



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Making the Change in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Social Justice through Lois Lowry's *The Giver* Quartet

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Social issues and the social responsibility of individuals play an important role in Lois Lowry's Quartet. They represent the core elements that all the events in the Quartet are about. Each book depicts a society that needs to be changed, since these societies are represented as malfunctioning and cannot prosper unless there is some kind of change that would turn them into suitable places for living. This paper will focus on the Quartet's young protagonists at their missions to achieve social justice to argue that the Quartet exhibits four necessary elements and conditions for social justice to take place. These elements are: the absence of parents, the presence of unsympathetic or dysfunctional societies, the young adults' need and tendency to run away, and finally, the gifts that those protagonists possess and the sacrifices they have to make. Understanding the necessity of these elements in young adult texts would help us understand the nature of those young characters' motives and reasons for embarking upon such missions.

By linking these four elements with Havighurst's (1952) "Adolescents Developmental Tasks" and Stover and Tway's (1972) adolescents' common concerns, I will move the discussion to how teachers can use these four elements in their attempts of teaching social justice through the Quartet. This discussion will provide teachers with

ways to engage their students with these texts regarding what those students can tell about their roles in achieving social justice.

Making the Change in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Social Justice through Lois

Lowry's *The Giver* Quartet

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by

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“Things could change, Gabe. Things could be different. I don’t know how, but there must be some way for things to be different” (Lowry 161).

These are the words of Lois Lowry's 12-year-old protagonist, Jonas, who is on a mission to change the community he is living in and to fulfill a promise that things will definitely change in his world. With these words, Jonas declares his dream of change, his vision of a colorful future, and his hope for a better world.

### **Introduction**

Social issues and the social responsibility of individuals play an important role in Lois Lowry's Quartet. These represent the core elements that all the events in the Quartet are about. Each book depicts a society that needs to be changed, since these societies are represented as malfunctioning and ones that cannot prosper unless there is some kind of change that would turn them into suitable places for living. Therefore, change here is not an option but a necessity. Each book in the Quartet represents a community that has three elements: governmental authority, oppressed people, and young characters who try to make changes to the community. These elements can prompt young readers to consider issues of social justice and, perhaps, to act to achieve it in their own lives. Thus, this paper will focus on those characters in Lowry's Quartet and their missions to achieve social justice.

The first book in Lois Lowry's Quartet, *The Giver*, came out in 1993, followed by *Gathering Blue* in 2000, then *Messenger* in 2004, and finally concluded with *Son* in 2012. However, the Quartet's most distinctive recognition is the one that *The Giver* received by winning the 1994 Newberry Award for the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children. My work here is to point out what makes this Quartet gain this spectacular attention from readers. One possible answer to investigating the Quartet's



fame is derived from its ability to touch upon sociological and political themes. Susan G. Lea examines the text of *The Giver* and tries to fill in the gaps in the text by applying several lenses of racism, power, and social structure in order to support her claim that *The Giver* is considered “an investigation of universal fears of the unknown and of difference, and its implications for our historical and current notions of race, colorblindness, and social injustice” (Lea 52). It is also valid to expand Lea's claim to include the other three books in the Quartet, since Lowry skillfully touches upon several sociological and political issues not only in *The Giver*, but throughout the other three texts in her Quartet.

Most scholarly research about the Quartet lies in the depiction of the young characters and their missions of achieving social justice and the effects of these books on young readers' minds. Another area of research is the possibility of using these books and many other young adult texts in the classrooms in order to teach students about their roles and how to function in their societies, and, perhaps, to consider issues of social justice in their own communities. Jacqueline N. Glasgow asserts that “Young adult literature provides a context for students to become conscious of their operating world view and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations” (54). Indeed, young adult texts have this ability of enriching the students' minds and their awareness of contemporary political and sociological issues, and in particular, issues like social justice. Likewise, James A. Banks, the director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, notes that “A literacy education that focuses on social justice can make a major contribution to preparing students to be thoughtful and active citizens of their nation and the world” (19). By acknowledging these potentials of young adult texts, I will deal with Lois Lowry's Quartet and investigate the four books to argue that these texts exhibit elements that could be used by teachers to help young

students understand the concept of social justice and how to achieve it. In particular, I will argue that the Quartet exhibits elements and conditions that are necessary for achieving social justice. These elements include: the absence of parents, the presence of unsympathetic or dysfunctional societies, the young adults' need and tendency to run away, and finally, the sacrifices those young adults have to make. Understanding the necessity of these elements in young adult texts would help us understand the nature of those young characters' motives and reasons for embarking upon such missions. This investigation, I hope, will consequently inform the attempts of teaching social justice through Young Adult Literature and provide teachers with ways to engage the students with these texts and what they can tell about their roles in achieving social justice.

I will begin my discussion by defining the term *social justice* and by looking at the theme of social justice in young adult texts and how they are treating several aspects of social justice. This also includes a section where I discuss how the utopia/dystopia genre is considered a place where topics and issues of social justice might best be explored. Then, I will move the discussion to analyzing Lowry's Quartet by closely examining the four necessary elements and conditions for social justice to take place in each book of the Quartet. This analysis will be followed then by pedagogical discussions on the ways teachers can use these texts in classrooms as tools for encouraging students to be effective members in their communities and to think critically about their roles in their societies.

## Chapter One: Young Adult Literature and Social Justice

The term *Young Adult Literature* often confuses people, leading them to assume that young adult texts are just “children's books,” but this is absolutely a false assumption. One look at the definitions of both terms can make the distinction clear for those who believe that Young Adult Literature and Children's Literature are the same. Alleen Pace Nilson et al. define Young Adult Literature as “anything that readers between the approximate ages of twelve and eighteen choose to read either for leisure or to fill school assignment,” where children's literature, on the other hand, includes “books released by the juvenile or junior division of a publisher and intended for children from prekindergarten to about sixth grade” (3).

But even though we have such clear distinction between these two terms, some people still find it hard to differentiate between them. This confusion could be cleared up when we recognize that many young adult texts are now competing with the classic or canonical texts by dealing with complex political and sociological issues like wars, sexual orientations, race, religion, and so forth—issues that children's books cannot discuss or exhibit due to the intended audience's age. Moreover, a lot of the young adult books are raising some concerns among educators and parents. These concerns are usually accompanied with requests of censorship and banning for several books. James A. Davis points out that some of the objections to these books are due to the concerns that they contain, “discussion of religions, magic, witchcraft, ... one world government, ... homosexuality, ... violence, ... behavior inappropriate for children, racist terms, ... depressing content” (170). As a result of these concerns, organizations such as the American Library Association (ALA) has its updated lists for challenged books for each year and across several genres, and through a quick look at the reasons behind

challenging these books, either by censorship or banning, we see clearly the level of attention these books are getting not only by “children” but also by teachers, parents and education decision makers. It is worth mentioning here that *The Giver* has been one of the most controversial and challenged books since its publishing, being in 11<sup>th</sup> place in ALA's list of the 100 most frequently challenged books for the period of 1990 to 1999 and in the 23<sup>rd</sup> place for the period of 2000 to 2009. Susan Stewart notes that the novel “elicits complaints due to its depiction of infanticide, euthanasia, and the descriptions of Jonas’s 'stirrings,' or puberty-driven sexual awakening” (21). Therefore, these concerns about the influence of these young adult texts must be accompanied by a thorough investigation of the texts and an extensive analysis of the topics and themes they represent. One of these themes in Young Adult Literature is the theme of social justice.

Social justice becomes a crucial theme in many young adult texts. Books like *Sold* by Patricia McCormick, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, and *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* by Phillip Hoose are just examples of Young Adult Literature texts that talk about social justice issues. Achieving a more just society appears to be the lofty goal for many young adult characters. Often when reading a young adult book, readers will encounter a young character, usually the protagonist of that text, trying to change the way his or her community is living. This character is always occupied with the goal of having a community where every member has his or her rights. This goal embodies the notion of social justice that is often stressed in these texts.

