

The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism Study Guide

The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism by Naoki Higashida

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Summary

The Reason I Jump is a work of nonfiction written by then-13-year-old Naoki Higashida about his experiences with autism. Through a series of questions and answers punctuated with other bits of insight and a short story that illustrates the isolation he feels, Higashida provides readers with a unique look into the mind of a person with autism.

The book opens with an introduction by David Mitchell, the father of a son with autism and the husband of the book's translator, KA Yoshida. Mitchell describes how the author wrote the book by spelling out words and sentences in his native Japanese on an alphabet grid. Mitchell expresses gratitude for this work because it has given him a greater understanding of his son and suggested ways to help him. The book also demonstrates that people with autism are just as bright and curious as everyone else.

Higashida explains that although he can read aloud and sing, he has difficulty conversing with people because his words disappear. Then, he proceeds to set up a series of questions that he answers with honesty and insight. Throughout the book, he expresses the frustration felt by people with autism stemming from their need to communicate effectively and the difficulty of doing so, along with their inability to control certain behaviors.

Examples of his explanations include the fact that he forgets things very quickly, which prompts him to repeat things over and over as a means of remembering what he has been told. The difficulty of finding the right words at the right time is one of the greatest challenges he faces, along with the uncontrollable, violent reaction he often has when the smallest things go wrong. Higashida explains many other facets of autism, including the gestures and vocal intonations people with autism often make, the reasons they wear the same clothing and eat the same foods repeatedly, and the reasons they are so attracted to nature and water. Throughout the book, the author laments the fact that he knows his behaviors are annoying to others and pleads for understanding and patience.

The book concludes with a short story called I'm Right Here. It is about a boy named Shun who is hit by a car, dies, and goes to heaven. His frustration at being invisible to his parents and unable to help them in their grief process mirrors the frustrations people with autism face as they try to communicate with others.



Introduction- The Mystery of the Missing Words

Summary

In the Introduction, David Mitchell, who is the father of a son with autism, provides background information about Naoki Higashida (the book's author) and the world of autism. Higashida was 13 years old when he wrote the book by painstakingly spelling out words and sentences on a Japanese alphabet grid similar to a QWERTY keyboard in English. In the book, Mitchell says, he not only provides information about what someone with autism experiences, but also proves that autistic minds are as curious and complex as anyone else's despite outward appearances to the contrary. The book transformed Mitchell, giving him a greater understanding of his son and how he could help him. Mitchell's wife, Ka Yoshida, translated the book into English initially for her, her husband, and a small group of friends and caregivers. Now, it is being shared with a wider audience.

In the Preface, the author says that it is difficult for him to act like a normal person. Although he can read books aloud and sing, words vanish when he tries to have a conversation. He thinks that things would be better if autism were regarded simply as a personality type rather than a disability. Thanks to training from Ms. Suzuki at Hagukumi School and his mother, he has learned a method of communication by writing. He hopes he will be able to explain what goes on in the minds of people with autism.

In the following short chapters, Higashida answers questions people commonly have about people with autism. He explains how he is able to write the book by saying that speech is not the only way to communicate. Not being able to talk keeps a person from being able to share their thoughts and feelings, but after much work, he learned to communicate in writing. His mother developed the alphabet grid, making it possible for him to form words by pointing to specific letters, so now he can communicate more effectively with others. He says that people with autism often cannot control the volume of their voices even though it embarrasses them. He asks the same questions over and over because he quickly forgets what he has just heard and this is his way of remembering what he has been told. In addition, repeating questions gives people with autism a chance to play with familiar words, sounds and rhythms. He often repeats questions he is asked, which is a complicated process for sifting through memories for clues about what the questioner is asking. Making himself understood is like having to speak in a foreign language all the time. It is regrettable that people with autism forget things they have been told and must be reminded many times, but he urges others not to give up. People should speak to someone with autism according to that person's true age and avoid using baby talk. People with autism speak with a strange intonation sometimes because often the words they want to say don't match with the words that are accessible to them at that time, so a gap occurs. The reason they take so long to answer questions is not because they have not understood the question, but because



by the time it is their turn to speak, the reply they had formulated has vanished. Sometimes in striving to communicate, they make unintentional sounds. At times, someone with autism might say something that seems out of context because he or she is repeating something heard earlier and cannot find the words to say or ask what he or she really wants to say.

