

New Stage Theatre Presents

A STUDY GUIDE

"Mr. Jeavons said that I liked maths because it was safe. He said I liked maths because it meant solving problems, and these problems were difficult and interesting but there was always a straightforward answer at the end. And what he meant was that maths wasn't like life because in life there are no straightforward answers at the end."

— Mark Haddon, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time



the **CURIOUS** **INCIDENT** of the **DOG** in the **NIGHT-TIME**

a play by
Simon Stephens

based on the novel by
Mark Haddon

directed by
Francine Thomas Reynolds

March 29 – April 10, 2022

For tickets: 601-948-3533 or newstagetheatre.com

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WELCOME BACK!

As you take your students on the exciting journey into the world of live theatre we hope that you'll take a moment to help prepare them to make the most of their experience. Unlike movies or television, live theatre offers the thrill of unpredictability. With the actors present on stage, the audience response becomes an integral part of the performance and the overall experience: the more involved and attentive the audience, the better the show. Please remind your students that they play an important part in the success of the performance.

BE PROMPT. Give your students plenty of time to arrive, find their seats, and get situated. Have them visit the restrooms before the show begins.

RESPECT OTHERS. Please remind your students that their behavior and responses affect the quality of the performance and the enjoyment of the production for the entire audience. Live theatre means the actors and the audience are in the same room, and just as the audience can see and hear the performers, the performers can see and hear the audience. Please ask your students to avoid disturbing those around them. Please no talking or unnecessary or disruptive movement during the performance. Also, please remind students that cellphones should be switched off completely. No texting or tweeting, please. When students give their full attention to the action on the stage, they will be rewarded with the best performance possible.

GOOD NOISE, BAD NOISE. Instead of instructing students to remain totally silent, please discuss the difference between appropriate responses (laughter, applause, participation when requested) and inappropriate noise (talking, cell phones, etc).

STAY WITH US. Please do not leave or allow students to leave during the performance except in absolute emergencies. Again, reminding them to use the restrooms before the performance will help eliminate unnecessary disruption.

SYNOPSIS

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time focuses on Christopher Boone, a 15-year-old with many signs of autism spectrum disorder. Christopher lives with his father in Swindon, Great Britain, about 75 miles west of London. One night, Christopher discovers that his next door neighbor's dog, Wellington, has been killed with a pitchfork. Upset by this incident, Christopher, who doesn't like to be touched, strikes a police officer who tries to pull him away from the dog. Christopher is arrested and questioned about Wellington's death, but eventually released into his father's custody. Although his father encourages him to keep his nose out of other people's business, Christopher decides to find out who killed Wellington.

Christopher's teacher, Siobhan (pronounced sho-VAHN), suggests to Christopher that he write a story about what happened to Wellington. That story, supposedly written by Christopher, is the text of the original novel by Mark Haddon. In the play by Simon Stephens, Siobhan reads Christopher's book aloud at times, while in other scenes Christopher speaks to the audience directly. Some moments are narrated, but most are enacted by the cast, many of whom play several different roles. We see Christopher's father telling him about his mother's death, and we learn about the daily life of father and son in the two years since. We hear about the special school Christopher attends, and about his plans to be the first from his school to take A-levels (college entrance exams). Through Christopher's writing, we are able to get inside his mind, sharing his unique view of the world around him.

The story of the play is told not only through words, but also through choreographed movement by the ensemble of actors. The stage setting is very spare, allowing the text and the actors' movement to help us imagine a wide variety of different locations with simple, minimal scenic adjustments, along with extensive lighting, music, sound, and video projections.

Although Christopher is very uncomfortable with strangers, he begins his investigation of Wellington's death by going door to door, questioning neighbors to whom he has never spoken before. Eventually his questions lead him to a world of people he has never met and places he has never been. His experience and discoveries will change Christopher's life forever.





MARK HADDON, THE AUTHOR

Mark Haddon is a British author of novels, children's literature, poetry screenplays, and radio drama. He is known for his series of Agent Z books, one of which, *Agent Z and the Penguin from Mars*, was made into a Children's BBC sitcom. In 2003, Haddon published *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The first book that he wrote intentionally for an adult audience, it was successfully marketed to both adult and child audiences. Likewise, it won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize in adult categories, as well as the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. His second adult novel, *A Spot of Bother*, was published in 2006.