But before going any further, let us look at what is the meaning of social justice in the first place. Joseph Zajda, Suzanne Majhanovich, and Val Rust in a discussion of social justice and education, note that “Most conceptions of social justice refer to an

egalitarian society that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognises [sic]the dignity of every human being" (9-10). David Miller, in his 1976 book, *Social Justice*, asserts that social justice is a subdivision of the general meaning of justice. After arguing that "a just state of affairs" is the primary use when we talk about justice (17), Miller defines it as "that in which each individual has exactly those benefits and burdens which are due to him by virtue of his personal characteristics and circumstances" (20). He then defines *social justice* as being different from legal justice in that it "concerns the distribution of benefits and burdens throughout a society, as it results from the major social institutions—property systems, public organizations, etc." Miller also points that social justice "deals with such matters as the regulation of wages and ... profits, the protection of persons' rights through the legal system, the allocation of housing, medicine, welfare benefits, etc." (22). Another definition of social justice is given by William Frankena as "the equal (though not always similar) treatment of all persons, at least in the long run" (23). What stands out most in Frankena's definition is his distinction between equal and similar treatments since "individual needs and capacities differ, and what constitutes the good life for one individual may not do so for another" (20). Frankena later defines the just society as the "one which respects the good lives of its members and respects them equally" (20). But what do all these meanings and definitions of justice and social justice mean to young adults? And why is it important for young adults to understand and learn about social justice?

For young adults, a just community is the one in which individuals, especially teens, have the right to be different and independent. This means that racial, religious, and any other type of differences are recognized to be celebrated rather than

discriminated. Oftentimes, young adult texts have a character who is being depicted as different and alien to the other young characters in that text to emphasize the importance of being different. This depiction attracts most young adults because of the normal feelings of not belonging and alienation among this age group. This focus on differences in Young Adult texts is a major key in understanding one of the main concepts of social justice, which is the right to be different. Young adults are now reading books that deal with characters of the same age as the readers who are struggling in their societies just because they are different. This could create the type of awareness and appreciation of differences among those young adults, and it is this awareness that should be the goal of any teacher who wants to teach about social justice. Fortunately, the teachers' job here could be considered easy when we know that Young Adult books featuring characters who engage in missions of changing the world around them are appealing to the young readers. Moira Young writes in *The Guardian* about this connection between young readers and the characters they find in Young Adult books: "The outer, global journey of the characters is matched by an inner, emotional and psychological journey. These are no cartoon superheroes. They, like their teen readers, have to deal with recognisable [sic] concerns and problems, including friendship, family, betrayal, loss, love, death and sexual awakening." All of these topics and the depiction of those characters are the main reasons for the huge popularity of these texts among young adults, which, as mentioned earlier, could make the teachers' task of discussing social justice themes and issues much easier.

Another meaning for social justice for young adults comes when young adult texts depict a character who is not accepting the way the adults in his community are behaving toward some issues. This turns into a type of activism in which this young character

strives to change his or her society to be a better place. Even inside their smaller communities, teens in young adult texts are depicted as rebels in their homes; they do not like the way their parents are dealing with them and want to change it. Moreover, young adults have the ability to see and spot any kind of injustice or inequality in their society, and unlike most adults, they instantly think of ways to change these situations. This tendency to change the society becomes a major topic in most of Young Adult Literature texts. Mike Robert asserts in his article about the theme of change in Young Adult Literature that “Adolescence means change in so many ways: socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Change is central to adolescents' ability to answer 'Who am I?' ... and 'How do I shape the world?’” (121). It is on this end that Young Adult Literature does not only present the concept of social change and social justice to the young readers but also shows them how they might change even complex issues of race, sexism, discrimination, and other social issues. This meaning of social justice through a young adult perspective is what I am going to build on throughout the next sections of this paper.

### **Utopian/Dystopian Literature and Social Justice**

From all the different genres of Young Adult Literature, dystopian/utopian texts appear to be the most fertile place for the theme of social justice. Melissa Ames explores the dystopian adolescent literature in regards to the tragedy of 9/11, contending that “reading these texts may be a small step in the direction of engaging students in social justice issues and, perhaps, sparking more overt political action” (4). Away from Ames' narrow focus on post 9/11 YA Literature, Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, in their introduction of the book *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, provide a definition for the utopian and dystopian societies and many reasons for this genre to be the perfect place for discussing social justice issues. They define the utopian

society as the one that “strives toward perfection, has a delineated social system, and is described in reasonably specific details.” While dystopias on the other hand “are likewise precise descriptions of societies, ones in which the ideals for improvement have gone tragically amok” (Hintz and Ostry 3). The creation of these utopian and dystopian societies produces the space that enables readers to see their own societies, which in turn helps in providing the chance to critique them; Hintz and Ostry add, “Utopian literature encourages young people to view their society with a critical eye, sensitizing or predisposing them to political action” (7). In addition to this, utopian and dystopian writings can teach young readers about “social organization” (7); young readers can learn through these texts the meaning and function of several social terms and concepts, such as authority, individuals, activism and many other terms and concepts related to social justice.

Another advantage of utopian and dystopian literature, particularly within the field of Young Adult Literature, is its ability to encourage young readers to think and to ask questions about political and social issues. The current educational system is blamed that it is not doing its job in preparing students to face economic challenges, and this led to Stephen Wolk asserting that schools “have largely become factories for producing workers and test-takers” (46). Wolk adds that “Rather than being strictly economy-centered and work-centered, our classrooms and curriculums should be life-centered, student-centered, democracy-centered, community-centered, and world-centered” (46). One way of achieving this is through Young Adult Literature, which might be as Wolk notes “the perfect medium for teachers to use to truly engage their students in the cultivation of civic habits of mind” (46). Furthermore, it is utopia in particular that Pearl Goodwin thinks can prompt students “to achieve their potentials,” since it causes



“students to ask, 'What are we' and 'What can we become?’” (66). This process of stimulating the students' skills of inquiry is crucial in understanding the world around them and, therefore, making their missions of changing their societies attainable. This brings us to one of the most important skills that teachers should have in mind when dealing with young adults in their classrooms, which is the skill of critical thinking that students can master by reading and discussing issues related to their roles in the society in Young Adult Literature. It is on this point that I decided to choose Lois Lowry's *The Giver* Quartet to be the tool that can be used in classrooms to teach about social justice.

## Chapter Two: Social Justice in Lois Lowry's Quartet

In this section, I will discuss the Quartet texts to investigate the presence of the four elements as necessary conditions to achieve social justice. I will do this by focusing on one element at a time and the presence of this element in each book. I will start with the first necessary element for social justice to take place, which is the presence of unjust, unsympathetic, and dysfunctional societies in the Quartet.

### **The Society in the Quartet:**

Social justice represents the prevailing theme in Lowry's first novel in the Quartet, *The Giver*, and constitutes its central message. The goal of changing the society where differences are not allowed, and where every single aspect of its people's lives is controlled and determined by the authority, is what the protagonist of this novel, Jonas, is seeking. *The Giver* is a novel that tells the story of a twelve-year-old boy, Jonas, who is on a mission to change the way the members of his society live. The novel begins with depicting the strict rules of the society and how things are quite controlled to the extent that even saying "I'm starving" when meaning "hungry" is considered a lie and Jonas has to be "taken aside for a private language lesson" (*The Giver* 89). The story goes on until the time when the society has an annual ceremony that determines the lives of the people in several ways. At this important ceremony, newborn children are assigned to their approved families, the children are named, each age group is celebrated as it advances in the community, and—crucially—twelve-year-old children are assigned their future jobs and positions in the community. Jonas is among those who are being assigned their jobs, and his job turns out to be the new receiver of memory in the community. Jonas then is required to see the one whom he would replace, the Giver, to know more about the job, and to start the phase of Jonas's transformation and development.

Jonas's new role is basically the job where a person has all the memories and events of the world that the other members of the community do not have. The job is very important and it is there because the Elders in the Committee of Elders see it is important to have someone with these memories to ask when they need advice. These memories and events are currently in the possession of an old man in the community who is called the Giver, and Jonas needs to meet with him and take all these memories and events. Consequently, the Giver starts transmitting memories to Jonas: memories of happiness, pain, war, colors, and many others. Among these memories, one day Jonas saw his father releasing one of the newborn identical twins and realizes for the first time that “release” is nothing but killing the person who is being released. This causes Jonas a great deal of pain, and this shock triggers the conversation between Jonas and the Giver about the memories and how they “need to be shared,” and the Giver tells Jonas, “having you here with me over the past year has made me realize that things must change. For years I've felt that they should, but it seemed so hopeless” (*The Giver* 193).

Finally, Jonas decides to escape from the community and to take Gabriel, the newborn boy who is having troubles adjusting to the community and, therefore, is sentenced to be “released.” He left without anything to help except the strong desire to succeed and the memories that the Giver has given to him. Jonas faces different kinds of hardships starting with escaping a rigidly controlled community to surviving extreme weather with an infant with him: “Gabriel had not cried during the long frightening journey. Now he did. He cried because he was hungry and cold and terribly weak. Jonas cried, too, for the same reasons” (*The Giver* 218). At the end of the novel, Jonas and Gabe succeed in reaching Elsewhere, and Jonas for the first time is able to hear “something he knew to be music. He heard people singing” (*The Giver* 225).

