

2024 Classical Literature Scholarship—1st Place

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Be a Giver

Hot tears streamed down my face as I sat with my head in my hands on the floor of my dark room. My breath came in gasps and my chest shuddered up and down as I silently shook, not wanting to draw the attention of any of my family members. My body was tired but the deepest pain came from the inside. Being alive had never felt like this before. It felt as though someone was squeezing my chest and burning it at the same time. My best friend, mentor, and the closest thing I had to an older sister had left me for the other side of the country to serve a year and a half long mission.

I did what any good book lover does when confronted with sadness. I read my favorite book—*The Giver*. The idea of a community without pain sounded fantastic to me. No more sobbing in the shower, laying on the floor with music blaring in my ears, or biting the inside of my cheek to keep from crying when someone asked how I was doing. Loneliness had become my constant companion, and I wished I could live in a world where I didn't have to feel so utterly alone and miserable. I found solace in my friend Jonas who was exposed to the world of pain after his abrupt selection to be the new Receiver of memory.

Day after day Jonas worked with the Giver and experienced every sort of physical and emotional pain there is to experience. The Giver told him that the reason they must experience pain is because it is only through pain that wisdom can be acquired. Eventually Jonas breaks. “[He] did not want to go back. He didn't want the memories, didn't want the honor, didn't want the wisdom, didn't want the pain. He wanted his childhood again, his scraped knees and ball games” (Lowry 152). This was exactly how I felt after Mia left. Never before had I so fully understood Jonas' longing for simpler times. I wanted to go back to the long summer days spent

with Mia in my backyard or even the short yet meaningful car rides during freshman year. If feeling so alone my chest hurt was the price for wisdom I wasn't sure I wanted to be wise.

Instead of giving up, Jonas presses on. He continues receiving memories and when he must leave the community in order to save the life of his pretend brother Gabriel, he does so without hesitation. For weeks he and Gabriel bike through the countryside barely managing to stay alive. Despite the many difficulties, Jonas never regrets the decision he made to save Gabriel. He welcomed pain because with it came not only wisdom but the ability to feel everything else more deeply.

The situation becomes dire as Jonas and Gabriel grow increasingly weary. The weather becomes cold and when rain introduces itself to the once pain-free boys they both weep. “[Gabriel] cried because he was hungry and cold and terribly weak. Jonas cried, too, for the same reasons, and another reason as well. He wept because he was afraid now that he could not save Gabriel. He no longer cared about himself”(Lowry 128). For the first time in his life, someone else became so important to Jonas that he was no longer concerned with his own struggles. His primary focus became helping someone else.

I was at a boys soccer game when I finally understood what Jonas was feeling while he cried for Gabriel. It was during warmups and I was walking toward a nearby playground with two of the other team managers. I heard someone call my name and I looked back to see Coach Simmons staring at me from the sideline. “Don't just leave her,” he called to me with a look that spoke louder than any words. I glanced to my right and saw my friend Taylor, the fourth manager standing by herself. In an instant, everything made sense. I saw Taylor holding her stomach in pain, Taylor sitting on the stairs crying during lunch, Taylor struggling to find the words to explain the hurt she was feeling. I saw Taylor and realized that I didn't want anyone to

feel as painfully alone as I did. For the first time in my life, someone else became so important that my pain only mattered because it had taught me wisdom, how to feel deeply, and how to love.