



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# U n w i n d

Neal Shusterman

**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

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## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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**ISBN 978-1-50204-292-7**

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## Skills and Strategies

### Critical Thinking

Analyzing, making inferences, research, opinions, predictions, brainstorming

### Comprehension

Summarizing, cause/effect, compare/contrast, supporting judgments, identifying attributes, drawing conclusions

### Literary Elements

Theme, irony, symbolism, conflict/resolution, character analysis, point of view, setting, plot, genre, author's purpose

### Vocabulary

Definitions, application, synonyms/antonyms

### Listening/Speaking

Presentation, dramatization, discussion

### Writing

Essay, poetry, book review, letter, synopsis, e-mail

### Across the Curriculum

Literature—book review, author interview, other works of dystopian fiction; Science/Health—blood types, organ transplants, brain anatomy; Psychology—kleptomania; Social Studies—AWOL, urban myths, current events, airplane graveyards, pro-life vs. pro-choice; Art—cover art, photography, painting, collage, comic, poster

**Genre:** science fiction, dystopian fiction

**Setting:** Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, and Arizona

**Point of View:** third-person omniscient

**Themes:** identity, survival, love, familial bonds, self-preservation, free will, religion, definition of a “lifetime,” existence of the soul, life after death

**Conflict:** person vs. society, person vs. self, person vs. person, person vs. nature

**Style:** several alternating points of view

**Tone:** alternately bleak and hopeful

**Date of First Publication:** 2007

## Summary

In the future (after the Second Civil War, known as “The Heartland War”), abortion has been made illegal, but parents of newborns may legally abandon their babies by leaving them on porches (also known as “storking”). Between the ages of 13 and 18, unwanted children can be “unwound,” or donated to society, by their parents. The government harvests the bodies of these children, known as “Unwinds,” and uses every part for human transplants. It is said that the soul survives and the person lives on in a divided state, but many designated Unwinds do not believe this theory and attempt to escape. Connor and Risa are two such teenagers, and they take Lev, a tithe (a teenager donated in the name of God), with them on their journey. Facing both treacherous fellow Unwinds and terrorist “clappers” along the way, Connor, Risa, and Lev weave in and out of each other’s lives. Via an underground system, the three teenagers reach a desert location known as “the Graveyard,” where a man called “the Admiral” hides refugee teens. After Connor and Risa are betrayed by a fellow Unwind named Roland, they are brought to a harvest camp. Lev joins a group of clappers but decides at the last moment to save his friends rather than destroy the harvest camp. Connor, Risa, and Lev find new lives in a world where they no longer face the threat of being unwound.

## About the Author

Neal Shusterman was born in 1962 in Brooklyn, New York and was an avid reader as a child. He studied psychology and theater at the University of California, Irvine and later worked for a talent agency in Los Angeles, where he met his agent. Soon after, Shusterman began publishing books and winning awards, including the California Young Reader Medal, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and numerous state and library awards. *Unwind* is an ALA Best Book for Young Adults and a Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Readers. Other notable works include *Downsiders* (1999), *The Schwa Was Here* (2004), *Full Tilt* (2004), and *Everlost* (2007), which is being adapted into a feature film by Universal Studios. Shusterman also writes screenplays for movies and TV shows such as *Goosebumps* and *Animorphs*. He currently lives in California with his four children.

## Chapters 26–31

Lev sells some of CyFi’s stolen goods to help them get to Joplin. Meanwhile, the Fatigues use a decommissioned jet to move Connor, Risa, and the other Unwinds to a new location—a massive junkyard referred to as “the Graveyard.” On the road, Lev and CyFi get closer to their destination—but CyFi begins to succumb to the unnamed Unwind who shares his brain. In a final confrontation with the former Unwind’s (Tyler’s) parents, “Cy-Ty” begs not to be unwound. Lev, incensed by the unfairness of the situation, physically threatens Tyler’s parents. With Tyler’s burden lifted, CyFi allows his dads to take him home and Lev slips away, unnoticed.