The most prominent condition in the novel that necessitates a movement toward social justice is the status of the novel's society. In her utopian/dystopian novel, Lowry presents an imaginative community where everything is supposed to be perfect, but it turns out to be a society riddled with social injustice. Perhaps the best way to describe this society is as Susan Lea says that it is “a seductive world where there is a comfortable order, a harmony and routine of life that lacks pain, conflict, or grief” (52). But Lea also adds that the story becomes more “alarming” when we realize that the society lacks “emotions, choice, art, music, color” (52). The Giver also says to Jonas that “We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others” (*The Giver* 120). However, the community in the novel shows three main features that could be regarded as the reasons for Jonas to go on his mission of changing it. These features are: the fact that the community is secluded and isolated from any other community; the elimination of differences among people; and the current status of its people as accepting their way of living in such society and conditions.

The community where Jonas lives is set to be isolated from the outer world. Its people have never known any other place other than their community, except the short visits the school organizes for the students. Other than these school visits, there is no interaction of any sort between the community and the other communities around it. Jonas astonishingly says to the Giver when he (the Giver) tells him that he is going to transfer the memories of the whole world to Jonas that, “I don't know what you mean when you say 'the whole world' or 'generations before him.' I thought there was only us” (*The Giver* 98). Not only does Jonas think this way, but the other people in the community refer to any other place as the “Elsewhere,” not knowing exactly if there are any other places out there. This isolation makes it easy for the authority to implement any

rule it wants and never be criticized by its people. People would have no chance to compare between their community and the other ones. No one ever has experienced living in other societies, and, as a consequence, they are unable to make the comparison.

The second feature of this society is the fact that differences are being eliminated as well as colors and any other traits that could cause differences among the people regarding their appearances and life styles. The Giver says to Jonas, “Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness. Before my time, before the previous time, back and back and back. We relinquished sunshine and did away with differences” (*The Giver* 120). The authority might see that the choice to go on a complete sameness could solve all problems and issues related to race and discrimination, but this appears to be a false decision to make from the beginning. In “Discipline and Its Discontents: A Foucauldian Reading of *The Giver*,” Don Latham notes that the community in *The Giver* “has sacrificed free will, diversity, and individualism in the name of security and sameness” (134). Eliminating differences among people wipes out the vital characteristic of humans, which is diversity. People need to be different in order to thrive, and at the same time, they have to respect these differences.

The third feature of the community in *The Giver* is the people's acceptance of the Elders' rules and the current conditions. The people's acceptance would be understood since it is only due to the pills they are compelled to take so that they continue be under the authority's control, and this is not what I mean by mentioning the people's acceptance. What I mean here is that this attitude from the people makes it hard for Jonas, or any other person, to convince them that the Elsewhere they are afraid of and inferior to is just other communities where there are people like them, but with freedom to make choices for their lives, and people who are enjoying the colors, music, and even differences!

*Gathering Blue*, Lowry's second book in the Quartet, focuses on a group of people living in a village in a time after the "Ruin" or "the end of the civilization of the ancestors" (*Gathering Blue* 25). This society decides that handicapped and weak people have no place among them. Kira, the protagonist of the novel, has a deformed leg, and the people decide to expel her after her mother passes away; Vandara, the strong and fearsome woman in the village, says to her when Kira comes to rebuild her burned cottage, "We don't want you here[...] ... You don't belong in the village anymore. You're worthless, with that leg. Your mother always protected you but she's gone now. You should go too" (*Gathering Blue* 18). Kira didn't surrender, and she fought for her right to be in the community; she reminds Vandara and the other women there that they have to go to the Council of Guardians to solve their conflict; otherwise, and if she is being killed, "the causer-of-death must die" (*Gathering Blue* 20). Therefore, both women went to the Council of Guardians to solve their conflict. The Council then decided to keep her alive after Jamison, her appointed defender, convinced the Guardians that Kira has the talent of dyeing and threading which could help the Council with maintaining the "Singer's rope" for the annual gathering. They also decided that her place, where she used to live, is to be given to Vandara so that she and the other women can build a pen to hold their children while they are working. She is also being transferred to live in the quarters at the most prestigious building in the community, the Council Edifice. Kira then develops throughout the novel and meets with new people including Mathew, the Craver, and the little singer, Jo.

The story ends in the midst of the annual Gathering. She first notices that the feet of singer's on the stage are cuffed with a metal chain and realizes that she and all the other workers are nothing but prisoners of the Guardians. The realization is interrupted

with her union with her father, Christopher, who tells her that her defender, Jamison, is the one who tried to kill him. Her father offered for her to go with him to live in another village, but she refused that offer because she believes that she has an important role to play in helping the society to get a better life.

While Lowry's previous novel, *The Giver*, is meant to be understood by its readers as a utopian novel (at least early in the novel), *Gathering Blue*, on the other hand, is a dystopian one. The society in *Gathering Blue* is opposite in every way from the one in *The Giver*. Poverty is torturing the lives of the community people, and they are living in utterly poor conditions. Diseases are also there in this community, and those who die are left unburied at the Field of Leaving to be taken by the beasts. Fear overwhelms the lives of those people. Kira feels this fear when she is waiting beside her mother's dead body at the Field:

She felt a small shudder of fear. Fear was always a part of life for the people. Because of fear, they made shelter and found food and grew things. For the same reason, weapons were stored, waiting. There was fear of cold, of sickness and hunger. There was fear of beasts.

And fear propelled her now as she stood, leaning on her stick. She looked down a last time at the lifeless body that had once contained her mother, and considered where to go. (*Gathering Blue* 3)

Fear in this community has a very crucial part, and it is represented as the authority's main tool to control the people's lives. Just like the idea of isolating the people in *The Giver* is made a reality by referring to the outer world as "Elsewhere," the people in *Gathering Blue* are being threatened by the beasts whenever they think about going outside the boundaries of their village. The authority has abandoned its roles in enhancing

the people's lives, and it seems to be absent from all the scenes of the villagers' lives. They live in the safest and most secure building of the village, the Edifice, while the villagers live in poorly structured cottages that are vulnerable to weather conditions. They have their meals delivered to their rooms and they also have “found a way for water to enter the building” (*Gathering Blue* 76). All these luxuries are not available for the rest of the people in the village, which shows how the authority has widened the gap between them and the people. The only two cases in which there is a type of interaction between the authority and the people are at times of conflict between community members that need to be solved, and at the annual Gathering, where the past and future of the community is being presented through the song and the “Singer's robe.”

The authority's role is also absent when we see how the poorest place in the village is being depicted when Kara and Thomas are looking for Matt in the Fen. The place is plainly filthy and unsuitable for humans to live. It is “swampy and disagreeable,” and its people are always “looked down upon by most people” (*Gathering Blue* 9-10). The people in the Fen are usually holding what the other people in the community perceive as minor disgraceful jobs like draggers and diggers. These gaps between the authority and the community and between the communities in the same village are signs of the inequality and discrimination in which the community exists. Therefore, a social justice action would be required to change these conditions and to turn those people's lives to be better. Since the authority is withdrawing from all its responsibilities toward its people, and since the people in the community seem to be accepting the way they live in, someone needs to stand up to change these conditions. This person happens to be Kira in the novel, and it all started when she sees the awful conditions the people in the Fen are living in; she says to Mathew, “Why must there be such a horrible place? ... Why do



people have to live like this?" Then the casual reply to any attempt of questioning wrongs and injustices comes from Thomas that "It's how it is[.] ... It's always been." But Kira doesn't seem to be accepting this logic and says to Mathew, "We're the ones who will fill in the blank places. Maybe we can make it different" (*Gathering Blue* 177-178). Kira does not accept the general attitude of people, including Thomas's, and determines that the time for change has come, and it is their responsibility to act to ensure it happens.

