

# **Emergence: Labeled Autistic Study Guide**

**Emergence: Labeled Autistic by Temple Grandin**

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## Plot Summary

This book has a straightforward, autobiographical plot structure. It begins with a few chapters about the author remembering what it was like to grow up as an autistic child, right up through high school at a boarding school. The next few chapters use the images and symbols that are important to the author as she transcends the challenges of autism and uses them to her advantage. The final chapter makes some important observations about autism and how to help children who are autistic. There are three helpful appendices, as well.

This is probably one of the most unique books in the world, because typically autistic people never emerge from their handicap in order to communicate. However, as the story tells us, Temple is not usual in the world of autistics. Usually they do not learn to speak, much less to write, coherently, and often their words and phrases have meaning only for themselves. Autistics are difficult to be around as they can be unpredictable, violent, destructive, and in Temple's own word, just "weird." It is a frightening ailment, described rather dispassionately by Temple herself. She knows even as an autistic child that she is not behaving like others, that she is misbehaving, and that she cannot help herself. At times, however, she actually chooses bizarre behavior for attention seeking. Differentiating between the two strange sets of behavior is easy for the girl Temple, and soon it becomes rather easy for Temple's mother.

This is a testament to the loving, attentive care of a parent who can see into the heart and mind of her child, even when the child possesses the strange and hard-to-deal with behaviors of an autistic. Temple does not even start to talk until after age three, and then only minimally. Mostly she just screams to get what she wants, and one can imagine how hard this is for a parent to deal with. In reality, Temple's dad finally gives up and thinks that Temple should be institutionalized. Temple's parents eventually divorce. One wonders if this disparity in the treatment of their daughter has something to do with it. Surely having an autistic child in the house is a terrible burden on everyone in the family.

Temple also describes significant teachers in her life. Her first primary teacher does not understand her, and Temple relates how difficult it is to do linear kinds of learning, as in multiple choice questions that only have one answer, when Temple can clearly see several ways to answer questions. It is easy to extrapolate that a child need not be autistic to struggle with such issues. Indeed, throughout the book, the reader can easily extrapolate how Temple's problems, when looked at more minimally, can be problems shared by many people. Temple makes this connection herself, noting that although she possesses truly bizarre behaviors, many of her attitudes, fixations, and kinesthetic and visual propensities are shared by many people in lesser degrees. By inference one can see that the educational system in most schools ignores and even punishes such propensities.

Temple has the good fortune of being in a family with the means that allow her to go to special small schools and be treated by psychiatrists throughout her growing-up years.



True, many of the psychiatrists do not particularly understand her. Her primary psychiatrist, Dr. Stein, supplies M & M's to Temple but seems to offer little else, especially from the child's point of view. When Temple goes to a summer camp and is prematurely introduced to sexual matters on which she fixates but does not really understand, Dr. Stein latches right onto these things and attaches them to the most important thing in Temple's life, The Squeeze Machine.

The Squeeze Machine is a fixation and obsession from the time Temple is small. To understand its importance, one must understand that autistic children and autistic people absolutely cannot tolerate being touched. Babies stiffen up and turn away from their mothers. Young children become violent when touched. Parents and family understandably are hurt and put off by these rejections. However, Temple develops throughout the book the idea that the children really crave to be held, to be touched and cuddled, but their neurological affliction makes it impossible. Using a firm, gentle pressure as being held in Temple's invention, the Squeeze Machine, modeled on a cattle chute that Temple sees and experiments with as a senior in high school, the neurological disconnections, the vestibular mechanisms in the body, can be calmed and perhaps reset so that autistics can tolerate touch. The same operation renders the autistic more liable to be able to experience emotions, and this is a real difference because autistics may be excited and interested in machinery but not in people. They do not feel, and they do not love.

Temple is fearful of her machine because of this and because Dr. Stein, who is firmly grounded in Freudian theory, and others, insist that the Squeeze Machine is something negatively sexual. Temple does not really understand much about sexuality, yet she is deeply troubled by the suggestion that her machine may be some kind of sexual device. These doubts trouble Temple throughout her life, even though her Squeeze Machine and later her devices to help with animal husbandry become so famous that she travels internationally.

Those who have known autistics will be thrilled and surprised to find out that Temple learns to speak articulately and expressively, overcoming much of the flatness and inappropriate loudness typical to autistics. It is fascinating to watch Temple overcome her neurological condition, using research and logic to reason herself through crises. The book is fascinating not only as an inner view of an autistic, but a testimonial to the caring of family and friends and teachers.



# Foreword

## Foreword Summary and Analysis

This is the first piece in the book, an interesting foreword by a famed author on autism, Bernard Rimland. He notes that autism is often over-diagnosed but is certain that Temple Grandin is a genuine autistic, recovered or recovering. He is surprised that Temple has progressed through high school, college, and even graduate school. Rimland and his wife take Temple out to lunch, and Temple's loud, unmodulated voice brings unwanted attention, but when Rimland asks her to speak more quietly, she does not take offense. Rimland notes that Temple has taught herself to deal with her problems and use them to help herself. Rimland is particularly interested in Temple's insights about touch and autistic children. He notes that this is the only book in existence by a recovered autistic and remarks that Temple continues to grow and progress year by year.

# Preface

## Preface Summary and Analysis

This is another short piece by someone who knows Temple Grandin, this time one of her former teachers, William Carlock. Along with others in the school, he tries to make sense of Temple's oddities and special abilities. Even though she can be irritating and strange, Carlock says, people enjoy her. Although he finds her questions and interests odd, they fascinate him. He also notices that she is clean but not concerned with grooming. He notes that Temple has become a unique person not by trying to "get rid of" autism, but by using her characteristics to become a true individual. She asks hard questions, and he likes to try to find the answers. She is unsocial but she is likable. She is good at things like carpentry, rocketry, and "lock picking." Carlock points out that although there are difficulties, there are great rewards in mainstreaming even an autistic, that there is hope for people with such disabilities, proven by Temple Grandin's successes.



# Introduction

## Introduction Summary and Analysis

This chapter opens with author Temple Grandin being invited to a class reunion at her former school, Mountain Country School located in Vermont. She is a little surprised to be invited, because she knows full well how "bizarre" she has been as a child, how she "hit the other kids on the head." She remembers that she was truly bizarre, not talking until almost four years old but instead making strange noises such as "peeping" and "humming," as well as screaming. Although she grows up during a time when autism is not commonly known about, later she receives the diagnosis of autistic. She acknowledges that common wisdom is wrong, because she is an autistic that has changed her behavior. She asks how a child who is most likely to be institutionalized can make her way in the real world.

She defines autism as a "developmental disorder," a defect in the nervous system that causes the afflicted child to overreact to some things and under-react to others. Autistic children are often overwhelmed by normal stimuli and shut down. Typical stressors are sounds, movements, spinning and smells. Sometimes an autistic starts a movement and cannot stop it. This is called "perseveration" and is particularly annoying to adults that do not know what it is.

No one really knows what autism is, but it is thought that neurons in the brain grow and develop in the wrong direction. Autism shows up early, even in infancy. Symptoms include lack of reacting to sounds or other stimuli, crazy overreactions to normal, everyday things, avoidance of being touched, lack of speech, repetitive behavior, tantrums, over-reacting to loud or unusual noises, and inability to connect emotionally with others. People have tried many different treatments. However, no one thing generally works in treating autism.

Temple is writing this story to offer hope to parents, because she has been an autistic child who "groped way way from the far side of darkness."

This is a simple, straightforward, honest memoir of an autistic life, introducing the main concepts and conflicts of autism. The author has done ample research to know that she has truly been an autistic child, although many experts would like to argue with her and say that she cannot have been autistic, because she is high functioning now. The experts all want to offer retrospective advice, but Temple is fairly straightforward and realistic about her experiences as all that advice offers treatments that have not been available until now. Autism is frightening to see in a child. People do not know how to deal with an autistic, and even do not know what autism is. Temple has a very clear, straightforward way of explaining it, although she, along with everyone else, does not know why it occurs. The "bizarre" and strange behaviors of autism become understandable when she explains them even though they must be very frightening and hard to deal with in reality.



