

Son Study Guide

Son by Lois Lowry

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Plot Summary

Son is the conclusion of the novel *The Giver* by award-winning author Lois Lowry. In this novel, Claire is a twelve year-old girl. She lives in an isolated village that is strictly controlled by those in power. When she turns twelve, Claire receives her work assignment, which is to be a birthmother.

In Claire's society, as a birthmother, you give birth to up to three children. These children are then nurtured and cared for until they are turned over to the parents that will raise the children. By fourteen, Claire is in labor. During childbirth, however, something goes medically wrong and they have to deliver the child by Cesarean section, instead of naturally. This causes Claire to lose her certification as a birthmother and she is reassigned to work in the Fish Hatchery of the village. Prior to leaving, however, she finds out that she gave birth to a boy and that he is Number Thirty-six in the Nurturing Center, where he is cared for before being assigned to a family.

Claire forms a relationship with a worker at the Nurturing Center, so she can secretly spend time with her son. When her son turns one, however, the village elders deem him unfit to be assigned to a family, so the nurturer's son, Jonas, steals the baby so he won't be killed. Jonas runs off to another village with the baby. Claire leaves her village aboard a ship and ends up getting washed up on the shore of another village. While Claire lives there for several years, trying to get her memories back, she remembers she has a son and trains to climb out of the steep mountain village to find him. She has to trade her youth to find her son when she emerges from the village. Claire lives in the same village and watches her son grow and turn into a young man. Gabe doesn't find out Claire is his mother until she's on her death bed.

Gabe uses his special power to get Claire's youth back. Then, mother and son can live out the life they've been robbed of all of these years.



Book I Chapters 1 and 2

Book I Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Claire is fourteen years old. She feels as they put the blindfold on her so she cannot see the baby she gives birth to as Claire goes into labor. Claire was chosen as a Vessel when she was twelve. This means that she is inseminated and is the birth mother of children. Claire thinks about how when she was chosen that she was fed a special diet and moved into a special dormitory for Vessels.

Additionally, Claire recalls a forbidden conversation she had with some of the other Vessels about what it's like to give birth. When the matron overhears the conversation, she warns them on the loudspeaker to watch what they talk about.

Claire is in a lot of pain. She can hear the medical staff talking. She feels something is wrong but she doesn't know what it is. They put a mask over her mouth and nose. When she wakes up, she has a bandage over her stomach, but it is flat once again. Claire spends time recuperating in the hospital with the other women. When she returns to the Birthing Unit and talks about her stomach being sore and her scar, the other women say they are not sore and don't have a scar.

Claire is summoned by loudspeaker to stand before the committee. The committee tells her she's been decertified and that she's being reassigned to the Fish Hatchery. When Claire asks about the Product, one of the committee members says he's fine, instead of it's fine. Claire thinks about her son as she returns to her room to pack her things.

Book I Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

It appears Claire lives in a society where each person is assigned a purpose in life. Claire is chosen as a Vessel, which means her job is to give birth to children, which the society calls Products. Claire's older brother, however, is chosen to work in the legal field. Since this is Claire's first time giving birth, it foreshadows that Claire is going to have difficulty dealing with the emotional side of giving up her baby.

Claire is decertified as a Vessel because something went wrong during her delivery and she had to have the baby by Caesarean section instead of vaginally. The committee woman slipping up and mentioning the gender of the baby now has Claire thinking about the child she gave birth to, which foreshadows Claire going to look for her child at some point later in her life.

Additionally, the head of the committee suggests that the first person who examined Claire and deemed her a Vessel is going to be punished for not realizing that Claire should not be certified. The society has a clear cut plan for each of its citizens because even after a Vessel gives birth three times, they are reassigned to a location to work for the rest of their lives.



Book I Chapters 3 and 4

Book I Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Claire reports to the Fish Hatchery, to her boss Dmitri. She learns she will be assigned a bicycle. While training, one of the women shows her how they inseminate the fish eggs and remove the dead ones so they don't contaminate the rest of the fish eggs. As Claire overhears other workers talking, she realizes that she will have a lot more freedom now than she did as a Birthmother.

Claire decides that she has to find a girl her age, Sophia, who was assigned to the Nurturing Center, where the babies are cared for, at the same time Claire received her assignment as Birthmother.

One day, Claire is having a picnic lunch with some of the other workers when they see a supply boat. A school age boy near them starts to talk about what he could see if he is assigned to the supply boat. As Rolf, the other worker, rides his bicycle to the supply house to pick up something he ordered, Claire thinks about how she can slip away to the Nurturing Center by telling the workers she has to run an errand.

A few days later, Claire overhears her boss talking about picking up posters from the school, so Claire volunteers to do it. After picking up the posters, Claire goes to the Nurturing Center. She asks for Sophia, who recognizes Claire, but doesn't remember Claire's original assignment. Sophia gives Claire a tour of the facility.

Claire learns from Sophia that only fifty children are born and transferred to the Nurturing Center each year. The children are divided into multiples of ten, and separated into rooms for their care. Sophia says this is because new parents want children when they are old enough to play with them. Claire remembers that her son is Number Thirty-six.

When Sophia drops Claire off at the room where thirty-six is to volunteer, Sophia leaves to return to her assigned room to help feed the babies. When a baby starts crying, one of the workers says he recognizes his cry. It's Claire's son and the worker asks Claire to pick him up to try to get him to stop crying.

Book I Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

The insemination of the fish eggs is similar to the insemination of the Birthmothers. The society in which Claire lives is trying to control every aspect of society, from the babies that are born to the fish that are hatched.

Claire plans to find Sophia because Claire wants to find her son. Claire intends to find out how her son is doing. Additionally, Claire might even try to steal her baby and run away from her village to try to live a normal life outside the confines of her society.



The appearance of the supply boat represents Claire's getaway vehicle. It foreshadows Claire stealing her son and then stowing away on the supply boat to escape the confines of her society.

