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In the "ideal" world into which Jonas was born, everybody has sensibly agreed that well-matched married couples will raise exactly two offspring, one boy and one girl. These children's adolescent sexual impulses will be stifled with specially prescribed drugs; at age 12 they will receive an appropriate career assignment, sensibly chosen by the community's Elders. This is a world in which the old live in group homes and are "released"--to great celebration--at the proper time; the few infants who do not develop according to schedule are also "released," but with no fanfare. Lowry's development of this civilization is so deft that her readers, like the community's citizens, will be easily seduced by the chimera of this ordered, pain-free society. Until the time that Jonah begins training for his job assignment--the rigorous and prestigious position of Receiver of Memory--he, too, is a complacent model citizen. But as his near-mystical training progresses, and he is weighed down and enriched with society's collective memories of a world as stimulating as it was flawed, Jonas grows increasingly aware of the hypocrisy that rules his world. With a storyline that hints at Christian allegory and an eerie futuristic setting, this intriguing novel calls to mind John Christopher's Tripods trilogy and Hans Christian Andersen's The Little Match Girl.