This very short chapter establishes the concept of autism and places the author in the very unique position of being able to talk about it from the inside, having been an autistic child. It sets up the rest of the book, as the reader wonders what it could have been like to be that child and to be able to talk about it now, as an adult.





# Childhood Memories

## Childhood Memories Summary and Analysis

The chapter opens with the famous story Temple tells about almost killing her mother and sister. She is three-years-old and is on the way to a session with a speech therapist. Her mother asks her to put on her hat. The hat feels tight and squishes Temple's ears, making them feel as if they are just one ear. She screams as she lacks the language to tell her mother how she is feeling squashed by the hat. The mother is driving and cannot be so distracted so she just insists that Temple put on the hat. The hat begins to become physically uncomfortable for Temple even to hold. She feels she must toss it out the window but is too young and small to roll down her own window. So, she reaches across and tosses it through her mother's window. The mother instinctively reaches for the hat but misses it, and the car swerves into another lane and crashes into a semi-truck. When the windows break, the fragments fall on Temple, who calls out repeatedly, "ice," a miracle in itself, because she does not speak clearly. The texture and light of the broken fragments look like ice to her.

As a child and later, Temple lives in a visual world, so her childhood memories are images. She knows that she has been a difficult baby, who will not allow cuddling after six months. When her mother tries to hold her, she stiffens and claws out at her. In the following months and years, the mother must deal with other incomprehensible behaviors such as spinning things repeatedly, being solitary, destroying things, tantrums, not being able to talk, over-sensitivity to unexpected noises, interest in smells, and seeming not to hear things. These are typical autistic behaviors in children.

However, this is a time when autism is not widely diagnosed. The mother knows something is wrong and takes Temple for tests from a doctor who recommends speech therapy. Up to this time, Temple only screams to communicate, and the speech therapist, Mrs. Reynolds, helps her greatly. At first Temple can only say one-word sentences and mispronounces them. However, the voice is wrong, flat and without affect. She cannot focus on her mother's words but keeps darting her eyes away, another typical behavior for autistics.

She is overly focused on repetitive behaviors such as dribbling sand through her fingers or spinning in place for hours. This she finally realizes is the need to stabilize her incomplete nervous system. She hates loud noises and cannot relate well to others. She cannot enjoy birthday parties because of the sudden noises of the party favors and usually hits others at the party. Like many autistics, she cannot block out the variety of noises in crowded situations and reacts inappropriately. The governess takes advantage of this by threatening the child with loud noises if she does not finish her soup.

Temple's mother keeps a diary of Temple's life and writes that Temple sometimes cannot control inappropriate behaviors but sometimes does them on purpose. The mother loves the child but finds her so difficult.



This chapter establishes a friendly, straightforward tone in accessing important memories to Temple. She and her family remember vividly the almost-accident, but the most important aspects of the memory are the quality of the broken glass and the extreme discomfort of the tight corduroy hat. She hates the noise of the crash but is not frightened by it. She includes memories that might disgust or frighten others, such as peeing on the carpet or in the drapes or finger painting with feces all over the walls, but typical of many autistics, she tells these things without affect. There is little or no emotional content to the stories. She relates her fascinations such as spinning by backing them up with some research in her search to understand and be at peace with her oddities. When she recalls a family trip on a ferry, she points out that her family has a great time but it is a torture to her because of the intense sound of the foghorn. She analyzes the spinning, self-mutilation and lack of affect as an autistic's way of shutting out overwhelming stimuli.

These insights are a view into autism that no one has ever seen before, because of the very uncommunicative nature of the syndrome. To have an autistic be able to explain what she is experiencing is fascinating.

This chapter introduces the ongoing technique of including her mother's journals and letters in order to give another view into Temple's childhood and growing up. The mother writes expressively and compassionately, and her work is a valuable view into the child's life.



# Early School Days

## Early School Days Summary and Analysis

Temple's mother tells her school is going to be fun and exciting. Temple believes her, yet she knows she can be upset by strange situations. However, she does not yet realize how her bizarre behaviors will separate her from other children. Temple prepares the teacher for Temple's problems and the teacher tells the children. Temple sees the teacher's white face like a ghost and cannot stand the teacher's strong perfume. Most of all, the different way that Temple processes information makes trouble for her. The teacher wants her to mark all the words that start with various letters such as "b," and Temple calls a suitcase a "box," because the picture looks like one. She sees a birdbath in a garden so marks it "g." Mrs. Clark, the teacher, cannot accept Temple's alternative reasoning and logic and always marks her grades low.

Temple includes a lengthy poem she writes about the dark ages. The images are great but the rhythm is all wrong, and it is supposed to have been a rhythmic poem. She does this to illustrate her inability to process rhythm like other children. As young as the second grade, Temple begins to imagine a magic machine that would provide "intense, pleasant pressure stimulation" to her body. She realizes now that she needs tactile stimulation as a child but cannot get it, because she rejects physical touch from those around her. She introduces early a recurring image of a sliding glass door that separates her from other people and "normal" sensory experiences such as certain fabrics or even the touch of her own skin. She points out that autistics need touch just as much as other people but cannot receive it. Temple quotes scientists that say that any tactile stimulation is better than none, that lacking touch can cause "hyperactivity, autistic behavior, violence and aggression."

When in third grade, Temple envisions a coffin-like machine that she can crawl into and provide physical touch and pressure. She also envisions a warm, closed box she can hide in. These things become obsessions for her, just as many other transitory obsessions that drove her family crazy. These include election posters, buttons and bumper stickers. She talks endlessly and obsessively about these things. She asks constant questions about everything, a never-ending stream of the same question repeatedly. As before, Temple analyzes these things and points out that "obsessive questioning and perservation on one subject" are part of recovering autistics. Temple makes up endless stories with continuing characters. She includes real people in her stories and makes the stories so outrageous that she laughs and laughs, endlessly. Again, this uncontrollable laughter is part of autism.

Are the strange obsessions and fixations of autism bad? Temple thinks not in all cases. They can be channeled into something constructive.

Temple further recalls problems with academic subjects such as spelling, penmanship and math. She dearly wants to excel to get recognition and privileges, but she cannot.



She is excellent at reading, however, and her mother helps her excel. Her best subjects are art and woodshop. She is always excellent at creating things but not at certain academic subjects. Temple analyzes this by citing research that points out the differences between fluid intelligence as opposed to crystallized intelligence. A creative person has fluid intelligence but cannot always score well on tests that require "verbal mediation, sound inference, and sequential steps of logic in problem solving."

Temple is a child endlessly creative but not good at remembering logical rules and steps to things. She is also prone to unpredictable and negative behaviors, temper tantrums, and bad grades. Still, she endears herself to others. When it is the day to bring a pet, her mother doesn't want her to bring the family dog, so Temple dresses up as a dog and the children love it! In fifth grade, she builds all the sets for the school play. Still, she is constantly getting into mischief although not always being caught. One time, she and her friend collect glass bottles from all over the neighborhood and throw them and break them in the neighbor's birdbath. Another time, she and another neighborhood miscreant tear up a neighbor's lawn and blame it on dogs, still not being caught. Once she is caught, however, when she wears tennis shoes to church. Her dad punishes her outside by a chain link fence, with a terrible temper. Temple notes that such things as a bad temper and obsessiveness can be passed from generation to generation. However, she has worked hard to control her temper and mostly succeeds. She foreshadows the next chapter by mentioning that her temper got her into bad trouble in junior high.

This chapter has the quality of typical childhood reminiscences, although Temple's childhood is anything but typical. She tells the stories of her struggles with academic struggles with equanimity and a measure of understanding, often quoting research that backs up her personal experiences. There is a picture of Temple as a little child, showing her face a being pleasant and smiling but also a little "off." Temple evidences a measure of compassion and understanding for the teachers who deal with her, although there is an inference that with some flexibility, they would have been better educators for atypical children such as her. She remembers with fondness friends who overcome the handicap barrier and who love her for her own self. She mentions how very young she is when she first imagines and then designs a machine to provide pressure and contact comfort, quoting studies about how children and babies fail to thrive and even become unmanageable without proper physical touch, noting that autistics are especially at risk, because they refuse touch violently. She points out that her obsessive ness and "perservation," which is staying with a sentence, idea or behavior far longer than normal, are part of the autistic behaviors. Imagine how her family and teachers felt with her asking the same question repeatedly and over.

