The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

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Module B Close Study of Text

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Module B: Close Study of Text

Craft

How a text's textual features and details, structure and form shape meaning

How a text's textual features and details, structure and form establish its distinctive qualities

Perception

How the ideas, forms and language of a text may affect the perceptions of responders

HSC Expectations

- Better responses demonstrated a **deep understanding** of an idea or related **ideas**, drawing on detailed textual knowledge.

- Better responses reflected a **personal perspective**.

- Candidates who clearly understood the **purpose** of their texts were able to demonstrate **conceptual understanding**.

- Many responses limited themselves to the beginning of the text and consequently did not show the development of an idea throughout the novel.
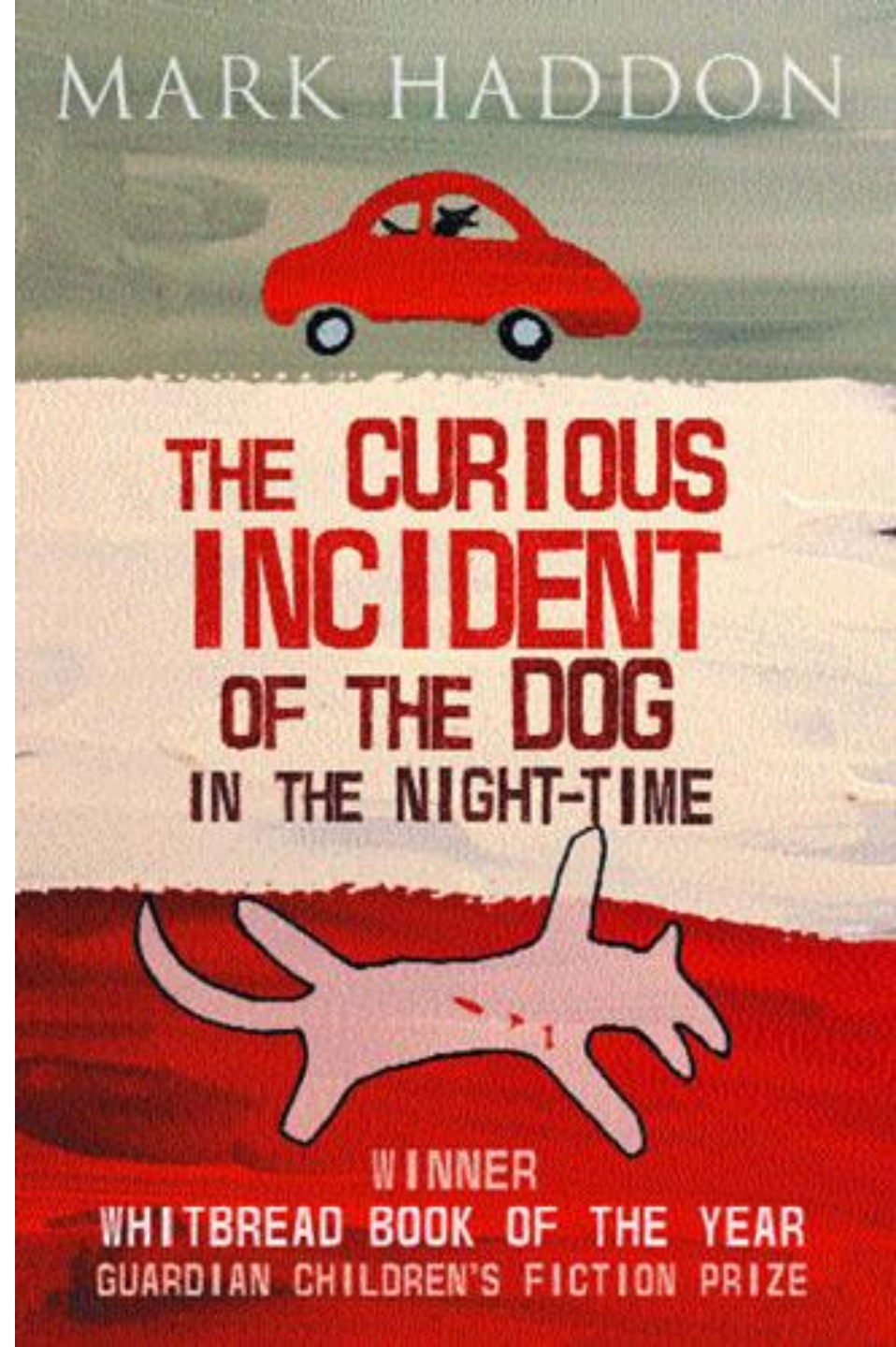
HSC Expectations

- Candidates who were able to select appropriate **textual evidence** and explain why

- Stronger responses used the **metalanguage** appropriate to their text type.

Conceptual Underpinnings

- **Craft - Textuality:**
- How a text's textual features and details, structure and form shape meaning.
- How a text's textual features and details, structure and form establish its **distinctive qualities**.