Analysis

The book's introduction by David Mitchell sets up what the reader is about to experience in reading *The Reason I Jump* and also provides a different perspective. While the body of the book comes from the viewpoint of a young person with autism, the introduction gives the perspective of a parent with an autistic child. Mitchell talks briefly about the frustrations parents experience, which we later learn author Higashida clearly understands and regrets enormously.

Following the introduction and preface, the rest of the book is set up primarily in a question and answer format as Higashida addresses specific questions about why people with autism behave as they do.

In several early chapters, the author addresses how difficult it is for people with autism to communicate. It is immediately clear that he is a very intelligent, insightful young man who desperately wants to communicate in ordinary ways; but, his words and thoughts are trapped inside his head. Higashida's intense frustration comes through in much of what he writes. He pleads for understanding from people who try to communicate with someone with autism but lose patience or think the person is somehow childish when in reality he or she is struggling to find words, hold onto thoughts and express them clearly and at the right time.

Vocabulary

Faculty, impulse, cascade, unstopably, divert, majority, vast, recommend, consideration, blare, hitherto, sensory, overwhelming, clamor, vestibular, proprioceptive, kilter, fluent, comprehend, render, entomb, autism, sedation, speculate, bestow, birthright, sentience, claimant, verdict, gauntlet, cynicism, scant, tangential, doctrinaire, pedagogy, unorthodox, anecdote, counterpart, transcribe, revelatory, acuity, propensity, unwittingly, empathy, reiterate, fraught, aversion, pristine, sparse, straightforward, intentions, indicate, deliberately, intonation.



Q11 - Q30

Summary

Higashida says that people with autism have a difficult time making eye contact because they must use all of their senses to focus and try to understand what the other person is saying to them. While they don't dislike holding hands with someone, when they see something interesting they tend to let go and run to investigate. Although people often say that he prefers to be alone, this is not true. He often feels that he is causing trouble or annoying other people, so he leaves. This does not mean that he does not want to be around others. Even though someone is standing right in front of him, he sometimes does not notice that the person is talking to him. That makes it appear as though he is ignoring the other person. It would help if people used his name to get his attention before speaking to him. People with autism seem to have limited facial expressions, but this is because what they find funny does not match other people's sense of humor. They laugh at different things. Many people with autism do not like being touched because it feels as though someone is trying to gain control over their bodies or they think their thoughts will become visible. People with autism sometimes laugh for seemingly no reason because they are picturing a scene in their minds or having an enjoyable memory. The author sometimes has flashback memories, which typically are bad ones, and needs to be allowed to cry until it passes.

Higashida knows that small mistakes like spilling a few drops of water are not important, but he cannot control his feeling that small mistakes are massive and often has a violent reaction but hates himself afterward. People with autism do not feel that their bodies are their own, so it is sometimes difficult to make themselves do what they are told immediately. He says that the worst thing about having autism is the idea that he is causing unhappiness and stress for other people. He would not necessarily choose to be "normal" if he could because he does not know what normal feels like and thinks that everyone needs to strive for happiness within his or her own abilities. He jumps up and down and claps his hands because it is as if his feelings are going upward to the sky and he feels lighter. People with autism often write letters in the air to confirm memories because letters and symbols are easier than spoken words. They cup their ears because certain noises, which vary from person to person, are terrifying for them, and they often have problems perceiving or gauging distances, making it difficult to pick up an object or make their limbs do what they want them to. Some people with autism express fear of having their hair or nails trimmed because it is associated with a bad memory while others seem to ignore true pain because they cannot express their feelings.