Temple sketches out how she fails and how she magnificently succeeds in school, pointing out that creative kids, to a lesser degree, have a harder time with fixed facts and rules in schools. She loves to make things and she's good at it, being allowed to enroll in woodshop at a time when girls are not allowed very often.

Temple points out how she may have inherited her bad temper, among other characteristics, from her violent dad. She doesn't tell many stories about this but she cites research on it. There is a "twinkle" in the style when Temple recites the naughty



things she does, such as breaking glass in a neighbor's garden birdbath and poker-faced blaming it on neighborhood boys.

It is inspiring that Temple can remember her childhood with all its difficulties and face it with calmness and acceptance, especially knowing that she is at the mercy of a physical condition not easily controlled.



# New Worries

## New Worries Summary and Analysis

The chapter begins with Temple's parents arranging for her to go to summer camp. The mother emphasizes many physical activities and because of these and because many kids go to summer camp, Temple partly wants to go but dreads the newness of the many experiences. Temple is shy to meet the new staff once they arrive. While she is changing, a boy mentions that Temple has no boobs. This is a new word for Temple, and she repeats it constantly. Finally, Nan, the camp counselor, tells her it's not appropriate. Temple cannot stop herself, however. A girl suggests she asks a boy to see his "peter," which Temple does, and horrifies the kids again. Other sexual words obsess Temple, and she repeats them constantly. Temple gets a urinary infection at the camp and is uncomfortably probed and swabbed. Her mother comes to get her.

Later, the mother writes a lengthy letter to a child psychologist explaining her points of view about Temple's condition and progress, talking about love as relates to success. She analyzes the failure of Temple to do well at the camp, but points out that Temple is not hypersexual nor prematurely sexual, but just responding to her environment. The mother points out that Temple thinks about her hard experiences and makes conclusions from them, learns from them. She is motivated by wanting to be included, so she will learn difficult things such as swimming or riding a bicycle. The mother concludes her letter with confirmations of being willing to work with the doctor.

The psychiatrist thinks that autistics have suffered a "psychic injury," which is now totally disproved. Temple is smart enough to withhold certain information from the psychiatrist, since she knows that he talks privately with her mother. Temple acknowledges that she is clueless about personal relationships around her and adamantly refuses to see her parents' marital discord. Temple wryly recalls her sessions with the doctor, making sure she shares only that which will serve her situation. She eats all his M & M's.

This chapter contains another lengthy letter from the mother to Dr. Stein, explaining the good things about Temple's progress. She affirms Temple's good-heartedness and willingness to try things, to succeed.

This chapter reveals a good deal about Temple's condition and behavior through lengthy letters from her mother, both to Dr. Stein, the family's chosen psychiatrist. These letters reveal a compassionate, intelligent nature from the mother, who uses anecdote and analysis to explore the child's behaviors. Temple's mother is her staunchest advocate as revealed in these letters. She stands up for Temple even when the father goes off on tangents about her. She insists that Temple is a good-hearted girl. When the camp counselors and nurses all insist that Temple is improperly and prematurely sexual, the mother points out that Temple's behavior applies to all things, and not just sexual things. She slightly reproves the camp personnel for being prudish and old-fashioned relating to



masturbation, although there is no evidence that Temple's urinary infection comes from masturbation.

This chapter reveals two aspects of Temple's social skills. One aspect is that she does not truly understand social relationships and emotional relationships around her. However, on the other hand, she understands people well enough to know when to give information and when to withhold it.

The lengthy letters in this chapter give an interesting, compassionate outsider's point of view to Temple's story. When Temple flatly describes her obsessive repetition of words, for example, it is hard to visualize it, but it is easier to see when an adult writes or talks about it. Temple's wry description of the doctor trying to elicit more information is very funny.

# Forgettable Days at Junior High

## Forgettable Days at Junior High Summary and Analysis

Temple remembers only fragments of her junior high days, because they were so horrible, and she doesn't like to look at the memories. The teachers are cruel, the students reject her, and the environment is noisy and crowded, all anathema to an autistic. She is enrolled in a private girls' school with class changes in noisy halls, and a new teacher each hour, bad for a child who cannot tolerate change. All the work is abstract and conceptual but Temple needs hands-on learning. She flunks a lot but does well in biology and creative classes like jewelry making. She gets naughty when she is bored. She also gets naughty just to see how her peers react and if she'll be caught. She hides kids' clothes during gym. She ties the blind cords to kids' desks so the blinds fall down when kids open the desks. She laughs uncontrollably at these jokes.

Dr. Stein writes a letter to the headmaster explaining things about Temple, including her high IQ and his idea of her condition. He points out that even though she can be difficult, Temple wants to blend in.

During this time, Temple becomes fascinated with science fiction, including "The Twilight Zone." She creates effective paper airplanes. Still, she cannot get along well with her peers. Finally, she is expelled for hitting kids whenever they tease her, which is all the time. Once a child calls her a "retard," and she flings a heavy book and hits the child in the eye. The principal is very upset and expels Temple. Mother enrolls her in a small school called Mountain Country School, a small school that makes things easier for Temple. She still dreams of her magical holding machine.

This is a rather short chapter, and a painful one. Typical of junior high school age, the children at her junior high are cruel to her and the teachers do not understand, either. When the academic work becomes highly abstracted, Temple simply flails. She cannot do this kind of abstraction although she does fine in visually oriented classes such as biology and in arts and crafts classes. Temple gets herself into trouble partly out of boredom and partly just to see what will happen.

Adolescence is a difficult time for anyone and Temple's condition is making it worse. She gets so angry when kids are mean to her! She keeps hitting them, once flinging a book that could have blinded a girl. As usual, Temple's mother sets her mind to finding a more suitable situation for Temple. The mother is truly a heroine in this story, never giving up on her daughter.





# Boarding School

## Boarding School Summary and Analysis

The new school that Temple will attend is far from home so she will go there as a boarding student. Temple asks multitudinous questions which her mother answers with grace and humor. Fishing, camping and horseback riding are part of the boarding school, and these things fascinate Temple. There are only 32 kids in the school, a good manageable number for an autistic. The director of the school explains at length the program of the school, which combines individualized help for problems, social skills, everyday living skills, and academics. Some students get therapy if needed. Temple has a hard time sitting through the interview, fixating on textures of her sock, which she rubs repeatedly. Mother kisses Temple but doesn't hug her, even though Temple aches for the hug, though stiff and unresponsive. Temple hits a kid for cutting in line, but the teacher in charge just listens to the story evenly and helps Temple cope better.

Still, whenever things don't go well for Temple at this school, she smacks people, often on the head. When Miss Downey's counseling fails, she removes Temple's horseback riding privileges, which works. Temple loves the animals so much that she teaches herself to stop hitting people.

However, at this time Temple begins to suffer something she calls nerve attacks. She remembers that she needs routine and sameness to function, just as most autistics do. However, she is also going through the hormonal craziness of adolescence. She becomes more impulsive, more prone to fantasize, and more of a social misfit. The nerve attacks add to the problem. She describes them as a powerful anxiety attack, including hypersensitivity and major trembling. The attacks can last for hours and finally stop later at night. Temple thinks that the attacks, in retrospect, are cyclical, relating to the menstrual cycle and the diurnal cycle. Checking for mail and answering the phone can trigger the attacks. Having a terrible itch such as caused by pinworms, becomes unbearable during the attack.

Temple hypothesizes that the attacks may have been better if she has had more physical stimulation and touch as a child. She has read that there may be a deficit in noradrenergic activity. In addition, autistic children have too much norepinephrine, which transmits nerve impulses. Resting and intense physical workouts help, but sometimes nothing helps at all. She just endures the attacks.

This chapter is a fascinating view of how the onset of adolescence interacts with autism. In a new school, Temple is motivated by the right techniques to modify her behavior. She stops hitting when she loses horseback riding privileges. However, she begins to suffer physical symptoms without rhyme or reason, called "nerve attacks." The simple description of the attacks may not really reveal how hard they are to bear, especially over the period of hours. Temple has done some research on the physiology of autism

to help understand these dreadful recurrences. As always, she refers to her need for firm holding and tactile stimulation, which she and other autistics lack.



