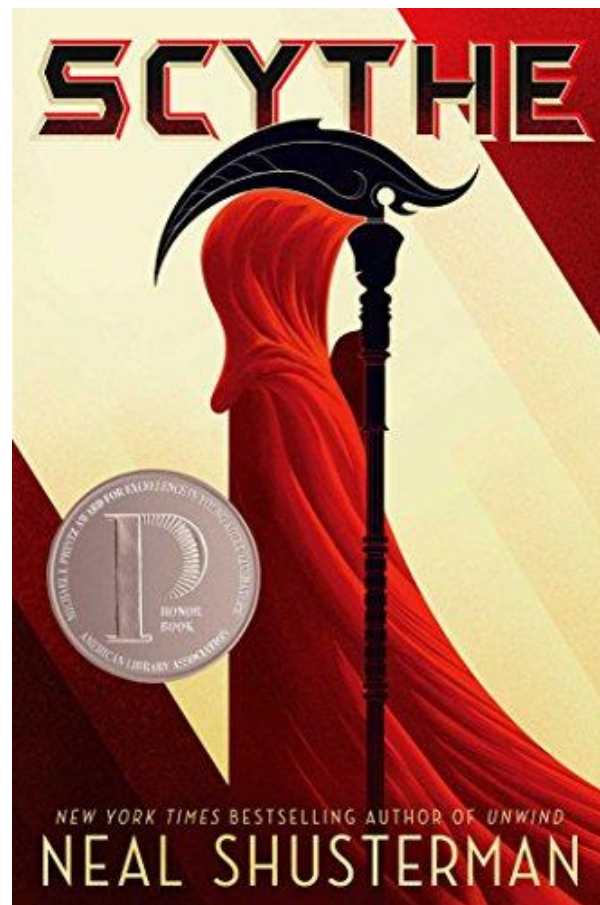


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Dr. Warner  
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English 112B Section 1

Scythe

By Neal Shusterman



### About the Author:

<http://www.storyman.com/about/>



Source: <https://booksparks.com/portfolio/neal-shusterman/>

As a child, Neal Shusterman wanted to be an actor, doctor, architect, and rockstar amongst many other professions. He describes being discouraged by a teacher who told him that he couldn't juggle all of his dreams. However, Shusterman reminisces on that teacher's judgment as he writes "I had it worked out: I'd be a jack of seven trades, and a master of three." Luckily, Shusterman had a ninth grade English teacher who gave him extra credit for each month that he wrote a story which allowed him to feel like a creator. At sixteen, he moved from New York to Mexico City where he gained a new perspective on the world.

(<http://www.storyman.com/about/>).

- Shusterman has a degree in Psychology and in Drama
- *Scythe* received the Michael L. Printz Honor book award and is being developed as a film with Universal Studios.

### **Summary:**

*Scythe* is set in a futuristic version of Earth where humanity achieves immortality. Earth is a utopia where the Thunderhead, an all-seeing Artificial Intelligence (A.I.), helps humanity make giant leaps in science, technology, and government. The only human-run organization in the world is the “Scythedom”. The Thunderhead has no control over the Scythedom’s actions, but the A.I. was the originator of the idea of the Scythedom as a solution to population control. The goal of this group is to glean (kill) people in hopes of population control by meeting quotas set by the Sythedom. The organization has many branches throughout the world.

The two main protagonists of the book, Citra Terranova and Rowan Damisch, are chosen to be Scythe Faraday’s apprentices. Throughout the novel, Citra and Rowan learn about the Scythedom’s corruption, ideologies, and history. The apprentices also learn about their own morality and how they fit into the organization’s institution.

### **Quotes**

“‘During your year with me,’ Scythe Faraday told Rowan... *And it will only get worse.*” (77-80).

I chose this quote because it details the intricacies of sythedom- weapons mastery, education, and morality to Citra, Rowan, and the audience. While the job of a Scythe is violent, the job requires a sense of morality that Scythe Faraday exemplifies. The best part of the quote that describes this is, “‘If you do not cry yourself to sleep on a regular basis, you are not compassionate enough to be a Scythe’”. While the idea of a Scythe sounds like a job fit for a killer, Scythe Faraday lets his apprentices know that the job of a Scythe involves a moral responsibility and respect for life. The ideals of a Scythe must not be for the enjoyment of killing

but compassion and dignity. Scythe Faraday chooses Citra and Rowan as his apprentices because of their perceived compassion and love of life. However, as the text continues, to show how the two apprentices are challenged as they explore the Scythedom.

“They circled back, and Scythe Curie let Citra off on a side street just a block from where the gleaning occurred... ‘You thought wrong’”(188-191).

This quote shows Citra’s new apprenticeship under Scythe Curie and the compassion that Scythe Curie practices after gleaning someone. First, she contacts the family, as Scythe procedure requires, to give them immunity from gleaning. But, then she cooks them a meal and learns about the person she gleaned which allows the Scythe and her apprentice to humanize and get to know their victim. Scythe Curie also reminds Citra that once she’s a Scythe, she’ll have to find her own way of gleaning in order to keep her from hating herself. Scythe Curie’s teachings are akin to Scythe Faraday’s as she takes on a compassionate approach to gleaning. The scene is also an antithesis to Rowan’s new apprenticeship under Scythe Goddard, a Scythe who is famous for his mass gleanings.

“Then came the day Scythe Goddard threw a new wrinkle into the taut fabric of Rowan’s life...another part of him wanted to howl to the moon like a wolf” (246-250).

