



The Execution

In the first year, 10 students from three schools, who identified as being interested in this project, read dystopian fiction. They were interested in how this fiction related to modern society. The big question focus was: “What are the characteristics of a dystopian society? What message does it give the modern reader?” The students began reading in June, choosing from a selection that included “classics,” such as *1984* by George Orwell, and modern young adult novels, such as *Feed* by M.T. Anderson. The school board courier system was used to exchange novels. Students did not meet until the final forum.

Student presenters were clearly invested in their first novels, especially because they knew that most of their audience had read the book. Each student had been thinking about the same big question for six months and could immediately see the connecting threads and themes in the other selections. The afternoon included a workshop where students created, among other things, bookmarks for the selections with an important quote and the identified message for the modern reader. Students also indicated how the book rated as a work of dystopian fiction. These were reproduced and distributed to the schools and the public library.

In the second year of the project, 18 students in the target group were readers who identified with the protagonist’s journey for empowerment and success. The big question was: “What is the main character’s definition of success? What empowering decisions did they make to achieve success?” This was an instructive way to use literature to examine the process of achieving success in one’s own life. Once again, the project culminated with a forum where students shared their novels. The afternoon workshop focused on designing ways to extend the learning with Grade 8 students. It was an enthusiastic collaboration with intense discussions and new friendships forged.

Some participants prepared a workshop for Grade 8 girls that looked at how to make empowering decisions in high school to achieve success – a reflection of the big question. One of the novels from the book project, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, was used as the lens for discussion. The Grade 8 students had read the novel, and student facilitators from two of the

high schools organized a quiz based on the factions that are a construct in the book. The facilitators also prepared scenarios for the Grade 8s to discuss, having them pretend to be members of the various factions. This was a comfortable way to use the literature as a filter to discuss decision-making without the Grade 8s saying, “I would...” but rather, “Someone in Dauntless or Amity would...” The empowering feature of this workshop was that the group of students saw five possible decisions – faction strategies – to solve any issue. There was no one right answer!

Template and Tips

The strength of this project is in its simple but highly adaptable template. By working out the seven facets of your book project at the beginning, further details can be fleshed out to suit your particular setting – a classroom, extracurricular or public library book club.

Theme		
The Big Question	Proposed Titles	Specific Audience
Timeline	Schedule of Annotation and Book Switch	Presentation Mode

Each facet can be made as complex or simple as your vision warrants, with themes being broad or specific, the big question being cursory or analytical, and the presentation mode formal or relaxed. The most crucial thing to get right is the scheduling. In the case of multiple schools or multiple libraries, understanding your courier system is key. Participants have more fun when they know they are going to get their next book on time. In the case of a smaller, more localized, group, the logistics are much simpler. Beyond that, you can integrate whatever enhancements that you think will further engage your audience.

We received funding for this project through Trillium Lakelands program enhancement program. The main expenses were the books – students were able to keep the books they read first – release time for teachers, travel, supplies and some refreshments.