krupnik, *Number the Stars*, and the linked dystopian novels that form *The Giver Quartet*.



A film adaptation of *The Giver* starring Jeff Bridges, Meryl Streep, and Taylor Swift (as Rosemary) was released in 2014. The film differed from the novel in a number of ways, including Jonas's early adolescent age and developmental stage. Rather than depicting Jonas as a 12-year old on a bicycle, the film version of Jonas is an 18 year-old with access to a motorcycle. In 2018, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt released a special 25th anniversary edition of the original novel. In 2019, P. Craig Russell created a graphic novel adaptation of the story. Since its publication in 1993, *The Giver* has been challenged (the first step to banning a book) for its depiction of sexual desire, suicide, infanticide, and euthanasia.

The Giver is the first of four novels known as *The Giver Quartet*. The other three novels are *Gathering Blue* (2000), *Messenger* (2004), and *Son* (2012). *Gathering Blue* and *Messenger* both take place in different communities but in the same world as *The Giver*. *Gathering Blue* follows the story of Kira, a talented young artist living in a dystopian society where physical deformities lead to exclusion. In *Messenger*, readers are introduced to Matty, a character with a unique gift for healing who can navigate a mysterious forest. This novel also addresses the aftermath of the two previous novels and some of their characters. Kira materializes in *Messenger* and as does a character from *The Giver*. In *Son*, the final book of *The Giver Quartet*, a woman from the original Community in *The Giver* searches Elsewhere for her lost child.

While *The Giver* takes place in a fictional dystopian society in which the rules, regulations, and order of the Community has operated for generations and no historical memory exists of the time before Sameness, Lowry's earlier novel *Number the Stars* addressed the arrival of fascism and genocide in the historical setting of Nazi-occupied Denmark. The novel follows the journey of Annemarie Johansen and her family as they risk their lives to save their Jewish friends during the Holocaust. Through the eyes of the 10-year old protagonist, Annemarie, the novel tells a fictional version of the historical evacuation of over 7,000 Jews to Sweden by the Danish resistance.

The legacy of Lowry's work is evident in the volumes that line our present bookshelves. In *The Giver* and the subsequent linked novels, Lowry introduced dystopian fiction to the world of children's and young adult literature. Now, young readers are not only familiar with the story of Jonas and his struggle with the consequences of Sameness, but also Katniss Everdeen's revolutionary survival in *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins and Tris Prior's train-jumping heroism in the *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth. But the dystopian exploration is just one aspect of Lowry's work. At the heart of *The Giver* and her other books are young protagonists who navigate the vicissitudes of life—war, grief, injustice, illness—while also sharing with us their dreams, joys, feelings, and firsts.

LOIS LOWRY AND THE LEGACY OF THE GIVER CONT.

For both *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*, Lowry received the Newberry Medal in 1990 and 1994, respectively, the highest award in the United States for children's and young adult literature. Here are the most recent books to receive the Newberry Medal:

Merci Suárez Changes Gears by Meg Medina (2019)
New Kid by Jerry Craft (2020)
When You Trap a Tiger by Tae Keller (2021)
The Last Cuentista by Donna Barba Higuera (2022)
Freewater by Amina Luqman-Dawson (2023)

Have you or any of your play companions read any of these?

What was the most important part of the book for you?

How do these books capture how a young person experiences the world?

BIOETHICS, UTOPIAS, AND LITERATURE

The Giver takes place in a society absent of hierarchy and oppression based on race, gender, and ethnicity. Yet, it is a society that values intellectual ability over other knowledge abilities and skills, and it is also a society that practices eugenics and genetic engineering to control the size and composition of the Community. Many readers of the book and audiences of the play are shocked to encounter not only a society in which humans have been altered not to perceive the color spectrum but also a society that kills its young and old based on health, fitness, and societal contribution.

As a play, *The Giver* is a work intended for all ages. Some of our adult audience members will remember reading this and other books by Lois Lowry when they were younger. Other adult audience members will be new to this story. What will not be new to any of our audiences, however, are the questions of bioethics, technology, government, equality, and freedom. These questions are not only debated in the realms of science, politics, and religion, but also in art. As political experiments, scientific innovations, and new ideas enter society, works of literature have emerged to speak to our ongoing moral quandaries of what kind of humanity we can – and ought – to engineer. Artists not only address these quandaries through realistic depiction, but also through alternative worlds, science fiction, and magical realism. Since Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), writers have imagined societies and communities with problems and solutions not so unlike our own. Here are works of twentieth and twentieth-century literature that address the conditions of our present and our future:

Herland by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In this 1915 novella, three American men fly a small plane to an undiscovered land occupied only by women. For 2,000 years, they have been able to asexually reproduce and select intelligent women to do so. The three men have various levels of difficulty navigating a society absent of patriarchy.

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley. Published in 1931, this book explores the glorification of science and technology and its ability to maintain social control in a caste-system dystopian society of artificial wombs and artificial happiness.

Nineteen Eight-Four by George Orwell. Responding to the mechanisms of the Soviet Union in 1949, the novel features a cadre of literal Thought Police and explores the role of the surveillance in maintaining a totalitarian state.

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury. Written during the McCarthy era and exploring mid-twentieth censorship at both home and abroad, this 1953 book takes place in a future America in which all books are destroyed and screen distraction is used to control the population.

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro. This devastating love story published in 2005 takes place in an alternative England of the recent past. Advanced medical technology allows for life to be prolonged through organ “donation” from clones who are raised for this purpose.

Super Sad True Love Story by Gary Shteyngart. Set in a future New York obsessed with wealth, attractiveness, advertising, and obsessive social media use, this hilarious 2010 novel depicts the replacement of democracy and a market economy with totalitarian consumerism. The wealthiest extend their lifespans through technologies offered by “Post-Human Services.”

Broken Earth trilogy by N. K. Jemisin. All three books from this trilogy published between 2015 and 2017 received the Hugo Award, the highest award for speculative fiction. Set on the Stillness, a continent of strict assigned social roles and population control, the novel follows the story an orogene, a member of an oppressed super-human race, on a quest to save her daughter.





(865) 974-5161

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