While Citra is learning how to be a good Scythe, Rowan is being taught how to be a ruthless and effective killer. He is taught to enjoy the art of gleaning by Scythe Goddard. Unlike Scythe Faraday and Scythe Curie, Goddard takes pleasure in gleaning and tries to sway Rowan into enjoying it too. In this scene, Rowan is ordered to kill twelve real people instead of dummies. Once he completes his task, he realizes that he enjoys it. I chose this scene because it

shows Rowan's internal struggle. He was taught to be compassionate, but now he is being taught to be strong and proud of his killer instincts. This is one of Rowan's weak points in the book as he usually leans towards being compassionate rather than giving into Scythe Goddard's twisted philosophy.

### **Classroom Use**

I would use this book in the classroom during a Unit where my classroom studies dystopian novels. *Scythe* would pair well with *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card and *The Giver* by Lois Lowry because both books question their governing societies in an hands-on capacity just like *Scythe*. However, *Scythe* could also pair well with some canonical readings like *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and *1984* by George Orwell during a Unit on Dystopian novels as the novels all explore the deconstruction of their world's ideologies. A good way to pair *Scythe* with these canonical texts would be through an activity where students are split up in groups where they focus on one of the four texts (*Fahrenheit*, *Brave New World*, *1984*, or *Scythe*) and compose a presentation on their assigned dystopian world. What are the pros and cons of this book's world? Can their problems be fixed? An essay can also assess their understanding between *Scythe* and a canonical book of their choosing. Of course, class time would be spent deconstructing the books beforehand.

This book would be most appropriate for 9th to 12th graders based on some of the more gruesome scenes in the book. Ideas, plot points, and the general writing of the book are presented in a simple manner. Teens should read this book because it is well-paced with ideas and action scenes that grab their attention. The book also weaves ideas of morality, dystopia, and corruption into every aspect of the book. There is no part of the book that wouldn't leave a student with

some questions such as: “Why is Rowan doing this? Why does Goddard think this way? How does the Sythedom feel about this”. Students may also feel out-of-place in their own lives such as characters in the novel do. The book also talks about fighting for what you believe in, a message that I think Generation Z would really relate to. However, the book’s length may be daunting coming in at 435 pages.

### **How it applies to Chapters 4-8 in *Adolescents and the Search for Meaning***

#### *Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences*

- Once Citra and Rowan become Scythe apprentices, they are ostracized by everyone around them- friends, family, classmates, and even strangers. Many teens can also feel this way.
- Citra and Rowan have to prove themselves worthy of Scythedom by learning from their teacher and participating in tests that dictate their worthiness. Oftentimes, teens can feel pressured to impress their teachers, especially in extracurricular activities, and feel like they have to stretch themselves thin in order to do good. The anxiety of tests also stresses students out.
- Teens start to question the institutions around them that sprout from their inner rebel, *Scythe* also has this as Citra and Rowan question those around them as well as the world they live in.

#### *Chapter 5: Books about Facing Death and Loss*

- Teens can learn about overcoming obstacles in order to better their lives and the lives of others.

- Teens learn about the morality and sanctity of other people's lives by reading about Citra and Rowan's empathetic thoughts and actions.
- Teens learn that death is a natural part of life that must be met with sanctity.

#### *Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions*

- Teens might have questions about why people discriminate against other people. This book does tackle discrimination in terms of elevating one's power by getting rid of "undesirables".
- Teens have to make difficult decisions like Citra and Rowan as they seek to find ways to become good Scythe.
- The Scythedom is a political entity that may lead to students critiquing the politics in the real world.
- The book has characters from different ethnicities that students may like to see as representative of themselves.

#### *Chapter 7: Books about Courage and Survival*

- Citra and Rowan vow to find ways to become good people despite the systems in place. The main characters try to fight against their governing body.
- Scythe Goddard teaches teens that hate, discrimination, and obsession with power are learned traits.
- Citra and Rowan make risky decisions that end up helping them in the long run.
- Citra and Rowan are unafraid to accept help from others when needed.
- Challenging new and old problematic situations and introducing new ways of solving problems.

## *Chapter 8: Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable*

- Teens are familiar with the trope that Artificial Intelligence is evil and are interested in a story where Artificial Intelligence is good.
- The internet is a powerful tool that can help teens learn more about the world around them.
- Ideas of an overall utopian world with dystopian traits may interest teens into reading forward.
- The absence of real-world religion could show relate to students who have trouble believing in God.

### **Text Complexity**

#### Quantitative

Lexile: Age:12-17, 830L

AR: ATOS Book Level: 6.5, Interest Level: UG 9-12, AR Points: 17.0

#### Qualitative

##### 1. Structure

*Scythe* is moderately complex with a conventional structure of beginning, middle, and end that is easy to understand. The text introduces different acts of the book as “Parts” of which there are five. The text is told from the third person omniscient point of view. Perspectives and feelings of every character are apparent to the reader.

##### 2. Language Conventions and Clarity



The text's language is clear. There is no overly complex language. Actions are conveyed clearly. Terms that are exclusive to the text, like the word "gleaning", are defined and understood within a context that makes it easy for the reader to understand its meaning. Literary Devices like metaphor and imagery are used to convey characters actions well. The text places an emphasis on explaining the character's feelings rather than their surroundings.

### 3. Knowledge demands

The text demands that the reader know what artificial intelligence is, connections to other science fiction works that present artificial intelligence as all powerful, and what the "cloud" is. The text blends contemporary technology with futuristic elements that are recognizable to people alive today such as trains, cameras, and "cloud" technology that saves everything that is online.

### 4. Levels of meaning/ Purpose

The surface-level meaning of the text is to explore a tale of human corruption in a utopian world built by artificial intelligence. The purpose of the text is for teens to explore and advocate for their own morals within corrupt systems to introduce positive change.