MARK HADDON

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

WINNER
WHITBREAD BOOK OF THE YEAR
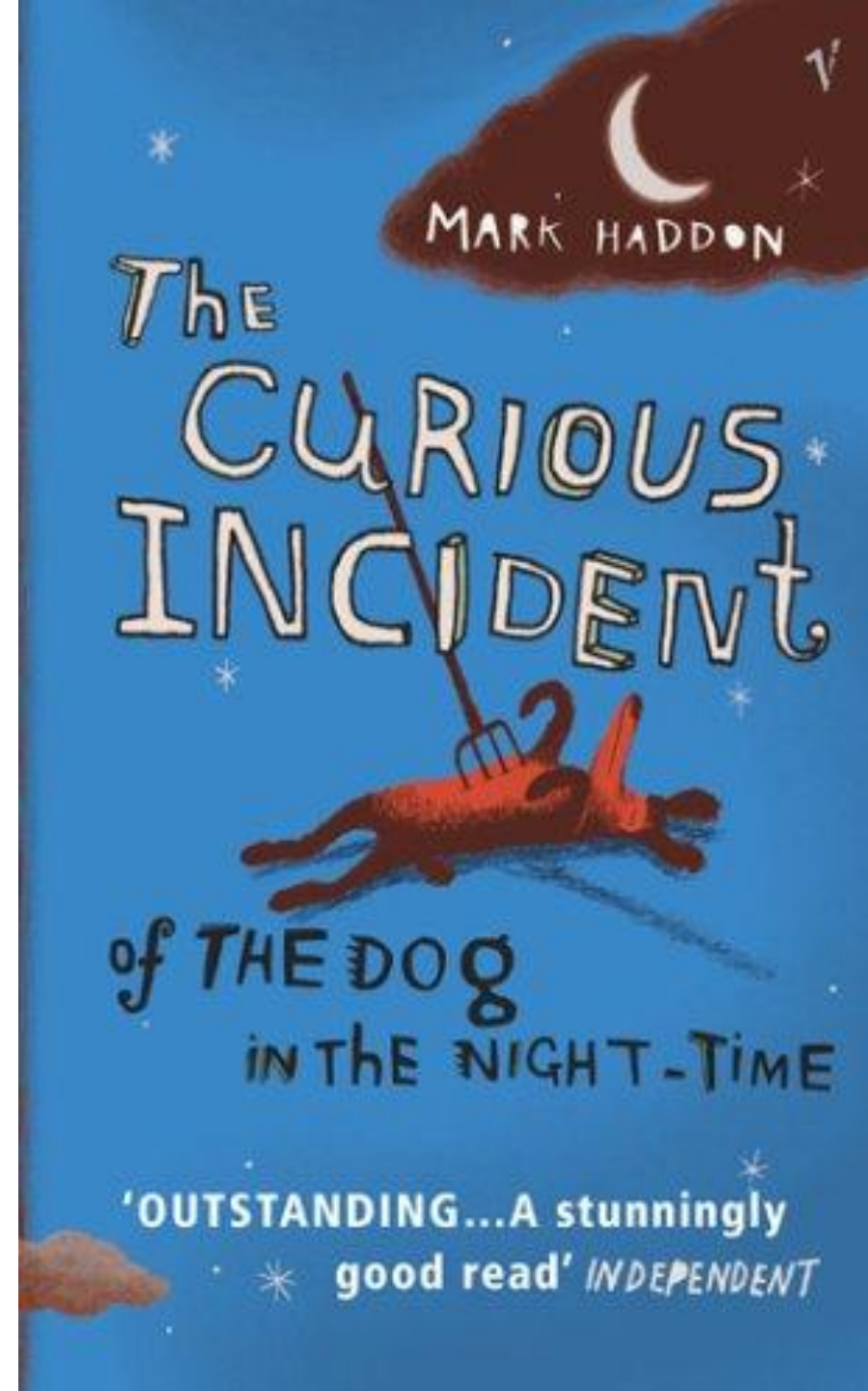GUARDIAN CHILDREN'S FICTION PRIZE

Distinctive Qualities

One of the key aspects of Module B is an exploration of what makes a text distinctive – unique, different and memorable - such as: the genre, setting, the unforgettable narrative voice, key incidents, characterisation and the significant ideas.

Conceptual Underpinnings

'A novel can put you inside another person's head and give you an understanding of their life you could only get by moving into their house for six months' Mark Haddon.

- **Perceptions:** How the ideas, forms and language of a text may affect the perceptions of responders. Perception refers to the interplay of recognition and interpretation and is influenced by our preconceived ideas, memories, experiences and senses.

MARK HADDON

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT of THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

'OUTSTANDING...A stunningly good read' *INDEPENDENT*

Perceptions

- Haddon challenges us to view the world through the eyes of someone who has a disability. Walking in another's shoes has the potential to alter our perceptions of people and life.

