A Curriculum Guide for

UnDivided
by Neal Shusterman

This guide correlates to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.9–10. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) (L.9–10.5, 5a) (RH.9–10.4) (WHST.9–10.2, 7, 9)

About the Book

Connor Lassiter and Risa Ward, reunited in *UnSouled*, are holed up in Sonia Reinschild's antique store as the novel begins. They hide there with Grace Skinner, who helped Connor escape from her brother, and a dozen AWOL Unwinds given refuge by Sonia as they have nowhere else to go.

The elderly Sonia, a research scientist before the war, gives Connor, Risa, and Grace a 3-D printer that can produce human organs. Invented by her late husband, this prototype is the only unit remaining after Proactive Citizenry destroyed the rest and suppressed the technology. The organ printer can render unwinding unnecessary—but only if the teens can find a company willing to mass-produce it.

Grace's brother, Argent Skinner, is meanwhile working closely with Jasper Nelson, former Juvey-cop turned "parts pirate." They capture teen AWOLs and sell them to Divan Umarov, a big-league black marketeer with his own private harvest camp. Divan convinces Argent to track down his sister, Grace; once they have her, they'll capture Connor, and the Akron AWOL's parts will be worth a fortune at auction.

At the same time, Lev Calder, given sanctuary by the Arápache, and Camus Camprix, the Rewind constructed by Proactive Citizenry, each have their own plans to end society's reliance on Unwinding: Lev hopes to convince the tribal council to declare the reservation a safe haven for AWOLs, and Cam plans to reveal what Proactive Citizenry and the military are really up to, as soon as he figures out what that is.

As the novel races toward the breathtaking conclusion of the series, obstacles loom: Mason Starkey's Stork Brigade is violently liberating harvest camps, spreading terror and amplifying society's call for more draconian unwinding laws; Lev fails to raise the consciousness of the tribe; Cam is held captive by Proactive Citizenry; Sonia's antique shop is burned to the ground; and Connor and Risa are trapped aboard Divan's airborne Harvest Camp, a radically modified jumbo jet, and there's no way out without being unwound . . . .

Discussion Questions

1. Early in the novel, Sonia tells Conner, "There isn't one single thing that will end unwinding. It will be a hodgepodge of random events that come together in just the right way and at just the right time to remind society it's got a conscience."

What does she mean? What are some of the "random events" in the novel that will have to come together for unwinding to end?

2. Who is the character you most relate to in the story, and who is the one you find the most repugnant? Why? Now imagine yourself spending time with those characters in the world of *UnDivided.* What would you say to them?

3. The fourth book in a series poses many challenges for an author, including the need to remind readers about characters introduced and events dramatized in the previous books, without slowing down this story's forward momentum. Shusterman finds clever, often poignant ways to do this (such as when he reminds the reader about Cam's deep love for Risa in the context of Cam's inability to remember her name—thanks to nanotech particles inserted by his keepers that disrupt his thoughts whenever he thinks of her). Select a passage or two of backstory in this novel, and describe the technique(s) Shusterman used to weave the exposition in.

4. One of the novel's most powerful symbols is the disembodied arm of the Statue of Liberty. Describe how the arm, and other arms, are used throughout the novel, from an early scene where the statue's original copper limb is replaced by an aluminum/titanium alloy, to the final mention of the arm as a monument covered by the names of all the Unwinds. Now look at the cover: How does the image differ from the actual arm of the statue as well as the arm described in the book? Why do you think the cover artist chose this portrayal?

5. The novel is, in large part, about the manipulation of society by powerful special interests, represented here by Proactive Citizenry. And yet, as one character explains, before unwinding, people were "afraid to leave their homes for fear of feral teenagers, while other people suffered needlessly with everything from heart failure to lung cancer." Describe some of the things Proactive Citizenry does to manipulate public opinion. And how complicit do you feel the society itself has been in its own manipulation?

6. During the course of the story, Connor, Risa, Lev, and others run into minor characters who do heroic things—for example, a scientist at a research facility who helps Conner instead of turning him in; a stranger who pulls Grace from a burning building; people who donate their organs to the survivor of a shooting. Who are some of the other everyday heroes mentioned in the book, and what do they do? What do you think the author is saying about human nature?

7. Even knowing that Mason Starkey's campaign of terror is increasing the public's support for unwinding, the reader experiences mixed feelings as Starkey's army violently attacks harvest camps, since those involved in unwinding innocent teens *should* pay for their crimes. How does the author exploit the reader's conflicted emotions to increase the tension in these scenes and, ultimately, create sympathy for Starkey?

8. Connor needs to see his parents and his little brother; Cam is "mothered" by Roberta; Lev is adopted by a literal tribe; Risa feels that the Unwinds are her extended family—the theme of belonging to a family runs strongly throughout *UnDivided.* List some other examples of families or characters who belong to family groups. How do some of these families affect the story? The characters? What happens to these families at the end of the story? Which ones stay the same? Which ones change?

9. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." —Edmund Burke, eighteenth-century Irish statesmen.
   This sentiment is vividly dramatized throughout the novel, as in the scene told from the point of view of the head gardener at a harvest camp who plants trees while children are unwound. Discuss how other characters and/or scenes represent this concept, and describe how it plays out in the end: Do good men and women finally take action against the evil being done in their names?

10. "Do you believe in democracy?" Special Agent Aragon asks Connor near the end of the novel. "I believe in the way it's *supposed* to work," Connor replies, and Aragon says, "It always works the way it's supposed to work." What do you think Aragon means by this? What do you think Connor means? What do you think the author means?

11. Most of the major characters receive some form of justice, for good or ill, by the end of the story. Sometimes it's straightforward, sometimes it's delivered ironically. What do you think of the justice meted out to various characters in the novel: Argent? Starkey? Nelson? Divan? Lev? Cam? Conner? And others? Do you think justice was served in each case, or was the guilty party treated too harshly—or not harshly enough?

12. What do you think makes the conclusion of a book series satisfying? According to Neal Shusterman, concluding a book series "is not about having a happy ending, or wrapping up everything neatly. It's about creating a trajectory—a light at the end of the tunnel, with the knowledge that the characters can get there, both internally, and externally." Do you agree with his description? Do you think Shusterman achieves that for the Unwind series? Why or why not?

Activities and Research: Beyond the Text

1. Political advertising and the politics of fear play a large role in *UnSouled.* Research some actual political ads that manipulated people's fears, from the famous "Daisy" ad that aired during Lyndon Johnson's 1964 presidential campaign to more recent examples raising fears about candidates or issues. What is the message conveyed by the ads? Do you think such ads are effective? Do you

think they should be prohibited? Present information by campaign experts to explain why they keep being used.

2. Lev tries the political route first, bringing a petition to the Arápache tribe calling for official sanctuary for AWOLs. Ultimately Lev starts a movement that helps to wake people up to the reality of unwinding. Study a political movement of the past (such as the antislavery movement, the temperance movement, the women's suffrage movement) or present (such as the Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street, environmental, and antihuman trafficking movements). Discuss the symbols and strategies that these movements employed to spread their message and convince others to join them. Do you think they were, or are, effective? Explain.

3. From the first reference to unwinding as a "divisional solution," to the names of the Harvest Camps themselves (e.g., "Mousetail Divisional Academy"), euphemism plays an important, and sometimes darkly humorous, role in the novel. The black marketeer Divan calls himself an "independent supplier of biological upgrades"; Hayden ironically refers to the organization behind the clappers as "the applause department." Find several real-world examples of widely used euphemisms (such as "ethnic cleansing," "enhanced interrogation techniques," and "special rendition") and explain what the phrases stand for and how they have been used. Why do you think individuals or societies would choose to use euphemisms?

4. The sections of the novel are separated by real newspaper articles covering such subjects as organ harvesting, euthanasia for children, breakthroughs in organ printers, and more, from several contemporary sources. Why do you think the author chose to include real articles? The URLs of these articles are included in the book. Look up one of these articles and research the latest information on the same subject, or find recent articles on another topic or theme of the novel (such as feral teens, the breakdown of society, the juvenile criminal justice system, cutting edge military tech, etc.). Present your findings and discuss how it relates to the novel.

5. Hayden Upchurch begins what he calls the VSF, or "Verbal Strike Force," in order to deliver his Radio Free Hayden podcasts, commenting on the problems caused by unwinding, and to call for its end. Pick an issue or problem that affects your school or community, and create your own podcast that explains or explores the problem, and suggests a possible way of solving it.

6. The Rewinds in the story, unable to string together conventional thoughts, communicate through metaphor. When one Rewind feels he is being led into a trap, he blurts out "Montressor," the villain from Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado." Another Rewind wants to ask what his name is, but instead shouts out, "Back of my jersey? On the birthday cake?" We finally see inside one Rewind's head as he's trying to put his thoughts together. He can't articulate the phrase, "Where am I?" but can imagine a globe from his childhood with the

words "Rand McNally" printed on it—which is all he is able to say. Put together your own dictionary of metaphorical language, devising surprising links between words and meaning, and explain the derivations of the phrases. Write a scene between two Rewinds who are only able to communicate in metaphor.

7. Why do they call Roberta "Madame Mengele"? Who was Mengele? Although this is the most overt Holocaust reference in the novel, it is not the only one. What other Holocaust imagery, motifs, and themes does the author work into the story? Research the Holocaust and other genocides (the Armenian genocide, the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and others). Trace how these societies allowed these genocides to happen. In a report, compare and contrast these actual atrocities to the events in UnDivided.

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