# The Door

## The Door Summary and Analysis

At sixteen, Temple is desperate for relief from these nerve attacks. Research at Yale explores some of the reasons for them, but at the time, Temple only suffers. She finds a temporary relief from an amusement park ride called The Rotor, which by centrifugal force pushes one hard against a rotating big cylinder. When she is on The Rotor, and for a time afterward, she has relief from her symptoms. Research has validated her experience that spinning hyperactive children in an office chair reduces their hyperactivity. At any rate, she becomes obsessed with The Rotor but still experiences bad nerve attacks. Temple remembers Alfred, her childhood imaginary character. She writes letters "from" him to her. In the letters, Alfred begs, demands, and even threatens to get a Rotor for their school. Alfred is also called "the Shadow." She is fixated on the machine. She cites studies that relate these rushes of chemicals to rats injected with amphetamines. Those who are handled physically have less bad reactions, and Temple again refers to her lack of having been touched.

During a Sunday service, the minister offers the scriptural image of Christ as a door, on which you can knock and go through to peace and happiness. Temple sees all the doors in the subsequent days as possible entries to love and joy. She examines and rejects all the doors until she finds just the one, the door. It is a small wooden door that opens out on a rooftop on an observation deck. She keeps visiting this place that is called the Crow's Nest by local carpenters. She thinks about her childhood and all that happens to her. Finally, she goes through the door, literally, out onto the roof, and it is a spiritual step for her. She walks out of her old life into a new life. She tries to explain to the school psychiatrist the powerful image of the door. He tries to get her to promise to stop going there, but she doesn't obey.

She still is bored with school and fails most classes. Then she meets Mr. Brooks, the psychology teacher, who tells stories about animals. He introduced "The Ames Distorted Room Illusion" and challenges Temple to construct one. She works hard to figure it out. At the same time, she helps with horse shows, sets and costumes for the school play, and construction on a new house on the grounds, being especially good at shingling. Kids still call her names, and it hurts her. Still, she clings to her breakthrough through the door.

This chapter gives a fascinating insight into the literal nature of images and symbols for the autistic child. The scriptural reference to going through a door to "love and joy" becomes literal to Temple. She starts looking at every single door to be that door for her. She finally finds the door, high on a rooftop, opening to a roof. She visits this place all the time and finally wills herself to go through. She feels she is permanently changed, and she is. She gives up many of the childish ways and goes on to be more responsible. Her psychiatrist cannot understand this literal application of symbolic imagery.



Temple begins to show her flair for her later skills in life, carpentry and animal husbandry. She is truly marching to the beat of a different drummer. The kids call her names, such as "Bones," "Work Horse," and "Tape Recorder." They do not understand her, and it is hard to not only go through the normal angst of adolescence but with the added burden of autism.



# The Magical Device

## The Magical Device Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins with a letter from Temple's mother, sent to Temple while she is visiting her aunt in Arizona. Her mother is trying to explain some basic emotional realities to her daughter. She compares machines to people, saying that people can feel while machines cannot. She compares animals to people, saying that people develop deeper relationships to each other than to animals. Why all of this? Autistics do not understand feelings between people. Temple responds with a comment that what her mother really means is that the machine is not a human so it's not good. Everyone is discouraging Temple from her machine.

When Temple finally goes to college, she becomes the resident campus lock picker, making friends this way. The college is near her former school, and Mr. Carlock encourages the machine, saying that she needs to experiment with normal students to see if it works generally. Temple must do some research, he says, to back up her ideas. Temple finds out that there is a whole field called sensory interaction that deals with the subject. She builds a machine called PACES, Pressure Apparatus Controlled Environment Sensory. She still feels guilty about it, because the psychiatrists keep referring to her machine as some sort of sexual bondage device, and it is definitely not that to Temple. Temple's research, which she quotes here, points out that autistics are simply turned off, cold, emotionally. Temple recalls herself that as a child, she cannot tolerate touch, but as an adult, with the help of the machine, she can tolerate a pat on the shoulder or a handshake.

People have built such guilt into Temple about her machine that she vaguely fears it is some kind of sexual aberration. She realizes that public acceptance of the machine will somehow mean complete acceptance of herself as a person. She still worries that she will become dependent on such a machine. She tested it on normal college students, and 60% of them enjoyed the pressure but after a time, they have enough of it. She relies on that study quite a bit, that the machine is a normally good thing. She quotes an occupational therapist who uses it for hyperactivity, Lorna King. Temple cites various studies that demonstrate that vestibular pressure helps brain development in rats and dogs.

Temple reflects back on her fixation with doors, and feels again that she must literally go through a door in order to facilitate her college graduation. She goes through a trap door onto a roof, and feels the progression and release into the future. Temple spends quite a bit of time thinking about her machine and justifying it to herself, perhaps to the world. She sees it as a good tool for some autistics, perhaps replacing the self-mutilation that some do.



Temple writes a paper for graduation about marriage. She is put off by society's ideas of marriage and is not sure that she will be a good candidate for it anyway. She goes again through the trap door, ready for the next stage of her life.

Temple spends a good deal of time worrying about the Squeeze Machine and justifying it to herself and others. She knows it is good for her, and she even runs a study with normal college kids, who mostly like it. She can't help but quote that more than once, because she wants people to know that machine is not some sexual deviation. How sad that well-meaning therapists and teachers have misunderstood the machine, which is not sexual to Temple. However, she cites that it has helped her to participate in normal societal touch, however minimal.

Temple does not want people to think she is weird. She has bad memories of people calling her names during college. Still, she has the courage to persist in developing her machine. She spends some time with a young autistic child and notes that the machine could calm him down. However imperfect it might be, especially since many autistics are fascinated with machinery rather than people, it proved successful.

Temple justifies and makes an argument for helping autistics deal with their fixations by turning them into positives. This goes against standard autistic theory and therapy, so it is an interesting argument she makes, and her life proves it out. Temple includes a paper she writes in college on marriage, and then actualizes the symbol of the door by climbing on the roof and going through the door.



# Graduate School and the Glass Door Barrier

## Graduate School and the Glass Door Barrier Summary and Analysis

After college graduation, Temple builds a new improved Squeeze Machine while at home. Although she suffers from nerve attacks and alternates with eczema and colitis, she finds healing and calm in the new machine. She does not want to become dependent on the machine but fears that she will become too vulnerable emotionally if she doesn't use it, as it opens her up to people. Using it, she says, even makes the cat like her better, which is good for a smile.

When Temple leaves for graduate school, she is plagued by feelings of "self-doubts and a sense of worthlessness." She fixates on a sliding glass door as a symbol of getting through these bad feelings. It is a supermarket door. She stands there and looks at it at length without going through, although many people pass in and out. She sees the glass door as having a quality of openness, which she desires. Three weeks after seeing the door, she just walks through one day. She feels it is a "groovy" experience. One day, she walks in and out ten times, but the store manager doesn't bother her about it.

During this time, she revisits the Rotor machine that put her onto the idea of vestibular pressure as a calming influence. How rough it is compared to her machine. It's a good machine, and she struggles with that. This short chapter contains a letter from her mother reaffirming that.

In this short chapter, Temple is getting quicker at resolving conflict, understanding herself, and going through the door, literally and figuratively. Instead of taking a whole semester as with the trap door, she watches the sliding glass door at the grocery for ten days, and then walks through easily and casually. She goes in and out even though she faces ridicule. Without too much trouble, she realizes that her depression at graduate school is just a need to adjust to new surroundings. She begins to be more and more positive about her machine, and her mother helps with that.