Context

- Haddon's knowledge of aspergers comes from his work with autistic people as a young man – *'If you're going to write something dark and funny about disability, you have to feel comfortable with your subject.'*

- *'I am an atheist in a very religious mould'*

- Excelled in Mathematics
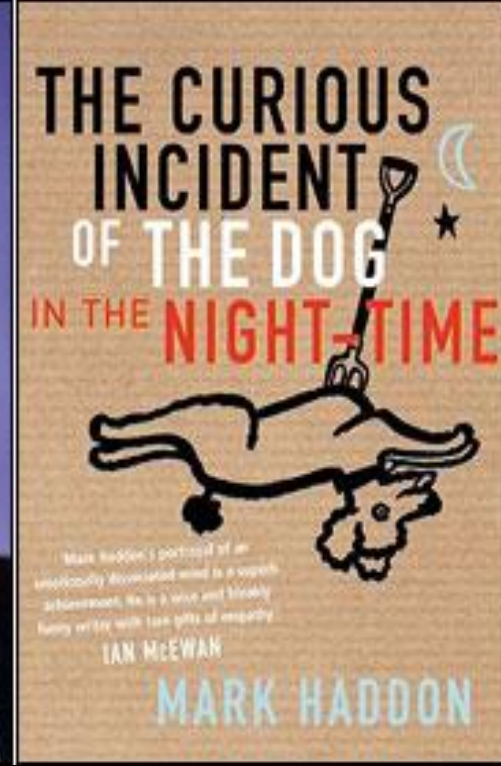
Context

'The corner I kept on fighting over Christopher, the main character in Curious, who suffers from Asperger's, is that he's not ill; he just has a radically different view of the world. What I'm interested in is how the human mind works, and when we're abnormal or going wrong people are much more fascinating.'

Distinctive Features

- *'I better make the plot good. I wanted to make it grip people on the first page and have a big turning point in the middle, as there is, and construct the whole thing like a roller coaster ride'* Mark Haddon.

- 'He just has to say, *I enjoy Sherlock Holmes stories and I'll try to do something similar to that.* It was that. That was the biggest puzzle for the book. When I solved that, I began to see how I could shape the story' Haddon.

- What do you find distinctive?

Structure

If you enjoy math and you write novels, it's very rare that you'll get a chance to put your math into a novel. I leapt at the chance' Mark Haddon.

- Chapters – Prime numbers
- One chapter deals with the narrative and then the following chapter explores Christopher's mindscape
- Emoticons
- Orthography

Hybridity

- Differences: Mathematics savant 15-year old boy as the detective

- *'His mind... was busy in endeavouring to frame some scheme into which all these strange and apparently disconnected episodes could be fitted.'*

- Constants: Puzzle, clues, red herrings, mystery

- The lack of closure and the real mystery – Christopher's future

Hybridity

- Bildungsroman – journey to experience

- *"The world is full of obvious things which nobody by chance ever observes"*

- In conflict with society

- Focuses on the psychological and moral journey of the teenage protagonist

- Seeking answers and growing up

- Subversion: Christopher cannot achieve complete understanding and moral growth

Narrative Voice

- **Christopher's voice** is distinctive. His detailed yet simplistic observations of people and places devoid of emotion enable us to see through his eyes. - Siobhan told him *'the idea of a book was to describe things using words so that people could read them and make a picture in their own head'*

- Telling more than showing – e.g. Conjunctive adverb *'Then'* - *'Never explains too much'* – conjunction 'and' - as if he has to tell us in a rush;

Narrative Voice

- His isolation from the rest of world, revealed through his comments about his yearning for silence and confinement in a small safe place, challenge our perception of life as being about close social connections to friends and family. As most individuals are social beings who enjoy the company of others, Christopher's strong desire to be utterly alone is confronting and poignant. Suddenly, you realise what it would be like to have autism:

- *So I would have to be an astronaut on my own, or have my own part of the spacecraft which no one else could come in to…And I would be able to look out of a little window in the spacecraft and know that there was no one else near me for thousands and thousands of miles…* (p.65)

Objective descriptions in the past tense.

Simple, short sentences creating tension. A crime fiction convention.

Disjunction 'but' introduces the mystery and the dilemma.

First person establishes Christopher as the narrator

Blunt tone conveyed through objective simple sentences

It was seven minutes after midnight. The dog was lying on the grass in the middle of the lawn in front of Mrs. Shear's house. Its eyes were closed. It looked as if it was running on its side, the way dogs run when they think they are chasing a cat in a dream. But the dog was not running or asleep. The dog was dead. There was a garden fork sticking out of the dog. The points of the fork must have gone all the way through the dog and into the ground because the fork had not fallen over. I decided that the dog was probably killed with the fork because I could not see any other wounds in the dog and I did not think you would stick a garden fork into a dog after it had died for some other reason, like cancer, for example, or a road accident. But I could not be certain about this.