Analysis

In this section, the author addresses a number of physical issues people with autism face. As is the case with communication issues, Higashida is very anxious for others to



understand what goes on inside his mind even when it is often difficult for him to understand himself. For example, he realizes that it is unrealistic to think that being touched means someone is attempting to gain control over your body or that it will make your thoughts visible somehow, but this is how his brain is wired and he has little control over those feelings. In one of the book's most insightful and heart-wrenching moments, the author reveals that he often is aware that his peculiar behavior is annoying or disturbing to others so he removes himself from the situation, leaving the false impression that he does not want or enjoy the company of others. His intense loneliness is in some respects self-imposed because he wants to avoid getting on other people's nerves, so he becomes physically isolated in addition to the isolation imposed by his limited ability to communicate his thoughts and feelings.

Higashida also reveals that people with autism often experience self esteem issues, although he does not use that term directly. However, he mentions several times that although he is unable to control certain behaviors such as becoming extremely upset over mistakes others regard as minuscule, he later berates himself over his actions. Again, his hope is that by explaining what goes on in his mind, others will be more understanding and kind in their responses.

Vocabulary

Properly, impulse, dart (verb), remotely, desperately, deliberately, arrogant, whatsoever, duvet, tactile, accordingly, dread, barricade, imitate, scattershot, racket, massive, tsunami, wreckage, agonizing, despair, ordeal, ecstatic, relentless, strive, manic, quiver, immobile, constrain, grate (verb), jostle, malfunction, stoic.



Q31 - Q44

Summary

Higashida says that many people with autism want to eat only a limited number of foods because they need more time to appreciate new tastes. Only the foods they are familiar with are appetizing. He wishes everyone could see the beauty in the world through the eyes of someone with autism. When they see an object, they see details first before the entire image gradually comes into focus. The reason some people with autism wear the same clothes regardless of the season is difficult to explain, but it might be because keeping things the same is reassuring. Time is a difficult concept for people with autism because they worry about what problems they will face in the future and the passage of time cannot be captured on a piece of paper. People with autism find light consoling, but they sometimes flap their fingers in front of their faces to make it enter their eyes in a more pleasant, filtered way rather than directly. People with autism enjoy activities like lining things up and watching running water more than games like make-believe.

The author says that people with autism love being in water because it gives them a sense of freedom from time and returns them to a primeval time before aquatic beings emerged onto dry land. They don't necessarily enjoy television commercials, but are drawn to them because they are on often and become familiar. Higashida enjoys children's TV programs because they are straightforward and familiar. People with autism like memorizing train schedules and calendars because they love numbers – they never change and follow a set of rules. It upsets him that people do not understand how thirsty he is for knowledge, but reading long sentences is difficult because his patience is limited and he loses track of what the sentence was about. People with autism cannot study by themselves. They need more time, different strategies, and help from people with a great deal of patience.

Analysis

In explaining the reasons behind a number of quirks often exhibited by people with autism, Higashida stresses the importance of familiarity. He has touched on this issue before in describing his preferences for words he knows well and his habit of repeating words and actions, but he now addresses its importance in other areas such as food and clothing choices. Familiarity brings comfort and reassurance to Higashida and others with autism, explaining why they often prefer to eat the same foods and wear the same clothes even if they are not appropriate for the season. The need for familiarity also extends to Higashida's entertainment preferences, leading him to enjoy TV commercials simply because they are repeated frequently so they become familiar.

One of the most wrenching concepts Higashida puts forth is his keen desire for knowledge and information, which is hindered by his limited attention span and other



factors related to autism. As he often does throughout the book, he stresses the need for patience and understanding in helping him learn.

Vocabulary

Distinct, foodstuff, nudge, vivid, cherish, extension, obliged, interval, infinitely, nocturnal, fidgety, rotate, particle, console, primeval, evolve, stimulation, catchphrase, resemble, dispute, sublime, ambiguous, urgency.



Q45 - Q58

Summary

Higashida says that people with autism like going for walks simply because they love the greenness of nature, which recharges their bodies and is always welcoming. He feels he can make friends with nature and get mentally lost in it. When he is given free time, he often picks up a familiar toy or object simply because that is something he can do, not necessarily what he wants to do. He tells about seeing a huge statue of Buddha that made him cry because of all the hopes and prayers it represented. He felt that the statue was saying to him, "All human beings have their hardships to bear, so never swerve away from the path you're on." His tendency to constantly dash around bothers him but is difficult to control, although jogging and walking seem to help because they refresh and calm him. People with autism often get lost for this reason and because they never feel completely at ease. They often wander or run off in search of a place where they do feel comfortable.

