

# EDUQAS: A Level Drama – Component 3 – The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Simon Stephens

## Original Performance

- National Theatre Production
- First performed at the Cottesloe Theatre in 2012 and then transferred to the Apollo Theatre in 2013
- Directed by Marianne Elliott, Stage design – Bunny Christie, Lighting – Paule Constable, Movement: Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett (Frantic Assembly)
- The original production, in the Cottesloe Theatre, was in the round and the performance space was small. The positioning of the audience around the action had various implications. Firstly, the audience itself was raked and looked down on the space, surrounding the action and joining Christopher’s world. The implications for set meant that for the audience to see all the action, there could not be a large set, so the design focus for location and atmosphere was mainly on lighting, costume and sound effects.
- The implication for the actors was that they were free to move in the space; however, more stationary characters like Siobhan were conscious that they had their backs to the audience. Once the production transferred to the West End, the play was in a proscenium theatre, which gave wider opportunities for the use of space, set and props, lighting and sound. The physical movements were reworked for the space and to interact with the set. This bigger venue made the whole production more dynamic.

## Performance Conditions

- Lights – Projection, such as strobe lighting and pixel mapping is used on the floor and walls to enhance setting but to also help us understand what life ‘looked like’ in Christopher's world .
- Sound – A Large amount of music and speech is projected to enhance our understanding of Christopher's World, for example at the train station the music helps us understand Christopher’s anxiety, train announcements are also used in this scene to enhance the narrative.
- Set – There is a Perspex floor to show the lighting more effectively. The floor is checked black and white but can be written on in chalk therefore there is interaction with the set. They use ‘blocks’ to represent objects and setting e.g. the train, simple props are also used to assist the narrative e.g. backpack and map.
- Costume – Simple, modern clothing to enhance character e.g. police uniform for the police officer

## Creative Team

<b>Director</b>	Marianne Elliott
<b>Designer</b>	Bunny Christie
<b>Lighting Designer</b>	Paule Constable
<b>Video Designer</b>	Finn Ross
<b>Movement Directors</b>	Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett from Frantic Assembly
<b>Music</b>	Adrian Sutton
<b>Sound Designer</b>	Ian Dickinson
<b>Associate Director</b>	Katy Rudd
<b>Resident Director</b>	Ashley Scott-Lay
<b>Fight Director</b>	Kate Waters



## Historical Context

- Christopher is likely on the autism spectrum, though this is never explicitly stated.
- Autism was not recognized until the twentieth century, and for many years, it was regarded without question as a disorder for which a cure needed to be found.
- The autism rights movement began in the late 1980s and is still gaining strength, led by autistic people who believe that they need no cure; instead, society needs to change its perspective on autistic people.
- Christopher matters more as a character for his unique perspective on the world than for the fact that he is probably on the autism spectrum.

## Style and Origin

<b>Acting Style</b>	Physical Theatre
<b>Design Style</b>	Minimalism
<b>Origins</b>	<p>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time was originally a novel and has been adapted by Simon Stephens into play form. This version of the text is meant to be seen in performance. The staging of the play is original and contributes massively to how the audience perceive the events and characters on stage.</p> <p>The play fits into three possible genres - a family drama, a crime mystery and a coming of age story or bildungsroman (tells us about the psychological development of the main character.</p>

## Structure

1. The initial structure of the play imitates a murder mystery, as Christopher tries to solve the murder of Wellington. It then takes on the form of a personal journey or quest. The audience innocently joins him in this.
2. Christopher must overcome challenges on his journey from Swindon to London – some of which appear very ordinary perhaps to the audience, but seen through his eyes, they engage in the difficulties he has in processing the world.
3. Wrapped around this narrative is the play within a play structure. This is evident in the narration from Christopher’s book, mostly performed by his mentor, Siobhan, who engages in dialogue about the events with him. Other characters speak his words to move the action forward or to allow the audience to stand back from the action.
4. Christopher’s response to events is often very sensual and overwhelming for him.
5. The distancing effect of the play within a play structure enables the audience to take a breath and process the emotions or action – something we see Christopher cannot do in his experience of the world. It therefore has the effect of developing empathy and hopefully understanding of his condition.
6. Scenes blend together, helping to maintain the pace of the action and imitate the thought processes and energy of storytelling.
7. The opening note states “scenes run into one another without interruption regardless of alterations in space or time or chronology”. Scenes move from reality to visual landscapes of the imagination, as if recreating the way the mind becomes distracted or attracted to other things as you tell your tale.
8. The position of these poetical and illusionary scenes contrasts harshly with the juxtaposition of moments of blunt reality of everyday life. Christopher’s childish imagination reminds the audience of simpler times when the world was not so frantic and stressful. This encourages them to escape into them again.
9. The final scene, when Christopher steps forward to solve the Maths question, returns him to the safety of what he knows and what is safe.
10. The impact on the audience is to see exactly how he excels where the majority of them do not, thus highlighting the strengths and weaknesses we all possess, and encourages a response of acceptance.
11. Christopher “appears rising through the centre trap. There is very cool, electro music.” This theatrical entrance gives him the status he deserves for his talents and finally breaks the fourth wall, making him a part of the audience’s world.