Language

- **Factual, objective language:** Christopher's blunt descriptions and his factual digressions reflect his disability and his need to escape the complexity of life and language.

- **Simple sentences**, honest observations, emoticons (symbols used to convey emotional content), relaying of dialogue and seemingly unrelated observations of things such as the Milky Way.

Language

- **Similes:** Concrete, simple comparisons that enable him to explore his feelings, the world and other people's actions concretely and visually. *I could see him touching me, like I was watching a film of what was happening in the room, but I could hardly feel his hand at all. It was like the wind was blowing against me.*

national bestseller

the curious incident

of the dog

in the night-time

a novel by

mark haddon

"Gloriously eccentric and wonderfully intelligent."
—The Boston Globe

Language

- *'My book has a very simple surface, but there are layers of **irony** and **paradox** all the way through it'* Haddon.

- Bitter sweet humour: *'And mother got the flu and I had to spend three days with Father and stay in his house. But it was OK because Sandy slept on my bed so he would bark if anyone came into the room during the night.'*

Language

- **Imagery:** moments of poignant lyricism : '*we will know that the world is going to end soon because when we look up into the sky at night there will be no darkness, just the blazing light of billions and billions of stars, falling.*'

- **Emoticons, graphics and orthography:** The faces, the illustrations and the graphical use of writing to convey his emotions aptly reflect an autistic child who finds it difficult and frustrating to communicate with others.

- **Pathos:** What is left unsaid…

'*And I would be able to look out of a little window in the spacecraft and know that there was no one else near me for thousands and thousands of miles*'.'

Setting

- *'Every life is narrow. Our only escape is not to run away, but to learn to love the people we are and the world in which we find ourselves.'*

- Physical location of Swindon and London

- Swindon on the railway line between Bristol and the chaotic city of London in 1998. The landscape is dominated by the chalk hills of the Wiltshire Downs to the south and east. Christopher's favourite detective Sherlock Holmes ate lunch in the town in the short story 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery'.

Distinctive Setting

- Psychological landscape of Christopher's mind. He regularly describes his dissatisfaction with others and the world he lives in: *"And in the dream nearly everyone on earth is dead, because they have caught a virus…And eventually there is no one left in the world except me…"* (p.242)

"And in the dream nearly everyone on earth is dead, because they have caught a virus…And eventually there is no one left in the world except me…"

Ideas

'It's about how little separates us from those we turn away from in the street. It's about how badly we communicate with one another. It's about accepting that every life is narrow and that our only escape from this is not to run away (to another country, another relationship, a slimmer, more confident self) but to learn to love the people we are and the world in which we find ourselves' Mark Haddon.

Ideas

- The importance of honest open communication, trust and acceptance in relationships.

- The difficulties of raising a child with a disability.

- How being different can isolate you in society.

Ideas

- The importance of order and stability in our lives.

- Adult insincerity, hypocrisy and opacity

- The complexity of human emotions, motives, actions and relationships.

Ideas

- How ordinary people can be dysfunctional.
- How people prefer ignorance over knowledge:

- *"And it shows that something called Occam's razor is true …No more things should be presumed to exist than are absolutely necessary."*

Characterisation

- The textual features that craft a character
- Actions, attitudes and values
- Relationships
- Personal response

Christopher

- A *'quiet dignity, the nobility of someone unable to process the evasive shifts and contradictory movements of human interaction in what most of us deem the 'real' world.'*

- Asperger's Syndrome: lack innate social skills; no empathy; literal; obsessive about single topics; heightened sensitivity

Christopher

- An unreliable narrator

- Dispassionate style of narration

- Dreams of being an astronaut, alone in space and a virus has killed everyone except for '*special people like me*"'