Vocabulary	
	elaborate
	belligerent
	ferocity
	decommissioned
	hardpan
	resignation
	benevolent
	emotes
	incinerate
	cowering

### Discussion Questions

1. How does the letter from eBay on the title page for Part Four of the novel refute the ideas and laws set forth in Connor, Risa, and Lev’s society? (*According to the eBay representative, if a soul does exist [and legislation in Connor, Risa, and Lev’s society says that every child has one], it would be considered “human parts and remains” [p. 155]. So, if a soul exists, eBay considers that soul a tangible thing. However, the society in the novel claims that when a child is unwound [and all of his/her body parts are used] the soul stays intact and the child never stops living. Hence, the society in the novel believes a soul is intangible.*)

2. What about Lev piques the pawnbroker’s interest, and how does Lev make a deal with the man? How does Lev get more money than he originally requests? (*The pawnbroker notes*

*that Lev is different than the usual, desperate-looking people that enter his shop. He observes that Lev looks “clean-cut” and seems “refined and graceful, deliberate and delicate” [p. 157] in his movements. The pawnbroker also cannot resist the allure of the diamond-and-gold bracelet Lev offers. To the pawnbroker’s surprise, Lev is honest about his Unwind status and the fact that the bracelet is stolen. Lev uses logic and cunning to barter with the pawnbroker. After following the pawnbroker to his safe in a back room, Lev knocks the man unconscious and takes \$1,500 for the bracelet [but leaves the bracelet in the safe for the pawnbroker].*)

3. How do the Fatigues transport the Unwinds to the Graveyard, and how does Connor avoid traveling with Roland? (*The Fatigues corral the Unwinds into crates. The crates are loaded onto planes and shipped to the Graveyard. As they near the crates, Connor punches one of Roland’s friends so a Fatigue will separate them. In this way, Connor is able to climb into a different crate from Roland and his buddies.*)
4. What paradox is represented by the adjacent sentences, “The box is like a coffin. The box is like a womb” (p. 166)? (*Answers will vary. On one hand, the terms “coffin” and “womb” both describe dark, enclosed places where there is no visible escape. On the other hand, the terms “coffin” and “womb” represent the end and beginning of life, respectively. However, both seem fitting to describe the crates the Unwinds are enclosed in, since a new life at the Graveyard means the “death” of each Unwind’s old identity and the “birth” of a new identity.*)
5. What thought-provoking question does Hayden ask just before the plane takes off? How does each boy respond? (*Hayden asks the others whether they would rather die or be unwound. Diego claims he would rather be unwound. Emby claims he would rather die because at least then he could go to Heaven. He believes that Unwinds would not be able to enter Heaven, since they are not technically dead. Connor does not answer the question.*)

6. What do Hayden, Diego, and Connor find out about Emby en route to the Graveyard? (*Emby once had pulmonary fibrosis, but then his parents paid to have his failing lungs replaced with one lung from an Unwind. Due to lack of money, Emby received a lung that had asthma, which is the reason for his breathing problems. The three boys also find out that Emby's parents died and it was his aunt that signed Emby's unwind order.*)
7. How do the Unwinds react to arriving in the Graveyard? How does Risa help the situation? (*The Unwinds are initially babbling about how "half the kids died" [p. 178]. Then, one Unwind comments that the plane can easily be tracked. Risa allays fears about being found by explaining that the jet they were transported in, which was just decommissioned, was headed to the Graveyard anyway. No one will miss the plane or think to track it, since the Unwinds were loaded onto it secretly.*)
8. Describe the Admiral. What is Risa's opinion of him? (*The Admiral, an older man in his sixties, has a clear, strong voice and is clearly ex-military. He is grave and firm as he tells the Unwinds that each of them will contribute something to the Graveyard. He refuses to reveal his real name, but he does say that he disagrees with the practice of unwinding, which is why he helps Unwinds. Risa thinks the man is sharp-witted, reassuring, and intimidating all at the same time. One of the strangest things Risa notes about the Admiral is that he has perfectly straight, white teeth—a stark contrast to the rest of him, which "seems worn down to the nub" [p. 182].*)
9. What happens to CyFi as he walks through Joplin? What does "Cy-Ty" accomplish, and how does this bring CyFi relief? (*CyFi feels the unnamed Unwind taking over his body as he walks through Joplin. After confronting a middle-aged couple at their home, CyFi discovers that the boy who inhabits his brain was named Tyler. Cyrus-Tyler, or "Cy-Ty," demands a shovel from his parents. Then, he digs up a buried briefcase of stolen items and apologizes for stealing them. Once Lev forces the couple to promise they won't unwind their son, Cy-Ty visibly relaxes. Tyler seems to be satisfied, and CyFi seems to be back to his old self.*)
10. **Prediction:** What will happen to Lev?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Research kleptomania, the affliction Tyler suffered from. Prepare a creative presentation for your class on the topic.
2. Research a real-life airplane graveyard or "boneyard" (e.g., Pinal Airpark in Arizona). In a two- to three-page essay, discuss the history of the boneyard and how it operates.

## Urban Myth

<p><b>What is the myth about?</b></p>	
<p><b>When did the myth become popular?</b></p>	
<p><b>How and where did the myth start?</b></p>	
<p><b>Was the myth ever proven true or false? If so, how?</b></p>	