## Synopsis

1. The play opens with fifteen-year-old Christopher Boone standing over the dead body of a dog. It has been impaled with a garden fork. The dog belongs to Mrs Shears, one of Christopher’s neighbours. He decides to find out who has murdered Wellington, the dog. He records the facts he discovers in a book. This book is read out during the play by his teacher and mentor, Siobhan.
2. While searching for the murderer of the dog, Christopher encounters his neighbours and other people he considers “strangers”. He struggles to decipher their behaviour. This investigation throws a light on his relationship with his father, Ed. He has been brought up by his father since his mother’s ‘death’. During the course of the action, it is discovered that his mother isn’t dead and that she is living in London, and that his father is the one who killed Wellington.
3. Christopher is distraught and confused by his findings and runs away to his mother’s house. This journey from his home in Swindon to London is overwhelming for him, but he eventually finds his mother. Finally, he returns home to take his A level Maths exam. This return to the safety and security of what he understands is calming. He receives the highest mark possible. This, however, is not the end of the play. After the “story” ends, Christopher steps forward to the audience and brilliantly solves his favourite mathematics question from the exam. This confirms to the audience the ‘savant’ nature of Christopher’s personality.
4. Although his Asperger’s condition isn’t directly referred to in the play, it reveals itself gradually throughout the action. The audience sees and experiences his different approach and reaction to situations. In this way, the audience walks with him and sees the world in a different but equally curious way.

## Communication

- The form of the play is very familiar. The use of narration and personal experience draws the audience in to the experiences of the character. However, each of the character’s voices are different, both in their pattern of speech and what they say about who they are.
- Siobhan is able to question and guide Christopher throughout and perhaps becomes the voice of the audience. She asks questions on our behalf – “Did it make you sad to find this out?” [P31].
- Christopher’s difficulty in being understood makes us see that the language we use and its context are sometimes inadequate when trying to convey a message. That is why the visual imagery and the use of the performance space, music, lighting and sound enhance communication or say what words cannot.
- The language of the play breaks down [P65] and becomes signs which mean nothing to Christopher and reflect the excessive bombardment of words in our lives. Words surround us but mean little. With all these words surrounding them, the characters still struggle to find the right words to say what they want to.



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## Characters

<b>Christopher</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Christopher Boone is a fifteen-year-old autistic boy who is the narrator of the play.</li> <li>Christopher attends a school for students with special needs, but he is something of a math genius, and he is very interested in science too.</li> <li>He likes order and logic, and tries to solve any problem using logic.</li> <li>He can remember an astonishing amount of facts and figures, and his ambition is go to university and eventually become a scientist.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He has a much harder time handling feelings and emotions, which he does not understand well.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Siobhan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Siobhan is Christopher’s teacher at school. She understands him well and knows how to communicate effectively with him.</li> <li>She is his voice of reason and the one person that he trust fully.</li> <li>She often appears when Christopher is overwhelmed with the world around him, almost as a vision to calm him down.</li> </ul>
<b>Ed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After his wife left him to live with Mr. Shears, Ed was left to raise Christopher by himself.</li> <li>He is more patient with the boy than his wife was, and does his best to understand him, but he also finds his son exasperating.</li> <li>Ed cannot think of how to explain to Christopher why his mother is no longer there, so he tells him she is dead.</li> <li>Christopher is frightened of his father and goes to live with his mother. However, Ed makes every effort to make amends and to win back his son’s trust.</li> </ul>
<b>Judy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Christopher’s mother is more hot-tempered than his father, and she found raising Christopher to be a hard task.</li> <li>After Christopher has found his mum Christopher’s mother breaks off her relationship with Mr. Shears, and returns to Swindon, where she and Christopher live together.</li> </ul>
<b>Roger</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Roger was formally married to Mrs Shears whose dog has been killed.</li> <li>He does not get on well with Christopher and does not know how to approach him when he is struggling.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This causes arguments between them.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Themes

### Family

- The familial relationships in the Boone family are at the centre of the play. How a parent approaches parenting and how they balance their own challenges with those of raising a child can be seen in the way Ed struggles to find the right way to communicate with Christopher and how Judy poignantly describes her feelings of inadequacy – “I remember looking at the two of you and seeing you together and thinking how you were different with him. Much calmer...And I think I realised you and your father were probably better off if I wasn’t living in the house.” [P44]
- Another consideration is the impact of the situation on Judy and Ed’s marriage and how they are finally able to parent on their own terms in the best way they can. The challenges of living together as a family are explored when Christopher moves to London and lives with Roger and Judy. This is not an ideal situation and all the characters come to realise there isn’t an ideal way.

