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Intertexts: Both Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus* books allude to and often import other media into their narratives (maps, diagrams, other novels, photographs, etc). Discuss the purpose of some of these intertexts in one of these works, and, in your answer, consider whether or not they enhance or frustrate the reading experience.

Mark Haddon
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

In Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* visuals such as diagrams, maps, photographs and excerpts from other novels are used effectively as mediums to enhance the story and the reader's understanding of Christopher, the novel's autistic hero. The images interspersed throughout the novel do not take away from the reading experience. Instead, the illustrations aid in the development of Christopher's character. The intertexts also act harmoniously with Christopher's style of story-telling. The intertexts provide an appropriate accompaniment to the stop-and-go flow of Christopher's staccato sentences.

A novel is meant to arouse the imagination based on detailed and elegant descriptions but Christopher does not understand metaphors or other literary devices and has trouble using elaborate and descriptive words. This sets a limit on the complexity of the language Christopher is able to use in his book. Christopher describes his surroundings, such as his backyard, with very simple sentences and basic words; "at the bottom of the garden is a shed. It has a lawn mower and the hedge cutter in it" (Pg 124). These short sentences and unexpressive words do not sufficiently fuel the imagination. Christopher has hardly finished describing the first object before he switches to another, without letting the reader know if the previous item was red, green, or blue. The lack of vivid depictions in the novel limits the reader's imagination but makes the language level appropriate for its autistic narrator. Therefore, incorporating diagrams and other media into the novel does not subtract from the potential for imagination - they augment it. Visual explanations in the novel also serve to decrease the confusion the reader experiences. Christopher understands mathematical theories and aspects of life which the reader may not be familiar with. Though these difficult concepts cannot be removed from the novel since they are an important part of Christopher's character, they can be simplified through visual representation. "Then she drew some other pictures (...) but I was unable to say what these meant" (Pg 3); Christopher does not understand emotions and therefore is unable to explain what the pictures his teacher, Siobhan, drew without using a diagram. By incorporating a sharp, simplistic picture of what these faces look like, the reader is able to know what Christopher has seen but cannot understand or

describe. The mathematics presented in the book would also be hard to visualize and comprehend if Christopher did not provide diagrams to illustrate his thought process. “First you write down all the positive whole numbers in the world. (...) Then you take away all the numbers that are multiples of 2. Then you take away all the numbers that are multiples of 3.” For a reader to be left to figure out how prime numbers are found based on a purely textual description would make the reading experience less enjoyable.

The complexity of the subject matter found in some sections of the book could lead the reader to skip that area simply because he or she does not understand what Christopher is trying to articulate. His lack of verbal communication skills make the novel difficult to read without the aid of diagrams and pictorial explanations. With the inclusion of these images, the reader is able to enjoy every aspect of the novel and further understand Christopher’s mentality. The complexity of Christopher’s mind is revealed in the way he makes decisions. While trying to reach a conclusion about which course of action to take after he has run away from home, Christopher envisions a chart of his options and then “[he imagines] crossing out all the possibilities which were impossible” (Pg 130). The way his brain functions would not be as easily understood without a portrayal of how he was processing his options.

The insertion of other novels and literature into Christopher’s novel shapes his character. “[He does] not know,” (Pg 5) the meaning of some lines from Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* that use metaphors; yet he likes Sherlock Holmes because he “doesn’t believe in the supernatural” (Pg 74). Christopher’s appreciation of Sherlock Holmes shows that he has a logical and deductive mind. He does not get pleasure from the parts of the Sherlock Holmes novels that use elaborate descriptive language to represent a person since he “doesn’t know what some hardness, perhaps of eye means, and [he is] not interested in faces” (Pg 71). The material Christopher reads ranges outside of what the average fifteen year old boy would read. Christopher reads articles that involve science and mathematics. The superiority of Christopher’s mind is really highlighted when he writes about “a famous story called The Monty Hall Problem” (Pg. 62). The problem is quoted in the book followed by

reviews from various experts that claim the mathematical content of this problem is incorrect.

Astonishingly, Christopher does not pay any mind to these educated critics as he comically dismisses their comments and moves on to explain the problem in such a way that any grade school student could comprehend the concepts. By inserting the article into the novel and using this mathematical question, Haddon allows the reader to form an opinion about just how intelligent Christopher is.

Computer games and television are also mentioned in Christopher's story. Instead of watching programs such as WWE or Motocross, Christopher enjoys videos like "Blue Planet [which is] about life in the deepest parts of the ocean" (Pg 79). He enjoys programs like this "because it shows you that there is always something new that science can discover" (Pg 80). The narrative delves deeper into Christopher's genius by the subtle mention of an intricate game called Minesweeper. The average person might not play this game for recreational purposes, but Christopher enjoys minesweeper as if it was a trouble-free, relaxing activity. In one sitting he "played 76 games (...) and did the Expert Version in 102 seconds, which was only 3 seconds off [his] best time, which was 99 seconds" (Pg 21). The incorporation of this game in the story displays how quickly Christopher is able to understand mathematical material and logical problems.

The different types of media inserted into the *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* enhance the reading process. The sudden stops to integrate different images work well with the choppy transitions in the novel. Each time Christopher is about to supplement his writing with an image or diagram, he uses the phrase "like this," (Pg 88) to relate the forthcoming illustration to the preceding paragraph simply and succinctly. The need for Christopher to supplement his language with diagrams and images wordlessly describes the trouble he has communicating using normal language. The rational and technical media presented in the narrative give the reader insight into how brilliant Christopher truly is. Therefore, the use of intertexts in the novel positively contributes to the understanding and appreciation of the autistic mind.