

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Maze Runner

by James Dashner

written by Sydney Palmer

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The Maze Runner

Note to the Teacher

A *New York Times* best seller, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* follows Thomas as he is thrust into the Glade, remembering only his name. The Glade, filled with other adolescent boys without memories, is an efficient, orderly civilization that feels all too familiar to Thomas. It quickly becomes Thomas's job to figure out how to escape the complicated maze that surrounds the Glade and changes every night. With recollections of his former life and the help of a mysterious girl who delivers a crucial clue to solving the Maze, Thomas helps the boys leave the lethal experiment that is the Glade.

The first in a five-book series and a 2014 movie, *The Maze Runner* is a high-interest read for struggling and proficient adolescent readers alike.

The Maze Runner vividly depicts intense violence, disturbing creatures, and body horror at many points throughout the novel. Though very little strong language is used, the author substitutes clear euphemisms for offensive language. There are several instances of both obvious and implied character death in the novel as well.

All references come from the Delacorte Press edition of *The Maze Runner*, copyright 2009.

The Maze Runner

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify elements of dystopian fiction apparent in *The Maze Runner*.
2. discuss the importance and meaning of the following symbols:
 - the Maze
 - the Glade
 - the Box
 - the sun
3. cite moments of crisis in *The Maze Runner* and discuss their impact on the plot.
4. describe the evolution of the following characters' goals and motivations throughout the novel:
 - Thomas
 - Newt
 - Alby
5. identify the author's use of cliffhangers at the ends of chapters and discuss their purpose in the story.
6. explain the effect of the limited-omniscient narrator on the reader's understanding of *The Maze Runner*.
7. describe how the author characterizes the major characters and compare the characters' various strengths and weaknesses.
8. discuss Thomas's status as a hero throughout the novel.
9. identify instances of foreshadowing and flashback in the text.
10. describe the effect of the novel's beginning *in medias res*.
11. cite examples of allusion in the text and explain their meanings.

The Maze Runner

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Who are the antagonists in this novel? Explain how one of the antagonists changes throughout the course of the novel.
2. Describe the ways in which the Gladers maintain order in their society. Are their methods effective?
3. Is Thomas a hero? Cite information from the text as support for your opinion.
4. What attributes of dystopian literature are present in *The Maze Runner*?
5. The Gathering of the Keepers carries out justice when rules are broken in the Glade. Are all of the council's decisions fair? Provide textual support for your response.
6. Examine the paradox "WICKED is good." Given the events of the final chapters, why might the Gladers distrust this statement?
7. Because they have no memories of their lives before the Glade, Thomas and the other Gladers struggle to discover their identities. What does Thomas learn about his identity throughout the course of the story?
8. Find two examples of man vs. society conflict. Compare and contrast the two conflicts. Who is right? Who is wrong? Where is there doubt? Explain your response in detail, using information from the story.
9. How do cliffhangers impact the reader's experience?
10. Why do you think the author chose to write from a third-person limited-omniscient perspective? What impact does this choice have on the reader?
11. Why do Gladers behave differently after they go through the Changing?
12. Identify changes in Thomas's goals. What causes these changes?
13. What motivates Newt? Alby? How and why do their goals change?
14. Compare the Glade before and after Teresa triggers the Ending. What does the disappearance of the sun in Chapter 34 symbolize?

The Maze Runner

Chapter 1

VOCABULARY

amplified – increased in volume
ascended – moved upward
grating – unpleasant; screeching, like metal against metal
haunted – ghostly; tormented
jolt – a sudden, harsh movement
lurching – abrupt
predicament – a difficult situation
swarm – a large group of flying insects
tinny – sounding like tin; metallic

1. How does the novel's beginning *in medias res* affect the reader? What purpose does this technique serve?

2. What does Thomas realize while he is in the dark elevator?

3. What is waiting for Thomas when the doors open?

4. Explain Thomas's emergence from the dark elevator as a symbolic rebirth.

Chapter 4

VOCABULARY

absently – without thought or attention
brief – quick; not taking much time
claustrophobia – a fear of small or confined places
considerably – notably
deafening – loud enough to cause loss of hearing
diameter – the distance across the middle of a circle
gaped – stared in awe
glitch – an error or malfunction, especially in programming
monumental – large; important
obscurity – the unknown
riveted – attached; unable to detach
trepidation – hesitation or anxiety about something in the future

1. What is Thomas surprised to learn about the walls around the Glade? What emotions does he experience as he witnesses the activity around him?

2. Thomas has a brief “flash” of an image of “stone walls...moving like sliding glass doors.” He knows that the image is from his life before the Glade. What could this memory foreshadow?

3. What are Thomas’s goals in this chapter? What motivates him to continuously ask Chuck questions that Chuck refuses to answer?

Chapter 9

VOCABULARY

banished – permanently sent away
contemplation – consideration; thought
contrary – opposite
cringe – to shrink away in fear or disgust
crumple – to crush
dumbfounded – speechless
ominous – unpleasant; threatening
prodded – prompted
shabbily – poorly; cheaply
spectator – an observer

1. What does Alby decide to do with the girl after she passes out, and what is his warning to the other boys? How does Alby’s warning affect Thomas’s opinion of him?

2. What thoughts begin to bother Thomas about the girl?