The society is very strictly organized. They only permit the birth of fifty babies each year. They have a strict procedure for nurturing and caring for the babies until they are old enough to be placed with their families. Now that Claire is holding her son, she is likely to form an emotional bond with him. This foreshadows her stealing the baby and running away with him.



Book I Chapters 5 and 6

Book I Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Claire learns that her baby might not be assigned to a family in December at the Ceremony because he is not thriving. The male room attendant says he sneaked into the office to see what Thirty-six's name is so he can use it in secret to see if it helps the baby be more responsive. When Claire returns to the Fish Hatchery, her life continues on in its routine manner, but her mind never strays from thinking about her son.

Claire thinks about how each dwelling is assigned one girl child and one boy child. Since Claire is younger than her brother, she doesn't know much about babies. She questions some of her co-workers, Dmitri, Rolf and Edith, about their feelings for their younger siblings. None of them experienced the yearning Claire seems to have for her son.

Dmitri mentions babies of all species are created to look cute so that they will be cared for and fed. He also mentions when their society had mammals and "pets." By November, Claire finds time to return to the Nurturing Center.

Book I Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Society seems to have evolved from a society that we know to the one where Claire lives now. It suggests that the society was formed to operate at an optimal level, which is why they no longer consume mammals or have pets. Society members have even learned to control their emotions by abiding by the strict rules of the society and not becoming emotionally attached to anything or anyone.

Claire, however, is different. She is experiencing normal human emotions. This is why she yearns to see her baby, to hold him and wonders how he is doing. These feelings are what will propel Claire to steal him from the Nurturing Center and run away with him, somewhere where they can live together.



Book I Chapters 7 and 8

Book I Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

The male attendant recognizes Claire. He mentions the babies are being assigned to their families in December. He says Thirty-six is not being assigned because they want to give him another year to mature. He whispers to Claire that he takes the baby home at night with him so he doesn't wake up the other babies.

When Thirty-six cries, Claire volunteers to pick him up. The male attendant tells her to take him in the hall. While Claire gets the baby to fall asleep, she thinks about walking out with the baby. When she returns to the room, however, she realizes the baby has a security bracelet around his ankle. The male attendant says he removes it before taking the baby home with him at night. Claire thinks she overhears the attendant whisper the name Abe to her son.

Claire volunteers to man the Fish Hatchery during the two-day Naming and Placement Ceremony for the newchildren. After the children are placed with their families, the Matching ceremony occurs. This is where people who have applied for a spouse are matched. After their marriage is monitored for three years, they can apply for their first child. As Claire monitors her computer screen, she notices the moored supply boat that will have to wait for the ceremonies to end before unloading. She thinks, for the first time, about the crew from Elsewhere.

Book I Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Claire's thoughts are evolving. She is plotting and planning, subconsciously at this point, to steal her baby and run away. Now that she knows the male attendant takes the baby home with him, at night, and removes his security bracelet, Claire's plan will be to steal the baby during the night.

Book I Chapters 9 and 10

Book I Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

When the others return from the first day's ceremony, Claire finds out that even though Dmitri applied for a spouse, he didn't get one. Jeanette, one of her co-workers, says they named one of the babies Paul, which means her father is gone, since they only give names when people die.

Claire takes a walk after dinner. Everyone turned in early from the long day at the ceremony, and the second day of the ceremony looming before them. Claire looks at the bridge that leads to Elsewhere. She thinks about what might lie beyond and that she doesn't know anyone who has ever traveled Elsewhere. The male attendant waves hello to her from his bicycle. She sees Newchild Thirty-six is asleep in a basket attached to the back of the bicycle. The male attendant invites Claire to visit again soon and says he has to get home because his son is part of the Twelve ceremony in the morning.

The next day when the workers come back, they tell Claire that the Elder skipped one of the Twelves at the ceremony. She called him up last on the stage, even though he was Number Nineteen. She says that he was selected instead of assigned, and was talking about a Giver and a Receiver. Nobody, including the boy, Jonas, seems to know what the Elder is talking about.

Book I Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

While Claire has been content to follow the rules all of her life, she is now wondering what else is out in the world. With the moored supply boat and her child unsecured in the home of the male attendant, Claire is going to realize that now is her time to break free of the society.

The inference is that Jonas is the male attendant's son. Additionally, the reference to the Giver and the Receiver suggests Jonas was selected to provide sperm to inseminate the birthmothers.



Book I Chapters 11 and 12

Book I Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

That night, Claire takes a walk by herself again. She runs into one of the boatmen and they start talking. When the boatman tells Claire he learned to swim when his Dad threw him in the pond, Claire doesn't understand what he's talking about. In their community, the children learn to swim at five and she doesn't know what a Dad is because the children are assigned to parental units.

The boatman invites Claire to tour the boat. She says she cannot because she doesn't think it's allowed. When the boatman mentions the sea, Claire continues to ponder what this is.

Three months later, Claire runs into the nurturer again. He has the baby in a carrier seat on the back of his bicycle. The baby now has two teeth. Claire asks if he can use the baby's name in public now, but the nurturer says no. They talk about his daughter Lily and his son Jonas. Then, the nurturer rides away.

Book I Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

The society where Claire lives is isolated from the outside world. The society has its own set of rules that are strict and very different from the outside world, Elsewhere. Claire is starting to experience wanderlust, where she wonders what's outside of the society and what it's like Elsewhere. Now, Claire knows that Jonas is the nurturer's son.



Book I Chapters 13 and 14

Book I Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Claire starts planning her walks so that she runs into the nurturer and her son. Abe is one now. He's talking and imitating faces Claire makes and what Claire does. The nurturer mentions that Abe still isn't sleeping well at night and he doesn't know what will happen to him if they don't place him with a family.

Over a period of three months, the ship comes back to deliver supplies several times. On the third trip, however, the same boatman is no longer part of the crew. Claire does see Marie, the ship's cook the boatman spoke of during their previous conversation. Claire also notices how each boatman has a different hairstyle. All of this is foreign to Claire because each age group and gender has a prescribed haircut and clothing.