SIMON STEPHENS, THE PLAYWRIGHT

Born in 1971, Simon Stephens is a prolific and award-winning playwright, whose notable works include *Punk Rock* (2009) and an adaptation of Brecht and Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* (2016). Stephens is an artistic associate at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London, and the associate playwright of Steep Theatre in Chicago. His adaptation of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* won seven Olivier Awards including Best Play in 2013. In 2015, the Broadway production of *Curious Incident* won five Tony Awards, including Best Play and Best Actor. Stephens has written more than 30 original plays and adaptations.

FROM THE NOVEL TO THE STAGE

Are you Curious about how *Curious Incident* was written? Here's a little background on how the critically acclaimed novel was adapted into a Tony award-winning play!

The title of Mark Haddon's book (and this play), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, is a direct reference to *The Adventure of Silver Blaze* - a story from the Sherlock Holmes series by British author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In the story, Sherlock Holmes discusses with Gregory, a Scotland Yard detective:

Gregory: Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?

Holmes: To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.

Gregory: The dog did nothing in the night-time.

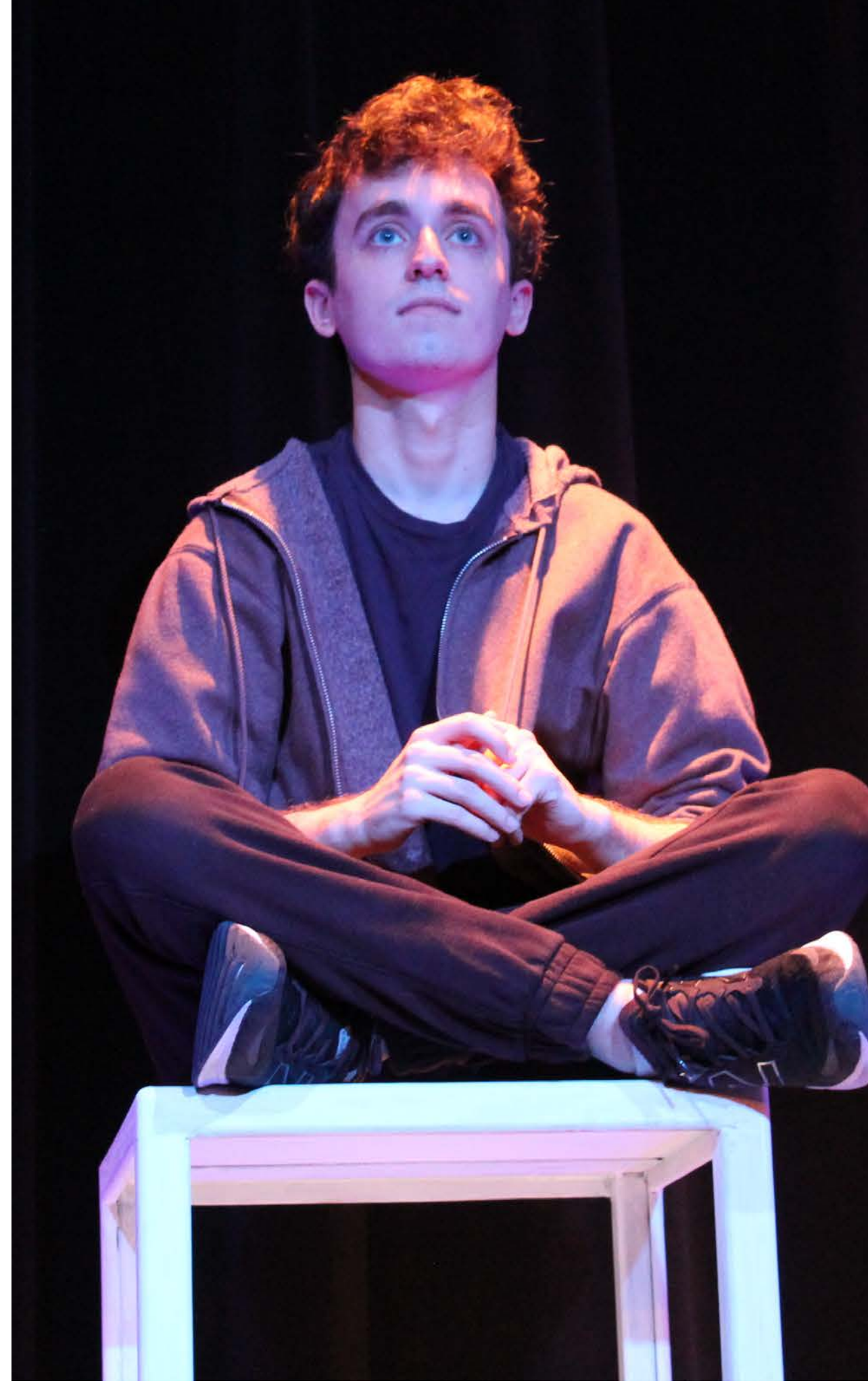
Holmes: That was the curious incident.