- Unforgiving and resolute
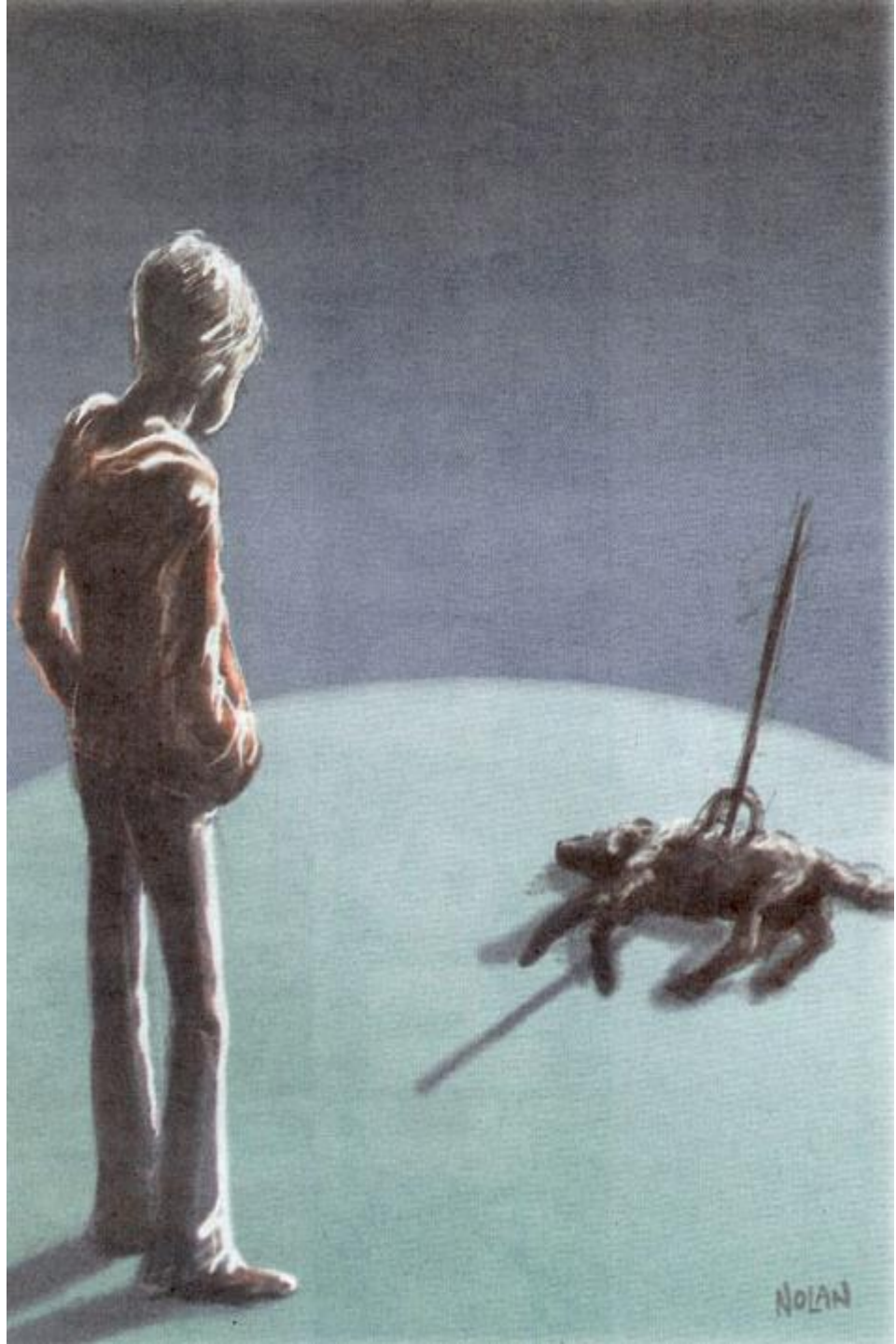
Christopher

- We are concerned for his future:

- His mother is on anti-depressants

- The gulf between Christopher and his father is insurmountable: "*And mother got the flu and I had to spend three days with Father and stay in his house. But it was OK because Sandy slept on my bed so he would bark if anyone came into the room during the night.*"