# Through the Sliding Glass Door

## Through the Sliding Glass Door Summary and Analysis

Here she participates in nitty-gritty cattle operations, putting animals in the chute, doing vaccinations, castrations, and all, without a moment's upset. She gets along fine with the cowboys who don't blink an eye when she lets a calf through by mistake, saying they all do it sometimes. Going to the grocery and walking again through the glass door, she realizes that interpersonal relationships are as easy as walking through that door. When her therapist notices that she's getting along better with her classmates, she restrains herself from using symbolic language to explain it, which autistics often do, to the confusion of others. She thinks about working at a cattle operation but doesn't really do it. She visits "Beefland," where animals are killed for food, and thinks about humane treatment of creatures. She goes home for Christmas and has a huge nerve attack, because she has to think about family and other people instead of her fascinating work. However, her mother challenges her to stay with it and journal it. She does. Later she realizes how important cattle, feedlots and such operations are to her. She notices that placing her hands on an animal calms it down, and relates that to her machine. She begins to develop equipment that calms animals down, calling the first one "a Stairway to Heaven," working with other workers to make it good.

Temple researches the effects of touch on animals and people, noting that being touched releases endorphins and calms and reassures people. Temple begins to reach out and relate to people more and more. She begins a master's thesis on the design of cattle chutes in feedlots. Her need to fixate helps her get that finished.

Temple ends this chapter by noting that she is mostly recovered from the worst autistic symptoms, although when stressed, she may shut down some. Still, she has the courage to present her thesis to a European Meeting of Meat Research Workers.

This short chapter bridges the time from beginning to end of graduate school. In it, Temple begins to find easier relationships in normal situations such as working on a cattle operation. She endures the stress of being home, out of her normal routine of work and study, and stays with it instead of running away or reverting to autistic behavior. She spends some time here analyzing the need for touching in humans and animals, repeating her typical style of finding research to validate and support her personal findings. She has the tenacity to stay with and finish research and a master's thesis on the design of cattle chutes. Then she drops the amazing and interesting detail that she's invited to present her paper at an international convention, and she goes and does it.





# Working—Coping—Surviving

## Working—Coping—Surviving Summary and Analysis

Here Temple generalizes about herself. She notes that her visual and spatial mind makes it easier for her to design machines and facilities. She has a hard time with abstractions and usually invents visuals to help her remember them. She recalls that classes such as statistics are especially hard, because she has to remember lengthy sequences of abstractions. After this information, she lists various exams she has taken and tells how she does on them. On the Hiskey Nebraska Spatial Reasoning Test, she scored at the top of the norms. On the Woodcock-Johnson test, she has a somewhat lower test score. It is timed, and she cannot finish them. However, she tests at highest levels for the ones she does complete. On the other Woodcock-Johnson test segments, she does reasonably well even on the numbers, which she masters by reading them aloud. She does fine on the blending subtest and visual auditory tests when she can assign a visual image to the abstract concepts. She does poorly on comparing shapes, because her short-term memory cannot hold that many tests. On the Visual Attention Span segment, she does poorly, because she cannot sequence the pictures.

The Oral Directions subtest of the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude requires retaining information while performing another task at the same time, and she cannot do this. She cannot hold onto one piece of information while manipulating other information. Nevertheless, she excels in visual thinking, which makes her a good designer. She cites several good designers and architects who are masters at visual imaging. She examines brain surgery research that indicates that visual learners have some left-brain impairment, which allows for more development of right-sided brain functions such as imaging, music, and left-handedness.

Temple recites the medications that help her nerve attacks disappear. She refers to antidepressants to treat anxiety disorder. These medicines have helped her concentrate on her design and inventions. She hypothesizes that anxiety and fixation may motivate people to higher accomplishment, and she is successful in her business designing systems to help take care of animals in stockyards and other places. The chapter contains diagrams and pictures of some of Temple's inventions for livestock and agriculture. The chapter ends with a nice letter from her friend Lorna King, who writes that Temple has made immense progress in her condition and now is an amazing and effective speaker.

This interesting chapter is like a recitation of various tests and subtests that Temple has taken, indicating which ones she excels at and which one she does not excel at, and why. The chapter also relates research facts about why people might have more right-brain strengths and more left-brain weaknesses. Temple again hypothesizes from these research facts to show that her disability has turned to serve her well. She quotes another letter from a dear friend to support the information about her improvements and successes.

True to form, Temple stands back from her disability, turns it to an advantage, does research to understand it, and again shows her vast improvement through the information in this chapter.

# Autstics and the Real World

## Autstics and the Real World Summary and Analysis

This chapter directly addresses issues relevant to people dealing with autistic children. It is presented in bullet form and each section is very concise at to the point. It could almost be used as a flyer or information sheet for people dealing with autism.

Here are the main points.

Autistic children are all different, so require different responses and treatments. Temple's own life illustrates this point. If one follows the many approaches researched and tried by Temple's mother, it becomes obvious that each child is different and that their needs change as they grow up.

Parents should find what interests an autistic child and build on that interest. Teachers can also participate in this search. Even when the interests seem bizarre, such as Temple's lifelong search for a machine that could balance her vestibular system, and even when people think the interests are "weird," as some people called Temple's research, parents can decide for themselves. Interests are the way into an autistic child's mind and world.

Spinning is actually good for autistic children because it helps with balance, coordination and perception. This point may not mean much to people who do not deal with autistics, but they often spin. Research has pointed out that the spinning balances the vestibular system, which helps calm the child and open him or her up to better human interactions.

The Squeeze Machine and other deep pressure therapy can help some autistic children so they can receive touch more readily. The important concept is stabilizing the vestibular system. Although the idea was originally thought to be rather zany, it is more and more acceptable in light of recent research and practices, such as the related Holding Therapy. Temple gives schematics and plans for the idea in the book and even more on her website.

Watch the children for how they feel about things, both the negatives and positives. This relates to the next two points. As a child can change all the time, parents, therapists and teachers must adapt as the child matures. It is possible to redirect a child's behavior by minimizing simple things that may affect an autistic negatively, such as sounds or smells. By emphasizing positives, a parent or teacher can help a child open up to learning.

Be alert to what affects autistic children. Test autistic children often to find and record and respond to changes. This point directly relates to the former point. Without a doubt, this requires far more attentiveness and time than typical child rearing, a requisite when dealing with autistics.



Educate the child kinesthetically instead of abstractly, especially singing songs with them and allowing them to touch textures. This advice could be applied to many children whose behaviors are perhaps not as extreme as autistics, but kinesthetic learners respond better to these kinds of teaching techniques. It is known that people incarcerated in the penal system are almost all kinesthetic learners, not having been able to fit into the regular teaching techniques. It is also known that boys are much more often kinesthetics than girls. School programs that stress this kind of learning include Montessori and Waldorf Schools.

Provide private quiet places for autistic children, especially little enclosed spaces so dear to children and very important to autistics. Many autistic children, as Temple learns from her own life and from observing autistic children, like to enclose themselves, even to the point of wrapping themselves tightly in blankets despite very hot weather. Most children build little forts or enclosures such as covering a card table with blankets. Making this type of thing available is particularly important for autistics.

Be cautious introducing pets to autistic children. It is important to protect pets until you know what will happen. While it is true that autistic children can sometimes relate to animals more directly and positively than they relate to humans, it is important not to scare children with premature introduction to pets, nor to expose animals to possible harm from a frightened or somehow triggered child.

Use behavior modification with autistic children with care and do not assume that they can generalize one learning to another. The intellectual misfiring that sometimes occurs can frustrate parents and teachers who do not know this. As an example, a child may be able to ascertain certain shapes or letters but not transfer this understanding to other ones. A child may learn to put on a shirt but not understand how to transfer this understanding to putting on pants or shoes. It is hard to be patient with children who lack these generalization skills, but it is necessary to do so.

Understand that spontaneous reactions in autistic children may not be controllable. Temple recalls many times when she would throw or break things and not even want to do so. Understanding this is vital in dealing with autism as a handicap. By preparing a safe environment and watching a child carefully, a parent or teacher can avoid damage or physical harm that an autistic may cause going out of control. It is impossible to know what's going on inside the child's mind, but Temple points out that as a child, it is normal to grab and fling things and not even know why.

Be careful to regulate the diet. Many autistic children have deficiencies and also need supplements. Temple lists a few of the typical deficiencies and recommends appropriate supplements.

Watch for and regulate food allergies, which can exacerbate symptoms. There is a list in the chapter of frequent allergies in autistics. The allergies are similar to many typical food allergies, such as lactose, gluten, cheese, and others. It may seem to be an additional burden to test a child for these allergies, but doing so can cut problems significantly.