The title directly reflects Christopher's interest in Sherlock Holmes's detective stories. In the novel, Christopher says that "I think that if I were a proper detective [Sherlock Holmes] is the kind of detective I would be."

The book *Curious Incident* has the audience reading the pages of Christopher's journal and he tells his story through drawings, diagrams and photos.

In the play, Christopher's teacher Siobhan functions as a narrator, reading portions of Christopher's first-person observations in his book, occasionally conversing with him what he has written. At times, ensemble members, who play multiple roles, also speak his thoughts as the production attempts to have us see and hear the world as Christopher does. Sometimes, this means emphasizing things that would ordinarily go unnoticed but are very important to Christopher, as a person on the autism spectrum and as a detective.

This Tony Award-winning adaptation of Mark Haddon's critically acclaimed novel of Christopher's adventure has dazzled audiences all around the globe.



CHARACTERS



Christopher John Francis Boone: A 15 year-old English boy who lives with his father and attends a special school. Although his specific diagnosis is never identified, it is assumed that he is on the autism spectrum with characteristics we typically call Asperger's Syndrome. He is a brilliant math student.

Siobhan: Christopher's teacher. She narrates part of the story, speaking from Christopher's writings.

Ed: Christopher's father who is his sole caregiver.

Judy: Christopher's mother, who now lives in London. She admits that caring for her son was overwhelming.

Mrs. Alexander: A kindly neighbor.

Mrs. Shears: The neighbor whose dog, Wellington, was dead with a pitchfork stuck in him.

Roger Shears: The Boones' neighbor.

Reverend Peters: The proctor for Christopher's A Level exams in Maths.

Toby: Christopher's pet rat.

Ensemble: passersby, police, train employees, shopkeepers, neighbors, etc.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A levels: The advanced level exams needed to leave school in the United Kingdom. They are given in separate areas of study. In *The Curious Incident*, Christopher is taking the Maths A Levels. They are part of the General Certificate of Education, are national examinations, and like our College Boards or ACT, they are required for entrance into university.

Aloo gobi sag: An Indian dish consisting of cauliflower and potatoes, seasoned with garam masala. Indian food, often as take-out or packaged food, is as popular in England as Mexican food here.

A-star (A*): When taking the A-Levels, one can earn a grade of A*, A, B, C, D, or E. A* is given to students that achieve an average of 80% across all modules.

First Class Honours Degree A bachelor's degree in which the recipient is in the 70th or higher percentile in his or her class. (Words that end in -or in the United States, such as honor, are often spelled with -our in Britain.)

A to Z: A pocket-sized map guide to London.

Battenberg Cake: A sponge cake constructed to create a checkerboard pattern of pink and yellow layers when cut.

Bed-sit: A one-room apartment that we would call a studio.

Biscuit: Cookie

British Rail: The English train system, which is much more extensive and popular than our own Amtrak.

Cashpoint card: A debit card

Further Maths: The name given to any mathematics course studied beyond AS-Level and A-Level courses, including advanced algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and calculus.

Invigilator: An exam proctor.

Jumper: The British term for a sweater.

Lemon squash: A carbonated drink made from a fruit syrup, in this case lemon.

Lose my rag: To get angry or lose one's temper.

Marks & Spencer: A popular chain of department stores. In slang, it is often called "Marks & Sparks."

