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Dr. Warner

ENGL 112B

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### Rationale

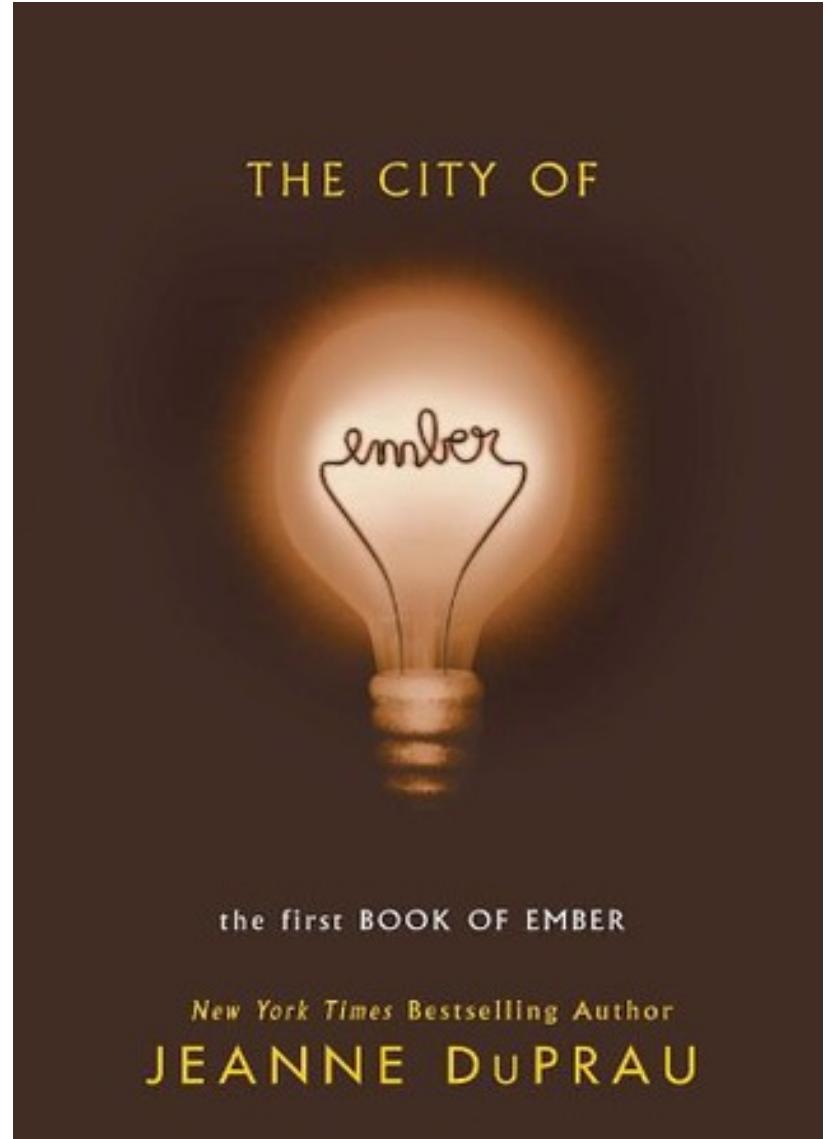
For literature aimed directly at teenagers, otherwise known as future voters and future leaders, I believe one of the most important qualities it can have is the ability to explore subjects that are often difficult to understand in a setting outside of school. History books can teach a student all about tyrannical leaders and oppressive regimes, but when a student picks up a novel and sees those systems through the eyes of a character with a story that captures their attention, they may come to understand the causes and effects of these institutions on a much deeper level. This is why dystopian novels, which show imaginative worlds with many of the same social and political structures that characterize real-life oppression, are so necessary to include in a modern day literature curriculum. Some themes that are common within the dystopian genre are discrimination, wealth inequality, tyranny, loss of individuality, the use of propaganda, and environmental destruction. Many of the characters in these novels are led to believe they live in a utopia rather than a dystopia, and throughout the course of the novel they come to realize that things are not always what they seem. Through following the journeys that these characters go on, readers may learn to recognize the signs of oppression when they see them and gain the ability to question unjust systems that have become normalized or accepted. For this reason, each of the novels I've chosen to discuss exemplify Exeter Quality #4, meaning they "inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns."

### ***The City of Ember***

DuPrau, Jeanne. *The City of Ember*. Yearling, an Imprint of Random House, 2003.

*The City of Ember*, the first in a series of post-apocalyptic novels, follows two recently graduated 12-year-olds, Lina and Doon, living in an underground society that had been built two centuries earlier to save the human race from disaster. The founders of the city had left behind a box with instructions for leaving the city when the time comes that supplies start running out, though the box had been lost for the last 100 years. At the time of the novel, lights start going out around the city and food supplies are beginning to run low. Lina finds the box in her apartment, though the letter inside is torn so she enlists Doon's help in deciphering the message and escaping before it's too late.

