

# ANCHOR ACTIVITY

A SERIES OF SHORT INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS  
RELATED TO A SIXTH GRADE ENGLISH UNIT  
ON *THE GIVER*, BY LOIS LOWRY.

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# ANCHOR ACTIVITY

This anchor activity involves a series of mini independent research projects related to a sixth grade English unit on *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry.

## Rationale

These projects are differentiated by INTEREST (with some attention to learning style as students select a mode of presentation for their work) and are designed to:

- Help students develop their independent research skills;
- Enhance students' understanding of *The Giver* by exploring some of its concepts or ideas in greater depth than is allowed by the time constraints of class;
- Increase the chance that students will make a personal connection to the big ideas of *The Giver*, since they are able to explore an area of interest related to the text;
- Build a sense of classroom community, since students are required to present their findings to the class and must also add their work to a classroom pin-board displaying findings from all research projects. In this way, students are given the sense that they are engaged in important work on behalf of the class;
- Ensure that important, interesting work is available to students who finish another assignment early or find themselves waiting for other students or the teacher.

## When and where will the anchor activity take place?

- In the regular classroom (it is assumed that computers with internet access and other research resources are available), with the option of accessing the school library, other subject-area teachers, or other essential people or sites. Students wishing to access sites outside the classroom must complete a permission card and lodge their request with the teacher.
- The anchor activity will take place whenever students find themselves in 'ragged time.' "Catch up" days might be offered to ensure that all students have the opportunity to complete the activity.

### **What are the expectations for anchor work?**

- Each student is expected to complete at least two anchor activities over the course of the unit. These will comprise part of each student's grade for the unit.
- Students must complete a short research plan prompt sheet before they begin their research.
- Students must 'report back' to the class group with their findings. This report could take any of a variety of forms, but it must include a tangible product that can be displayed on the class pin-board.
- Students must keep their research notes and materials in folders that will become part of the classroom resource collection.
- Students can choose to work with a partner or in a small group if other students are available at the same time and wish to explore the same topic.

### **What materials and information will students need to complete the activity independently?**

- The procedure and expectations for the anchor activity will be explained to the whole group at the beginning of the unit.
- Students will be provided with a checklist for completing the anchor activity (see attached). Laminated copies of this checklist will be available in the designated area of the classroom, and each student will receive a copy of the checklist to guide his or her work through the activity.
- Possible project topics (see attached) will be printed on separate cards located in the designated area. These cards will be updated throughout the unit, and students will have the option of designing new cards for themselves or other researchers.
- A list of useful internet sites and other available research resources will be posted in the designated anchor area. Students will be encouraged to add to this list as they come across useful sites or resources in the course of their research.

### **How is the anchor activity an example of differentiated instruction?**

- The anchor activity is primarily designed to allow students to explore areas of interest in greater depth. The list of suggested projects is designed to cover a broad range of disciplinary areas. Students are also encouraged to design their own projects (with the teacher's approval), and to suggest projects to add to the list for other students. This allows for the student who becomes interested in a particular topic to design or request subsequent 'spin-off' projects to nurture that interest.
- Students have the option of working in pairs or groups when feasible, to cater for those who are motivated by group work.
- Since some of the research cards will be more open-ended, more abstract, or require more background in a discipline than others, students can be guided to select (or design) a project that matches their level of readiness on these dimensions. The checklist and the list of suggested research sites provide scaffolding for those students less able to work independently.
- There is flexibility in the way students can choose to present their findings. This caters to different learning styles.
- The provision of an anchor activity shows respect for the fact that students work at different paces. That is, rather than expecting all students to work at the same pace, respectful and challenging tasks are available to those who finish a class activity earlier than others. By providing opportunities for all students to complete anchor activities over the course of the unit, students who work at a slower pace are also shown respect.

### **How will anchor work fit into the rest of the unit?**

The anchor activity is designed around the core text and KUDs for the unit. The goal is for the independent research to enrich students' understanding and appreciation of the text as findings are shared with the class.

