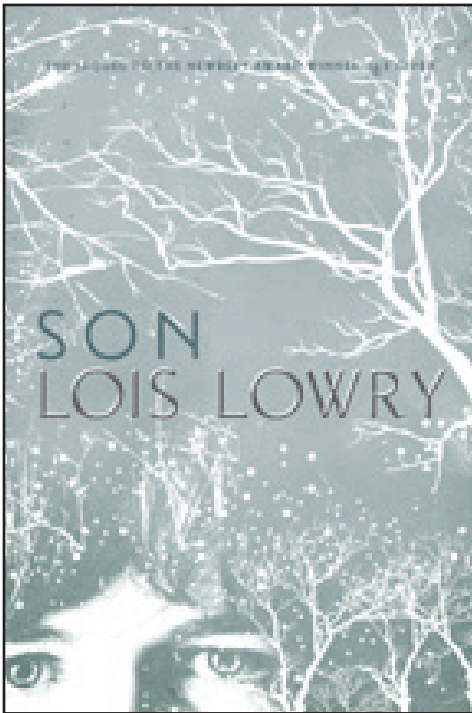


A GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION  
AND CLASSROOM USE

**SON**  
by LOIS LOWRY



### About the Book

Claire had hoped for a prestigious assignment when she turned twelve, and harbors disappointment when she is named Birthmother, the least favored assignment. She is fourteen when she gives birth to "Product number Thirty-six," but something goes terribly wrong with the birth. She is a miserable failure and reassigned to the Fish Hatchery, and number Thirty-six is whisked away to the Nurturing Center. When Claire begins to experience an unfamiliar "yearning" for her baby, she makes excuses to leave the hatchery and visit the Nurturing Center, where she learns that her son isn't thriving according to schedule. Then Jonas, the main character in *The Giver*, escapes with the baby to Elsewhere, and Claire has a mother's urge to find her son. She leaves by boat and lands in a seaside village, where she meets a wise old woman and a lame sheep herder who help her come to terms with the secrets of her past and find a path to her son. Her greatest obstacle is the evil Trademaster, who demands that she trade something precious for a glimpse of her child. This is a story of a mother's love, and a son's desperate desire to discover his past.

### PRE-READING ACTIVITY

*Son* is divided into three parts. "Book One: Before", "Book Two: Between", and "Book Three: Beyond." Lead a class discussion about why it's important to deal with the "before" and "between" in life in order to understand and confront the "beyond."

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Craft & Structure RL. 6-8.5; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 6-8.4.

### DISCUSSION

- Ask students to define *community*. Compare and contrast each community in which Claire lives. How is she a mystery, or a foreigner, in all three communities?
- Discuss how the rituals in the seaside community in "Book Two: Between" define the culture of the people. How does Claire's previous life resemble a science lab? What is the connection between science, culture, and the human experience? How does Jonas understand the human experience? Explain how Claire's "Between" years help her make the transition to "Beyond."
- Claire is inexperienced with feelings. Why is she so confused when she begins to have a "yearning" for her product? How does this feeling frighten her? Discuss how the emotion of love overtakes the emotion of fear. Explain how Claire's "yearning" sets her free.
- Discuss Claire's reaction when she learns that she is a failure as a Birthmother. Debate whether she thinks she has failed herself or her community. Discuss whether her product's failure to thrive contributes to additional feelings of failure. How does her failure as a Birthmother cause her shame in the seaside community? Why is she considered "stained"? How does her failure as a "vessel" allow her to become a mother?
- Secrets and lying are prohibited in the community. How do Claire's secret feelings cause her great pain? Debate whether Claire is guilty of lying or simply creating excuses to wander from the Fish Hatchery to the Nurturing Center. The man who is caring

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for Thirty-six is also harboring a secret. What would happen if the Chief Elder of the community discovered that he had named the product, now a newchild? What is symbolic about the newchild's name?

- What does the nurturer see in Thirty-six that others can't see? Explain Gabe's gift. Jonas gave Gabe life by taking him to Elsewhere. Debate the possibility that Jonas saw something "special" in the infant Gabe. What does he give him at the end of *Son*?
- In "Book One: Before," Claire says that she is lonely, though she really doesn't understand the meaning of the word. How does she confront her feelings of loneliness as she makes her journey to "Between" and "Beyond"? Which other characters suffer from a similar loneliness? Debate whether Gabe is lonely or simply needs to understand his history.
- In "Book Two: Between," Alys realizes that Claire is deeply wounded. How does she help Claire come to terms with "Before"? Why does Claire decide to tell Bryn her story? How does Claire know that Lame Einar won't be scornful of her past?
- Discuss what Lame Einar means when he tells Claire, "It be better, I think, to climb out in search of something, instead of hating what you're leaving." (p. 209) How is love stronger than hate? Discuss how Alys understands a mother's love, even though she is not a mother herself.
- Explain the statement, "Fear dims when you learn things." (p. 162) Debate whether Claire's fear intensifies or lessens as she continues her plight to find her son. What does she learn in "Book Two: Between" that dims her fears? Which characters in the seaside village help her gain knowledge?
- Power may corrupt, but it can heal. How does Trademaster use his power to corrupt? Jonas needs for Gabe to understand the difference between a unique power and a gift. Why does Jonas feel that having a gift is burdensome? Discuss why Gabe is uncomfortable with his special gift. He uses his gift of veering to destroy evil. Debate whether he will ever use his gift again.