Much of the dystopian nature of Ember is hidden due in large part to the necessity for having restrictions in an underground society that's nearing its expiration date; however, over the course of the novel Lina and Doon discover that the Mayor has been stealing supplies and hiding them to create a stash for himself. When they try to tell the guards about this, they become the subjects of a manhunt and are forced to run before they can tell everyone else about how to escape the city. The mayor, though introduced as a benevolent character, reflects the ease at which those in power are able to abuse that power at the expense of the people they're meant to protect.

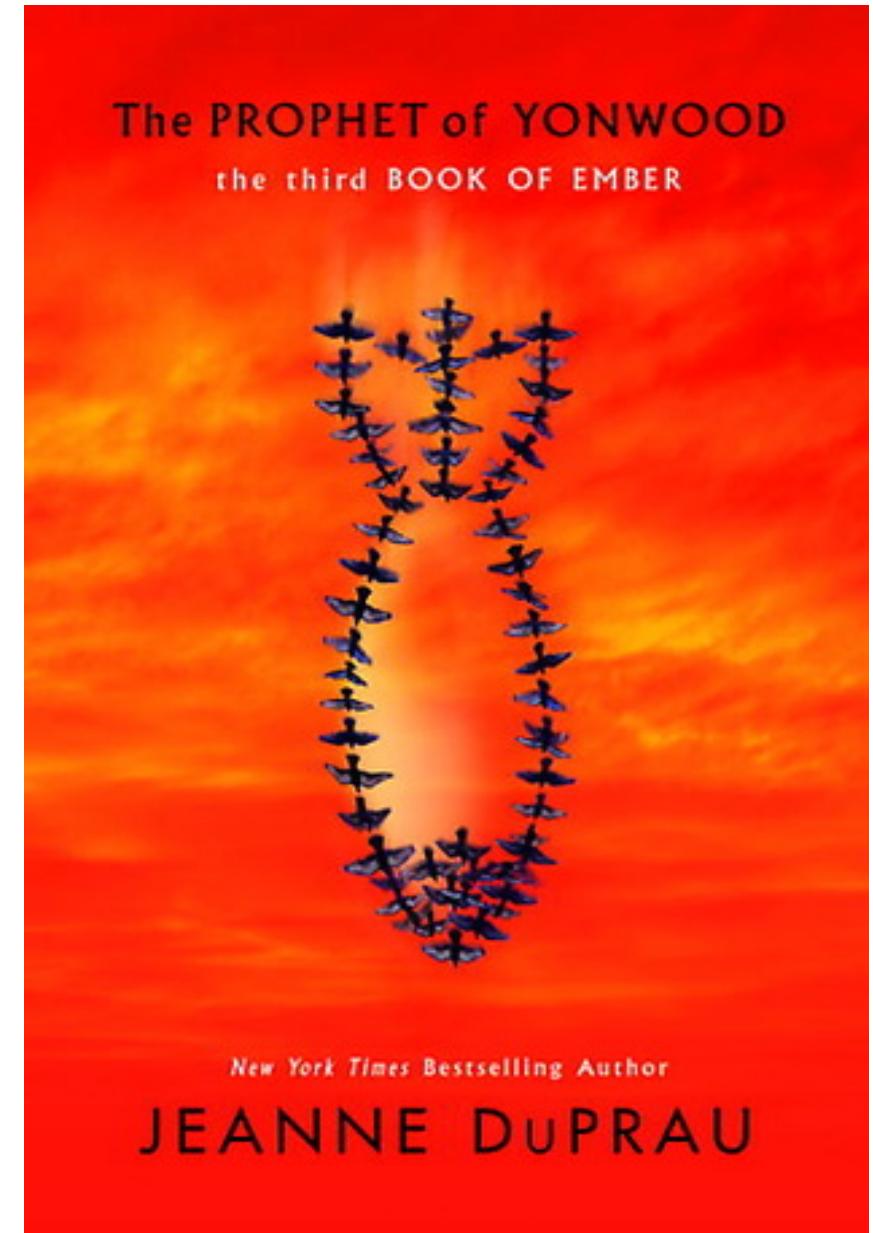


### ***The Prophet of Yonwood***

DuPrau, Jeanne. *The Prophet of Yonwood*. Yearling, an Imprint of Random House, 2006.

Set fifty years before the disaster that caused society to move underground and 250 years before the events of *The City of Ember*, *The Prophet of Yonwood* tells the story of eleven-year-old Nicki who's visiting the town of Yonwood with her aunt. There, she encounters a prophet who's had a vision of fire and destruction. A friend of the prophet, Mrs. Beeson, takes it upon herself to hold the inhabitants of Yonwood to a set of strict regulations, meant to keep them in God's favor so that they may survive the foreseen destruction; however, this quickly leads to an oppressive regime in which people begin spying on their neighbors and rule-breakers are given vibrating bracelets that cannot be removed. (Summary paraphrased from TeenInk's review and DuPrau's website).