The third text in the Quartet, *Messenger*, focuses on a group of people living in a village that was described in the previous novel, *Gathering Blue*, as "the village of healing" (228). It took its name because injured and deformed people who are being expelled from other communities found it to be a welcoming place for them so they decided to live there. It follows the life of Matt (from *Gathering Blue*), now known as Matty, the protagonist, who serves as the messenger for the people of the village, since it is surrounded by the forest and Matty is the only one who is able to commute through it. The people of the village are afraid of the Forest because it is "dangerous for them. Sometimes Forest closed in and entangled people who had tried to travel beyond," and they trusted Matty "to know the paths, to be safe on them, and to do the errands that required travelling" (*Messenger* 9). Matty lives with an old man named Seer, who appears to be Christopher, Kira's father in *Gathering Blue*. When the people of the village decide to close the borders for newcomers, Christopher asks Matty to bring Kira from the other village before the border is closed, and Matty accepts his request. He then starts his journey to bring Kira, and on their way back to the village, they notice that the Forest has changed, and it becomes strange and hostile even for Matty who knows it very well. Leader, who is Jonas from the first novel *The Giver*, saw them because of his ability of "Seeing Beyond" and communicates with Kira telling her to tell Matty to use his gift

which is healing. Matty then touches the ground of the forest and everything returns to normal; people have abandoned the decision of closing the borders and they also have returned to their normal behavior. Leader finds them and finds that Matty is now dead, consumed by its own gift, so he carries Matty and returns with Kira to the village.

Lowry's depiction of the society in this novel is interesting. Aside from the utopian/dystopian worlds in *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*, the society in *Messenger* appears to be the closest parallel Lowry's readers get to the contemporary world. The realistic feature of this society lies in its changing attitude and behavior between them and toward other societies. At the beginning of the novel, Lowry describes how Matty finds himself staring at the large visible stain on the face of Mentor, the school teacher, and how he (Matty) remembers that in his old village, marks and stains like this “were not allowed. People were put to death for less,” but the situation in the village of healing is different. People are not considering these marks and flaws as danger or weakness; instead, they “were valued” (*Messenger* 6). Moreover, the people's attitude toward others who come to live in their society has been always welcoming and supportive; Christopher (Seer in *Messenger*) tells Kira in *Gathering Blue* that the people in the village of healing “help each other ... Those who can see? They guide me. I am never without helping eyes. Those who can't walk? They are carried.” He adds, “The village of the healing has existed for a long time[.] ... Wounded people still come. ... And we have others who have found us and stayed because they wanted to share our way of life” (*Gathering Blue* 228).

But then, this sympathetic and caring society has turned upside down, and the once welcoming society is now raising a petition to close the village's borders for the newcomers. They will have a debate to discuss this issue and a voting process about the decision. The result of this vote was to close the village borders, and the villagers, led by

Mentor, started immediately to build a wall around the village. Such turns of events and radical changes are natural and inevitable results of ignorance and bigotry that started to appear in that society. Seer responds to Matty's question of whether this movement is because of shortages of food or housing that it is not, but it is only due to the selfishness that is "creeping in" (*Messenger* 33-34). But what causes this "selfishness" that leads to these changes?

One possible answer to this question is found by looking at what Matty observes during the village meeting when they are debating about closing the village. Lowry notes that he is able to see "those who had traded. Some of those who had been among the most industrious, the kindest, and the most stalwart citizens of Village now went to the platform and shouted their wish that the border be closed so that 'we' ... would not have to share the resources anymore" (*Messenger* 85). Matty noticed that all those who want to close the borders are those who have been to Trade Mart. Trade Mart is the place for the villagers to trade what they don't need in exchange for what they need, but Seer senses that "It's changed, Matty. I hear people talk of it now, and I feel the changes. Something's wrong" (*Messenger* 53). Seer's concerns are being proved now by Matty's observations that those who have traded are those who are voting to close the borders, and those citizens who were "untouched by trade" would go up the stage and talk about how their society has been always welcoming new ones who need help. What Lowry tries to convey here is the fact that the society in *Messenger* has shifted to be a pure materialistic one that in which people's main concerns are the materialistic objects that they are fighting about. Lowry's depiction here reveals a number of political and social connections and allegories to our own world that we can get from this changing society. Readers would find many examples and events in our world that are also present in

*Messenger*. Lowry in this novel depicts a world that is in great need for social justice and for someone to fight for change.

The last installment of Lowry's Quartet here is *Son*, which recounts the story of Claire and her journey of finding her son, Gabe. The novel is a continuation of the events of *The Giver* but told from another perspective. It is divided into three parts: before, between, and beyond. Its first part takes place at the same place in *The Giver*, but its focus is on the story of Number Thirty-Six, Gabe, and his mother. The story begins with Claire being tied to the bed waiting for her "product" (*Son 4*) to be born. Her job at the community is a "Birthmother" (*Son 5*), which is basically giving birth to children. She is now in the delivery room giving birth, but it appears that something is wrong with her pregnancy and she has to deliver through a cesarean surgery. Once the surgery is done, she is taken to another room where she can recover along with other women in the Birthing Unit. But she noticed that the other women there don't have a scar in their bellies as she does. She is now filled with questions and worries about herself and her "product." Three weeks later, and without seeing her baby, she is being asked to report to the office at the Birthing Unit. She is informed that something went wrong at the time of her delivery and she is no longer capable of handling another pregnancy. She is told that "she had been decertified" (*Son 14*).

She has been transferred to work at the Fish Hatchery, and she develops an enormous desire to have her son back. She goes from time to time to see him at the Nurturing Center, and this increases her desire of taking him away with her. But the little boy is having troubles adjusting at the center, which makes it difficult to be assigned to his family. He is now being given another chance to adjust or he will be "released." At the end of his second year at the center, and with the Assignment Ceremony approaching,

Gabe is still not adjusting and still having difficulties sleeping. The nurturer at the center, who happens to be Jonas's father, tells Claire that the Elders are “not assigning him. And no more extensions, either. They've run out of patience with him. They voted today” (*Son* 124). The vote is to get rid of him by release, which we already know from *The Giver* is killing him. The next scenes tell how Claire recalls seeing things going crazy at the community and hearing the nurturer searching for his son, and when asking him, he says that Jonas has left and took the baby with him to Elsewhere. The next thing Claire remembers is being on the boat that was ashore at the river and calling for her son. She unconsciously finds herself leaving the community in search of her son.

The society in Part One of *Son* is the same as the society in *The Giver*, but it is being told through the lens of Claire and her assignment as a Birthmother. From the very beginning lines of the story, we are introduced to the way those Birthmothers are being treated at the Birthing Unit. Claire is blindfolded so that she cannot see her child; one of the birthmothers tells Claire that the mask or the blindfold is because “They don't want you to see the Product when it comes out of you” (*Son* 4). Birthmothers, or Vessels, as they are called in the community, are just being treated as if they are machines for producing humans who will be assigned jobs later on when they are twelve-year-olds. Jonas states at the beginning chapters of Part Three that it is not only Gabe who “was a manufactured product, ... we all were” (*Son* 280). This inhumane treatment of the people in that community is crucial to understand the reasons for Claire, and Jonas before her, to escape that community.

Part Two of the novel deals with Claire's survival after the boat she boarded had encountered a storm in the middle of the sea. She is now seen by the people of a village on a peninsula on the coast of unknown sea. She has been taken out from the water and

rushed to the old woman, Alys, who would take care of her from now on. Claire spends six years at the village not only recovering from her injuries and loss of memory but also preparing and training hard to climb up the cliff which is the only way to leave the village other than the sea which she will never go to again. She tells Einar, the only one who successfully climbed the cliff, that “I must try to climb out. ... I have a child out there. A son. I must find him” (*Son* 208). So, her journey of searching for her son continues and she finally reaches the top of the cliff after a dangerous and near-death experience climbing up the cliff. At the top, she meets with the man whom Einar had told her about and instructed her to say “yes” to whatever price the man asks in exchange for his services. She never thought that price would be her youth, and she helplessly says yes to his request, and she is immediately turned an old woman. Only then Claire gets to know not only the name of this man as he tells her “My name ... is Trademaster” (*Son* 266) but also for the first time, her son's name, Gabe.

The society in this part is the only new one in the novel that has not been in the other three texts. This society is occupying an isolated peninsula and surrounded by the sea and an enormous cliff. For years, the people of this peninsula have never encountered new people coming to their village, but they seem to be generous. They helped Claire in her first days in the community by making her shoes, petticoat, a comb, and a hat. They accepted her into their community until they knew about her pregnancy without a husband, which they regarded as a major immoral act a woman could make. Tall Andras, one of the villagers who hoped to marry Claire, says after he finds out about her pregnancy that “Women who couple in the field, like animals. They have a stain to them. No one wants them, after” (*Son* 169). This shift in the villagers' attitude toward her makes it clear that she is now in a society that looks down to her and considers her inferior to its

members. But this matter does not seem to be her biggest issues; her main focus now is finding her son at any cost. She then started her preparations for departure by training under the supervision of Einar who helps her until she is ready to climb the cliff. The arduous journey to climb up the cliff is concluded by meeting the “Trademaster,” who took her youth in exchange for his services. Loaded with hopes of seeing her son again, Claire is forced to say “yes” or she will face Einar's fate who had said “no” to the man and ended up on the ground down the cliff.

