Son is divided into three parts. “Book One: Before”, “Book Two: Between”, and “Book Three: Beyond.” Lead a class discussion about why it’s important to deal with the “before” and “between” in life in order to understand and confront the “beyond.”

DISCUSSION

• Ask students to define community. Compare and contrast each community in which Claire lives. How is she a mystery, or a foreigner, in all three communities?

• Discuss how the rituals in the seaside community in “Book Two: Between” define the culture of the people. How does Claire’s previous life resemble a science lab? What is the connection between science, culture, and the human experience? How does Jonas understand the human experience? Explain how Claire’s “Between” years help her make the transition to “Beyond.”

• Claire is inexperienced with feelings. Why is she so confused when she begins to have a “yearning” for her baby? How does this feeling frighten her? Discuss how the emotion of love overtakes the emotion of fear. Explain how Claire’s “yearning” sets her free.

• Discuss Claire’s reaction when she learns that she is a failure as a Birthmother. Debate whether she thinks she has failed herself or her community. Discuss whether her product’s failure to thrive contributes to additional feelings of failure. How does her failure as a Birthmother cause her shame in the seaside community? Why is she considered “stained”? How does her failure as a “vessel” allow her to become a mother?

• Secrets and lying are prohibited in the community. How do Claire’s secret feelings cause her great pain? Debate whether Claire is guilty of lying or simply creating excuses to wander from the Fish Hatchery to the Nurturing Center. The man who is caring for Thirty-six is also harboring a secret. What would happen if the Chief Elder of the community discovered that he had named the product, now a newchild? What is symbolic about the newchild’s name?
• What does the nurturer see in Thirty-six that others can’t see? Explain Gabe’s gift. Jonas gave Gabe life by taking him to Elsewhere. Debate the possibility that Jonas saw something “special” in the infant Gabe. What does he give him at the end of Son?

• In “Book One: Before,” Claire says that she is lonely, though she really doesn’t understand the meaning of the word. How does she confront her feelings of loneliness as she makes her journey to “Between” and “Beyond”? Which other characters suffer from a similar loneliness? Debate whether Gabe is lonely or simply needs to understand his history.

• Discuss what Lame Einar means when he tells Claire, “It be better, I think, to climb out in search of something, instead of hating what you’re leaving.” (p. 209) How is love stronger than hate? Discuss how Alys understands a mother’s love, even though she is not a mother herself.

• Power may corrupt, but it can heal. How does Trademaster use his power to corrupt? Jonas needs for Gabe to understand the difference between a unique power and a gift. Why does Jonas feel that having a gift is burdensome? Discuss why Gabe is uncomfortable with his special gift. He uses his gift of veering to destroy evil. Debate whether he will ever use his gift again.

• Discuss the symbolism of the river that flows through the community in “Book One: Before.” Why are the people taught to fear the river? At what point does Claire recognize that her fascination with the boat and the river may have meaning? How is Gabe lured to the river in “Book Three: Beyond”? What is symbolic about Gabe’s swimming across the river at the end of the novel? Might his boat be displayed in the Vehicles of Arrival exhibit?

REACHING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Ask students to write a decree announcing the death of Trademaster. Include a statement about his evil use of power and how he attempted to destroy the village.

The sled that brought Jonas and Gabe to the village is displayed in the Vehicles of Arrival exhibit at the town museum. Ask students to imagine other vehicles that are included in the exhibit. Then have them write a description of each vehicle for the museum exhibition catalogue.

Alys is the midwife and healer in the seaside community in “Book Two: Between.” Have students make a list of the various herbs and plants that Alys uses in her practice (e.g., goldenseal and chamomile). Instruct them to make an illustrated chart of the plants that includes their medicinal use.

Claire struggles to understand the cycle of life. Dimitri, the head of the Hatchery operation, is puzzled that she didn’t learn that in evolutionary biology. Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to learn about the study of evolutionary biology. Have them write a course description for a college catalogue.

The community in which Claire is born is colorless. In “Book Two: Between,” she begins to learn colors. Have students list the various emotions that Claire experiences throughout the novel (e.g., love, passion, anger, fear, hope) and ask them to select a color that symbolizes each emotion. Then ask them to color freedom from Claire’s point of view.
It’s a custom in the village where Claire finds Gabe to perform a welcoming ceremony for new residents, at which time their histories are told. Ask students to discuss why Claire never received a proper welcome. Then have them plan and perform a welcoming ceremony, called “Son and Sun,” for Claire after she regains her youth. Give roles to Gabe, Jonas, Kira, and Claire.

Have students make a poster announcing Claire’s welcoming ceremony to the people in the village. Consider illustrating Claire as an old woman, created by Trademaster, and the young woman, brought back to life by Gabe.

A ballad is a form of verse that tells a story and is often set to music. Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to find examples of musical ballads. Then have them write a ballad about Claire’s quest to find Gabe.

Jonas is the librarian, or keeper of knowledge, in the village. Ask students to select books from the school or public library that Claire may place in the village library in honor of the following characters: the nurturer, Alys, Lame Einar, Old Benedikt, Bryn, Gabe, Kira, and Jonas. Write a brief dedication for each book.

Jonas saves Gabe at the end of *The Giver*. Now it’s Gabe’s turn to save his Birthmother. Role-play the scene when Gabe first sees Claire as a young woman. What does he say to her?

**VOCABULARY**


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