It is difficult to explain why he sometimes wandered off from home when he was younger. It seemed to happen because his body was lured by something. Once outside, people with autism just keep walking because turning back does not seem to be an option. They repeat actions over and over because their brains keep sending the same signal and it is comforting. Another serious problem is doing things he is not supposed to do even though he understands that he should not. When he does something that is not allowed and is reprimanded for it, his impulse to recreate the sequence overpowers the knowledge that he should not do it, creating a pleasant buzz in his brain. People with autism obsess over certain things, but not because they like it. It soothes them, but they are miserable when they know the action is bothering others. At some point the obsession will inexplicably go away, so the author asks for patience from others until that happens. People with autism often need verbal cues and prompts before they can do an action even though the next step seems obvious. Higashida says that he moves constantly because when he is still, it feels as though his soul is detaching from his body, which is terrifying. He does not like having a visual schedule for activities because they create a strong impression and when actual events vary, it causes extreme panic. Instead, it is best to simply discuss the day's plan verbally even though it might lead to many questions. People with autism look like everyone else, but they are different in many ways. It would give them pleasure to help people remember what truly matters.

Analysis

Several times in these pages, Higashida discusses the heightened emotions he often feels. He previously has touched on his love of nature and the outdoors, but he goes into more detail in Q47 – an example of something people with autism really enjoy – in which he expounds on how nature makes him feel. He actively considers nature a friend and treasures its ability to improve his mood. In previous sections, he has mentioned



that he and others with autism often cry uncontrollably out of frustration, but his description of seeing a large statue of Buddha is the first instance in which he describes crying as a result of a positive emotion.

Again Higashida expresses dismay at his knowledge that many of his behaviors bother others, citing doing things he knows are not allowed and obsessing over certain things as examples. His continued pleas for patience and understanding, along with specific tips to help others deal with and help someone with autism, provide a valuable road map for caregivers.

Vocabulary

Rustle, sway, speck, sensation, cherish, majesty, dignity, swerve, teleport, impulse, escort (verb), lure, cease, impact, rein, sequence, imprint, obsess, nonetheless, torment.



I'm Right Here - Afterword

Summary

This section consists of a short story called I'm Right Here. A young boy named Shun suddenly notices that people on the street are giving him an icy stare. He goes home and his mother gives him the same cold look so he runs outside and goes to a park, where he thinks back over his day and realizes there is a gap in his memory. He returns home, but his parents do not seem to see him. He meets an old man who tells him he was hit by a car earlier and died. Shun begins to cry as the memory gradually returns. The man leads him to heaven, where he meets God and realizes that his body has disappeared. Shun is sent back to his home, where he silently apologizes to his grieving mother, who tells his father she feels his presence. Back in heaven, he eventually adjusts and enjoys an existence where everyone is kind and there are no barriers of ethnicity or language. Visiting his home again, he sees his mother crying and saying she cannot go on without him. He asks God for help and is told he can be reborn as his parents' child but Shun himself and all his memories will cease to exist, but he rejects the idea. On the first anniversary of his death, Shun visits his home again to find his mother near death and saying she wants to see him. He cannot bear this and tells God he wants to be returned to his mother. His mother awakens and says Shun came to her in a dream, and his parents decide to pick themselves up and start over. Five years later, they have had a new baby – a girl named Nozomi who is now four years old. Nozomi sees the old man, who recognizes her and says he is an angel but apparently he cannot be seen by others. The story ends with Nozomi thinking she likes all the things her brother had liked.

The book concludes with an Afterword in which the author says he hopes his explanations will help people understand that the actions of people with autism do not come from selfishness or ego. That is Higashida's purpose for writing the book.

Analysis

The book's final and longest chapter consists of a short story Higashida has written. In it, a young boy named Shun is hit by a car and dies. As he adjusts to his new reality in heaven, he takes advantage of the opportunity to look in on his grieving parents but is frustrated because he cannot help them. Eventually learning that his mother is dying of a broken heart, he agrees to God's suggestion that he be reborn as a new child for his parents.