- Growing Up
  - Trust
- Truth, Love and Safety
- Logic vs. Emotion
  - Perspective
- Absurdity of the World



### Honesty

- Christopher’s open and non-dissembling approach to life throws into relief the deceit or dishonesty of other characters. Whether it be the lies we tell others, e.g. Ed telling him his mother is dead, or the realisation that we have to face the lies we tell ourselves evident in Judy’s realisation that her relationship with Roger isn’t what she needs.

### Honesty

- All the main characters face challenges that invite them to re-evaluate their circumstances. The play itself is a quest where Christopher challenges everyday life. He overcomes misunderstandings and his fears to achieve his aim. He learns from this quest and becomes resilient and determined to achieve his goal – his A level Maths. Judy and Ed overcome their failings and admit their responsibilities towards Christopher, and they learn to move forward in a better way as a family. Whether it’s the general public or the policeman, they too have to adapt their actions and learn to accommodate Christopher’s needs.
- The whole play opens Christopher’s world, which might be misunderstood by the audience, but his quest is also that of the audience. They too learn to understand and accept his quirks and talents; they are thoroughly impressed by his mathematical ability by the end of the play. The profound message that we, as individuals, are both different but very much the same – all failing, succeeding or just getting by daily – pervades the action of the play. The hope is that this acknowledgement leads to acceptance.

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## Lighting

- Lighting could be used as a way to transform the audience into Christopher’s world and make them understand how Christopher sees the world around him, or how he feels.

### Intensity

- The brightness. Christopher admits that he feels calm when he ‘gets into the airing cupboard...pulls the door closed...and sit there...it makes me feel very calm’
- A designer might look for moments where Christopher is most happy and calm and consider low-level lighting or use lighting to create an enclosed dark space for him.
- In comparison, at moments of extreme tension, such as his altercation with the Policeman, or his trip to the train station, the lighting could switch to being very vivid and intense. As the brightness changes, the audience’s eyes will have to adapt and they may empathise with the fact that Christopher does not find it easy to adapt to these new situations. Bright light makes an audience become more alert and it will help them to understand how anxious Christopher feels.

### Colour

- Colour is very important to Christopher.
- Colour will affect the mood and atmosphere of a scene.
- Christopher’s mood – if he encounters a situation he doesn’t like, you could use yellow, his least favourite colour.
- ‘additive colour mixing’ – mixing two or more different lights each with a different gel to produce a third colour.
- ‘Subtractive colour mixing’ – when two or more different gels are put in front of the same light to produce another colour.

### Form

- Forms that lighting can take dependent on lantern and positioning – e.g. soft diffusion lighting (lighting without shadows) to hard distribution (stark, hard beams of light).
- Distribution = the way lighting is spread. This means you need to think about positioning, angle, etc.
- The size and type of lantern will affect the light produced.
- Fresnel, par-can, spot, flood, etc.

### Movement

- i.e. transitions – the change in lighting from one moment to the next.
- Light movement to move the audience’s attention from one location to another.
- Lights moving with the actor – e.g. if the actor is carrying a torch – could this idea be used when Christopher is out searching for clues to solve the murder of Wellington or when he’s secretly reading his mother’s letters?
- Chase effects, gobo rotators

## Sound

### **Things to consider:**

- Where and when?
- Mood and atmosphere?
- Style?
- Realism?
- Symbolism?
- Effects?
- Fades?
- Speaker positioning?
- Live or recorded?
- Diegetic or non-diegetic?

### **Transitions between sounds – vocab**

- Segue: one sound effect stops and the next one begins.
- Cross-fade: one element fades out, the next fades in and they overlap each other
- V-fade: one element fades to inaudible before the second one begins
- Fade to black: v-fade with some silence between sounds.
- Waterfall: as the first sound fades out, the second sound begins at full volume.

### **Sound Effects**

- In this play, sound can be used as a way of conveying Christopher’s reactions and letting us gain a glimpse into his emotions and feelings, especially because he is a person who finds it hard to vocalise his feelings. (e.g. when Ed grabs his arm and he screams – sound can be used to express Christopher’s horror at being touched).
- Literal effects: sounds used quickly to tell the audience what’s happening (e.g. a literal sound of a tannoy announcement when Christopher is at the train station to help the audience understand the location being created on stage. Background noises like cars beeping, etc. when Christopher is in the street are literal sounds. They are diegetic because the characters on stage would be able to hear them in their world.
- Non-literal effects: things that don’t have a characteristic sound. For example, in that moment when Christopher screams, you could use the sound of an alarm sounding at the point of physical contact. This is non-diegetic because the characters would not be able to hear it in their world – it is used for symbolism or to create mood and atmosphere.
- Consider if you should layer multiple sounds too. E.g. train station layering of announcements, people, luggage being wheeled around, etc. layering lots of sound could help to create Christopher’s sense of anxiety and convey how overwhelmed he feels.