Even the meals delivered to the dwellings are prepared by whoever is running the community. Claire thinks about when her mother put on some weight. Dietary restricted meals then start to arrive at the dwelling for her mother.

Even though Abe turns one at the Ceremony, Claire celebrates Abe's true one-year birthday in her own mind while she plays with the baby.

From time to time, Claire sees Jonas riding his bicycle. She still doesn't know what his special assignment is. She sees him one day go into a building marked Annex near the House of the Old.

Book I Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Claire is different from the other members of society. She, for example, has an emotional attachment to her birth child. Part of this is because the women do not typically have the opportunity to see their children after they give birth. This is how the elders of the society have planned the community.

For some reason, they have removed emotions from the way the community works. Instead, everything is methodically planned. When things do not fit into the box that society has established, then a change is made. This means that since Abe does not thrive like a normal child that the society will do something with him. This might be what prompts Claire to steal the baby and run away with him.



Book I Chapters 15 and 16

Book I Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Claire thinks about the pills that the community members take. When she was chosen as a Birthmother, she was instructed not to take the pills. In her transition, someone must have overlooked prescribing her the pills. Claire realizes that the pills prevent the people from having feelings and emotions. This is why she feels the way she does about Abe.

It's a year later. The supply boat arrives early so it can unload before the two-day ceremony begins. Claire thinks about how Abe will be assigned to a family this year. When she gets to the Nurturing Center, a woman commands her to help with another baby, and plops Abe in his crib to throw a fit. The male nurturer tells the woman he's going home early with a headache. She starts to argue with him about him taking Abe home, but just tells him to bring the baby back early the next morning.

The male nurturer tells Claire to ride her bike with him. He tells her they voted to send the baby away in the morning so she better say goodbye. She asks where they are sending him but the nurturer doesn't know. He also tells Claire she has his name wrong, that it's not Abe. Then, he rides away.

Claire thinks about how, years later, when she remembers her last days in the community, it's in fragments. The next morning, the boat is getting ready to leave but it is still there now. Alarms are going off in the main building of the community because they are looking for someone—someone who is missing.

Claire remembers the male nurturer staring at the river. She thinks she remembers him saying that Jonas took the baby Elsewhere. Claire boards the ship crying and Marie comforts her. She remembers the boat leaving and that she's still on it. Right away, Claire starts experiencing things she's never experienced before. She thinks about how this is all she can remember, even years later.

Book I Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Claire foreshadows her leaving the community when she thinks back on her "last days in the community." It appears as if Jonas has run off with the baby to Elsewhere. Now that Claire is aboard the ship, it foreshadows her going after Jonas to find her son. While it apparently takes years for her to do so, the inference is that Claire travels around Elsewhere on a journey to find her lost son.



Book II Chapters 1 and 2

Book II Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Years after Claire is saved, stories vary as to how she came to live in the village. The reality is that Old Benedikt found her floating in the sea holding on to a piece of the ship mast. Tall Andras was there when Old Benedikt brought Claire to shore.

The men take Claire to Alys; she's the village midwife. She combs Claire's hair and puts her to bed for the night. In the morning, Alys feeds Claire and tries to get Claire to speak. Finally, Claire tells Alys her name.

The villagers start calling Claire Water Claire. Over the next several weeks, each one brings Claire a gift. They know she doesn't have anything, so each generously gives her something she can use. Claire doesn't have any memories of her life. While Alys is a midwife and aids with the sick, she says she doesn't have anything that can help Claire's memory return.

When Tall Andras finds out that Claire is sixteen, he says she should be wed. Old Benedikt forbids it until Claire gets her memory back.

Book II Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The inference is that the ship Claire was on sunk at sea during a storm. It appears that Claire is the sole survivor. Claire thinks that the sea has taken away her memories. In reality, losing her son was such a traumatic experience, Claire's mind has blocked out the memories of her life prior to being saved from drowning in the sea.



Book II Chapters 3 and 4

Book II Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Alys is brewing a special tea for Bryn, a woman in the village who keeps miscarrying. When Claire smells the tea, she weeps. Alys says smells bring back memories and that something about the smell of the tea is reminding Claire of something.

Claire smiles as she overhears three of the six year-old girls playing tea in the forest. Claire thinks that she will relearn what a queen is and all of the other things she needs to know. she still wonders, though, why the smell of the tea saddened her. As Claire walks back into the woods, Tall Andras sees her as he is working in his field. The crows are circling him in the air because of the bugs and worms his hoe is digging up.

They all realize that Claire is afraid of animals. The only animal she doesn't seem to be afraid of is fish. One day, Claire is writing her name in the sand on the beach, while the three little girls play nearby. When one of them asks Claire what it is, she says it's her name. This is when Claire finds out the girls don't know how to write, what letters are or what school is.

Lame Einar brings Alys and Claire a bird in cage for a pet. A few days later, Claire learns the color yellow, which is the same color on the bird's wings. Claire names the bird Yellow-wing.

Book II Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Crows are symbolic of something evil or bad happening. This is an ominous premonition for Tall Andras, suggesting that something bad is going to happen to him. The reason Claire is afraid of all animals except fish is because she has never been exposed to animals before.

Claire is starting to get some of her memories back. For example, she has a flashback of attending school. She is also starting to be exposed to different cultures. In her culture, schooling was a priority, but where she is living now does not prioritize education.

Lame Einar and Claire live parallel lives. Lame Einar once climbed out of the village where they live to go Elsewhere. He was injured in the process and returned home, which is why his name is now Lame Einar. Claire too is elsewhere. She too is lame, although she is lame in the mind rather than having a physical ailment.



Book II Chapters 5 and 6

Book II Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

As the village prepares for a wedding, Claire learns what a wedding is and hears music for the first time. At the end of the ceremony, as the dancing begins, Claire notices Lame Einar staring down at the scene from atop a cliff. When she thinks of calling him back to dance with her, he's already hobbled away.