Don't overmedicate an autistic child. So many children are medicated for hyperactivity and similar neurological impairments, and this can harm them and hold them back. At the end of her recovery, Temple begins to take medications to help with the "nerve attacks" and to help with other symptoms such as patterns of anxiety and depression. However, this is medication for an adult. It is important not to give autistics too much medicine, but rather to give what seems to help, keeping it at a minimum, and to use other adaptive techniques instead.

Keep a predictable, quiet, stable schedule for autistic children. Monitor noise and speech to autistic children. Temple tells a number of stories about how sounds and words have sent her into a frenzy. In particular, going to a regular school with loud noises, bells, class changes, lunchrooms and similar situations can be devastating to the autistic child. It is important to keep activities during the day predictable according to a good schedule, because autistics can fly out of control when the schedule is suddenly changed.

Use fixations to help the children develop strengths. A perfect example is Temple's expertise in designing apparatuses. Don't discourage fixations unless they are harmful, such as self-mutilation. Many therapists discourage fixations, but Temple advises using them to get into an autistic child's mind and directing behavior in a positive way. A couple of wonderful teachers use this technique in Temple's life, resulting in her emerging from her autistic handicap.

Find specialists, and hear many different opinions. Temple's mother certainly sets the example for this. It can be expensive to do such a thing, and Temple's family happens to be wealthy enough to afford it. At this time, there is plenty of governmental help for parents of autistic children because of their handicap. If one specialist says something that doesn't feel quite right, a parent should explore other options till she or he hears many different points of view, and then take the counsel that feels most appropriate to his or her child.

Again, in true Temple Grandin style, this is a straightforward, to-the-point, no-nonsense guide to helping autistic children. She concludes with the wry observation that no one would have thought that such a "weirdo" would have developed into such an accomplished person as she has.

# Appendices

## Appendices Summary and Analysis

Appendix A and B analyze various tests and responses. Appendix A comes from the Institute for Child Behavior Research and is a form and Checklist for Behavior-Disturbed Children. This is a copy of the actual form. It contains the responses that Temple's mother entered when Temple was tested as a child. Appendix B contains an extensive bibliography of important documents relating to autism. It comes from the Autism Society of America. These are almost all professional journal articles. Appendix C contains a summary of basic autism research. It contains a summary of possible causes, a short description of the subtypes of autistic children, some general recommendations for treatment and education, a brief document about tactile stimulation, an analysis and diagram of the Squeeze Machine, and some comments on fixations and medications. General recommendations that echo Chapter 14 complete the Appendices.



# Characters

## Temple Grandin

This is the author of the book. Although there is a ghostwriter working with her, named Margaret M. Scariano, Temple's is the main voice of the book. Temple is an autistic child, evident early on from infancy. She is aware of how different she is from other people and knows how many of her behaviors bother others, even causing trouble for them. However, she often cannot stop herself from doing things she knows are wrong or annoying. Furthermore, she learns in a different way than others. If school classes are boring to her, she cannot stop herself from coming up with crazy things or what she calls "naughty" things to amuse herself.

## Mrs. Reynolds

This is the speech therapist that helps Temple when she is a young child. The therapist has great patience and takes Temple far in learning to process what she hears and also to speak. However, Mrs. Reynolds uses a sharp pointer for her lessons and typical for autistics, Temple focuses in on the pointer and cannot always focus on her lessons as she is afraid the pointer will poke out her eye.

## Temple's Mother

Temple's mother writes a diary and various letters which are included in the book. Her words add a compassionate and detailed view of Temple that Temple herself could not relate so well. Temple is her mother's firstborn. She must figure out how to deal with this strange child, especially since autism has not been well described nor diagnosed in these early years. Temple's mother has other normal children and begins to understand bit by bit that Temple is handicapped. She makes sure that teachers know what is wrong with Temple. She provides an education with small schools with small classes so Temple can avoid being overwhelmed. When Temple is almost grown up, the mother agonizes over how much to protect her and how much to let her go.

## Mrs. Clark

This is Temple's first teacher in public school. Temple remembers vivid images of her, such as a very high neckline, a white face like a ghost, and a strong perfume. Although Mrs. Clark tries to be inclusive and understanding, she is an old-school type of teacher that cannot accept alternative learning and reasoning. Occasionally she gets so upset with Temple's inabilities, such as not being able to clap in rhythm, that she loses her temper and makes Temple sit out of the activity. Her angry voice infuriates the girl.



## **Alfred**

This is a classroom bully who misbehaves all the time, putting a mouse in the teacher's drawer or a garter snake in the teacher's book. Temple uses him as a character in long, drawn-out stories she makes up to herself. She laughs and laughs uncontrollably and endlessly at the character, a typical behavior of autistics.

## **Crystal**

Temple's elementary school best friend is named Crystal. Crystal can look through Temple's oddities and enjoy the creative mind of her friend. She understands Temple's odd speech and likes her as she's not a boring person.

## **Eleanor Griffin**

This is another of Temple's dear friends, who remains so throughout elementary school. She is a well-behaved child but defends Temple against teasing.

## **Temple's Father**

Temple does not talk much about her father, but she says that he has a bad temper and notes research that shows that certain traits such as bad temper can be passed from parent to child. She is much more extreme than her father, but she sees the similarities. Her father also obsesses over things such as mutual funds or planning the details of a trip.

## **Nan, the Camp Counselor**

This young camp counselor is assigned to Temple at summer camp. As it turns out, she is unable to deal with Temple's obsessions, which take a sexual turn when she learns for the first time sexual terminology which is frequently passed around at this young age. Temple gets a urinary infection, and Nan and other camp personnel think it comes from masturbation. Nan is too immature to deal with Temple's condition.

## **Dr. Stein**

Dr. Stein is the psychiatrist that Temple begins to see after her experiences at summer camp. He believes that Temple has suffered a "psychic injury" of some sort which has caused autism. Temple sees Dr. Stein weekly but she is savvy enough to be wise about what she shares with him, because he discusses the sessions with her mother. Dr. Stein is helpful to the mother in dealing with Temple. He supplies her with plenty of M & M's, which Temple gladly enjoys. She never shares with him her dream of a holding device for contact comfort.





## **Miss Downey**

This is a teacher at Temple's boarding school who reasonably and rationally helps Temple learn more appropriate behaviors, especially helping her learn not to hit. When counseling doesn't work, Miss Downey takes away Temple's horseback riding, which Temple adores, so Temple curbs her violence.

## **Mr. Brooks**

Mr. Brooks is a psychology teacher at the boarding school that Temple attends as an adolescent. He tells stories about animals, which Temple adores, and teaches her interesting things such as optical illusions. He challenges her to construct a famous one, the "Ames Distorted Room Illusion." He challenges her to build one but doesn't give her the answer on how to do it. She works long and hard to figure it out. Mr. Brooks is an ideal teacher for a child like Temple.

## **Lorna King**

She is an occupational therapist that uses the machine for hyperactives.

## **Jake**

This is a young autistic boy that Temple sees during her college years. She recognizes many things in him that remind her of herself, including wrapping herself in blankets even though it's very hot.



## Objects/Places

### The Squeeze Machine

This is Temple Grandin's invention, based on a cattle chute. It gives firm, gentle pressure and stimulates the vestibular system and calms the person. It is useful for some autistics but it has been particularly useful in Temple's transition from autism to a normal life.

### The Trap Door

This is a literal door onto a roof at Temple's secondary school, but it is also a symbolic door that she passes through to her future and a better life.

### The Arizona Ranch

Temple's Aunt Ann owns a ranch in Arizona. When Temple is a senior in high school, being there releases her into the adult world and introduces her to the concept that eventually becomes her Squeeze Machine.

### The Wrecked Car

This is one of Temple's earliest memories, and perhaps one the most telling details of her life. She flings a hat out her mother's car window, when Temple is only three, causing a car wreck, almost killing her mother. She does this, because the hat is squashing her head.

### Urine and Feces

Like many autistics, as a child, Temple urinates in the house and in the draperies, and uses her feces to color the walls. This image helps the reader understand how difficult it actually is to raise an autistic child.

