



# The Achievers Journal

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## Contextualizing Freewill in Lois Lowry's Novel *The Giver*

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### Abstract

*The winner of The Newberry Medal, 'The Giver' is one of the most beloved and successful books for children and young adults. A few countries have prescribed this book in their school curriculum. But at the same time this book has been a matter of controversy among many readers, mainly because of its distinct setting and events. The present paper is an attempt to explore the concept of 'freewill' and 'freedom'. The aim is also to examine the significance of freewill and freedom in Jonas's community and its relationship in leading a meaningful life in the novel.*

**Keywords: freewill, limited, society, choice, authority, control, community**

### Introduction

Life is full of choices and people are the product of their choices. Freewill is the ability to follow one's heart as per one's will without the influence of any outside circumstances. One must be free and independent to ensure freewill in their life. Freewill deals with the ability of a person to make his own choice and independent decision based on his interest and passion. A person should not be influenced by any external circumstances or conditions during making



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choices or decisions; rather he/she should have the liberty to choose their courses of action unrestricted.

Freewill provides empowerment and motivation for a person to make advanced decisions based on willingness. Freewill appears to be limited in the society of *The Giver*, a novel by Lois Lowry. *The Giver* is a science fiction set in a dystopian community in which freewill has been sacrificed for the security and perfection. The novel initially appears to be set in a utopian community, however, as the story gradually unfolds; it is the community of dystopia. Freewill is generally restricted to control the society in the author's world of 'sameness'. Jonas', the protagonist's community is deprived of freewill as roles and responsibilities for the citizen are clearly assigned by authority. Similarly, the society seems to lack other facilities and rights as discussed below.

## **Assignment of Jobs by Authority**

To maintain a total control, a committee of elders restrains the community's lifestyle in detailed regulations to avoid people from making false choices. People must accept the roles prescribed for them by the government as the community being tightly regulated by the system of rigid rules. Based on their judgments, the committee of elder is responsible to decide and assign job to every person in the community. The assignment for children is entirely decided by the Committee of Elders and the children have almost no clue about their future until revealed at



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the ceremony of twelve. In case children failed to comply with the norms and regulations of the society they will be punished or released as per the law of the community. Every year, for instance, the first ceremony is each new child is given a name and handed by the nurturer to its new family unit. At the age of eight, for instance, children receive the identifying jackets with smaller buttons and pocket; get bicycles at the age of nine: at the age of ten each child's hair gets snipped neatly into distinguishing cut, female loses braids, and the twelve year-olds' are assigned the most important assignment that is jobs for their lifetime.

## **The System of Training**

In *The Giver's* community, the training system is one of the effective tools to cultivate dominance of the entire community. The training begins at an early age and the children are extensively trained to be a person who can handle the assignment to support their community. Jonas exposes the challenges and various stages of training system in his community. He endures numerous difficulties while undergoing his training as the Receiver of Memory. Sometimes he hated going to training as he cannot bear the pain and hardship that he has to endure and even nearly gives up his assignment. As Jonas' training of Receiver of Memory progresses, he starts to feel lonely and isolated from his family and friends. His friendship, childhood and freedom seem to be getting farther as Jonas becomes richer with wealth of memories as presented in the novel:



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Jonas Trudged to the bench beside the Storehouse and sat down, overwhelmed with feelings of loss. His childhood, his friendships, and his carefree sense of security- all of these things seemed to be slipping away. With his new, heightened feelings, he was overwhelmed by sadness at the way the others had laughed and shouted, playing at war. But he knew that they could not understand why, without the memories (171).

## **The Rule of Colour**

The community does not understand the concept of colour as the members of the community are not able to see colours. The Giver tells Jonas that it would be very a very long time before the community had the concept of colours. Nevertheless, Jonas learns from the Giver about the names of colours and enjoys their beauty. Jonas begins to see them all in his ordinary life although he knew it was no longer ordinary and would never be again. Whatsoever, since the people's brain in this community is incapable to recognize the colour of the world, save two main colours white and black, Jonas cannot explain the names of colour to the rest of the society.

It happens during the recreation period when Jonas was playing with Asher. Jonas casually picks up an apple from the basket where the snacks were kept, and throws to his friend. Asher throws it back to Jonas and they begin a simple game of catch. There happens to be nothing special about it: it is just an activity that he does countless times. One occasion, when



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Jonas sees the colour of red, the apple's true color, but the only word that he can think to describe the situation is "changed."