There are two aspects of this novel that I found particularly compelling in terms of what it may show about dystopian societies – the first is that it's set in a time of political turmoil in which the president of the United States has announced the inevitability of war between the US and a group of other advanced-military nations. This provides a breeding ground of fear and anxiety for US Citizens who will look to any source of power to make them feel safe and allows Mrs. Beeson the chance to become a leader in her own community. The second is the response to Mrs. Beeson's regimen, which reveals the natural instinct to follow a powerful voice and lose individual moral standards in times of turmoil. This novel has the ability to teach students about the potential for individuals to take advantage of the fears of the masses and become tyrannical figures.

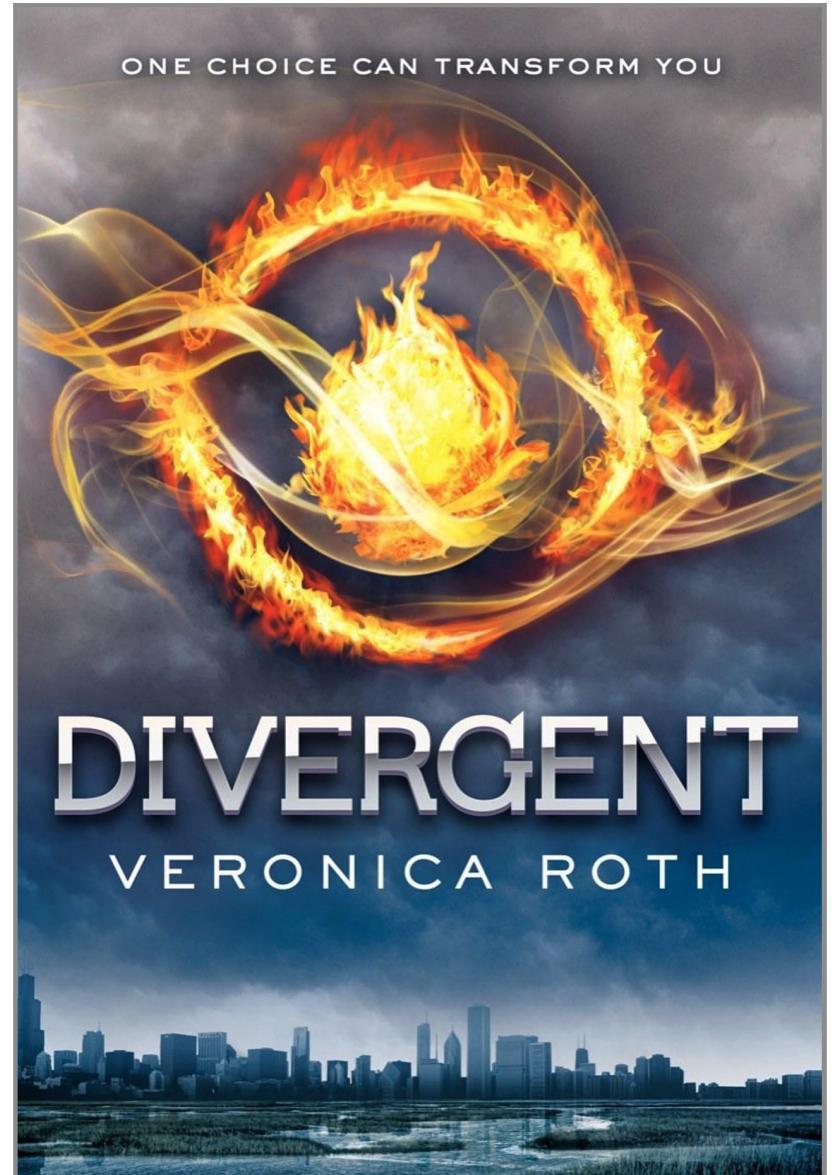


## *Divergent*

Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. HarperCollins, 2011.

The introductory novel to the *Divergent* trilogy unveils the story of Tris Prior, who lives in a community that divides its people into five factions based on the results of an aptitude test they take at the age of sixteen. If someone chooses to not take the test, they join a group called the “factionless” who are permanently unemployed and homeless. Throughout the story, Tris learns of a conflict between two of the factions that results in a full-blown battle in which the members of the faction Erudite inject the members of Tris’ faction, Dauntless, with a serum that essentially turns them into mindless soldiers to take down members of the faction Abnegation. The serum doesn’t work on people who are divergent, or fit into several factions equally well, such as Tris. This allows her and other divergents to fight against the Erudite leaders and defend their friends and family from themselves.

