

**FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

**BOOK TALK: DYSTOPIAN YOUNG ADULT NOVELS
SUBMITTED FOR LIS5566 INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUNG ADULTS
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Book Talk: Dystopian Novels

1. “It’s time for the drawing. Effie Trinket says as she always does, “Ladies first!” and crosses to the glass ball with the girls’ names. She reaches in, digs her hand deep into the ball, and pulls out a slip of paper. The crowd draws in a collective breath and then you can hear a pin drop, and I’m feeling nauseous and so desperately hoping that it’s not me, that it’s not me, that it’s not me.” *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins is a novel set in the near and tragic future where children ages 12 - 18 are entered into a lottery system in which they must compete to the death once a year in The Hunger Games. They are forced to enter into an arena rigged with dangerous settings, animals, and situations and only one can survive. But what happens when two of the competitors form an alliance, fall in love, and rebel? Will they both survive? Or will they be forced to compete against each other? For Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark this is their fate.

2. “She began to run. And then the lights flickered, and flickered again, and went out. Darkness slammed up in front of her like a wall. She stumbled, caught herself, and stood still. She could see absolutely nothing. Shouts of alarm came from up and down the street, and then silence.” In *The City of Ember* by Jeanne DuPrau a city is faced with a shortage of supplies for survival. Their generator that runs the city’s electricity is slowly failing causing power outages and their food, clothing, and medical supplies continue to dwindle. For one teenager, Lina, she dreams of another city where there is light, warmth and happiness instead of cold, grey, sadness. One day Lina finds secret instructions for an exit out of Ember City but they are torn up and missing words. Will she be able to decipher the instructions and escape her dying city? Help Lina and her friend Doon solve the mystery of the mysterious “Instructions for Egress” and escape to a new city where there is light, warmth, and happiness.

3. “But she has not contributed. She cannot dig or plant or weed, or even tend the domestic beasts the way other girls her age do. She drags that dead leg around like a useless burden. She should have been given away when she was still nameless. It is the way.” The novel, *Gathering Blue* by Lois Lowry features a girl named Kira who was born with a deformed and disabled leg. In her community, if you are not able-bodied and able to perform physical labor, you are perceived as worthless. For Kira, she was protected by her mother until her sudden death left her an orphan which allowed for the other women in her community to take advantage of her situation and try to get her kicked out. Luckily for Kira, while she cannot do much physical labor, she does have the gift of weaving and sewing. Due to her skilled hands, she is saved by the Grand Court and becomes the expert weaver for the Singer. Kira soon meets others who have special skills that the Grand Court has capitalized on. She soon realizes that these skills make her a captive versus free and she must decide between continuing to work as a slave to the governing body or try to change the society.

The audience for this book talk consists of young adults both male and female in the ages of 14 - 18. With *The Hunger Games* being the most mature of the novels and *Gathering Blue* being for the youngest ages on the spectrum. While the main characters in each of these books are young women, I do think that due to the amount of action as well as mystery involved in each book they would also be well liked by young adult males as well. The theme of this book talk is dystopian futuristic novels. I chose to pick a particular theme for this book talk as these are types of books that I enjoy reading myself. Lynch-Brown states it is important to be enthusiastic about the books you choose to discuss as it will encourage the students to take what you are saying more seriously (page 183). The type of book talk that I chose to do combines two methods based on both plot and mood. As Lynch-Brown says, "You can focus on a scene or character that the story revolves around, but do not discuss a scene that gives away the ending" (page 183). The main technique I used is to quote an important scene in each book and then use questions to create intrigue for the main action and plot of the book.

In each one of these novels, the main character struggles with having to be independent at a young age and rely on their own skills and knowledge to survive. As this book talk is aimed at 14 - 18 year olds, independence is a developmental task that they would be struggling with. As young adult you are always trying to figure out who you are and how you can become more independent from your parents and begin to focus on friendships over family. Each of these novels features a young woman who must take on the role of an adult for another child. In *Hunger Games*, Katniss must take care of her younger sister Prim as well as her mother by becoming the sole provider of sustenance and protection, in *City of Ember*, Lina must take care of her younger sister Poppy and her grandmother, and in *Gathering Blue*, Kira takes care of her young friend Matt. Furthermore, due to the nature of these books, the characters live in harsh

conditions that they must trudge through each day and still come out alive. An important part of surviving these types of settings is having intimate relationships. Intimate relationships in these novels is more than just romantic or sexual feelings, each character has a strong friendship with a character that gives them the strength to survive. In *City of Ember*, Lina has more than just one intimate relationship. The most obvious is her friendship with Doon who helps her to decipher the instructions and escapes the city with her. She also has an intimate relationship with her friend Clary who she confides in as well as Mrs. Mundo who becomes her caretaker after her grandmother dies. These books can help define intimate relationships for young adults and help them understand how to process and support their friends'/boyfriend's/girlfriend's emotions and develop a connection with each other.

I think the best way to evaluate the efficacy of the book talk would be to first take an inventory of the books being featured and then find out how many of those books are checked out from the library after the talk. This would be a statistical conclusion of how effective the talk was. However, I also think that if students have questions about the books after and/or during the talk that is a positive sign that they were both paying attention and are also genuinely interested in wanting to know more about the books and how they can get a copy themselves to read.

References

1. Lynch-Brown, C. & Tomlinson, C. (2010). *Essentials of Young Adult Literature*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.