

Mini-lesson #1a: Student Sample Essay #1

Directions: Read the following student essay and complete the ratiocination guide below. Then, answer the questions that follow.

Ratiocination Guide

As you read, complete the following steps. If you are unsure of what some of these items are, make an educated guess.

- Locate and highlight the thesis statement.
- Locate and highlight the topic sentences and concluding sentences.
- Underline textual evidence (quotations/ paraphrasing).
- Draw brackets around the explanation/ analysis of textual evidence.
- Circle any higher-level vocabulary.

Student Sample Essay #1

Imagine having not being able to understand emotions or read emotions. Christopher Boone is not a typical teenage boy. His world revolves around writing a murder mystery novel as he tries to solve the death of a neighbor's dog—all while having autism. Through this mystery, he learns of the lies and deceit of his father, as he discovers his mother never died of a heart attack and his father is a murderer. When this occurs, Christopher begins to feel afraid, one of the only emotions he is capable of experiencing. In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, author Mark Haddon demonstrates that betrayal leads to courage through situational irony and the characterization of Christopher Boone as a teenager with autism.

Unfortunate experiences and unexpected situations frighten Christopher and force him to grow up, which is depicted through the situational irony of the novel. When Christopher discovers the dishonesty of his father, he “scream[s] and push[es]” him, refusing to speak with him (Haddon 122). The irony of this situation is that Christopher's father had once represented the only safe haven for him in life. However, discovering his father's dishonesty forces Christopher to realize that even his father is not safe and is not perfect. His father's deceit acts as the ironic situation that inspires Christopher to face his fear of leaving his neighborhood. As Christopher flees from his once safe home, he concludes that there is “nothing he [can] do which [feels] safe,” except go to London to find his mother (Haddon 130). Facing the betrayal of his father strips away Christopher's naiveté and acts as the catalyst that gives him the courage to journey to his mother's house. Even though Christopher has not seen his mother in years and had felt betrayed by her as well, he decides to take the risk to visit her and give her a second chance. With his actions, Christopher proves that the unimaginable becomes possible when faced with lies. Ironically, Christopher begins to see that what he once deemed safe is not actually safe and what he deemed dangerous is not actually dangerous—all as a result of witnessing his father's duplicity.

The author also reveals through Christopher's autism that he becomes more courageous and matures because of his father's lies. Christopher's autism forces him to feel continuous anxiety. In fact, he tunes his radio to the “white noise” in

between stations in order to diminish his worries (Haddon 8). In his own personal way, he is able to make his stress and anxiety disappear if only for a moment because he “cannot hear anything else” (Haddon 8). He believes that the scratchy noise will make his concerns vanish. This is not the mark of a person who would be capable of journeying alone through a huge city such as London to find his mother. The fact that minor disturbances send Christopher to his “white noise” radio reflect the fact that he is very insecure and dependent on his safe home for comfort. This is especially emphasized when certain things frighten Christopher so immensely that he becomes “sick,” “curl[s] up on the ground” and groans, sometimes for hours at a time (Haddon 137). Normal everyday occurrences are huge obstacles to Christopher due to his autism, which makes his triumph at the end of the novel even greater when he reaches his mother’s house—all on his own.

In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, Mark Haddon educates the audience about how betrayal can ironically give someone the power to overcome adversity and fear. He shows that even someone with autism is capable of overcoming anxiety in order to discover the truth. In this coming-of-age story, Christopher Boone serves as an example that anything is possible with a bit of courage and inspiration.

Post Questions

1. What is the student’s argument? Paraphrase the argument in your own words.
2. How is the essay structured from beginning to end?
3. How are individual paragraphs structured?
4. How does the writer use textual evidence? How is that evidence formatted?
5. What do you notice about the language of the essay?
6. What else do you notice about the essay?