- Discuss the symbolism of the river that flows through the community in "Book One: Before." Why are the people taught to fear the river? At what point does Claire recognize that her fascination with the boat and the river may have meaning? How is Gabe lured to the river in "Book Three: Beyond"? What is symbolic about Gabe's swimming across the river at the end of the novel? Might his boat be displayed in the Vehicles of Arrival exhibit?

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 6-8.1, 6-8.2, 6-8.3; Craft & Structure RL. 6-8.4, 6-8.5;; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 6-8.1, 6-8.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 6-8.4, 6-8.6.

## REACHING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Ask students to write a decree announcing the death of Trademaster. Include a statement about his evil use of power and how he attempted to destroy the village.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 6-8.3.

The sled that brought Jonas and Gabe to the village is displayed in the Vehicles of Arrival exhibit at the town museum. Ask students to imagine other vehicles that are included in the exhibit. Then have them write a description of each vehicle for the museum exhibition catalogue.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 6-8.3; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 6-8.4.

Alys is the midwife and healer in the seaside community in Book Two: Between. Have students make a list of the various herbs and plants that Alys uses in her practice (e.g. goldenseal and chamomile). Instruct them to make an illustrated chart of the plants that includes their medicinal use.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 6-8.7, W. 6-8.9.

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Claire struggles to understand the cycle of life. Dimitri, the head of the Hatchery operation, is puzzled that she didn't learn that in evolutionary biology. Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to learn about the study of evolutionary biology. Have them write a course description for a college catalogue.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 6-8.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge We. 6-8.7

The community in which Claire is born is colorless. In Book Two: Between, she begins to learn colors. Have students list the various emotions that Claire experiences throughout the novel (e.g. love, passion, anger, fear, hope) and ask them to select a color that symbolizes each emotion. Then ask them to color freedom from Claire's point of view.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 6-8.3

It's a custom in the village where Claire finds Gabe to perform a welcoming ceremony for new residents at which time their histories are told. Ask students to discuss why Claire never received a proper welcome. Then have them plan and perform a welcoming ceremony, called "Son and Sun," for Claire after she regains her youth. Give roles to Gabe, Jonas, Kira and Claire.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 6-8.8; Language: Knowledge of Language L. 6-8.3.

Have students make a poster announcing Claire's Welcoming Ceremony to the people in the village. Consider illustrating Claire as an old woman, created by the Trademaster, and the young woman, brought back to life by Gabe.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL 6-8.2.

A ballad is a form of verse that tells a story and is often set to music. Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to find examples of musical ballads. Then have them write a ballad about Claire's quest to find Gabe.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 6-8.9; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 6-8.3.

Jonas is troubled that some people want to close the borders of the village. He reminds them that every citizen arrived from some other place. Ask students to relate this to the current debate over immigration laws in the United States. Then sponsor a class debate around both sides of the issue.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 6-8.9; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 6-8.2; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 6-8.4.

Jonas is the librarian, or keeper of knowledge in the village. Ask students to select books from the school or public library that Claire may place in the village library in honor of the following characters: The Nurturer, Alyse, Lame Eisnar, Old Benedikt, Bryn, Gabe, Kira, and Jonas. Write a brief dedication for each book.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 6-8.3; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 6-8.9.

Jonas saves Gabe at the end of *The Giver*. Now it's Gabe's turn to save his birthmother. Role-play the scene when Gabe first sees Claire as a young woman. What does he say to her?

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 6-8.4.

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**VOCABULARY**

Encourage students to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them taking clues from the context. Such words may include: insemination (p. 7), inconsequential (p. 12), solicitous (p. 15), camaraderie (p. 22), chastise (p. 33), calibrated (p. 39), medicinal (p. 40), attributes (p. 79), derisive (p. 111), fastidiously (p. 162), profusion (p. 163), mimicry (p. 175), agility (p. 223), luxuriant (p. 263), benign p. 281), eradicate (p. 293), precipice (p. 316), malignant (p. 317), convoluted (p. 337), sardonic (p. 359), tenacity (p. 378), pliant (p. 382), malevolence (p. 387), and resilience (p. 392).

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 6-8.4.

This guide was created by Pat Scales, Children's Literature Consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.