The author uses this story to demonstrate the extreme frustration and helplessness people with autism feel when they try to communicate. Before he realizes he is dead, Shun notices that people look at him strangely, mirroring the looks people with autism and other special needs receive from those who do not understand their behavior. Shun tries to speak but cannot make himself heard and he experiences the pain of being



invisible to those he loves most. While Higashida himself is not physically invisible, like Shun he is incapable of making others understand what he is thinking and feeling, and even what he is capable of. Shun gets lost in his own world but eventually finds a way to reconnect with his parents, just as Higashida has done in writing this book, and of course the name of the story's main character refers to the concept of shutting out people who are "different" because of their special needs.

Vocabulary

Ominous, revolve, marshal, desperate, crouch, blubber (verb), quaking, remote, bleak, mull, serene, reckon, infinite, piercing, hurtle, velocity, downcast, astonishing, utterly, ethnicity, blissful, delirium.

Important People

Naoki Higashida

Naoki Higashida is the book's author. Higashida is a young Japanese man living with autism and was thirteen years old at the time he wrote *The Reason I Jump*. Although he has great difficulty communicating verbally, he has learned to use an alphabet grid developed by his mother, enabling him to communicate his thoughts in writing and it is this tool that enabled him to write the book. Higashida is bright, insightful, and inquisitive -- traits he wants his audience to know are common to people with autism even though they are not always apparent. Through his writing, the author wants very much to help others understand why people with autism behave the way they do and learn to communicate more effectively and with greater patience and understanding.

David Mitchell

David Mitchell is the father of a son who has autism, the husband of the book's translator, and the author of the book's introduction.

Shun

Shun is the main character in a piece of fiction the author includes in the book. He is a young boy who dies and goes to heaven. There he is frustrated by his invisibility and inability to communicate with his grieving parents. Higashida uses this character to illustrate the extreme frustration felt by people with autism in trying to make themselves heard and understood by the people they love.



Objects/Places

Alphabet Grid

The author's mother developed an alphabet grid to help him communicate in writing when it is difficult for him to do so verbally.

Nature

The author describes why nature is so important to people with autism. He says that he considers nature a friend and it helps him keep calm.

Heaven

In the chapter entitled I'm Right Here, fictional character Shun dies and goes to heaven, where he learns to cope with his new reality.

Hands and Bodies

The author writes at length about the way people with autism feel about their hands and bodies, often struggling to control them and feeling as if their souls might become separated from their bodies.

Clothes

Higashida discusses the fact that people with autism often wear the same clothes over and over because they crave familiarity.

Food

Higashida discusses the way people with autism feel about food, often preferring to eat only familiar things rather than try new ones.

Water

The author describes the affinity people with autism feel for water because it makes them feel free.

Numbers

Higashida discusses the interest people with autism have in numbers because they are consistent and help bring about order.

Television

The author says that people with autism are often attracted to television commercials and children's programs because they are repetitive and easy to understand.

Buddha Statue

Higashida describes the emotional reaction he had upon seeing a huge statue of Buddha because it represented the hopes and dreams of many people.



Themes

The World of Autism

The book's primary theme is its topic -- a glimpse into the world of a person with autism. One of the most frustrating things faced by both those with autism and those who care for and about them is the inability of the caregiver to understand what is going on in the autistic person's mind, but Higashida provides thoughtful explanations about a wide range of topics. Although he has difficulty with appropriate verbal communication, the author has developed the ability to write fluidly and he uses this ability to open up his mind and heart, giving honest and insightful answers to even the most delicate questions such as why he speaks so loudly and why he does not make eye contact with others.

Higashida sometimes speaks for himself and sometimes for others with autism, enabling readers to understand the complexities of a mind that might seem simple and childlike to many people, but is actually very active and brimming with curiosity and a thirst for knowledge. In addition to explaining many baffling facets of his behavior and thought processes, the author provides specific tips to help people who care for someone with autism to better cope with their often-strange behavior and build stronger, closer relationships.