Ed Boone

- We only read Christopher's perspective
- Not easy to feel sympathy for this character
- Ed's violence, dishonesty and frustration
- Indicators that Ed is a good man who is trying to be a loving father
- Identifies with Chris as being different
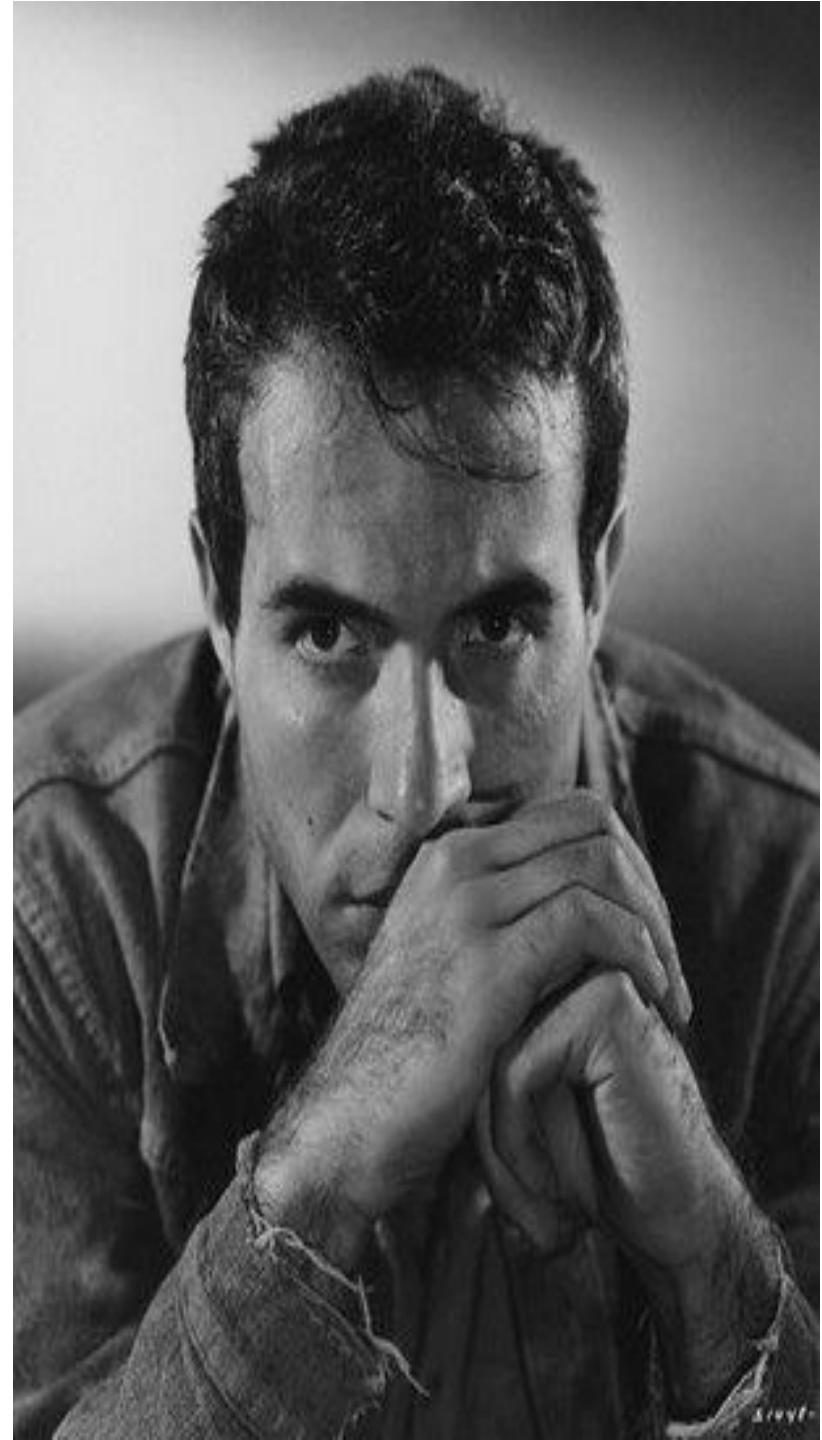
Judy Boone

- *'Jesus, Christopher, I am seriously considering putting you in a home…'*
- Judy's abandonment of her child
- *'she was a very hot-tempered person'*
- *'But then everything was OK…and the doctor gave her pills to take every morning to stop her feeling sad.'*

Key Incidents

- When referring to the key incidents, discuss:

✓ How this incident conveys a character's personality, values, relationships with others and/or attitude to life and people.

✓ How the incident advances the story and/or adds to the mystery.

✓ The idea/s conveyed by the incident.

✓ How you personally respond to the incident.
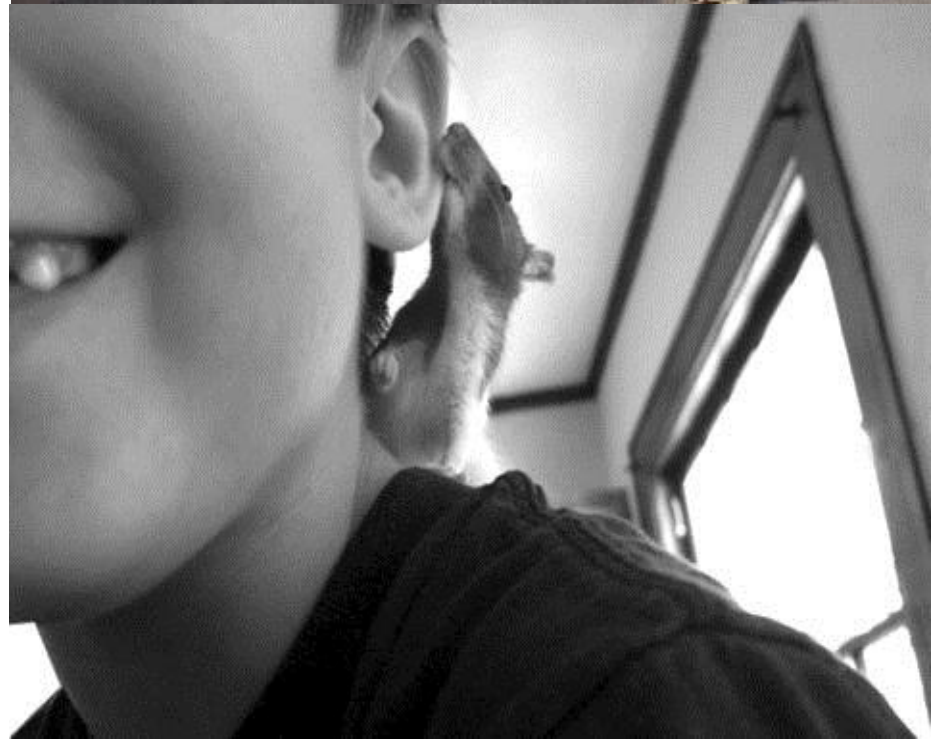
Key Incidents

- One such incident could be when Christopher first arrives in London, and his disability proves to be a major disadvantage. His experiences on the train and in the underground when he almost dies trying to rescue his pet rat Toby are harrowing.