The Third Part of the novel is set to be at the same village where the previous novel, *Messenger*, is set, the village of healing. Claire, now an old woman, is watching her son Gabe and disappears whenever he catches her looking at him. The focus in this part is not on Claire only as the previous two parts do, but it is now on her as well as on Gabe. While she struggles to find a way to tell him that he is her son, he on the other hand, is also struggling to know about his past. Claire appears to be losing the hope that she will ever be able to tell Gabe that he is her son; she at some point decided that “[I]t was enough that she had found him. She would let him be. But she realized then the magnitude of the cruel exchange Trademaster had offered her” (*Son* 304). She felt the injustice the Trademaster has done to her. She felt how he took advantage of her weakness and vulnerability when she was desperately looking for her son and traded his services with her youth. She refused to accept this injustice and found the way to take back her life again. She summons all the courage she has and tells Jonas everything. Jonas, as usual, understands her situation and successfully convinces Gabe that Claire is his mother. Gabe goes to confront Trademaster and beats him by telling Trademaster that all those he thinks that he had destroyed, including his mother, are now living their lives normally and all his evil plans have failed. This brings Trademaster to a complete

destruction, and the story ends with a happy reunion of Gabe and his mother.

The society in this part is the one that is in *Messenger*. What is important to know from this part regarding the society is that it has return to its previous status as caring and ideal for living. Jonas is no longer the leader there but he is now living with Kira and their children. Mentor has also returned to his old life, teaching patiently the children at the school. The diseases that have invaded the village in the past have been stopped. All these and other signs of change tell that Matty did not die in vain, and his sacrifice has brought back the society to its old tradition as being “a sanctuary, a place of welcome” (*Son* 290).

The three societies in *Son*, however, are examples of the different societies and communities in our world right now. Claire was living in the most unsympathetic and governmentally-controlled society that did not even let her see her own child. She felt the urge to run away and search for her lost son. Then she found herself in another society that shifted its behavior, but she managed and focused on achieving her goal of finding her son and succeeded in her attempt. Finally, and after a long and tedious journey, she is now living with her son and enjoying the victory over an oppressive government, unsympathetic society, and evil individuals.

The societies in the *Quartet* are depicted in a way that they show unequal and unjust treatment of the individuals and particularly the young people. The young characters in the *Quartet* are able to spot these stances of injustice and inequality and decide to change them. However, these unjust societies are not the only element and reason behind the young characters' decisions. There are other factors, including a focus on absentee parents.



### **The Absence of Parents in the Quartet:**

Readers of Lowry's Quartet can see that there is an obvious absence of parents in those texts. This absence could be real (physical) either by death or other reasons that prevent parents from being physically with their children. It also could take another shape, in that parents are present but their role is what is absent. The portrait of parents in the Quartet, I argue, is another necessary element for the young characters to start working toward a more just society. Therefore, this section is devoted to investigate this absence and to see how parents are depicted by Lois Lowry.

Like all the utopian elements in *The Giver*, the picture of Jonas's family seems, at first, perfect. The father works as a nurturer at the Nurturing Center, and the mother works at the Department of Justice. Jonas has a little sister who is seven years old, and this family of four is having a good life in the community. However, things start to change for Jonas as soon as he is chosen to be the community's next Receiver of Memories. He starts to feel differently toward his family. His new job requires him to see the old Giver who will transmit all the memories to him. The Giver gradually seems to take the role of father in Jonas's life, and Jonas is becoming more aware of the reality of his family and community.

In one of the memories that Jonas receives from the Giver, he sees a happy family sitting together in what seems to be a Christmas Eve. They are all together and the kids are playing and opening their presents. Moreover, Jonas is puzzled seeing that there are also old people sitting with the family, and after asking the Giver about them, the Giver says that those are the grandparents in the family. But the fact that the grandparents are with the family and not in the House of Old like in Jonas's community is not the only thing Jonas is thinking about; it is his feeling about this memory that confuses him and

makes him unable to find the right word to describe it. The Giver then tells him that the feeling he senses is “love,” a new concept for Jonas that he has never known before but that he certainly likes. After knowing what it actually means, Jonas asks his parents one day, “Do you love me?” His parents reply that love is a “very generalized word” and he should have asked if they “enjoy” him or feel proud about his accomplishments and they would have said yes, but love is a “meaningless” word (*The Giver* 159-160)! Right after this incident, Jonas starts feeling the need for changing the way his family and society live. He says to Gabe when he is asleep, “[T]here must be some way for things to be different. There could be colors ... [a]nd grandparents ... There could be love” (*The Giver* 161-162)! The fact that love is missing even from his parents makes it necessary for Jonas to change the situation.

In another memory, Jonas watches his father releasing one of the newborn identical twins and realizes for the first time that “release” is nothing but killing the person who is being discarded by the authority. This causes Jonas a great deal of pain, and this shock brought an end to anything beautiful Jonas felt for his parents and his father especially. Realizing the true meaning of “release” opens Jonas's eyes to the true nature of the authority of his society. Furthermore, it also reveals how his father has been lying to him. This realization triggers Jonas's decision of running away to reach Elsewhere so that all the other members in the community would have these memories of the true meaning of life. Jonas's father is present in Jonas's life, but what is crucial here is Jonas's feelings about his father. Jonas misses the real parent-son relationship in that the parents are supposed to be the model for their children. Jonas's parents lie to him, and his father is committing infanticide. The values and ethics of his parents contradict with his vision of the world, and this creates the gap between him and his parents. Ultimately, and

with combination of the unjust society Jonas lives in, the need for action toward justice is what he decides to do next.

In *Gathering Blue*, the absence of parents in Kira's life is different from what it is in Jonas's *The Giver*. Right from the beginning of the novel, we see Kira with her mother's dead body in the Field of Leaving where they usually put dead people in that society. We are also introduced to the fact that her father is also absent when he was eaten by the beasts in his last hunting trip (this is discovered later to be not true). So, it is clear that the absence of parents in Kira's life is real and tangible, rather than being absence of feelings as in *The Giver*. As soon as her mother dies, the other people in Kira's village are now trying to take her place and expel her from the village. The group of women, led by Vandara, tells her that they need her place to build a pen for their children and Vandara says, "We don't want you here. ... You don't belong in the village anymore. You're worthless, with that leg. Your mother always protected you but she's gone now. You should go too" (*Gathering Blue* 18). Kira realizes that she is not in her mother's protection anymore and she must act on her own now. She recalls what her mother or father would do in this situation and decides to stand up against those women; surrender does not appear to be a choice for Kira here.

Kira now is standing as straight as she can and looking directly, without showing any fear, into the women's eyes. Some of them lowered their eyes which signals that she is gaining some power. Then finally she reminds them that they have to go to the Council in cases of conflicts like this one. The realization that she is alone now without parents to protect her is her main motive to challenge the unjust treatment she receives from her society. She does not show any sign of surrender to this unjust society; instead, she fights for her right to rebuild her cottage and to stay and live there. But again she is now faced

by another force that is greater than Vandara and the other women. The Council of Guardians is her last hope to get her rights, and they decide that she has been chosen to live in the Edifice. She has to abandon her cottage to the other women. This decision could be considered a victory for Kira since she has not only avoided being thrown out of the village, but also has been chosen to live in the most prestigious building in the village.

The absence of parents remains an important part of the novel, especially when we get to know that the other two children in the Edifice, Thomas and little Jo, are also parentless. Moreover, Matt escapes his mother's harsh treatment and is now in another community. This finding comes after Kira meets her father who was believed to be dead and discovered that Jamison is the one who tried to kill him. She realizes now that the authority in her community is behind the absence of all the gifted children's parents in order for the authority to control those gifts. Her decision now is to stay in the village and help her community to have a better future.

What causes Kira to remain in the society is a sense of responsibility that has grown with her since she lost her parents and learned to count only on her own strength and gift of threading. The loss of parents has taught her that she must fight not only for herself but also for her community. After understanding that the Guardians “were forcing the children to describe the future they wanted, not the one that could be,” and considering that the Guardians are weak without her and her friends' gifts, she decides that “she must stay” (*Gathering Blue* 238) to create the future of herself and her community.

