

## A Curriculum Guide to

### ***UnSouled***

Part of the Unwind Dystology

By Neal Shusterman

This guide correlates to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.7.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9) (W.7.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9)

### **About the Book**

As the novel begins, most of the characters from the previous Unwind novels have been cast far and wide: Connor and Lev are in pursuit of the answer to a riddle that might put an end to unwinding forever. But after a serious accident, Lev is badly injured, and the two head to the Arápatche Reservation where he can safely receive medical attention. Connor doesn't know Lev is still held partly responsible for a tragedy that occurred when he lived there.

Many states away, Risa has her own share of narrow escapes, and is given refuge by the sympathetic owner of a hair salon. Cam, meanwhile, under the supervision of his creator, Roberta, is wowing the elite in Washington DC. While they hope to get Roberta more funding, Cam is still hopelessly in love with Risa. At the same time, Starkey and his flight of "storks" have survived a crash landing in California's Salton Sea. And Nelson, juvey cop turned parts pirate, is on Connor's trail.

As tension mounts, these strands are brought closer together: Cam discovers that Connor, his rival for Risa's affection, is still alive, and finds him on the reservation. Together, they set out in search of answers. Risa, suspecting where Connor is heading, gets there first. Starkey begins a string of stunningly violent attacks on harvest camps. Nelson, after being first led astray, is once more following Connor's tracks.

As the pieces of the puzzle begin falling into place, Connor, Risa, Cam, and the others begin to realize that Unwinding is just part of a decades-old conspiracy that goes deeper than any of them could have imagined.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Explain how the fictional Janson Reinschild's quote at the beginning of Part One is ironic (i.e., the opposite of what he meant to happen). What was Reinschild's intent in founding Proactive Citizenry, and what role do they actually play in the novel? Do you consider Reinschild a hero, a naïve victim, or a monster?
2. If Unwinding technology were available today, and you were in an accident or had a physical condition that severely impacted one of your limbs or organs, would you accept

a body part from a stranger? Why or why not? Would your answer change if you would die if you didn't accept an unbound part? What if it was a loved one — your brother or sister — or a parent whose life would be saved by getting part of an unbound?

3. Choose a major character: Connor, Risa, Lev, Starkey, or Cam; or a secondary character: Sonia, Nelson, Argent, Grace, Roberta, Hayden, Bam, Audrey, Una, etc. What are the objectives and motivations of that character? Do you agree with his or her choices? Which character do you relate to the most? Why?

4. Most of the chapters are told from the point of view of a major or secondary character, but occasionally the story is told from the viewpoint of a minor character—the Night Manager of the 7-Eleven, or the Arápathe Border Guard, for example. Why do you think the author chose to move the story forward through these peripheral characters? What perspective do they bring to the story? How does the structure of the book in some ways resemble Cam?

5. Connor sees a little of himself in Argent, in Starkey, and in Cam. How are their goals and methods the same? How are they different? What mistakes do they each make? What are their successes and failures? Who do you feel you are most like?

6. One of the sources of humor in the book is Shusterman's twisting or literal use of clichés for emphasis, irony, or poignant effect. For instance, when Connor talks to his grafted limb, he calls it "talking to the hand." Later, Cam feels something that "made his seams crawl." Find more examples of tweaked clichés in the novel, discuss how the cliché is normally used, what it means, and how the author turns the meaning on its head or otherwise changes its meaning.

7. Much of Cam's internal struggle in the novel is his attempt to answer the question, "Am I truly alive? Do I even exist?" What do the other characters in the story think? What is your opinion? Why? As the story progresses, Cam becomes aware that he is considered a piece of property that can be sold by Proactive Citizenry to the military. Can you relate to Cam's struggle?

8. The world of the book contains many objects that are familiar to us today, such as Facebook, the fast food restaurant Sonic, and the musical *Cats*. Occasionally the author introduces something that doesn't exist but seems oddly familiar, such as the ToXin Energy drink, or a "medical tobacco license" for a pack of cigarettes. Find other examples of both the familiar and the unfamiliar in the novel. How does the author use them to establish the reality of this world?

