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112B

**Unit of Study**

I’ve chosen to base my unit of study around dystopian literature, something I believe fits well with late-middle school to high school age students. I chose this particular theme because it challenges the ideas of a society that is perfect and encourages looking deeper than the surface. This is good for the middle/high school age given that they are trying to form an idea of the world they are heading into at this point in life and encouraging them to view everything from multiple perspectives can be a powerful tool. I’ve chosen *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* by Ursula Le Guin as my centerpiece for a couple reasons. First and foremost, it is a short piece, making it an easy read that gets right to the point of dystopian worlds. Having worked with children for so long, I have learned that I need to grab their attention immediately if I want to have any hope of keeping it, hence the short piece first that we can focus on a relate back to. The second reason I have chosen this particular centerpiece is the way it is formatted. The town of Omelas is presented in a positive light and it isn’t until the end that we get a complete picture, allowing the reader to create their own conclusions and develop their own opinions before presenting them with the ultimate question of whether the people of the town have made the correct decision or not. Because of the freedom of decision offered, I think this is a good story to begin with as other dystopian books don’t offer much in the way of a choice.

**Intro to the Unit**

To introduce the unit I would first have the students explore a vocab sheet of terms that are prevalent in dystopian literature, including the differences between a utopia and a dystopia. This could be a homework assignment or an in class one, but the resulting conversation would include opinions and examples of each to get each student on the same page. I don’t think it would take much introduction so we can dive right into the centerpiece at this point. Popcorn reading for a piece so short would suffice and this allows us to experience the story unfolding as a class. I would most likely have the students stop reading at intervals to allow for some discussion before continuing the story. At the end we can have a brief debate as to the ethical choices made by the people of Omelas and what choices the students would make themselves. If there are enough students on both sides it can be a mostly student run debate, otherwise I can step in to fill one side of the argument if necessary.

**Supporting Texts**

After introducing the unit and discussing the centerpiece, I would split the class and have one half read *The Giver* by Lois Lowry and the other half read *The Guardians* by John Christopher. Both of these books offer a good idea of dystopian life and tie back to the centerpiece well. Homework would include reading a few chapters a night and keeping a logbook of responses to the reading as we move through it. Each half of the class would the class would then have to explain to the other what is happening in their book and the opinions they have formed as a result. This allows us to move more quickly through the material, but also allows the students to get a better understanding of the reading through their peers. I find that in the end, the students will listen to each other better and this gives them a sense of responsibility that will encourage them to keep reading and dig deeper. The final set of books I would present would be a choice between three series: *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, and *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner. Only the first book of the series would be assigned, but I would encourage all the students to finish whatever series they choose to begin. At this point the class should have a firm grasp on their own opinions and how dystopian societies function so teacher run discussions will most likely not be necessary. The students can form book talk groups and discuss the books on their own, with topics provided by me or themselves. All three of these series have been made into movies so we can have a final debate between groups as to which series they believe is the best representation of a dystopian society and vote on which movie to watch.

**Book Summaries**

**The Giver** by Lois Lowry

Twelve-year-old Jonas lives in a seemingly ideal world. Not until he is given his life assignment as the Receiver does he begin to understand the dark secrets behind this fragile community.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/3636.The_Giver>

**The Guardians** by John Christopher

Set in the year 2052, the novel depicts a future, authoritarian England divided into two distinct societies: the modern, overpopulated "Conurbs" and the aristocratic, rarefied "County"; the former consists of crowded city districts and all-pervasive technology while the latter is made up of manors and rolling countrysides typical of 19th-century England. The novel follows a young Conurban named Rob as he comes to experience life in both worlds, uncovering truths and choosing sides in the process.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/114403.The_Guardians>

**The Hunger Games** by Suzanne Collins

The nation of Panem, formed from a post-apocalyptic North America, is a country that consists of a wealthy Capitol region surrounded by 12 poorer districts. Early in its history, a rebellion led by a 13th district against the Capitol resulted in its destruction and the creation of an annual televised event known as the Hunger Games. In punishment, and as a reminder of the power and grace of the Capitol, each district must yield one boy and one girl between the ages of 12 and 18 through a lottery system to participate in the games. The 'tributes' are chosen during the annual Reaping and are forced to fight to the death, leaving only one survivor to claim victory.

When 16-year-old Katniss's young sister, Prim, is selected as District 12's female representative, Katniss volunteers to take her place. She and her male counterpart Peeta, are pitted against bigger, stronger representatives, some of whom have trained for this their whole lives. She sees it as a death sentence. But Katniss has been close to death before. For her, survival is second nature.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2767052-the-hunger-games>

**Divergent** by Veronica Roth

In Beatrice Prior's dystopian Chicago world, society is divided into five factions, each dedicated to the cultivation of a particular virtue—Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful), and Erudite (the intelligent). On an appointed day of every year, all sixteen-year-olds must select the faction to which they will devote the rest of their lives. For Beatrice, the decision is between staying with her family and being who she really is—she can't have both. So she makes a choice that surprises everyone, including herself.

During the highly competitive initiation that follows, Beatrice renames herself Tris and struggles alongside her fellow initiates to live out the choice they have made. Together they must undergo extreme physical tests of endurance and intense psychological simulations, some with devastating consequences. As initiation transforms them all, Tris must determine who her friends really are—and where, exactly, a romance with a sometimes fascinating, sometimes exasperating boy fits into the life she's chosen. But Tris also has a secret, one she's kept hidden from everyone because she's been warned it can mean death. And as she discovers unrest and growing conflict that threaten to unravel her seemingly perfect society, she also learns that her secret might help her save those she loves . . . or it might destroy her.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13335037-divergent>

**The Maze Runner** by James Dashner

If you ain’t scared, you ain’t human. When Thomas wakes up in the lift, the only thing he can remember is his name. He’s surrounded by strangers—boys whose memories are also gone. Nice to meet ya, shank. Welcome to the Glade. Outside the towering stone walls that surround the Glade is a limitless, ever-changing maze. It’s the only way out—and no one’s ever made it through alive. Everything is going to change.

Then a girl arrives. The first girl ever. And the message she delivers is terrifying.

Remember. Survive. Run.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6186357-the-maze-runner>