- This incident advances our understanding of how Christopher's disability makes him so vulnerable. It reveals Christopher's loyalty and care for animals. Remember that the initial case that he had to solve was the murder of Wellington the poodle.

- When you realise how close Christopher came to being killed by the train and consider this along with his reflections on the earth and all of its inhabitants dying, you are confronted with the fragility of his life and you fear for his future.

Developing a Thesis

- Focus on developing, sustaining and supporting a thesis or line of argument
- Developing detailed tables
- Mind/concept maps
- Working on introductions
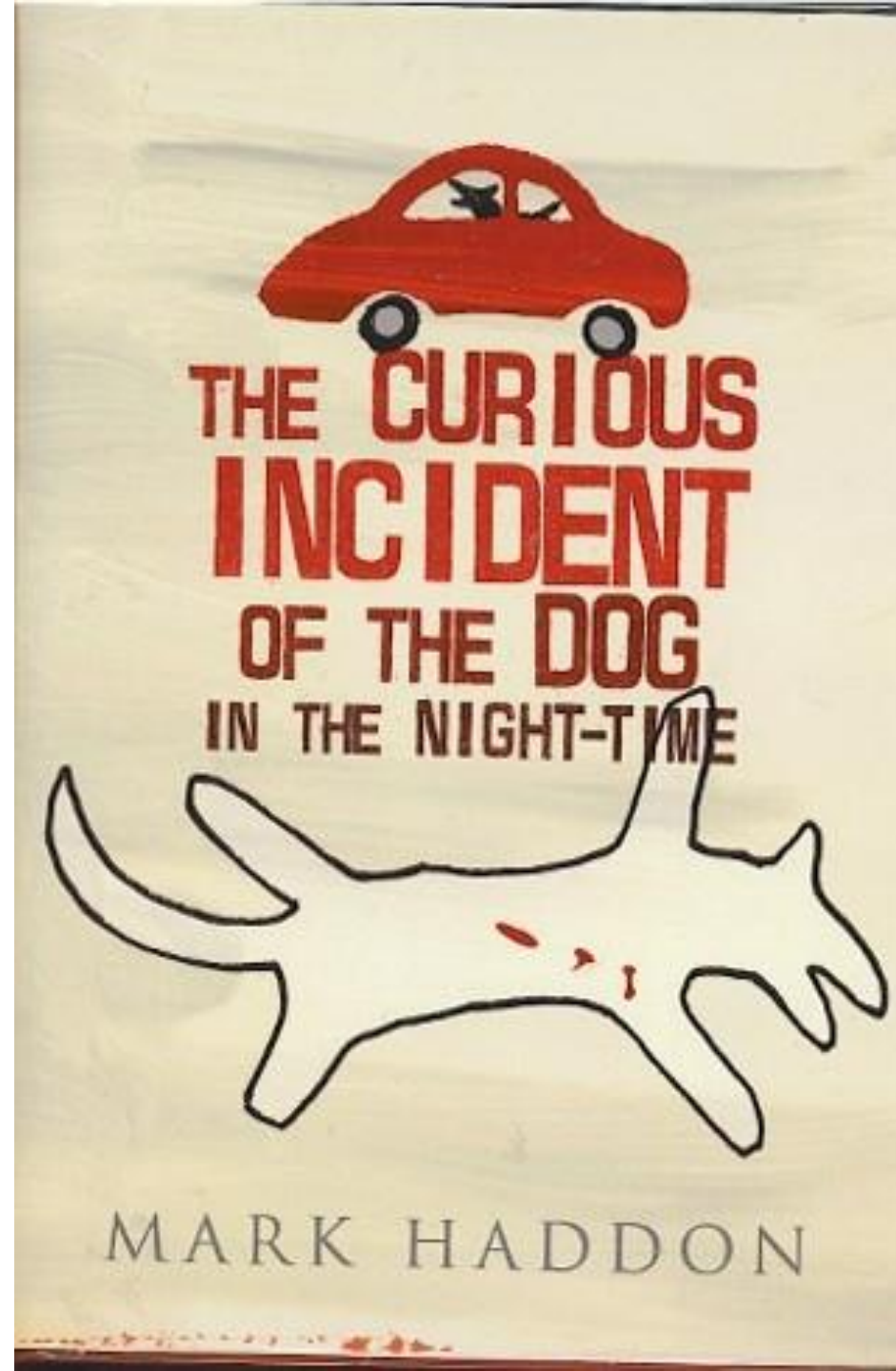
Developing a Thesis

- A thesis or line of argument should reflect your perception and understanding of the novel and its key ideas. It will be used to shape and direct your extended response and will be supported and/or challenged by the textual details and features that you use from the novel.

