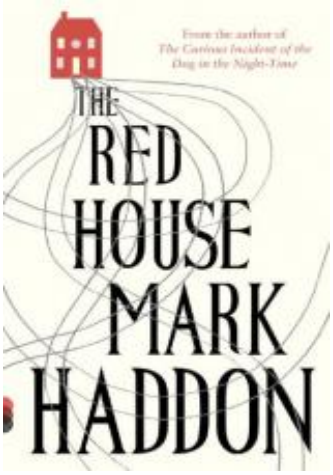
The Red House

by Mark Haddon



About the Book

The set-up of Mark Haddon's brilliant new novel is simple: Richard, a wealthy doctor, invites his estranged sister Angela and her family to join his for a week at a vacation home in the English countryside. Richard has just re-married and inherited a willful stepdaughter in the process; Angela has a feckless husband and three children who sometimes seem alien to her. The stage is set for seven days of resentment and guilt, a staple of family gatherings the world over.

But because of Haddon's extraordinary narrative technique, the stories of these eight people are anything but simple. Told through the alternating viewpoints of each character, THE RED HOUSE becomes a symphony of long-held grudges, fading dreams and rising hopes, tightly-guarded secrets and illicit desires, all adding up to a portrait of contemporary family life that is bittersweet, comic, and deeply felt. As we come to know each character they become profoundly real to us. We understand them, even as we come to realize they will never fully understand each other, which is the tragicomedy of every family.

THE RED HOUSE is a literary tour-de-force that illuminates the puzzle of family in a profoundly empathetic manner --- a novel sure to entrance the millions of readers of THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME.

Discussion Guide

1. What role does the Welsh landscape play in **The Red House**? How might this story be different if it portrayed an American family? Where would you set the story and what points of American culture would you add?

2. To what extent, if at all, did you see your family or your own family vacations reflected in **The Red House**?

3. What roles do death and absence play in the narrative? Discuss mortality as it relates to the characters of Angela, Karen, and Melissa.

4. Which character did you identify with most? Which characters would you want to spend a week with in a secluded vacation setting? Who seemed the most likable? The most perplexing?

5. Discuss the dining room table as a microcosm of the familial vacation experience. How do shifting places at the table reflect changing relationships and characters? internal and external struggles? Talk about the role seating order plays in your own family or groups of friends.

6. Discuss inner monologue as a plot device. What are the recurring themes of the inner monologue of each character? Give examples of how the characters? inner monologues come to light and come to the attention of other characters. How do the involved parties deal with the divulgence of these intimacies?

7. Romance, lust and longing weave themselves through the novel. Discuss the romantic and sexual urges of Louisa, Dominic, and Daisy. Are there any parallels between them? How do romantic overtures affect the other inhabitants of the red house?

8. What role does the house itself play in this novel? How might a different physical structure bring about alternate results for the characters? On another structural note, the novel is broken into sections, each titled with a day of the week.

9. Ian McEwan, Shakespeare, and the Legend of the Willow (Koong-se and Chang) all make appearances in the novel. What functions do these literary references serve in plot and character development?

10. On page 116, Daisy is reading **Dracula**, which Haddon quotes: ?We need have no secrets amongst us. Working together and with absolute trust, we can surely be stronger than if some of us were in the dark.? What resonance does this quote have in this context? How does it relate to matters at hand between the members of Richard?s and Angela?s family? To your own family?

11. From the start of the book, photography comes into play as a method of immortalizing landscape and human experience. What visual snapshots stick with you from the novels?

12. Where do you think the members of Richard and Angela?s families will find themselves in two months? Five years? Two decades? How might incidents from the vacation play themselves out in the future?

13. Benjy?s inscription in the visitor?s book reads, "I liked walking up the hill and the rain storm and shepherds pie at the granary." Do you think this is poignant? Explain why or why not. What is left out?

Author Bio

Mark Haddon is the author of the bestselling novels THE RED HOUSE and A SPOT OF BOTHER. His novel THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for First Fiction and is the basis for the Tony Award?winning play. He is the author of a collection of poetry, THE TALKING HORSE AND THE SAD GIRL AND THE VILLAGE UNDER THE SEA, has written and illustrated numerous children?s books, and has won awards for both his radio dramas and his television screenplays. He teaches creative writing for the Arvon Foundation and lives in Oxford, England.

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