### Summer Camp

This is one of the first experiences Temple has with sexuality. She is introduced to the normal naughty sex talk of preadolescent children, but the talk becomes obsessive. Later, when Temple has a urinary infection, the preceding sex talk makes the camp personnel think that the infection comes from masturbation, which they consider bad.



## **Valley Country School**

This is a small, therapeutic elementary school that Temple is enrolled in. It is a good, quieter environment for her, and she receives therapy in addition to academics.

## **Cherry Hill Girls School**

This is a regular matriculation private school that Temple is enrolled in as a junior high schooler. It is a dreadful experience for her, changing classes, much noise, and misunderstanding by teachers and students alike.

## **Mountain Country School**

This is the boarding school that Temple eventually attends and boards at for secondary school. Like the elementary school, it is therapeutic and has the additional aspects of having farming and horseback riding. Temple thrives in this environment although not everyone really understands her here.

## **The Door**

This is a symbol from scripture which Temple takes literally. She searches everywhere in her school to find the door, till she finds one that suits the image, high on the roof. She studies it many days before going through it, symbolizing breaking the boundaries of her condition.

## **The Distorted Room**

This is the name of an optical illusion which a beloved teacher challenges Temple to analyze and recreate. It represents the caring of an adult who is able to look past Temple's disability, to her brilliance.

## **The Cattle Chute**

This is a real cattle chute that Temple climbs into, and receives calming and balance from. It is on Aunt Ann's farm in Arizona and becomes the prototype for Temple's invention of the Squeeze Machine.

## **The Blanket**

Autistics often wrap themselves in blankets, as Temple does as a child, also using pieces of plastic. It reinforces her idea that autistics need to be closely and gently held by a non-threatening device such as the Squeeze Machine.



## Fixations

This is more an idea than an object, but they are key to understanding Temple and other autistics. One they get an idea, they repeat the words over and over again. They repeat the idea in their heads hundreds of times, never letting go. Wise teachers help Temple use her fixations to develop and create new things.

## Graduate School

Not only does Temple graduate from college, but she also even goes to graduate school. As few autistics ever even finish high school, this is an amazing and major step for Temple.

## The Sliding Glass Door

This is a new version of the door image that Temple latches onto when she is a graduate student. Going through the sliding glass door symbolizes Temple's full entry into normal adult life.

## The Feedlot

Here Temple begins her odyssey as a designer of humane, effective livestock devices. She visits a feedlot and notices that the animals are afraid and therefore injured, sometimes. She sets out to invent better machines and designs to help the animals.

## The Slaughterhouse

Temple visits "Beefland" where cattle are slaughtered. She notices that animals can be led to their deaths and slaughtered humanely, thus eliminating a torturous and fearful experience for them. She learns to touch animals gently to calm them down.

## The Rotor

This is a carnival ride which gives Temple her first experience and inkling of how pressure can calm her down. Later she revisits the ride and sees how strong and brutal it is, comparing it to her Squeeze Machine that is regulated by the user's own guiding.

# Themes

## Autistics Can Improve Their Lives

If the reader has ever interacted with an autistic child, s/he knows the extremity of an autistic's behavior. While Temple Grandin presents the behaviors rather coolly and straightforwardly, the behaviors are extreme. Autistic children deliberately do not control their urination so they urinate all over the house, often hiding the evidence. They save feces and at the same time use them to cover walls and furniture. Often they cannot talk so they scream all the time, or "peep," making odd incomprehensible sounds. When autistic children cannot get what they want or accomplish something, they thrash around and break things, even expensive things, irreplaceable things. They cannot respond to simple language many times, or only selectively. Sometimes they fly into emotional frenzies at everyday things like a phone ringing or someone coming to visit the house. They destroy materials and toys purchased to help them. Although Temple proves that autistic children need kindly loving touch, they stiffen up and refuse touch, even freaking out and going out of control. They rock and repeat strange sounds repeatedly. When they finally talk, if they ever do, they often repeat the same things, especially questions, even though they have been answered.

What does this mean to parents and educators? It takes the highest courage, persistence and love to take care of such a child, and many families give up. Many people put their children into special schools or institutions that just do caretaking of them. However, certain special parents, and those children who somehow can respond, can break through the barriers of autism to help children survive and even develop positive lives for themselves. Temple's dad gives up on her, understandably, but Temple's mother never gives up. She spends the resources, time, and love necessary to help Temple get through the behaviors and succeed in life.

This book gives hope not only for autistics but also for anyone who has mental, emotional, or physical disabilities. The road is hard, especially for autistic children and their families, because the behaviors are so outrageous. However, Temple Grandin proves that it can be done! She is the first autistic to ever write a book.

## People Can Turn Weaknesses into Strengths

Perhaps one of the most powerful themes in this book is the idea that egregious weaknesses, things that bother others and make troubles for the person and everyone around him or her, can be turned into admirable strengths. One of the most difficult behaviors of an autistic is what Temple calls fixations. These are obsessions that she turns repeatedly in her mind and cannot get rid of them. She thinks about them all the time, and she bugs everyone around her with them. Fixations are typical of autistic children but not just to them. Often right-brained people and people with other mental



illnesses, particularly bipolar disease, develop these fixations. Many therapists say that one should discourage these fixations in autistic children.

However, Temple asserts that with proper attentiveness and good focus, many fixations can be turned into strengths. She has had the obsession with small spaces and firm pressure from the time she is a little child. She longs for such things even though she cannot figure out why. Later she researches the concept and sees how it works with cattle. She leaps the boundary from hypothesis to reality when she actually fits herself into a cattle chute at her aunt's ranch. She cannot give up the fixation of the cattle chute as being an important thing for her. Finally, she creates a machine that proves to be helpful to many people, all from her fixation.

Similarly, Temple is fixated on the notion and image of doors after hearing a sermon about how Christ is the door. She searches for literal doors to fit her feeling about the image. Finally, she finds one and fixates on it, going back and back to visit it until she finally finds her way to go through, fulfilling her image of getting through barriers. A sliding glass door fits the same fixation. These images do not hold Temple back but instead move her forward.

The inspiration of this book is that if a person with so many difficulties as Temple can break through her weaknesses, everyone can. Temple thinks that autistic children demonstrate extremes of behaviors that may be common in other people but in lesser degrees. With good teaching, careful guidance, and love, parents and teachers can help autistic children and others turn weaknesses into strengths.

## **People Can Significantly Help the Handicapped**

If there is a hero in this story, it must be first of all Temple Grandin's mother. From the time that Temple is a little child, even before autism has been properly identified and diagnosed, Temple's mother holds to the love and dedication she has for her child, however difficult she is. Even when Temple causes an automobile accident, Temple's mother loves her. She takes her to many doctors and often stands up to the doctors when they think nothing can be done to help her child. She writes letters of encouragement to Temple when she is far away. She tries this and that treatment to help Temple, and she stays with the treatments. She devotes considerable resources to help her child.

Temple also has great helpers along the way, including a couple of superb teachers who refuse to see the strange, weird, unattractive behaviors in Temple and instead focus on the intellect and spirit they see in the girl. If the reader has ever seen an autistic child or dealt with one in a classroom, s/he knows that the behaviors are so outrageous that it is indeed difficult to see past them, reach into the mind and heart of the child, and teach them. However, inspired and loving teachers do just that for Temple, as do administrators to a lesser degree. Temple's psychiatrist tries hard but seems to miss the greatness that the teachers see.



Temple's Aunt Ann notices that Temple has strengths and gifts in building things and taking care of animals, and she directs Temple to these activities on the ranch. She encourages Temple's experiments with the cattle chute, however strange they seem to the eye. Aunt Ann has provided a model of strength, encouragement and courage for Temple.

This book not only is a testament to Temple's persistence and dedication to change and grow, but it is also a testament to those fine teachers and counselors that help her, and especially to Temple's mother.



# Style

## Perspective

This is one of the most straightforward of all books as it speaks directly from the author's perspective. Who better than a recovered autistic can speak from inside the mind? It is particularly interesting to see how Temple Grandin grows from being ruled by her fixations, obsessions and strange peculiarities of her condition, to become an adult who feels strong reactions but then backs up and considers what they mean, where they come from, and how to handle them.