### **What are the KUDs for the anchor activity?**

#### **Students will KNOW...**

- A variety of research-based sources and how to access them.

- Other knowledge will vary according to the nature of the individual research card, but will relate to the content (character, plot, setting, author, and/or or vocabulary) of *The Giver*.

### **Students will UNDERSTAND...**

- That the academic disciplines act as different windows on the same world (*as they engage in cross-disciplinary research*).

Selected concepts and principles related to *The Giver*:

#### Concepts

|          |           |                          |        |
|----------|-----------|--------------------------|--------|
| Memory   | Freedom   | Responsibility           | Wisdom |
| Sameness | Diversity | Individual vs. Community |        |
| Utopia   | Vision    |                          |        |

- That attempts to create Utopian societies often fail when they strive for pleasure (or comfort, or happiness) without pain.
- That the freedom to choose always carries the responsibility to choose wisely.
- That societies are defined by the way they balance individual rights and responsibilities with collective rights and responsibilities.
- That an individual can change a society, and a society can change an individual.
- That memory allows both individuals and societies to understand themselves.
- That tragedy is often the result of a failure to learn from the past.

### **Students will BE ABLE TO...**

(from National Council of Teachers of English):

- Conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- Use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

## SAMPLE RESEARCH CARDS

Where does the word 'Utopia' come from? What is its opposite?

When we discuss the term 'Utopia' in relation to *The Giver*, are we using it in a way that is consistent with its original meaning?

What is the professional title of a person who studies the origins of words?

What is the professional title of a person who researches the way languages change over time?

What might someone who studies language usage conclude about the way Jonas' people use words such as "release"?

Jonas' community represents an attempt to create a Utopian society. Different groups have attempted to establish alternative, closed societies to distance themselves from the mainstream culture. Some have been more successful than others. Research one of these societies. Give some brief information about the values, practices, history and success or failure of the society. Based on your research, what factors might have led to its success or failure? (provide examples)

Jonas becomes upset when he learns that a game his friends play actually simulates the painful events of war. Over time, the sometimes tragic origins of children's games are forgotten. Research the origins of a common children's game. (provide examples)

Through *The Giver*, Lois Lowry suggests that one person's actions can change the course of a whole society. Research the life of someone from history who changed the course of the society he or she lived in. Based on your research, which characteristics of the individual or the society do you think enabled the person to become so influential?

Every society is defined by the way it balances the rights and responsibilities of individuals with the rights and responsibilities of the community. Research a society (past or present) in which these rights and responsibilities are balanced differently from the modern United States.

Members of Jonas' community have been genetically engineered so that they can't distinguish color. Research the way the eye perceives color.

Members of Jonas' community have been genetically engineered so that they can't distinguish color. Research the experience of someone who cannot perceive color. What does the world look like through that person's eyes?

*The Giver* was inspired when Lois Lowry's father began to lose his memory, and she realized that our memories define us as human beings. Research someone (past or present) who collects or studies memories for a living. Explain the importance of that person's role in society.

## CHECKLIST FOR RESEARCH

- ☐ Select an interesting research card.
- ☐ Based on the card, develop 1-5 clear research questions that I wish to find answers to. Write these questions down, either on note cards, my notebook, or wherever I will be making notes.
- ☐ Check the pin-board and the resource folders to see whether another class member has researched a topic like this one. If so, find out what resources that person used and determine whether these will be useful to me.
- ☐ Check the list of helpful internet sites and other resources to find a good starting point for my search.
- ☐ Take notes as I find information. Remember to keep a careful list of my sources.
- ☐ Locate more than one source where possible to back up my findings.
- ☐ Determine how my findings can be most clearly displayed for the class. Make an outline of this report/ display.
- ☐ Develop a first draft.
- ☐ Edit my work or, if possible, ask a peer to review the draft.
- ☐ Add the final product to the pin-board display. Keep all research notes and materials together in a folder, and file the folder in the resource collection.
- ☐ Add any particularly useful resources or internet sites to the class list. Create new research cards if additional interesting questions came out of my research.
- ☐ Pat myself on the back for a job well done!