Claire is wandering through the woods when she comes across Tall Andras building a mommet to scare the birds away from his field. She says he needs a ribbon and she helps him decorate the face of the mommet. When Tall Andras makes a face at Claire, teasing her, Claire gets upset because it reminds her of something, but she doesn't know what it is. Claire goes home to Alys, who tries to help her figure out why she got so upset.

As the season starts to change, Tall Andras's ill mother dies. Alys and Claire are preparing his mother's body for burial. Alys talks to Claire about Tall Andras wanting to marry Claire. Claire also mentions the scar on Claire's belly and that Alys doesn't think Claire can have children.

Book II Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The face that Tall Andras makes at Claire is the same face that Claire taught her son to make. Even though Claire doesn't remember this, when Tall Andras does it, it reminds Claire of her son.



Book II Chapters 7 and 8

Book II Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Bethan, one of the six year olds, summons Claire and Alys because her mother, Bryn, is going into labor. When Alys uses a knife to cut the umbilical cord, Claire screams out for Alys not to cut Bryn. Claire also blurts out for Alys not to take away Bryn's baby. Alys assures Claire she isn't going to cut Bryn or do anything with Bryn's baby.

Claire confesses her memory of the C-section to Alys. Claire tells Alys that it didn't hurt because they gave her drugs for the pain. Claire also says they used some kind of electric tool to close the wound. Electricity is something the villagers do not have access to here.

Later, as Claire watches Bryn care for her new baby girl, Claire tells Bryn her story. Bethan and her friends are listening outside the door, so they start spreading the story throughout the village. When Glenys, whose marriage ceremony is the one Claire attended for the first time, finds out Claire's story, she tells Alys she wants her to deliver her baby, but doesn't want Claire to help.

When Tall Andras finds out about Claire having a baby, he changes the way he acts around her. when Claire talks to Alys about this, she explains that men want to marry women who are untainted. Alys also says that she thinks that if Claire doesn't remind Tall Andras about her giving birth that he will get over it eventually.

Book II Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Subconsciously, Claire remembers giving birth to her own baby when she is helping Alys deliver Bryn's baby. Claire's memories are starting to return. This foreshadows that eventually Claire will remember her son in more detail and that Jonas ran off with her baby. This will send Claire away from the village to find her son.



Book II Chapters 9 and 10

Book II Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Claire goes to Einar to find out about his attempt to climb the steep cliff out of the village. He tells her he left because his father blamed him for his mother's death because she died during childbirth. His father was cruel to him his whole life. He also tells Claire that he trained for years to leave. Claire says she must leave to find her son and Einar vows to help her.

For an entire year, Claire trains with Einar. He teaches her all sorts of exercises and does training sessions with her to prepare her for her climb.

Book II Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Claire is leveraging Einar's experience with climbing out of the village to make her experience successful. Even though Claire can choose to go by sea, she opts to climb over the mountain instead. The sea brings back terrible memories for Claire that paralyzes her with fear.

Since Einar was successful in climbing over the mountain, he can train Claire to be successful as well. Additionally, Einar can teach Claire not to make the same mistakes he made once he made it over the mountain. This can help to ensure that Claire is not injured and maimed as Einar was once he successfully escaped the village.



Book II Chapters 11 and 12

Book II Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

When it's almost winter again, Bryn gives birth to twin boys. In the winter, Alys and Claire sleep together so that Claire can help to keep Alys warm. Claire thinks about how Alys is training Bethan in her ways because Claire is leaving.

Seasons continue to change and time continues to pass. It's now six years since Claire was saved from the sea and five years since she remembered she has a son. Einar continues to train Claire for leaving and he tells her she'll be ready soon. One day, Einar comes to Claire to tell her that it's time to climb out of the village.

Book II Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Alys is teaching Bethan about medicine and potions, and training her in medical ways to take over for Alys when the old woman dies. Traditionally, this is something Alys would pass on to her own child, but since she doesn't have any biological children, Alys was training Claire. Now that Claire plans to leave, Alys is teaching Bethan.

There is some foreshadowing that Alys is dying. This is why Claire sleeps with Alys in the winter because Alys's frail body has trouble staying warm on its own.



Book II Chapters 13 and 14

Book II Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Einar sees Claire off for her climb. She has a backpack with her supplies, including salve and medical supplies from Alys. Einar has told Claire what caused his injuries so she is prepared for it. He has also been mapping out each step and grasp for her so that she knows what to expect during her climb. As Claire climbs, she thinks about each thing that Einar told her during their training together.

Book II Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Claire's journey out of the village represents Einar's second chance of getting out of the village. While he cannot physically climb out of the village again, Einar helping Claire to get out and to find her son is symbolic of Einar's second chance.



Book II Chapters 15 and 16

Book II Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Claire reaches a bird's nest that Einar told her about. When Claire reaches underneath the nest to grab a hold of the branch there, a huge gull comes out and pecks her in the neck. Claire realizes that when Einar climbed, the nest was empty. Now, it has baby birds in it.

Claire retreats to the tunnel where she was climbing out of when the gull pecked her. When she comes back out of the tunnel, the gull pecks Claire in the arm, causing a gash so deep that Claire can see the bone in her arm. Claire retreats to the tunnel and uses her supplies to dress her wounds.

Claire gets rid of all of the empty supplies and what's left of the backpack she uses for bandaging her arm. She throws this out of the tunnel. The only thing she keeps is a rope, which she uses to lasso the bird's nest and send it flying out of the tree and off the cliff. The gull flies after its falling nest and young. Claire then climbs the last bit until she is on top of the mountain.

Claire falls asleep while waiting for the man to come that Einar told her about. When Einar met the man on top of the mountain, Einar refused the man's help and then man cut off both Einar's feet with a hatchet. Einar tells Claire that she must accept the man's help to find her son.