Margaret M. Scariano ghostwrites this book, and it is possible to see the ghostwriter's hand in the lively conversations and descriptions, especially since Temple's point of view is often emotionally flat. However, it seems clear that Scariano has faithfully rendered Temple's voice and perceptions.

Temple often seems to lose confidence in herself. She cannot seem to trust her powerful instinct toward the Squeeze Machine, especially since therapists, school officials, teachers and even Temple's mother implant ideas that it is unhealthy, perhaps addictive, and perhaps sexually aberrant. From an outsider's perspective, such as a person reading the book, this negativity seems quite misplaced. The Squeeze Machine seems like a benign appliance, especially considering other firm touch therapist such as holding therapy, where the child is held not by a neutral machine but held tight by a parent or therapist. However, Temple reaffirms her beliefs about the machine by seeking and relating research and even conducting the research herself.

Temple often seeks affirmation for her ideas, almost for her self-worth, by researching supporting studies and citing them at length in order to support her views. This comes across as tender and loveable in a person who has already achieved so much herself.

Temple's conclusions and recommendations for parents and teachers of autistic children at the end of the book seem authoritative, because she is the one who has lived through the malady.

## Tone

Autistic children often have what is called a "flat affect," meaning that they don't seem to respond to emotion and rarely display it. This flatness comes out in Temple's voice as she is growing up. She evidences it in her inability to receive touch. However, she needs and craves it. Temple's voice is often called flat by people who hear her. In addition, sometimes when she writes, her voice comes across flat, even though the ghostwriter Margaret Scariano attempts to spice it up with conversations and wry recollections.





Occasionally, Temple evidences a funny twist as she enjoys recalling the naughty pranks she does as a child. She becomes a master lock picker and helps her college colleagues in and out of dormitories, cars and apartments. She engages friends in neighborhood pranks such as ripping up a lawn or standing up on a roof and breaking dozens of bottles in a nasty neighbor lady's birdbath in her garden. She breaks and flings things in classrooms, and sometimes speaks abruptly and rudely to teachers and therapists. Autistics sometimes have a strange sense of humor, and this definitely comes out in Temple's tone.

Temple often displays a poignant lack of confidence in herself, which is understandable, considering the obstacles she overcomes. As she progresses through her childhood to maturity, she often stops herself to consider why she is acting a certain way, to analyze it, and even to do research about it. She does considerable research and analysis to understand why she is so visual, finding brain research to understand left-brain deficiencies and right-brain strengths. She recommends that educators and schools allow for this kind of right-brain learning, including much kinesthetic education. When Temple is lacking confidence, she does research. The book flip-flops through self-exploration and research to back up personal ideas.

Another way that Temple bolsters her confidence and ostensibly the confidence of her audience is including letters to her and about her. This creates sometimes an uncomfortable shift in tone, but it is understandable.

The last of the book shifts in tone from personal recollection to recommendations for dealing with autistic children and includes additional information about Temple's inventions. These things are presented in a straightforward, easy to read style.

## Structure

This book contains some major themes that run through the book, creating an underlying structure. The image of the door that Temple wants to go through is introduced in the recollections of early childhood and runs through every school sequence and finally emergences as a climax when Temple finds a little trap door on the top of her secondary school, a door that exits onto rather a dangerous roof. Temple perches up there many days without being able to go through the door, and her emerging through that door, even when she gets into trouble with school personnel, references her ability to speak with confidence, to finish schoolwork, graduate high school, graduate college, and even earn a graduate degree complete with a thesis that wins her fame internationally. There is a similar image of a sliding glass door from the very beginning, that threads through the book and finally emerges at the end in the form of an automatic door at a grocery store. Temple stands there for many days watching the people go in and out. It is a fixation, but she soon overcomes it and goes through the door. In and out she goes, even though the store manager and others may possibly say something negative. This literal manifestation of an inner personal symbol is an interesting and powerful thematic thread throughout the book.



Similarly, the concept of the Squeeze Machine emerges very early in the narrative as Temple, like other autistic children and probably children everywhere, longs for a little, quiet, private place of her own. She even cuts up plastic pools and such to create coverings for herself. She wraps herself in a blanket even when it is hot. This is an exaggeration of the desire and drive that many children have for private, small places. The idea of enclosing herself in a coffin, in an Egyptian sarcophagus, and other enclosed places foreshadows Temple's eventual experience in the actual cattle chute and later in her developing her Squeeze Machine. It provides firm, safe pressure for vestibular stabilization that eventually allows Temple to tolerate simple touch and more importantly helps her calm down enough to feel love for those around her, especially her mother and the kindly educators that have helped her.

Otherwise, the structure of this book is transparent. It starts with early childhood, progresses through elementary years, goes through the painful experience of a bad junior high, which could be translated to many people's experiences growing up, into a boarding school dedicated to helping challenged students, up through college and graduate school. It is a simple, clear, straightforward memoir assisted with the gifted touch of a ghostwriter. At the end of the book, the structure changes somewhat as Temple presents her inventions and conclusions about autism.

What is remarkable is that Temple can synthesize her experiences and structure them into a helpful narrative that can assist autistic children and their families and teachers.



## Quotes

"To these people, it seems incomprehensible that the characteristics of autism can be modified and controlled. However, I feel strongly that I am living proof that they can." Page 9.

"For some unknown reason, the many millions of neurons which are growing in the developing brain make some wrong connections. Studies on the brains of deceased dyslexics, a condition that may be related to autism, indicate that neurons may have grown in the wrong directions." Page 10.

"In 1950 I was labeled autistic and groped my way from the far side of darkness." Page 11.

"Our bodies cry out for human contact but when contact is made, we withdraw in pain and confusion." Page 28.

"Obsessive questioning and perservation on one subject has been observed in other cases of youngsters who have recovered fully or partially from autism. Even in bed I had to talk—tell stories to myself out loud. It wasn't enough to just think about a story. It had to be told aloud. . . ." Page 31.

"Studies about delinquency in gifted young people show that they score high in the area of fluid intelligence and nonverbal thinking as opposed to crystallized intelligence, which requires previous training and education." Page 34.

"I've seen temper destroy possessions, friendships, families. In junior high my temper got me into serious trouble." Page 39.

"'Temple! Pay attention! I asked you about your father. Go on. What about him? Do you get along?' Dr. Stein's hand made a rolling motion in the air." Page 51.

"No way was I going to tell him about Dad's quick temper. I helped myself to another handful of M & M's and looked up at Dr. Stein." Page 51.

"But, again, as in elementary school, when I didn't understand the subject, I became bored and when I became bored, I was naughty." Page 56.

"These nerve attacks, complete with pounding heart, dry mouth, sweaty palms, and twitching legs, had the symptoms of stage fright, but were actually more like hypersensitivity than anxiety. . . .The panic would worsen as the day progressed and the afternoon hours from two to four in the afternoon were the worst." Page 68.

"But as an adolescent, the nerve attacks made me feel as if I were clinging to a greased rope suspended over an abyss." Page 71.

"Fixation was my middle name." Page 75.



"For the next few days, I viewed each door as a possible opening to love and joy." Page 76.

"I love you because I have invested so much of myself in you and I want to see you grow. But how do you feel about me?" Page 97.

". . .I was finally beginning to be able to endure brief physical contacts like a pat on the shoulder or a handshake." Page 101.



## Topics for Discussion

People usually say that autistic children cannot be helped to be normal. How does Temple Grandin refute that assertion?

Temple feels guilty and afraid of her Squeeze Machine. Discuss the reasons for this and determine if they are valid reasons.

Various people look past Temple's disabilities and assist her. Explain the work of at least three major assistants in Temple's growth. What particular acts or approaches help Temple the most?

Temple's family evidently has major resources to pay for private schooling and therapists. Discuss the possibilities for disadvantaged children who are autistic to recover from symptoms.

Temple discusses the great need for animals and children, all creatures, to be touched and held, yet she cannot tolerate touch. Explore her journey to being able to tolerate and receive kindly touch.

Discuss several of Temple Grandin's inventions and discoveries for animal husbandry.

Temple's mother provides many letters in this book. Examine the letters and analyze Temple's mother's character from the letters and from her actions generally.

Temple leans on much research to support her claims and reinforce her recovery. What does this reveal about her character?