The idea that divergents are seen as a threat to the standing order is a clear representation of the fear that many bodies of government hold that their subjects will rebel. Those who think independently and refuse to follow the status quo are the ones most likely to take a stand against tyrannical or unjust regimes, and this is represented in the concept of divergent people being immune to the mind-control serums that Erudite leaders use to take control. The novel also provides an example of a de-centralized government, as each faction has their own leaders and there is no overarching law or system.

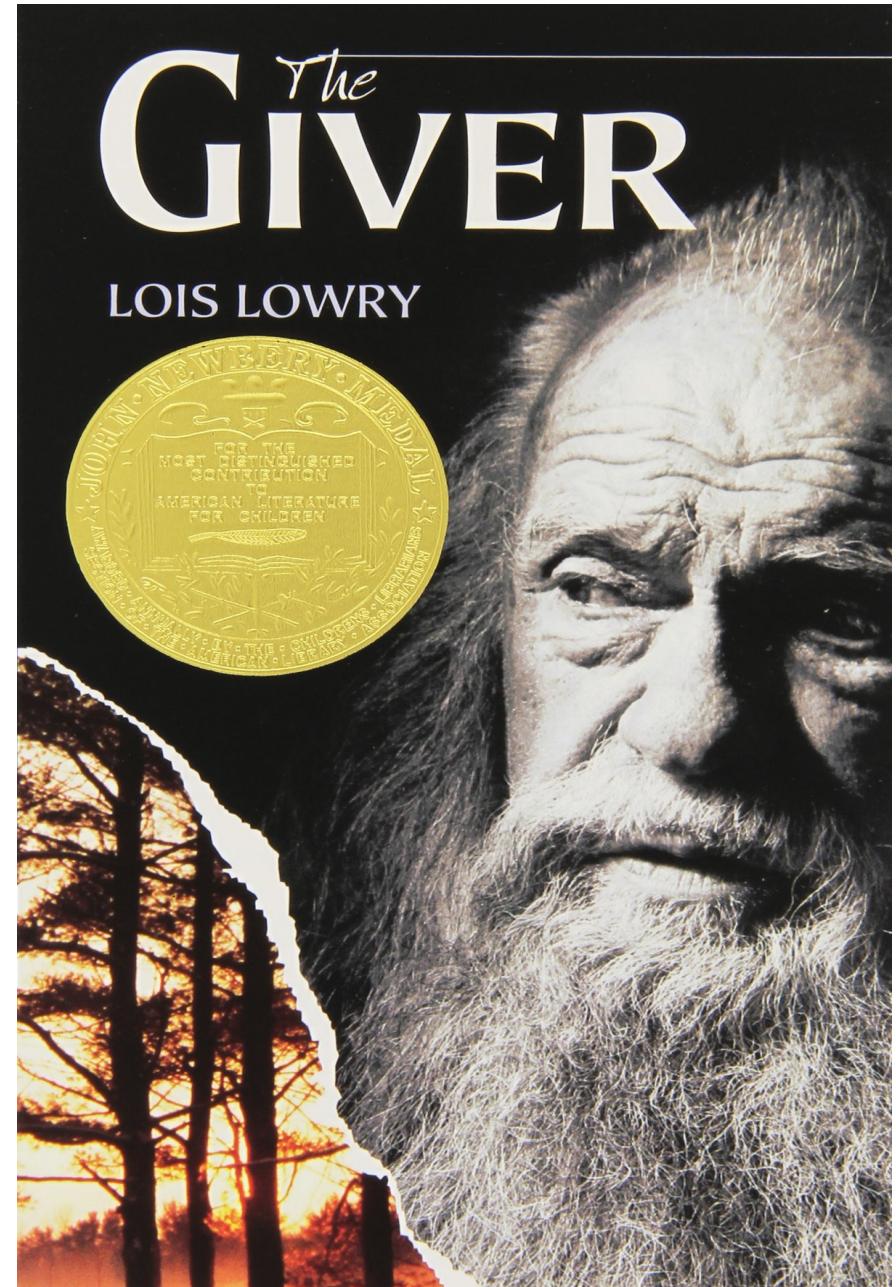


## *The Giver*

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1993.

In *The Giver*, the main character Jonas is living in a closed-off community in which nobody sees color and the inhabitants are required to take a pill each morning to prevent feeling any strong emotions. At age twelve, each child is given their work assignment based on the volunteer work they've done and the careers that they show an aptitude for. At Jonas' "Ceremony of Twelve," he is given the position of the "Receiver of Memories," which is revered as one of the most important positions within society and is only given to one person at a time. He attends work every day with the "Giver," whose job it is to hold onto all memories from a previous time and guide the Council of Elders on appropriate courses of action. After several months of working with the "Giver" and becoming familiar with everything the government holds back from its citizens, as well as feeling all of the emotions he was previously unaware of, Jonas becomes increasingly uneasy with this way of life and resolves to leave.