9. Shusterman makes up future slang in the story: Grace is referred to as "low cortical" and soldiers are known as "beoufs." Native Americans are referred to as "Chancefolk" or derogatorily as "slotmongers." Find more examples of future slang words in the story. What are the derivations of these terms? Make up some of your own slang for an object or situation in the novel, and explain where it comes from.

10. Cam uses verbal metaphors to speak his emotions, for example “lockdown” when he doesn’t want to think of something, or “thirty pieces of silver” when he feels he’s been betrayed. Find other examples of the seemingly random yet actually poignant words Cam uses. What emotions or thoughts do they reflect? Come up with your own verbal metaphors to reflect your own thoughts and feelings, and explain what they mean.

11. Many authors have used stories of dystopian futures, from Orwell’s *1984* and Huxley’s *Brave New World* to Collins’s *The Hunger Games*, to comment on issues of the present day. *UnSouled* and the rest of the Unwind series, like these and other futuristic novels, is in many respects a social satire—a work of literature that criticizes or mocks the flaws in a social system—in this case by placing this criticism in the future. Discuss elements of *UnSouled* that can be considered social satire.

12. *UnSouled* is the third of a four-book series. Where are the major characters at the end of this novel? What crises are they facing? How does that contrast with where they were at the beginning of the book? What has changed for them, both internally and externally? What do you think (or hope) will happen to them in the next book?

### **Activities and Research: Beyond the Text**

1. Proactive Citizenry is a bland, nondescript name for an organization that promotes the evil of Unwinding. Historically, many groups and organizations that committed atrocities have operated under vague names. For example, during the French Revolution, the Reign of Terror and the execution of aristocrats by the guillotine was overseen by the “Committee of Public Safety.” Research other historical organizations or groups that had a nondescript name, and write about one of them. In your paper, be sure to address why you believe the organization may have found the lackluster name useful.

2. Throughout *UnSouled*, Shusterman lists arguments in favor of Unwinding, including several political advertisements. Stage a debate between two groups, one opposed to Unwinding and one in favor of it. Who has the most convincing argument?

3. Connor begins the novel in Kansas and ends it in Akron, Ohio. Lev also starts up in Kansas, and winds up near Pueblo, Colorado. Risa starts out in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and ends with Connor in Akron. Using a map, trace the paths of Connor, Lev, Risa, Nelson, Cam, Starkey, and other characters across the United States. Why do you think the novel covers so much territory?

4. In the novel, the Clappers are a homegrown terrorist organization that is attempting to bring down Unwinding, and yet their actions seem to be counterproductive. Other historical and contemporary homegrown terrorist organizations include the Ku Klux Klan, the Weathermen, The Symbionese Liberation Army, the Order, and many, many more. Using several sources, research and write a paper describing the history and ideology of a homegrown terrorist group.

5. Sprinkled throughout the novel, Shusterman incorporates actual news articles that echo the themes or events of the story—for example, a former doctor selling parts of dead bodies; anecdotal tales of heart transplant recipients suggesting that memories were somehow transferred from the donor’s life. Search the Internet for additional news articles that in one way or another relate to one or more events or themes of *UnSouled*, and explain the connection.

6. Chal, the Native-American (or, in the novel, “Chancefolk”) attorney, tries to get Connor political asylum on the Hopi reservation. Research the history of political asylum. What is it exactly? What are some of the most famous recent cases of political asylum. Draft the lawyerly brief, or argument, that Chal might write to get Connor asylum.

7. The Anti-Divisional Resistance is a nonviolent organization struggling against Unwinding. Throughout history, there has been tension between those who advocate for a violent overthrow of a system (such as Starkey in the novel), and those who argue for a nonviolent response. Using a variety of sources, research some of the great nonviolent leaders of the past and present, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, etc. Discuss their philosophy and strategy of nonviolence, as well as those who argued against them that violence was the only way to bring about real change.

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