Messerschmitt: A German World War II fighter plane.

Quid: Quid is slang for a pound, the basic unit of British currency, comprised of 20 shillings.

Plonker: A fool.

Red Mist: "When the red mist comes down" is a common British expression for getting angry. It is derived from the old belief that blood goes to the head when one is angry or excited.

Tube: The London subway system. trainers: Sneakers.



PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Neither author Mark Haddon nor playwright Simon Stephens ever use the word autism in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. In fact, no explanation is ever given for Christopher's unusual behaviors. Yet the autism community has embraced both the novel and the play as among the best literary representations of what it is like to be autistic. How much do your students know about autism? There are excellent resources listed in this study guide on pages 20 and 21. How do we learn to differentiate between what we think the disability community needs, and what they actually want? How can we learn to treat people of all kinds of difference with respect and understanding?

If your students have read the book, discuss how they imagine it might be adapted for the stage. What would be the particular challenges of presenting this story on stage? In what ways might the stage be a better vehicle for telling this story than film or television?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What challenges does *The Curious Incident* present to the ways we usually think and talk about characters in plays? How does it force us to reexamine our normal ideas about love and desire, which are often the driving forces in drama? By seeing the world through Christopher's eyes, what do we discover about ourselves?

Christopher says he doesn't understand lies, and that he cannot lie. Does the play bear that idea out? Why is lying such an alien concept to him? Why do "normal" human beings in the play, such as Christopher's parents, and most of us, find lies so indispensable? Why is the idea of truth so central to Christopher's narration?

How does the play help us understand, at least in part, someone we might otherwise never understand?

The title of the book (and the play) comes from Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story "Silver Blaze," about the theft of a racehorse. When Holmes mentions "the curious incident of the dog in the night-time," the police inspector says, "The dog did nothing." Holmes points out that the failure of the watch dog to bark shows that the dog knew the thief, thus narrowing the field of suspects. Why do you suppose author Mark Haddon chose this quote as his title?

Christopher's parents, with their affairs, their arguments, and their passionate rages, are clearly in the grip of emotions they themselves can't fully understand or control. How does this state relate to Christopher's incomprehension of the passions that drive other people?

After the play ends, what do you think will happen in Christopher's relationship with his father? What do you think the future holds for Christopher? Will he reach his goals? Why or why not?

More and more, projections are becoming an integral part of scenic design in the theatre. How effective was this production element in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*? How did it enhance or detract from your experience of the play? In general, how do you feel about the use of video elements in stage productions?

This production features a generous amount of non-realistic movement by the actors. How did this element enhance or detract from your experience of the play? How did it enhance or detract from the storytelling?



WRITING PROMPTS

In the play, Christopher finds a box of letters that his mother has written to him. Only a few are read on stage or included in the original novel. Write your own version of a letter to Christopher from his mother. It might be the first letter she wrote to him after she left, or a letter about an important day in her life, or about an ordinary day. Include in the letter a memory she has about Christopher, or something she has experienced that reminds her of him, or something she would like to do with him.

We learn about characters from what they say, what they do, and from what other characters say about them. Choose one of the play's characters and do a character analysis beginning with those three points. Then extrapolate more biographical information, such as age, education, passions, aspirations, likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams, work life, relationships, socioeconomic position, etc. Write an interview in the guise of an actor, asking questions of your chosen character, not only about the events of the play, but also about aspects of his or her life that are not seen in the play.

Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects— scenery, lights,

costumes, sound, direction, acting—as well as your impressions of the script and the impact of the story and/or themes and the overall production. What moments made an impression? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors' performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: smiles@newstagetheatre.com



RESOURCES

Books

The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism
by Naoki Higoshida, translated by K A Yoshida & David Mitchell

Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew
by Ellen Notbohm

Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism
by Temple Grandin

In a Different Key: The Story of Autism
by John Donovan & Caren Zucker

Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's
by John Elder Robison

Websites

<http://www.autism-society.org>

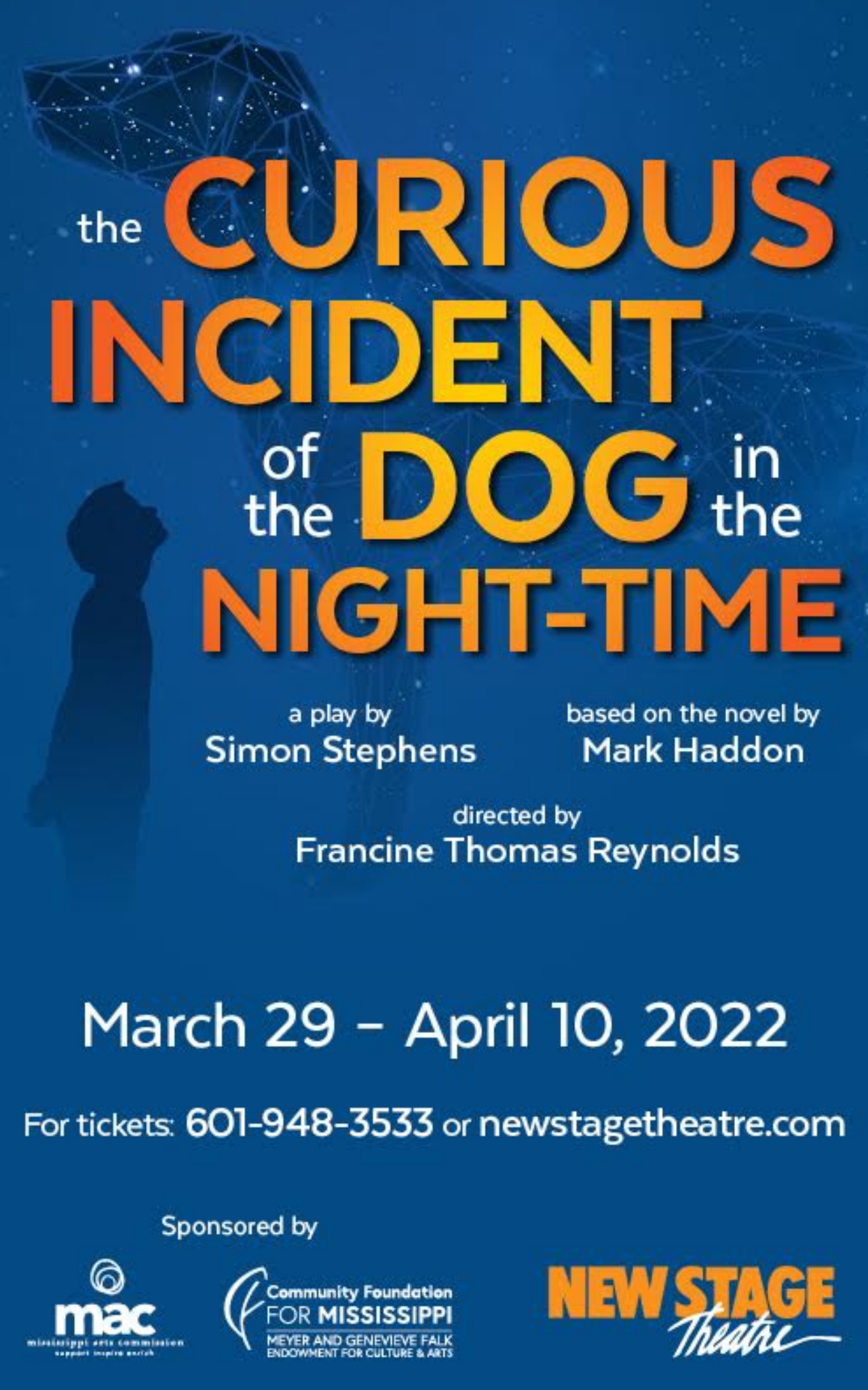
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/>

Valuable resources about autism, its many forms, and living with the condition

Haddon, Mark. <http://www.markhaddon.com> *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night time.*

Study Guide

Portions of this study guide were graciously provided by the Syracuse Stage Education Department and the Indiana Repertory Theatre.



The poster features a dark blue background with a silhouette of a person looking up at a large, glowing, geometric dog head in the upper left. The title is written in large, bold, orange and yellow letters. Credits for the play and novel are listed below the title, followed by the director's name. The performance dates and ticket information are at the bottom, along with logos for the sponsors.

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