In *Messenger*, we are able to see that Matty (Matt in *Gathering Blue*) is having a good life with Seer, Kira's father. We already know from *Gathering Blue* that he has escaped his mother's harsh and cruel treatment and has run away to a new place where he

is welcomed like all the other comers to that place. Now in *Messenger*, we see Matty is having an important role to play in the society; he is the only one who can travel through the Forest and he is carrying the village's information and messages to the other communities. Matty's new life in the village of healing is the best reward he could get for his courageous act of moving out from his old community.

For Matty, he would have not gone out of his parent's house if he was having a good treatment; his brother tells Kira and Thomas in *Gathering Blue* that, “Our mum, she thrashed Matt so hard he was horrid bloody, and so him and Branchi, they goed on a journey and they not be coming back, not to the Fen” (*Gathering Blue* 183). The horrible treatment Matty receives from his mother, and the fact that he does not know where his father is, create the absence of parents in his life and cause him to seek justice through his running from his community and living in the village of healing.

In *Son*, however, things are different, and the absence of parents is now turned into Claire's search for her motherhood right in searching for her child, Gabe, whom we know from *The Giver*. Claire's question to her parents at the beginning of the novel about whether they are embarrassed of her job as a Birthmother or not represents the first sign of a significant gap between Claire and her parents. Later in the novel, she confirms this by asserting how she knows that her parents were “disappointed” by her selection as a Birthmother and “They had hoped for more from their female child” (*Son* 36). She knows for sure that with such parents, she alone has to achieve justice to her own life and get her lost child. In a community where children are considered “products,” and with parents who feel embarrassed and disappointed about her job, she must act on her own and she does that when she finally escapes in a mission to find her son.

Claire leaves her community in search of her son and she is now in another

community in an isolated peninsula in the middle of nowhere. She meets Einar who has also another story of parents abuse that had forced him in the past to leave the village. She learns from him how she could climb the difficult cliff and she is now training hard to be ready to continue her search for Gabe. After successfully reaching the top of the cliff, she meets the evil Trademaster and trades her youth in return for his help. Her enormous feelings of motherhood are her only motive in her journey. Claire in her journey to find her son is the example of the true role of parents that all the other parents in the four texts fail to play. She again affirms her opinion of her parents, especially her mother, when she replies to Alys when she says that Claire's mother must be missing her that, "I don't think she loved me" (*Son* 227). But she is not going to act like her parents, and she agrees with Alys that her love for her son is the reason she is "soon to climb out" (*Son* 228).

In the third part of the novel, however, Gabe is the one who feels that the need for his parents is urging him to act. Loaded with the desire to know about his past, he uses his gift of "veering" and knows that back in his childhood there was a woman who loved him and he is now full of determination to find that woman. Claire and Gabe's success in their missions and defeating Trademaster symbolizes a victory against cruel society and authority, and at the same time, confirms that the absence of parents in the novel plays an important role in motivating Claire and Gabe to act against unjust society and authority.

Throughout the Quartet, parents are depicted in ways that show they are absent from their children's lives either by death, abuse, or even emotional absence. This absence creates the independence that young adults usually need to operate and achieve more social roles in their lives. However, the emotional absence of parents seems to be the most influential type of absence that, in a way, encourages children to seek emotions

of love, belonging, and respect through other sources. In the *Quartet*, these other sources appear to be other adults who provide those protagonists with advice, guidance, and sometimes love. Once the young protagonists know these emotions, they reflect back on the reason that their parents are not providing them with these emotions and find out that it is usually because of the unjust, economic-centered, and unequal world that they live in. Consequently, they decide to change these situations of injustice and inequality, and the first thing they think about is always running away.

### **Running Away in the Quartet**

Realizing that their societies need to be changed, and with the feeling of absence of their parents in their lives, running away often emerges as the right choice for the young characters in the *Quartet* to achieve social justice. Running away in Young Adult Literature in general is considered an important element of the development of adolescents. It is the way for them to prove their independence and growth and also a new phase in their lives. In her article about the runaways in adolescent fiction, Kristine E. Marshall points out that literature written about young adults boasts a significant history of focusing on runaways:

Adolescent runaways are a venerable part of American literary tradition. From Huck Finn's and Tom Sawyer's idealized high adventures on the Mississippi River to Holden Caulfield's less than romantic meanderings through New York City, readers have been captivated by the adolescent runaway. Characters' attempts toward independence and self-determination have given readers some of our most lasting and satisfying glimpses into adolescent motivations and concerns. (58)

But in *The Giver Quartet*, running away is not only about independence and self-

determination, but it is presented as an important and necessary step for those young “runaways” to change their societies. Each book in the Quartet has a story of running away as a necessary element to achieve the goal of social justice.

In *The Giver*, Jonas is forced to escape his society, taking the little child, Gabe, with him. His destination is Elsewhere, though it could be any place but his old unjust and inhumane society. He leaves everything behind him, even the remaining memories that the Giver was supposed to transfer to him. Jonas feels the urge to run away, and the fact that it is his only solution or the little Gabe would be “released,” makes it a necessary act that he must do.

Matt also finds that running is the right thing to do in order to stop his mother's abuse in *Gathering Blue*. He finds that, in his new home at the village of healing, the life is different than his old place. He is not only welcomed there but also valued as a human being. Kira, however, refuses to run away, since the need for running away is not there. Unlike Jonas and Matt, she believes that her society needs her and she has the ability to stay and to change the people's lives. When she succeeds in her mission, she would then follow her father and live with him in the village of healing.

In *Messenger*, Matty is the only person in the village who is able to travel through the Forest. After the radical changes that happen to the people of the society there, and their decision to close the village so that no more newcomers are allowed to enter, Seer asks Matty to bring Kira before the village is closed. Matty feels the need for him to run away and get Kira in spite of the several warnings from the Forest. Running away is Seer's and Matty's last hope for joining with Kira and it also proves to be the hope for the society as well. Matty, through running away, succeeds in his mission and brings Kira back to her father. He also brings the change to his society by healing the Forest, and



therefore, bringing them back to what they were before changing.

We finally see in *Son* that Claire's only hope to see her child is through running away. But for Claire, she has to do this exhaustive running away twice. The first time is when she realizes that her son is being taken away by Jonas. She unconsciously jumps into the boat in an attempt to follow her son. The second time is when she runs away from the peninsula after a difficult and extensive training to climb the cliff. At the end, running away one more time proves to be the best and only way to get her son.

All the young characters in the Quartet have decided on running away as a means for achieving more just societies. The importance of this element comes from the irony that achieving just societies starts with running away from these societies. Running away, perhaps, allows the individuals to see their societies in comparison to other societies and to come back with new concepts of equality, diversity, and coexistence. But even with the realization that those young characters now have about how dysfunctional and unsympathetic their societies are, and with the absence of parents in their lives, in addition to starting their missions of achieving social justice, they need things that would help them in their missions. The next section will discuss how those young protagonists get to know the gifts they have and how they use these gifts.

### **The Protagonists' Gifts and Sacrifices in the Quartet**

Jonas, Kira, Matty, and Gabe are all equipped with a special talent or gift that helped them in their quests to achieve social justice. Lowry depicts these gifts as necessary elements in the young characters' lives who must use them in their missions. What is interesting about these gifts is not the possession of these gifts, as Lowry points out about Matty's gift in a conversation at the end of *Messenger*, but “the fact of his willingness to use it, and in essence to sacrifice himself” (*Son* 176). It is also true to apply

this to all the other gifts and sacrifices in the Quartet.

In *The Giver*, Jonas's gift is his "Capacity to See Beyond" (Lowry 79), and because of this capacity, he is chosen to be the community's next receiver of memory. This ultimately leads to Jonas's awareness of the reality of his society and the world. He sees memories of colors, wars, music, and he also sees his father killing the baby. All these memories that Jonas receives because of his ability of seeing beyond, contribute to his decision of changing his society. He also continues using this gift in *Gathering Blue* and in *Son* to help the societies there, and with each attempt of using it, he sacrifices his health and consumes his powers.

Kira's gift in *Gathering Blue* is in her hands; she has the ability to see the future through the threading she makes. Even after she meets with her presumed-dead-father, and she finally has the chance to be with him for the rest of her life, she refuses to go with him and determines that she has to stay with her community to help it have a good future. She knows that she has the gift that can bring peace, prosperity, and justice to the people, and she is willing to use that gift even if this means living under a cruel government and in an unjust society. This also means that Kira will sacrifice being with her father after years of parental absence in favor of changing her society and, therefore, achieving social justice.