At the start of the novel, Jonas' community is often seen as Utopian in its efforts to eliminate discrimination and inequality. In this sense, it seems to be a perfect world. It is only through Jonas' discovery of everything they are not allowed to know and the freedom that comes with the ability to love and choose your own path that the community's true dystopian nature is revealed. *The Giver* reveals the risks of attempting to resolve discrimination by making everything the same. Though in theory this might work, it is clear that "sameness" comes at the cost of freedom and individuality. This is good for teenagers to read and understand because, when you're young and impressionable, it can feel like you have to be just like everyone else to fit in. Through experiencing a world in which everyone actually is the same, a young reader might realize their own individual worth and might also recognize when they have compromised their self-expression in favor of majority opinion.

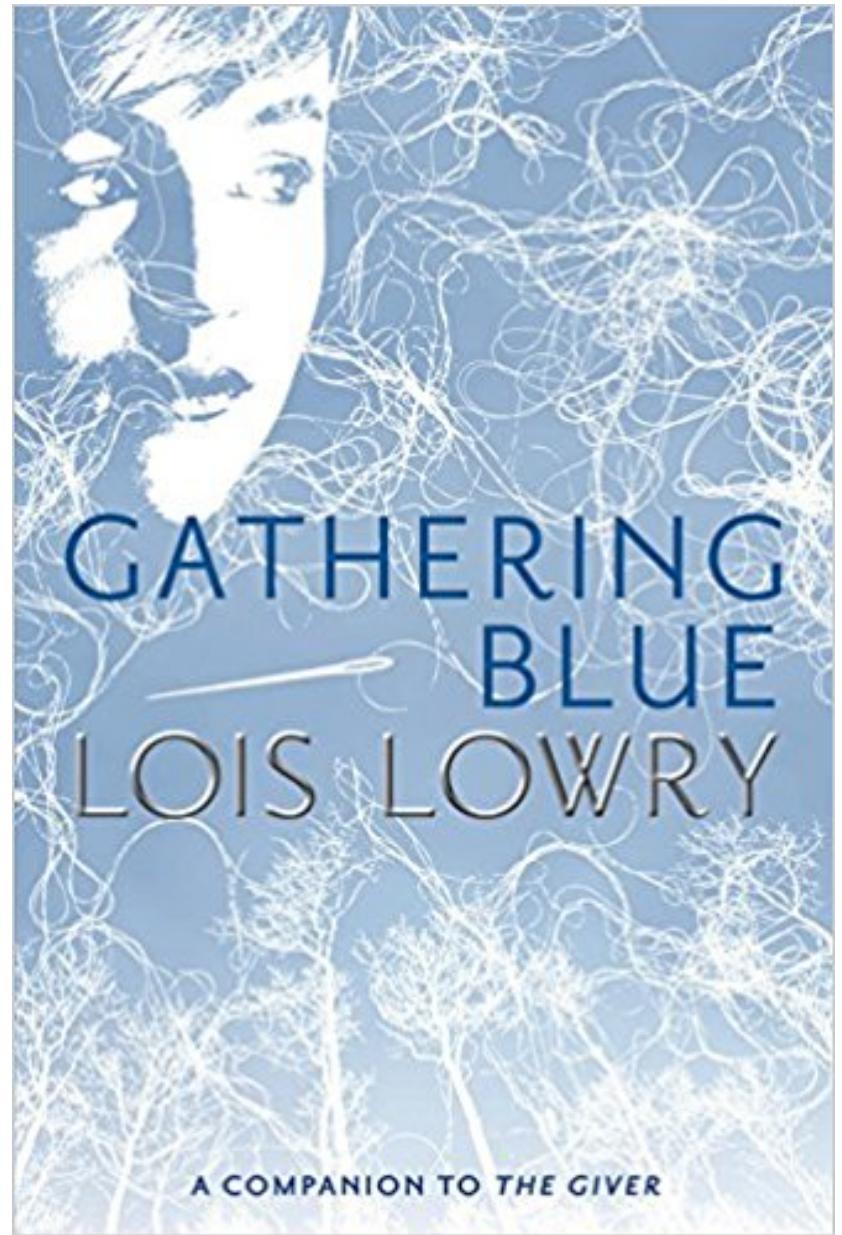


## *Gathering Blue*

Lowry, Lois. *Gathering Blue*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000.