Understanding and Patience

Throughout *The Reason I Jump*, author Higashida pleads with his audience -- presumably parents, teachers, caregivers and others who interact with people with autism -- for patience and understanding. His goal in writing the book is to provide insights into the reasons for his behavior in the hope that gaining greater understanding will enable others to develop both coping mechanisms for themselves and new methods for helping those with autism handle difficult situations.

Higashida is particularly unhappy about the fact that he knows much of his behavior causes annoyance and frustration in other people. Time after time he expresses regret about this as he tries to explain the reasons he does certain things and the fact that in many cases, he cannot control his behavior. For example, he refers to the fact that he becomes extremely upset over small mistakes and changes in plans, and he knows that his violent reaction is inappropriate and concerning for others, but he suggests that since he has little control over that behavior, others should try to wait it out. By understanding why people with autism do what they do, Higashida hopes to cultivate patience in caregivers and others, which will also help alleviate the guilt he feels when he knows he is annoying people.



Communication

Author Higashida, like others with autism, has a heartbreaking need to communicate with others but is often stymied by the challenges he faces. He writes at length about the difficulty of finding the right words at the right time, his need to repeat questions over and over in order to remember what he has been told, and the difficulty of holding on to a response until it is his turn to speak. Despite all these issues, he has a keen sense of curiosity but simply does not have the ability to communicate effectively with others.

In addition to helping people understand why he finds communication difficult, Higashida says that it is important to find other ways to communicate when speaking does not work. He wrote this book by painstakingly spelling out words and sentences on an alphabet grid developed by his mother and now has learned to type on a computer, which helps him communicate with both his parents and caregivers and the wider audience that enjoys his writings. The theme of communication goes hand in hand with that of understanding and patience as a gateway to help bridge the gap between people with autism and those who care for them.

Styles

Structure

The body of *The Reason I Jump* is divided into a series of very short chapters, most of them less than 200 words. The majority are titled with a sequentially-numbered question -- Q5 Why do you do things you shouldn't even when you've been told a million times not to? -- followed by the author's response. Sprinkled throughout the book are other short bits of insight, sometimes using a parable to make a point. The final chapter is more lengthy and consists of a short story written by the author to illustrate the frustrations people with autism feel when they are unable to express themselves to the people they care about.

In addition to the book's primary text, there is an introduction by David Mitchell, an author and the father of a son with autism, a brief preface and an afterword.

Perspective

Tone



Quotes

The thirteen-year-old author of this book invites you, his reader, to imagine a daily life in which your faculty of speech is taken away. Explaining that you're hungry, or tired, or in pain, is now as beyond your powers as a chat with a friend.

-- David Mitchell (Introduction)

Importance: The book's opening sentence gives an overview of the nature of the author's autism and the extreme difficulties he faces in everyday life.

I have no problem reading books aloud and singing, but as soon as I try to speak with someone, my words just vanish. Sure, sometimes I manage a few words -- but even these can come out the complete opposite of what I want to say!

-- Naoki Higashida (Preface paragraph 1, Page 3)

Importance: Here the author offers his initial succinct explanation of the specific difficulties he finds in conversing with others, including the mystery of being able to read or sing aloud even though he cannot find the words to speak otherwise.

What kept me hammering away at it was the thought that to live my life as a human being, nothing is more important than being able to express myself. So for me, the alphabet grid isn't just about putting together sentences: it's about getting across to other people what I want and need them to understand.

-- Naoki Higashida (Q1 paragraph 1, Page 7)

Importance: In this passage, the author provides his true reason for writing the book -- to make himself understood and do the same for others with autism.

I swear conversation is such hard work! To make myself understood, it's like I have to speak in an unknown foreign language every minute of every day.

-- Naoki Higashida (Q4 paragraph 1, Page 13)

Importance: This passage puts the language difficulty the author faces in terms that make it easy for the reader to relate.

You must be thinking: "Is he never going to learn?" We know we're making you sad and upset, but it's as if we don't have any say in it, I'm afraid, and that's the way it is. But please, whatever you do, don't give up on us. We need your help.