In *Messenger*, Matty appears to be paying the most sacrifice that someone can afford; he pays with his life in helping Kira join her father and in helping his society return to the welcoming and caring society it has been before. He knows that with each attempt of using the gift, it causes him great pain and exhaustion. Its effect is also gradual and relative: that is, the greater the cause or the object he directs his gift to, the greater the effect will be. When he first uses it on the frog he finds in the Forest, he feels some

exhaustion but it is much less than when he uses it on the dog and his mother. Now that the cause is saving his friend and the whole society, the effect of using his gift would be much greater than exhaustion; he sacrifices his life for such results.

Finally, in *Son*, Gabe is also having a gift, and his gift is “veering.” When the time comes to use his gift, Matty uses it to look inside the Trademaster's soul to discover that he is living by the people's miseries he causes. He then confronts the pure evil with good news of the people, including his mother, and how these people are not destroyed. This brings the evil Trademaster to his death, ending an era of suffering and injustice for a lot of people.

Furthermore in *Son*, Gabe is not the only one who uses his gift to defy evil; his mother, Claire also sacrifices an invaluable part of her life in the sake of finding her son whom she lost because of the injustice in her society. Claire finds herself in a position that she has to give up her youth in order to locate her son, and if she doesn't submit to the Trademaster's greed, she will never be able to see her son again. Claire's sacrifice here is telling us that it does not have to be a supernatural gift that we must have to fight for justice; she did not have any when she met Trademaster. In fact, there would be no need for such gifts if we believe that we should sacrifice whatever it costs to have a good life, a life of choice, colors, love, and justice.

It is the time now to conclude that the stances of injustice, corruption, discrimination, and inequality in those societies combined with absence of parents from the lives of those young characters who are charged with the need to run away and equipped with the required gifts and sacrifices are proved to be the major contributors and motives behind the novel's young characters to move and act toward social justice. Unlike most of the adults in the four texts, who are accepting the way as it is in their

societies, Jonas, Kira, Matt (later Matty), Claire, and Gabe are the ones who take the responsibilities for making things right. Barbara A. Lehman and Patricia R. Crook assert in their discussions of *The Giver* and *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* that the authors of the two books show respect and faith in children by the creation of the children protagonists; they particularly point out that Jonas and Gabe in *The Giver* “are the hope for the future; they are the ones, if anyone, who will save the society from its dystopian fate. They are charged with undertaking a highly dangerous mission and forced to embark upon it” (72). They indeed undertook this mission and never settled for less than freedom and justice. Don Latham asserts that “Jonas, however, refuses to accept passively his role or society’s rules. He displays a strong sense of individuality as well as courage and compassion in trying to remove himself and Gabriel from this world” (13), and it is clear that it is not only Jonas who refuses the injustice of the society but also all the other young protagonists of these four texts.

The four necessary elements and conditions for social justice to take place are present in Lowry's Quartet, however, this paper, so far, has discussed and analyzed these elements and their representations in each book of the Quartet. However, one could ask: what is the need for knowing these elements especially when teaching for social justice? While this seems to be a logical and valid question, the answer for it might best be seen in the relationship between these elements and the adolescents' psychological development. One place to see these development stages is in Robert J. Havighurst's concept of the adolescents' developmental tasks in his book *Developmental Tasks and Education*. Havighurst lists eight developmental tasks that adolescents go through in their adolescent years. One of these tasks is the “Accepting Physique and the Effective Use of the Body,” where teens “become proud ... of one's body; to use and protect one's body effectively”

(51). Another task is when adolescents achieve “Emotional Independence of Parents and Other Adults” and tend to “become free from childish dependence on parents” (55). A third task is when adolescents acquire “a Set of Values and an Ethical System as a Guide to Behavior—Developing an Ideology” (69). And finally, adolescents tend to desire and achieve “Socially Responsible Behavior” (75).

Similar to Havighurst's concept of the adolescents' developmental tasks, Stover and Tway note that there are some common concerns of adolescents which include:

- the need to define oneself outside the realm of the family[.]
- the need to come to terms with new visions of one's parents as 'less than perfect.'[.]
- the need to determine an individual set of moral, ethical, religious, or political principles[,and] . . .
- the need to forge a niche in the larger society. (140)

Havighurst's developmental tasks, and Stover and Tway's adolescents' concerns are closely related to the four elements discussed in the previous section that are necessary for the young protagonists in Lowry's *Quartet* to achieve social justice. This relation becomes clear, for example, in the absence of parents element and the adolescents' need to define themselves outside their families in Stover and Tway's adolescents' concerns, or the task where adolescents achieve emotional independence of parents in Havighurst's developmental tasks. Similarly, the acceptance the adolescents have of their physique in Havighurst's developmental tasks is related to the gifts and sacrifices the young protagonists in the *Quartet* discovered and used. Generally, these tasks and concerns are evidence of the importance of recognizing the four necessary elements and conditions in

this paper when dealing with young adult texts, and in particular, Lowry's *The Giver* Quartet. By acknowledging the importance of these elements and its relation to the young adults' psychological development, the next section of this paper is devoted to discuss how teachers and educators might use Lowry's Quartet in classrooms to teach about social justice.

### Chapter Three: The Pedagogy of Social Justice

The four elements and conditions discussed in the previous section, I argue, are crucial for teachers and educators who want to address social justice issues in their classrooms, especially when recognizing the relationship between these elements and the adolescents' psychological development. In its 2010 Annual Business Meeting in Orlando, Florida, the National Council of Teachers of English released a position statement stating that the council “support[s] efforts by educators to teach about social injustice and discrimination in all its forms with regard to differences in race, ethnicity, culture, gender, gender expression, age, appearance, ability, national origin, language, spiritual belief, sexual orientation, socioeconomic circumstance, and environment.” The statement also indicates that the council “acknowledge[s] the vital role that teacher education programs play in preparing teachers to enact and value a pedagogy that is socially just” (Resolution on Social Justice in Literacy Education). This acknowledgement and support for the efforts of teaching about social justice, and enacting a pedagogy that takes into account social justice issues, necessitates more efforts from teachers and educators to meet the importance of incorporating social justice issues into their pedagogies and practices.

In her article, “Teaching for Social Justice: Justice-Oriented Curriculum for Language Arts and Literacy,” Allison Dover attempts to “interrupt the false dichotomization of academically rigorous and justice-oriented teaching by examining approaches to teaching for social justice with a standards-aligned ELA curriculum” (518). She does this by conducting research with the aim to “understand how ELA teachers conceptualized teaching for social justice and how they reconciled that vision with the demands of teaching amid restrictive curricular mandates” (519). She then explains how

she collected the data from teachers who sent examples of their lesson plans which address issues of social justice. Dover concludes her article by stating:

The participants in this study demonstrate the potential of an authentic, ambitious, and justice-oriented approach to secondary ELA. By using social justice as a lens through which to consider canonized and contemporary texts, identify topics for research and analysis, and extend student learning beyond the classroom, participants organically addressed—and often exceeded—the CCR Anchor Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. This refutes critics’ ongoing attempts to portray teaching for social justice as unrelated, and even contradictory, to academically rigorous content instruction and underscores the efficacy of justice-oriented teaching as a strategy for teaching the critical and higher order thinking skills prioritized throughout the Common Core. (225-226)

Aside from the importance of Dover's research as a proof of the possibility of teaching about social justice in alignment with the Common Core standards, it also contains excellent examples of lesson plans that could inspire teacher's efforts of teaching about social justice issues. In one of the lesson plans Dover presents in her article, and under the reading skill, a teacher in a mainly white population community submitted a unit plan that uses the classical play, *The Crucible*, to discuss issues of “Blacklisting, Mob Behavior and Hysteria” in relation to the post-9/11 events and issues, especially issues of the “Arab Americans in their local community, including the high-profile arrest of a local Sikh man.” The students then were asked “to identify specific textual and conceptual parallels across the two contexts, cite textual evidence that supported their analysis, and



examine how differences in denotative and connotative meaning can reveal journalistic bias” (522).