- You need to include topic sentences in each paragraph that further your line of argument and are supported by your main points and examples. They are a signal to the marker that your response is cohesive and logical, and that your line of argument is sustained.

Responding

- "When we read novels we encounter interesting characters who invite our empathy and understanding."

- Select a character from your novel, and discuss why you found this character interesting or uninteresting.

EL CURIOSO
INCIDENTE DEL
PERRO A
MEDIANOCHE
MARK HADDON

narrativa
salamandra
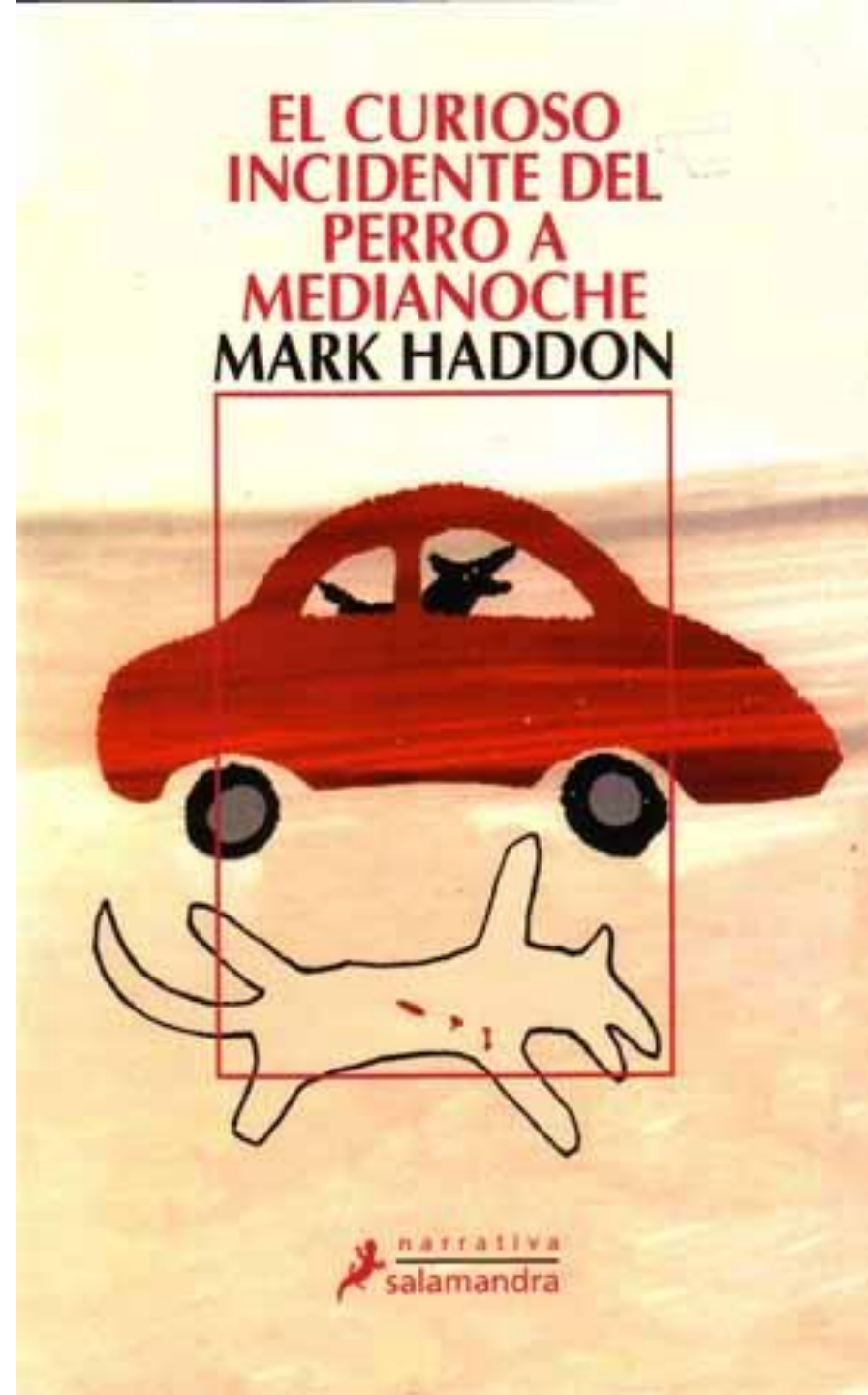
Responding

Refer to what you found interesting about the character, such as:

- How the character responded to what they experienced

- The character's personality, attitudes, actions and relationships with others

- Key ideas raised by the character

- The language features and dialogue used to represent this character

Final Preparation

- Compose an essay that focuses on textual integrity: why this novel is valued.

- Refer to:

- The interesting characters and the setting that provides a framework

- The structure and language features

- Important incidents

- The ideas!

- Your personal response

http://karenygr.wordpress.com/2010/05/15/karens-notes-for-crime-writing/