*Gathering Blue*, set in the same world as *The Giver*, follows the story of the skilled weaver Kira, who lives in a village where the inhabitants have been raised to be competitive and hostile towards others and to believe that the worth of each individual person is based on how much they can contribute to society – to the point where people who are injured or sick are sent to their deaths. After her mother's untimely death, she is sent to live in the Edifice and is given access to food and plumbing in return for her work mending the robes of the Singer, who relays the history of their community through song at a yearly ritual called the Gathering. Through meeting two other artists, both orphaned and living in the Edifice with their own set of expectations, she comes to realize that they may not be there by chance and unveils the sinister truth behind their parent's deaths and their roles within this society.

Through Kira's journey in discovering this truth, *Gathering Blue* displays a society in which the people are brainwashed into believing that there is very little worth to human life in and of itself. I believe this novel makes readers question our own world, and how working hard and making money is often seen as much more important than being compassionate and empathetic towards others. In addition to meeting Exeter Quality #4, it also fits into Exeter Quality #2 because the deeper intentions of the society are revealed as Kira discovers them.

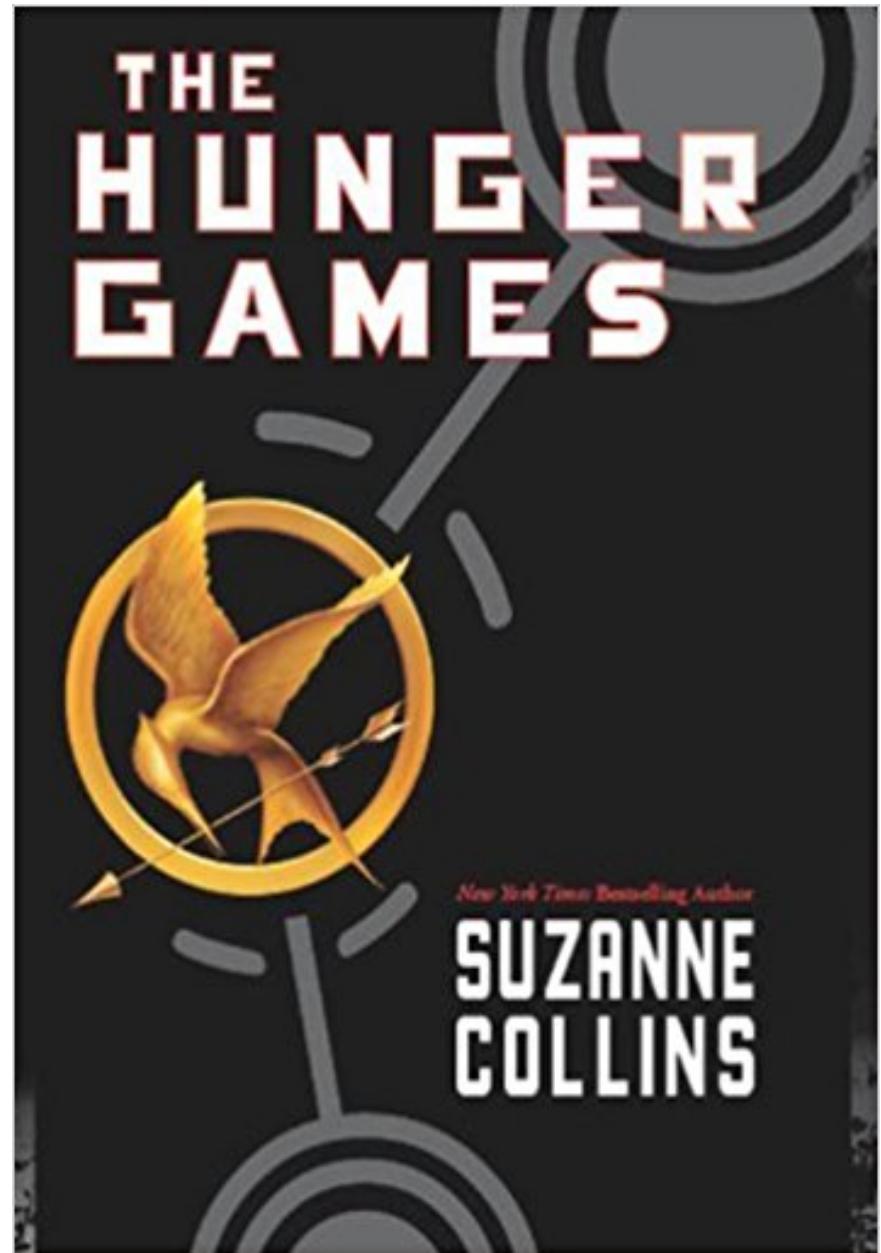


## *The Hunger Games*

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. Scholastic, 2008.