Claire wakes up to the man standing over her. He agrees to help her find her son, whom he says is named Gabe, in exchange for her youth. Claire agrees and instantly sees her hair is now gray instead of red and that her hands are old and full of veins and wrinkles. The man tells Claire that his name is Trademaster.

Book II Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

The big gull is protecting its young from Claire. One of the things Einar has trained Claire to deal with is unexpected events. The bird is one of these unexpected events, where Claire has to think on her feet in order to get herself out of the situation.

Everything comes at a price. In this case, Claire gives up her youth. In exchange for this, Claire is to reunite with her son.



Book III Chapters 1 and 2

Book III Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Gabe, Gabriel, lives in the Boys' Lodge, which is where orphans live. He knows that Jonas brought him to the village when he was a baby. Gabe possesses a power, which he calls veering. When he notices an old woman who always seems to be watching him and his friends, Gabe thinks about veering to see why she's following them.

Jonas is married to Kira and has children of his own now. Kira brings it to Jonas's attention that Gabe is building a boat. Jonas was once the town leader, but now he is the town librarian. Jonas tells his wife that he is the one who gave Gabe the books and information on how to build a boat. Kira and Jonas also possess special powers.

Book III Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Gabe appears to be building a boat so that he can leave his village. He wants to find his parents. Gabe doesn't fully comprehend how he didn't have biological parents in the village where he came from because in the village where he lives now, traditional families exist.

The old woman Gabe keeps seeing is Claire. Gabe's power, which he calls veering, is an ability to look into the minds of other people to see what they are thinking and feeling. Additionally, Jonas senses that someone is watching Gabe. He feels this person is harmless but that something else is nearby and that it is dangerous. The harmless person is Claire and the dangerous one is the Trademaster.



Book III Chapters 3 and 4

Book III Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Nathaniel, Gabe's best friend, tries to get Gabe to go fishing with him and their other friends. Gabe says he can't because he has to work on his boat. Gabe shows Nathaniel the picture of the boat in a book that he's using as a guide to build his own boat. Nathaniel says his sister, Deidre, misses Gabe. Gabe says he'll see her at the feast.

The village where Jonas and Gabe live is full of people who once came from other places. Part of the history museum is the story of Jonas, a young boy who saved a sick baby, and then became leader of their town. Another portion of the town history is when Trademaster deceived some of the villagers, such as Jonas.

Gabe thinks about his veering experiences. He confirms that he is able to step into the minds of other people to see and feel things as if he is them. It is a power that he has always kept a secret. Gabe was very close to Kira's adopted brother Matty, but Matty died.

Book III Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Claire is the old woman who has been watching Gabe and his friends all of the years she has been in the village. She regrets making the deal with Trademaster in the respect that he has stolen her youth from her and she feels she doesn't have much time left to live. On the other hand, she is grateful for getting to see her son and watch him grow into a young man.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Claire visits the Herbalist to get medicine for her aching back. She thinks back on how Gabe was eight or nine when she first came to the village. She also thinks about how the Trademaster deceived her. She worries about Gabe building a boat because Claire attributes sadness, pain and harm to bodies of water—the river she lived next to in her village and the sea she lived next to when she washed ashore.

Claire decides that she wants to tell Jonas her story. Then, when he feels the time is right, Jonas can tell Gabe. Ten days later, Jonas and Claire sit on a bench while she recounts her entire story to Jonas. Jonas confirms that Trademaster is evil and that he was banished from the village years earlier. As they decide they should tell Gabe the truth together, they hear boys shouting down by the river where Gabe is building his boat.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Claire doesn't yet realize that Gabe is building the boat to sail away to find his real parents. Ironically, Gabe is seeking her out and she's standing right in front of him half the time. The shouting that Jonas and Claire hear can be the boys cheering Gabe on because he has finished building the boat and has launched it into the water.



Book III Chapters 7 and 8

Book III Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Gabe finishes building the boat. He even creates a paddle to steer the boat. He plans to test the boat for the first time alone, but his friends end up going with him. While the boat does float, it doesn't work properly. Jonas arrives at the banks of the river and tells the boys to go home to get ready for dinner.

At home, Jonas tells Gabe about Trade Mart. Trade Mart is something Trademaster ran in the village, where he traded people one of their characteristics or traits for something the people really wanted. Jonas says this is why he banished Trademaster from the village. Kira and Jonas also tell Gabe about their powers—Jonas's ability to see beyond and Kira's to do things with her hands.

They both say they are losing their powers now. Jonas says he's going to use his power to find out where Trademaster is and then it is Gabe's responsibility to kill him. Jonas says there is more to the story but he'll tell Gabe later when Gabe is more rested.

Book III Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

It seems as if Trademaster relates somehow to the community Claire, Jonas and Gabe are from originally. The fact that Trademaster is trying to get back into their lives suggests that Trademaster is trying to kill Gabe, just as it seems that Trademaster has something to do with Matty's death.



Book III Chapters 9 and 10

Book III Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

When Gabe wakes the next morning, Jonas has been summoned away by an old woman who is dying in the village. Gabe admits to Kira about his power to veer. He explains he did it with her son Matthew this morning when Kira was playing with him. Gabe says this made him realize he remembers a woman who must have been his mother. Gabe goes to Claire's cottage. Claire tells Jonas to tell Gabe the truth.

Jonas tells Gabe the story, including that Claire is Gabe's mother. Gabe doesn't believe Jonas, so Jonas takes Gabe to the schoolmaster. The schoolmaster tells Gabe of his own trade with Trademaster. The schoolmaster confirms the trades made the villagers evil and caused Matty's death. Gabe rushes back to Claire's cottage but Claire's almost dead. Jonas uses his power to find Trademaster and tells Gabe Trademaster is on the other side of the river. Gabe leaves his village by boat and sees a cloaked man waiting in the darkness on the river bank where Gabe arrives.

Book III Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

The old woman who is dying is Claire. Gabe realizes his mother is Claire, the old woman who has been spying on him in town. There is some foreshadowing that Gabe must use his power to get rid of the evil Trademaster once and for all. Finally, it will become clear to Gabe that his real mother is Claire, and since Gabe can find closure in this information, there will be no need for him to sail away from his life in the village.