-- Naoki Higashida (Q5 paragraph 3, Page 14)

Importance: This is one of many heart-wrenching moments in which the author expresses both sadness over the problems he causes for others and the fear that others will give up on him.

But in our case, the words we want to say and the words we can say don't always match that well.



-- Naoki Higashida (Q7 paragraph 1, Page 17)

Importance: Here the author expresses succinctly one of the problems people with autism experience that causes peculiar behavior.

Whenever I overhear someone remark how much I prefer being on my own, it makes me feel desperately lonely. It's as if they're deliberately giving me the cold-shoulder treatment.

-- Naoki Higashida (Q13 paragraph 3, Page 27)

Importance: This follows the author's explanation that he often leaves the room because he knows his behavior is annoying people, and it drives home his need to please others even if it is to his own detriment.

So it would help us a great deal if you could just use our names first to get our attention, before you start talking to us.

-- Naoki Higashida (Q14 paragraph 1, Page 30)

Importance: This is one of many examples of the author providing very specific tips and ideas to caregivers to help them communicate better with people with autism.

It's as if my whole body, except for my soul, feels as if it belongs to somebody else and I have zero control over it. I don't think you could ever imagine what an agonizing sensation this is.

-- Naoki Higashida (Q21 paragraph 4, Page 40)

Importance: Here the author provides a heartbreaking but understandable explanation of not only why he finds it difficult to control his body when he is asked to do something, but also many other body issues associated with autism.

People with autism have no freedom. The reason is that we are a different kind of human, born with primeval senses. We are outside the normal flow of time, we can't express ourselves, and our bodies are hurtling us through life. If only we could go back to that distant, distant, watery past -- then we'd all be able to live as contentedly and as freely as you do!

-- Naoki Higashida (Q39 paragraph 3, Page 71)

Importance: This passage demonstrates the powerful insights the author possesses and his remarkable ability to communicate despite his inability to do so verbally.

I want to grow up learning a million things! There must be countless other people with autism who have the same desire, the same attitude. But our problem is, we aren't capable of studying all by ourselves. To be able to study like other people, we need more time and different strategies and approaches.

-- Naoki Higashida (Q43 paragraph 2, Page 81)

Importance: This quote both dispels any idea that people with autism are not bright and



also provides hints for caregivers and teachers who want to help someone with autism learn.

Simply put, people with autism never, ever feel at ease, wherever we are. Because of this, we wander off -- or run away -- in search of some location where we do feel at ease.

-- Naoki Higashida (Q49 paragraph 2, Page 93)

Importance: This passage provides a powerful insight into the mind of someone with autism. It is a complex answer to a simple question.

For people with autism, living itself is a battle.

-- Naoki Higashida (Q51 paragraph 3, Page 97)

Importance: This is another example of an insightful but heartbreaking thought that illustrates just how difficult every moment is for someone with autism.



Topics for Discussion

I'm Right Here

Discuss the story I'm Right Here. What do you think the author is saying in this piece of fiction? How does it relate to the rest of the book's content? What does he hope to accomplish by including it in the book?

Answering Questions

The author writes in several sections about the difficulty people with autism have in answering questions. Explain what he says causes these issues. What do you think others could do to make answering questions easier for a person with autism?

Living with Autism

In your opinion, what is the most difficult thing people with autism face? Why? Are there things you think could help alleviate that specific problem?

Body Issues

Discuss how the author feels about his body. What difficulties does he experience with his body that people without autism do not face? How do these issues affect his everyday life and his interactions with others?

Memory

In several sections, Higashida mentions how people with autism view and sometimes struggle with the concept of memory. Give at least two examples and discuss how he says memory affects his behavior.

Frustration

Throughout the book, Higashida brings up the concept of frustration. Give at least three examples of behaviors that he thinks frustrate those around him and three things that he finds especially frustrating about his own behaviors.



Finding Comfort

Higashida says that people with autism are often uncomfortable in their surroundings. Describe a few of the behaviors that bring him comfort and consolation. Why do they have this effect on him?

Relationship with Nature

Describe Higashida's relationship with nature and why greenery and water, in particular, are so important to him.