## **Control of Information**

The limitation of mass media in *The Giver's* community helps the committee to restrict their people to get information from "elsewhere" (a place out of community). The committee filters the knowledge or information properly, as it is necessary to maintain the domination. Information restriction in this community is perfectly effective to tie the ideology of the people. The committee controls the distribution of information among the people. The people in the community only get selected books for their reading sources. As reflected in *The Giver's* society, the people of the community only know some particular sources of written texts and restriction of information sharing is clearly revealed in a conversation between Jonas and the Giver. As it is represented in the conversation between the Giver and Jonas:

because the books are forbidden to citizens. You and I are the only ones with access to the books. So if I have spouse, and maybe children, I will have to hide the books from them? I wasn't permitted to share the books with my spouse, that's correct. And there are other difficulties, too. You remember the rule that says the new Receiver can't talk about his training (133).



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It is illustrated that the people do not know the word of newspapers or libraries in the community as it is evident from Jonas' feeling of surprise when he visits the Giver's dwelling for the first time. Jonas discovers the Annexe room's walls are completely covered by bookcases, filled, which reaches to the ceiling. Jonas feels amazed to see hundreds, perhaps thousands of books and their titles printed in shiny letters when he visits the Giver for the first time in Annexe room.

## **Rules of Technology**

Jonas' community is highly developed in terms of advancement of technology. Technology units are used to control every aspect of their lives such as; assigning jobs, housing, family units, sexual desires, and to "released," people who fail to obey the rules of the community. It is a crucial aspect of the controlling and monitoring system of the function of the community. One of the main roles of technology in the community is to manipulate and dictate the lives of people inside the society. The society tightly controlled by government which uses advanced technology to operate the system that they have made. This is stated when Jonas' father releases a baby by injecting a liquid into the vein with a syringe.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates the operation of controlling system, surveillance and punishments. The people in this society are strictly observed through CCTV and employed a loudspeaker to remind people of proper behavior, subsequently, limiting the privacy and freedom



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of choice of the people. One time an announcement is made: “ATTENTION. THIS IS A REMINDER TO FEMALES UNDER NINE THAT HAIR RIBBONS ARE TO BE NEATLY TIED AT ALL TIMES” (37).

## **Concept of Family**

In Jonas’ Community, they have a distinct family formation which is closely guided by strict rules and obligations. One of such rules is, a family unit has to raise two children that supplied by the government. Family units are required to raise the assigned kids meaning parents and children are not connected biologically. Children are not delivered through a normal biological process. What they know is that babies are born to “birthmothers” involving the use of advanced reproduction technology, raised by Nurturers in the Nurturing Centers until they reach the community age of one, and then appointed to a family that has been applied for them.

The parents do raise children from a young age but the absence of true love and affection in the family leaves the meaning of family incomplete. Parents and children lack mutual bond and closeness which is integral part of family. Once the children are gone from the home, the family unit splits away and the members lose connection and relationship with one another. Jonas’s parents provide him guidance and help during necessary times, discipline him when he needs it, and celebrate his victories. The depiction of family roles in Jonas’ community is also to strengthen the committee’s dominance.



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## **Rule of Release**

The term “release” in the community refers to killing of a person. A person is released for having three or more crimes. Although release is rare in the community, Jonas loses all his trust and respect for his father upon discovering his father releasing one of the twin babies by using syringe. An elderly person is released at a certain age after entering the House of Old as per the rule of the community. The adults, if they have energy and strength to work and contribute to the community, they can live with other childless adults. When they become older, the time comes; they are no longer required to create family units, they go to the House of the Old. And at certain age they will be released and no longer be seen in the community. Thus “release” is undoubtedly one of the cruelest and deadliest impositions in the society. The community had also released Rosemary after five weeks of her training and it was a disaster for them. The Giver confesses: “I was so devastated by my own grief at her loss, and my own feeling of failure, that I didn’t even try to help them through it. I was angry, too” (82).

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, Jonas’ society is highly advanced where things are regulated and monitored by authority in the hope of smooth functioning and to control disorders and misfortunes in the community. However, people are deprived from memories, freedom of choice, feelings and emotions and other essentials of human life. Citizens in the community are limited from the liberty rather have to fit in the world of ‘sameness’. As a matter of fact, freewill and freedom are





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fundamental attribute for human beings to sustain and survive in this universe. Freewill ensures liberty and autonomy to drive a meaningful life or to achieve life goals, which is extremely essential for any human being. Therefore, besides the importance of memories and emotions, freewill and freedom are fundamental attribute for any society to lead a successful, meaningful, and prosperous life.

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