Book III Chapters 11, 12 and 13

Book III Chapters 11, 12 and 13 Summary

Jonas and Gabe go back to Claire's cottage. Gabe sits with the dying Claire while Jonas uses his power to find Trademaster. Once Jonas sees where Trademaster is, he sends Jonas across the river to find and kill the Trademaster. As Gabe swims across the river, he keeps telling himself that he cannot kill anyone. When Gabe reaches the other side, Trademaster is standing on the bank waiting for him.

Trademaster greets Gabe. As they talk, Gabe veers into Trademaster. This helps Gabe realize how to stop Trademaster without having to physically attack him. Gabe starts telling Trademaster about some of the people with whom he made trades, and how he didn't ruin their lives. As Gabe does this, Trademaster and his tools become a pile of junk and Trademaster disappears altogether.

Gabe swims back across the river. When he gets to the door of Claire's cottage, Gabe sees that Claire is her young self again.

Book III Chapters 11, 12 and 13 Analysis

Jonas suggests that the Trademaster gets a sense of satisfaction out of being nearby because Trademaster likes to watch how he ruins the lives of those who conduct trades with him. In this case, Jonas suggests Trademaster is just across the river because he wants to see Claire die.

The power Trademaster has is simply an illusion. Once Gabe is able to strip Trademaster of this, the magic spells fall away from the Trademaster's knives, so that now they are just junk. The entire illusion of Trademaster himself also fades away into nothingness.

Characters

Claire

Claire is a fourteen year old girl. When the novel opens, she is giving birth for the first time in her role as a Vessel, or birthmother. Claire gives birth to a baby boy.

She has coppery hair. Additionally, Claire is raised by her parental units with her older brother Peter, prior to becoming a birthmother at the age of twelve. Claire lives in a village that runs on pretty strict rules and regulations.

Claire starts to experience normal human emotions because she is not taking the pills the village issues that suppress feelings and emotions. This is when Claire starts to ponder what exists beyond the confines of the village. Once Claire experiences the loss of her son, she takes the steps necessary to leave the village.

During Claire's journey to find Gabe, she finds out about the differences in the people where she grew up and the rest of the world. Claire also sacrifices her own youth so that she has the opportunity to see her son again. For many years, she watches Gabe grow and prosper until he finds out who she is.

Number Thirty-six and Gabe

Number Thirty-six is Claire's baby. He is the thirty-sixth child to be born that year. As a baby, he is not thriving while living in the Nurturing Center.

Number Thirty-six is not assigned a family for the first year he lives in the Nurturing Center. This propels the male nurturer to take a special interest in the baby. Claire continues to visit Number Thirty-six. She ends up teaching him how to say her name and to make a funny face.

The nurturer's son, Jonas, ends up kidnapping Number Thirty-six and running away with the baby. By the time Claire finds her baby, he's a teenager. Claire finds out that his name is Gabe. Gabe lives in an orphanage, but he still has a relationship with Jonas and Jonas's family.

Gabe is in the process of building a boat. He plans to use the boat to leave his village to look for his real parents. Gabe also notices the old woman, who is Claire, watching him and his friends over the years.



Peter

Peter is Claire's older brother. When Peter turns twelve, he is assigned to Law and Justice. Peter works in the Law and Justice building in the village, but Claire doesn't see him or talk to him during the novel.

Dmitri

Dmitri is the supervisor at the Fish Hatchery. Claire reports to Dmitri when she transfers from her role as a birthmother to that of Fish Hatchery worker. While Claire is working with Dmitri, he applies for a spouse. Dmitri is not assigned a spouse during the ceremony, which upsets him.

Nurturer

The nurturer is the man Claire meets at the Nurturing Center. Claire never asks the man his real name. He is assigned to the room where Number Thirty-six lives. Additionally, the male nurturer takes a special interest in the baby, even taking the baby home with him at night to try to get the baby to sleep properly.

Jonas

Jonas is the nurturer's son. When Jonas turns twelve, he receives a special, but secret assignment. Claire sees Jonas going into the Annex building near the Old Age home in their village. When Jonas finds out the village is going to kill Number Thirty-six because the baby is not thriving and not being assigned a family, Jonas steals the baby and runs away.

Jonas starts a new life in a new village. He ends up marrying and having children of his own. Jonas becomes the leader of the village, but eventually steps down from his leadership role. Then, he is the village librarian.

Kira

Kira is Jonas's wife. Gabe admits his special power to veer to Kira first. Kira says she has a special power to create things with her hands.

Nathaniel

Nathaniel is Gabe's best friend. Gabe confides in Nathaniel that he is building a boat to leave the village. Nathaniel urges Gabe to create a paddle so he can control the boat. Nathaniel goes with Gabe to the river to test out Gabe's boat, so Nathaniel is there when Gabe realizes that his boat is not ready to sail.



Trademaster

Trademaster is the man who meets Claire at the top of the mountain when she climbs out of the village. Einar tells her about Trademaster because Trademaster is responsible for maiming Einar for refusing Trademaster's help. Claire agrees to trade her youth for Trademaster to take Claire to Gabe. Jonas tells Claire and Gabe that Trademaster is evil and responsible for the problems in the village prior to Jonas banishing Trademaster from the community.

Deidre

Deidre is Nathaniel's younger sister. She has a crush on Gabe. Gabe also has a crush on Deidre.



Objects/Places

Birth Unit

The Birth Unit is where Claire is when the novel opens. It is the building where the birthmothers give birth to the Products, which are the babies born in the community. When Claire's birth does not go as planned, they have to take the baby by Caesarean section.

Fish Hatchery

The Fish Hatchery is where Claire works when she is de-certified as a birthmother. The Fish Hatchery is responsible for fertilizing fish eggs to create the new fish the village needs for food sources and other products. Claire often leaves the Fish Hatchery to go to the Nurturing Center to visit her son.