In *The Hunger Games*, what was once the United States is divided into twelve districts based on their commercial contribution to the Capitol. Each year, two “tributes” from each district between the ages of 11 and 17 are chosen to fight to the death in a highly televised and celebrated event called the “Hunger Games,” designed to remind the districts that they are under complete control of the Capitol. As the series progresses, a slight unrest within the lower-class Districts turns into full-scale rebellion against the wealthy and oppressive Capitol. The trilogy follows Katniss, a “tribute” from District 12, as she unintentionally becomes the face of the rebellion through her strength in competition and her kindness towards those commonly seen as lesser in society.

Many of the qualities maintained by the Capitol – their frivolity and unnecessary spending on luxury and appearance – are qualities we can see in the lifestyles of our top 1% today. Reality shows following the lives of people living in massive mansions make this lifestyle seem like something we should all aspire to, though the story within *The Hunger Games* reveals the unbalance created in societies in which one sector of the population is inherently more privileged than the rest. It begs the question of how people can be so comfortable throwing their money away on luxury goods while others are struggling to feed themselves and their families.



## *Legend*

Lu, Marie. *Legend*. Penguin Books, 2013.

*Legend* takes place in a world in which much of the Western United States is controlled by the totalitarian Republic during a time when the population is dwindling due to a plague and follows the stories of teenagers June and Day. June is a child-prodigy, who at fifteen is almost finished with her university degree and is living with her military brother after the plague-induced deaths of their parents. When her brother is murdered, she is given her degree early and is forced to join the military and find the person responsible for her brother's death – Day. Throughout the novel, Day is revealed to be innocent and June and Day begin to work together to solve her brother's murder before Day is killed. In this process, they discover that the plague had been created by the government as a form of eugenics and her brother was murdered for coming too close to the truth. (Summary paraphrased from GradeSaver)

Throughout the novel, an extreme disparity between the rich and the poor is revealed through June's undercover mission into the Lake sector, where Day is hiding out. It is suggested that the Trial, which is a test everyone in the Republic takes at the age of ten, is unfairly advantageous to the rich and perpetuates a system in which high-paying jobs are kept for those who grew up in wealthy homes. Through June's observation of the Lake sector and her growth in understanding the privileges that she's taken for granted, the text gives insight into our own divisive society and may make the reader question his or her own privileges.



## *Scythe*

Shusterman, Neal. *Scythe*. Simon & Schuster, 2017.

The world represented in the novel *Scythe* is one in which injury and illness have been eradicated and the power to choose who lives and dies lies in the hands of professional Scythes. Two teenagers, Rowan and Citra, are chosen by Scythe Farraday to become his apprentices and agree, not because they want to be Scythes, but because their families are granted immunity while they are under their apprenticeship. Only one of them can become a true Scythe, and so the novel follows their introduction into Scythedom and their battle to overcome each other. (Summary paraphrased from blog post)

Though the world that they live in can be considered utopian in that racism, war, and poverty have all been eradicated, it calls into question the true nature of humanity and what we might become given these “perfect” conditions. Because Scythes are performing a necessary evil, in that people must be killed to prevent overpopulation, the decision between who lives and who dies then becomes a matter of choice for individual scythes. The idea that Scythe Farraday chose both Rowan and Citra because they did not want the job highlights the mere fact that the potential for abuse in this situation is very high and provides a stark contrast with those seeking power in our world today. The novel reveals a system in which many Scythes abuse their power by accepting bribes from those who don’t want to die and by killing simply for the sake of killing.