Another lesson plan that was submitted to Dover is from Patrick, a white teacher in a Mid-western rural community of color, who wanted his students to “write to raise awareness about pressing community issues.” Patrick “used justice-oriented children’s books ... to help students examine 'sophisticated and politically charged topics in ... uncomplicated ways.’” His students then read and analyzed children's literature to understand its structure and form and moved to write original “activism, injustice, or inequity” stories in their own journal entries (522). These examples of lesson plans show how canonical literature and Young Adult Literature could be used as a means for addressing complex social issues of injustice, racism, discrimination, and many other issues. Similarly, Lowry's *Quartet* can be used in classrooms to address these issues. Moreover, the four necessary elements for social justice to take place could be discussed in classrooms contexts to teach about social justice issues in a variety of ways.

For example, the element of the dysfunctional or unsympathetic society as a necessary condition for social justice to take place, could be the base for a high school classroom discussion when reading *The Giver*. The teacher can lead a discussion of how the state of the society in the book necessitates an action to change it to be different. In other words, a teacher might productively focus on the features of the book's utopian/dystopian society that make Jonas feel the urge to change it. Features like the absence of colors and differences in the society in *The Giver* could lead to a discussion of race differences in our world and how is it crucial to recognize and respect these differences. Another feature of the society is the rigid control the authority has over the people and this might lead to a discussion of governments' laws and policies in our world

and how to assess and, perhaps change, these laws and policies. Moreover, the absence of free will and choice in the novel can be used as a main topic of discussing the individual's free will that must be valued and never submitted to any other individual or entity. In a bigger picture, the element of society in *The Giver* could be a valuable tool to discuss with the students to remind them of the importance of critiquing their own societies and working to change them into better places. In a conversation with Linda Christensen about social justice education, Christensen states that the most important piece of social justice education is “the critique of societies” (Golden 60), and this discussion of society in *The Giver* is helpful in encouraging the students to review, evaluate, and critique their own societies.

Another way of using the element of society in *The Giver* in classrooms is to explore ideas of politics and democracy. Christensen also points out that “yes, we live in a democracy, but that the democracy was not set up to serve everyone in it. Part of students' understanding racism, classism, sexism is understanding how our society has been set up to perpetuate those hierarchies” (Golden 60). Discussing these values and other values of democracy in connection with the society and authority in *The Giver* is essential if we want to have an education that helps students understand the meaning of democracy and individuals' rights. This kind of education for social justice is what could instill the true meanings of democracy, peace, and coexistence.

Like the element of society, the element of parents' absence as a necessary condition for social justice action in the *Quartet* could be discussed in classroom contexts to talk about parents' roles and parent-children relationships. A class, for example, could be centered around the representation of Jonas's parents in *The Giver* and how they were absent and far away from their child's needs and expectations. A discussion of how the

importance of truth that Jonas is mad at the fact his father lied to him could be a way of discussing the element of parents in the novel. Similarly, Claire's parents in *Son*, and the fact that they were embarrassed with their child's assignment as a birthmother, leads to her detachment from them. The discussion could go on to explore how the novel's "relationship of mother and son ... serves as the remedy for the chaotic universe" (Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Marecki 191), and is actually a motif for Claire and Gabe to act for justice. Another example comes from *Gathering Blue* and how Matt's mother's abuse and his father's death led him to go in a journey to find a better place.

Likewise, the element of running away as a necessary element in achieving social justice in the Quartet could be present in classroom contexts. Teachers can take Lowry's *Son*, for example, to discuss how Claire's decision of running away twice helped her in achieving her goal of finding Gabe. This could be a discussion of how leaving a society that is dysfunctional and unsympathetic, as in *The Giver*, happened despite the rigid control of the authority and the uncertainty of the destination for Claire. She also ran away from another society in Part Two, but this time with previous training and guidance from Einar and instructions of what will come next. This could be a lead-in for a discussion of how important it is to prepare well before attempting to act against injustice. Running away also appears in *Gathering Blue*, which could be discussed in terms of how it could create opportunities for a better life when students see how Matt is now in a new society that welcomes and values him.

The fourth necessary element for social justice to take place in the Quartet, the element of gifts and sacrifices, could be looked at to discuss the students' own abilities and talents, and how each student has his or her own distinctive potential that must be known and used. The protagonists in the Quartet were able to discover their gifts and

potentials and improve their mastery of these gifts, and then started using them in helping their societies change to be more just and effective societies. On the other hand, the sacrifices that those characters had to make are another area that teachers can utilize to discuss social justice issues like social responsibility. Each time the characters use their gifts in the Quartet, they actually sacrifice their health and powers. Matty in *Messenger* dies at the end sacrificing his life by using his gift of healing to heal the Forest and to bring his society to its normal and welcoming behavior. In a classroom context, this could be a topic of discussing what are the teachers and the students willing to sacrifice for improving their societies and the world. These gifts and sacrifices, however, do not need to be supernatural powers or life-threatening sacrifices, but teachers can remind the students that individuals can devote parts of their time and efforts to improve their societies. In a general sense, the element of gifts and sacrifices in the Quartet provide teachers and students with great opportunity of discussing and understanding that each person has a responsibility toward his and her society, and this responsibility requires actions and, sometimes, sacrifices that we have to make for our societies.

Another approach to teaching social justice issues through *The Giver* Quartet is derived from the importance of fostering and stimulating the students' analytical and critical thinking skills. Teachers can use *The Giver* Quartet to create inquiry-based lessons that address different social issues, including social justice. Steven Wolk asserts that, "In creating an inquiry unit, a teacher can either begin with an inquiry question that they connect to a book or begin with a book from which they form a question or set of inquiry questions." Wolk then gives an example by using the dystopian novel, *Rash*, and how questions like, "Where is the line between freedom and security?" and "How can fear be used as an instrument of control?" (666). Similar to Wolk's approach, teachers can

use *The Giver* Quartet to raise questions of freedom, diversity, parent-child relationships, social responsibility, and many other social-related questions. For instance, questions like: What stances of injustice that cause the protagonists to act for justice in their communities? What potentials that must be in a person who wants to change the society? And what sacrifices he or she must make? What is the importance of leaving one's society while attempting to achieve justice? What are the advantages and disadvantages of erasing differences in *The Giver*? As Wolk points out, "Using young adult literature is one of the most meaningful and enjoyable ways for students to inquire into social responsibilities" (667), these questions and many others that teachers and students can find answers to in *The Giver* Quartet might be one way of engaging the students in an inquiry environment in which they question, critique, and plan to change stances of injustice and inequality in their own communities.

### **Conclusion**

Young Adult Literature is now one of the most relevant and contemporary genres of literature. Authors of Young Adult Literature are writing texts that connect with the young readers in ways that they feel they are part of these texts. This puts Young Adult authors under great responsibility. Patricia McCormick says in an interview with Sofia Quintero for the National Book Foundation's website that, "Young adult authors are doing some of the most daring work out there. Authors who write for young adults are taking creative risks—with narrative structure, voice, and social commentary—that you might not see in adult fiction." These risks Young Adult authors take must be combined by courageous initiatives from teachers to incorporate issues of social justice into their lesson plans and classrooms. By acknowledging the importance of a social-justice-oriented education, which is emphasized by the National Council of Teachers of English,

and by recognizing the four necessary elements in *The Giver* Quartet to achieve social justice and their relation to the adolescents' psychological development, Lois Lowry's *The Giver* Quartet appears to be one of the best Young Adult Literature texts that teachers can utilize in their classrooms to teach and address issues of social justice. Barbara Elleman in her interview with Lowry asks her about the idea of “sharing *The Giver* with students,” and “what she hopes children will find in the story.” Lowry says, “I am in awe of teachers when I hear how they use my books. I write a book and put it there. Then, it comes to life in the hands of teachers who help children take from it” (201). Indeed, it is the teachers' job and responsibility to guide the students and to ensure that students can learn from books like those in Lowry's Quartet concepts of social justice and social responsibility.

The current generation of young adults has access to the resources that inform them about complex political and social issues that past generations might not have had. Young Adult Literature is one of the major resources for young readers to explore issues and concepts of racism, homosexuality, political engagement and many other issues that, at one time, were previously restricted to adults. Young adults are now not only exploring these ideas, but they are now effectively engaging in making and shaping some laws and political decisions. What is happening now regarding the shooting in Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Parkland, Florida, and the students' NeverAgain movement is current evidence of what the young generation can do. Charlotte Alter says in the latest issue of TIME Magazine that, “[T]hese students have become the central organizers of what may turn out to be the most powerful grassroots gun-reform movement in nearly two decades.” Alter reports that Cameron Kasky, an 11th-grader at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, says, “The adults know that we are cleaning up their mess.” What those high school students are doing is the same thing that the young characters in *The*

*Giver* Quartet do; they see that things must change, and they are the ones who will enact that change.

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