Law and Justice Building

Claire passes the Law and Justice Building on her walk from the birthmother area of the village to the Fish Hatchery. The Law and Justice Building is where Claire's older brother, Peter works. Claire thinks about her brother as she walks by the building.

Nurturing Center

The Nurturing Center is where the babies are sent and cared for prior to being assigned families. Claire visits the Nurturing Center after starting to work at the Fish Hatchery. Claire volunteers to help at the Nurturing Center from time to time so that she has an opportunity to see her son.

Bicycle

When Claire starts working at the Fish Hatchery, Dmitri gives her a bicycle. Claire uses the bike as transportation around the village. She often rides her bicycle along the route the male nurturer uses to go from work to his home, so Claire can see her son.

When Jonas runs away with the baby, he steals his father's bicycle. This is because the bicycle has a baby seat on the back of it. The bicycle ends up in the village museum where Jonas and Gabe go to live.



Supply Boat

A supply boat comes to the village where Claire lives. It is the boat that prompts Claire to start pondering what lies outside of the village. When Jonas runs away with the baby, Claire boards the supply boat to go look for her son. The supply boat ends up in a storm that throws Claire overboard. Claire is clinging to a piece of the supply boat's mast when some of the villagers find her offshore.

Baby Seat

When Number Thirty-six gets older, the nurturer installs a baby seat on the back of his bicycle. The nurturer puts the baby in the baby seat to transport the child back and forth between the nurturer's home and the Nurturing Center. Jonas places the baby in the baby seat on the back of his father's bicycle to run away with the baby to save the baby's life.

Mountain

A very steep mountain surrounds the village where Claire lives after leaving her community. When Einar climbs the mountain to leave the village, he is maimed at the top, so he returns to the village. Einar agrees to train Claire so that she can successfully climb the mountain, out of the village, to find her son.

River

There is a river near the village where Jonas, Gabe and Claire live. Gabe tries to sail his boat in the river, but fails. When Gabe goes to find and kill Trademaster, Gabe has to swim across the river to the other side, where Trademaster is.

Trade Mart

Trade Mart is a form of entertainment in the village where Jonas is leader. Trademaster runs the Trade Mart platform, where he offers the villagers the objects of their desire in exchange for traits and characteristics. Trade Mart shuts down when Trademaster is banished from the village.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. In this particular novel, the relationships start out as functions of the village rather than true relationships. In the village where Claire lives, every person has an assignment, a role that they are supposed to play. Parents do not even create and give birth to their own children, so there is a lack of emotion and bonds in the relationships people in the village form.

Additionally, the villagers are forced to take pills. The pills seem to suppress emotions and feelings. In Part I of the book, the relationships exist as a formality rather than as true interaction among the characters. This starts to change after Claire gives birth to Gabe and starts interacting with the baby.

When Claire lives in the new village, she starts to learn what it is like to form friendships and family relationships. Claire and Alys become friends, but they also have a relationship similar to a mother and a daughter. The other villagers also become friends with Claire, and like a family to her, because they are very generous and giving, which is the direct opposite of what the people are like from where Claire originates.

Claire even falls in love with Lame Einar. In this respect, she learns what it is like to love someone romantically, rather than be matched with a spouse like it had been in her own village. Even though Claire and Einar never pursue a romantic relationship, Einar loves Claire so much that he is the one who helps her escape from the village so that she can find her son. Both Claire and Einar sacrifice their love for one another so that Claire can find Gabe.

Family relationships are the other type of relationships covered in the novel. When Claire lives in her village, she has a mother, father and brother. All of these people are assigned to one another rather than being blood related to one another. Because of this, there is some allegiance among family members, but a true love and familial bond is lacking within each of the families in the village.

As Claire lives in the new village and then moves on to the village where Gabe lives, she finds out the meaning of a true family. Gabe lacks a true family and yearns to find out who his parents are and about the place where he came from. Jonas even moves on to marry and have biological children of his own, which is the direct opposite of the life he would have had if he remained in the village.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as losing a son. Claire struggles with the fact that her coming of age includes having to give up her birth child, which causes her to experience



emotions that she has never felt before. Claire also has to deal with the loss of her child again when Jonas steals the baby in order to keep Gabe alive.

Claire takes on adult responsibilities when she is forced to give birth to a baby at the age of fourteen. When she gives birth to the baby, she feels an attachment to the child that is not allowed in the society where Claire lives. Claire's coming of age also includes her learning how to deal with her emotions. Additionally, Claire makes the ultimate sacrifice, which is her own life, in order to be close to her son again and to watch him grow and prosper.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of Claire's families—her original family unit in her village, the family she forms with Alys and then her being reunited with her son to form a family at the end of the novel. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Claire's families have their own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.

By the end of the novel, it also becomes about the family of those who have come together in Claire's life. While the different characters in the novel have been segregated in the past, they unite by the end of the novel. The coming together of the different groups is symbolic of the world in which the characters live, breaking down the cultural barriers



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. The narrator of the novel is also the author of the novel, Lois Lowry. The narrator is telling the story as it unfolds, but she also switches back to some past events to provide the reader with some perspective.

The point of view of this novel is an intimate point of view that allows a reader to connect closely with each of the characters in the novel. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place to her and the characters of the novel without interrupting the flow of the narration. For these reasons, the point of view works well with this novel and the author's writing style.

Setting

When the novel first begins, the primary setting is in the village where Claire lives. The author never reveals the name of the village. The setting then moves to another village—the one where Claire lives after surviving the shipwreck. Eventually, the setting moves to a third village, which is the village where Jonas took Gabe when they ran away. The specific time period of the novel is never stated. The setting of this novel is important because it is about the drastic differences in culture between each of the villages that are the settings of the novel.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that Claire ends up leaving the only home she's ever known. However, as events unfold, Claire's struggle to find her son is a constant part of the plot.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is not formal and is easy to understand. The language is educated, strong and descriptive enough that it creates a flow that leaves the reader impressed with the words as much as the plot when the novel ends.