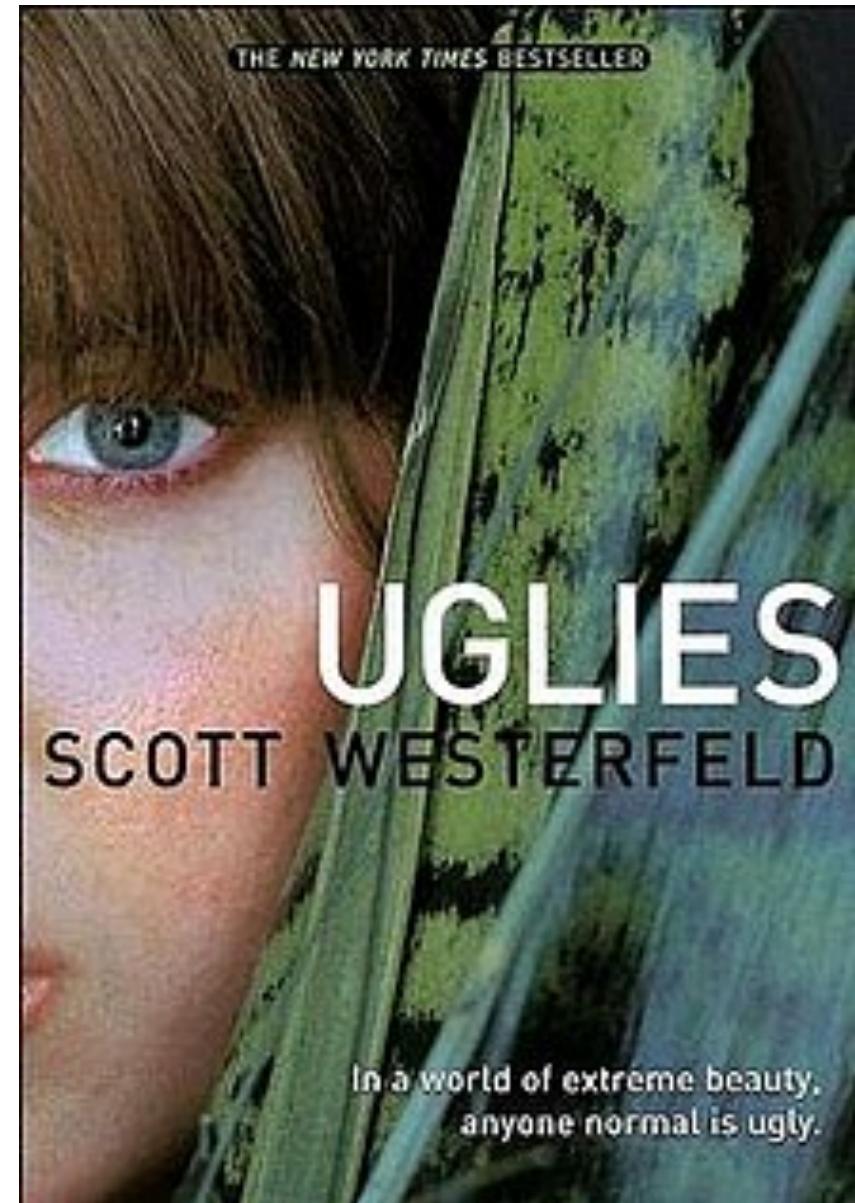


## *Uglies*

Westerfeld, Scott. *Uglies*. Simon & Schuster, 2013.

*The Uglies*, the first in a series surrounding a world 300 years in the future in which society is divided into groups based entirely on physical standards of beauty, follows a young girl named Tally as she approaches her sixteenth birthday – an occasion which, in this society, marks the date when everyone is required to undergo plastic surgery. Just before her birthday, she befriends an Ugly who rebels against the pressure to conform and runs away to a secret town called the Smoke in which no one has gone under the knife. Tally still wants the surgery, but when she goes in for her procedure she is questioned by a group called Special Circumstances who blackmail her into finding the location of the Smoke before she can become a Pretty. She finds the Smoke under their orders, but when she arrives she begins to question everything she was raised to believe and must decide whether to reveal their location or remain an Ugly. (Summary paraphrased from Shmoop)

There are a lot of themes within the novel that are highly prevalent to young adult readers – primarily, the theme of beauty and how it is perceived in society. Not fitting in with societal standards of beauty is a crime in their world, whereas in our world many teens seem to feel that if they don't look like what they see in magazines they will be ostracized by their peers. Through reading this novel, and subsequently the other novels in the series, they are exposed to ideas that counter these beliefs. One huge aspect of this is the idea that where you're raised and what you're exposed to has a lot to do with what you believe – Tally, for example, has been dreaming of her plastic surgery for her entire life. On the other hand, David, a character she meets in the Smoke, has been living there for his entire life and was never pressured to fit a certain standard of beauty. Through the development of their relationship, he shows her that individuality and exercising free will are much more important than the lavish, responsibility-free lifestyle that being a Pretty entails.



## *Under the Never Sky*

Rossi, Veronica. *Under the Never Sky*. HarperCollins, 2012.

*Under the Never Sky* is set in a post-apocalyptic world in which the Earth is subject to storms that disperse poison in the air, causing certain groups of people called Dwellers to settle into city-like pods where they live and interact with each other within virtual realities called Realms. There are tribes of people who live outside of these pods, called Outsiders, and both groups of people are heavily prejudiced against the other side. The novel follows the stories of Aria, a Dweller who is exiled from her pod for a crime she didn't commit, and Perry, an Outsider searching for his nephew who was kidnapped by Dwellers. Because they both have the ability to help each other, they form an alliance and travel together to clear Aria's name and find Perry's nephew. (Summary paraphrased from PluggedIn's review)

The idea that the two groups of people – Outsiders and Dwellers – both have strong prejudices against the other group that are disproven throughout the novel provides the story with a lesson on acceptance. Upon their first meeting, Aria assumes that Perry is a savage while he assumes that she's entitled and stuck-up. Throughout the course of the novel, they overcome these assumptions and develop a close connection. I think this story can be beneficial to teenage readers because it can teach them not to judge others based on what they are told or raised to believe and carries real-world connections to any culture in which the discrimination of another culture is socially accepted.