The language of the novel is appropriate to the plot because it is accurate to the characters in the novel and the education level of the writer. The novel is not in love with its own words, but it is descriptive enough that the reader finds enjoyment in the words as well as the plot. The language is not difficult to understand, however, and everything is clear in its context. For this reason the language of the novel fits well with the plot of the novel.

Structure

The novel consists of three parts—before Claire leaves her village, after Claire leaves her village, and when Claire finds her son. Each part of the book is broken down into chapters. Part I has 16 chapters. Part II has 16 chapters. Part III has 13 chapters. Each chapter is anywhere from five to ten pages long. The chapters tell the story both in exposition and dialogue. The author is the narrator of the book, so it seems as if she is injecting her own voice throughout the novel. This allows the author to provide her own opinions of the events surrounding the setting of the novel, as well as the actions taking place within the plot.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows the various relationships between the characters in the novel. The subplots involve coming of age and the trials and tribulations of the family.



Quotes

"Once they're sure it implanted then you're a certified Vessel."
Book I, Chap. 1, p. 8

"I meant that it's fine. The medical difficulties didn't affect it."
Book I, Chap. 2, p. 16

"Other places. Other communities. The boats must make a lot of stops."
Book I, Chap. 3, p. 29

"It's always Thirty-six!"
Book I, Chap. 4, p. 47

"They call it failure to thrive."
Book I, Chap. 5, p. 49

"I am. I am lonely."
Book I, Chap. 6, p. 55

"I take him back to my dwelling at night."
Book I, Chap. 7, p. 63

"It was part of the contentment she had always known."
Book I, Chap. 8, p. 69

"Our son's a Twelve this year. Lots of nervousness and apprehension."
Book I, Chap. 9, p. 78

"It had to do with the Giver and the Receiver."
Book I, Chap. 10, p. 81

"It's just one of the rules of the community."
Book I, Chap. 11, p. 85



"It's Jonas."

Book I, Chap. 12, p. 95

"He's trying to walk."

Book I, Chap. 13 p. 97

"They can't give him to parents if he doesn't sleep."

Book I, Chap. 14, p 105

"I began to be aware of my own feelings."

Book I. Chap. 15, p. 114

"My son."

Book I, Chap. 16, p. 127

"What bring you?"

Book II, Chap. 1, p. 137

"Sixteen. She could be wed."

Book II, Chap. 2, p. 142

"To hold memories. Scents do that. When you smelled the tea—."

Book II, Chap. 3, p. 149

"She's learning now. But she's like a babe about it."

Book II, Chap. 4, p. 168

"Something's come back then."

Book II, Chap. 5, p. 176

"But I fear this: that you will not be able to give birth. I think this has been taken from you."

Book II, Chap. 6, p. 181

"Give Bryn her baby!"

Book II, Chap. 7, p. 191



"I must find him."

Book II, Chap. 8, p. 194

"How do I start?"

Book II, Chapter 9, p. 209

"No. Not by sea. I won't."

Book II, Chapter 10, p. 212

"I'm a woman now."

Book II, Chap. 11, p. 228

"It's time to climb out."

Book II, Chap. 12, p. 234

"Do you think I'll make it, Einar?"

Book II, Chap. 13, p. 236

"Think only on the task. On the climb."

Book II, Chap. 14, p. 247

"Then she lifted herself, reached across, grabbed the now visible handhold with her uninjured arm, and pulled herself triumphantly across the cliff face and to the steps that would lead her to the top."

Book II, Chap. 15, p. 257

"Your son's name is Gabe."

Book II, Chap. 16, p. 266

"I had people I called Mother and Father. I'd been assigned to them."

Book III, Chap. 1, p. 273

"No. He's not in danger. At least not now. But there is a presence. It seems benign. I think...I think something—someone—is looking for him."

Book III, Chap. 2, p. 281



"So you're planning your own death?"
Book III, Chap. 3, p. 285

"You're going to find out you have a gift of some kind."
Book III, Chap. 4, p. 295

"What is your age?"
Book III, Chap. 5, p. 301

"Together we can help him understand."
Book III, Chap. 6, p. 321

"It needs work."
Book III, Chap. 7, p. 331

"It's everything to do with you Gabe."
Book III, Chap. 8, p. 343

"My gift. I have one. I call it veering."
Book III, Chap. 9, p. 347

"Claire gave birth to you. You were the only child she ever had."
Book III, Chap. 10, p. 356

"Gabe, hold her hand so that she knows you're there."
Book III, Chap. 11, p. 364

"Want it?"
Book III, Chap. 12, p. 384

"Your power is gone."
Book III, Chap. 13, p. 391

Topics for Discussion

Who is Claire? Why is she different from the other birthmothers in the novel? What does Claire recall about her life when she's living with Alys? Why is this important? How does it change her life?

Discuss the relationship between the nurturer and Claire. Are they friends or something else? Is there guilt or a sense of obligation in their relationship? How does Claire feel about the nurturer? How does the nurturer feel about Claire?

Discuss the relationship between Claire and Alys. Are they friends or something else? Is there guilt or a sense of obligation in their relationship? How does Claire feel about Alys? How does Alys feel about Claire?

Who is the true Jonas? Why does he want to save Gabe? Why doesn't Jonas tell Gabe the whole truth when Gabe is older? Do you think Jonas and Gabe feel a father-son bond?

Who is Einar? Why does he agree to help Claire leave the village? Why doesn't Einar talk about how he was maimed? Do you think Einar's life changes after Claire leaves?

Why do you think Claire watches Gabe from afar? Do you think the relationship between Claire and Gabe changes when Gabe returns from killing the Trademaster? Why do you think Claire receives her youth back after the Trademaster dies?

Discuss the cultural differences in each village where Claire lives. What impact do they have on the characters of the novel? How do the differences motivate them or hold them back?