10th Grade English, Dr. Peters

Book: Scythe by Neil Shusterman

Reading Guide for Scythe

1. Journaling is large part of a scythe's daily life. While reading consider the following concepts as they relate to the novel and our society:

- Honor
- Immortality vs. Mortality
- Conscience
- Progress
- Value

After each reading, journal about one or more of these concepts. Include specific references and connections to either history, other literary works covered this year, or popular culture. Date each entry, and include the page numbers from the reading. This does not have to be completed after each chapter.

2. Please consider getting three different color Post-It Notes. While reading look for examples or evidence in quotes and passages for:
   - Allusions
   - Reality vs. Illusion
   - References or connections to your assigned Patron Historic.

3. Use snippets of small Post-It Notes to identify intriguing, troubling, or surprising quotes or passages. Please make sure to have a variety from throughout the novel.

Enjoy!
Novel takes on questions of life and death

Feb 26, 2017

Hannah Ens

Contributing writer

Death has been eradicated. There is no sickness, no murder, no war, no injury you cannot be revived from. The only way to permanently leave the world is to be chosen for gleaning by a Scythe, a member of a corps of professional killers charged with keeping the population in check.

If you're thinking that this immediately sounds too morbid, know this — much like the grisly setup of "The Hunger Games," there is more to this book than its dark premise.

When Citra and Rowan are chosen to train as apprentice scythes, neither of them wants the role. But as their mentor, Scythe Faraday, points out, when decisions about death have to be made, the people most averse to the job are actually the best suited for it. Faraday is devastated by every gleaning he carries out, and seeks to impart the gravity of a scythe's responsibility to his apprentices.

Unfortunately, not every scythe shares that opinion. Many of the younger scythes have adopted the toxic ideology that they have the right to enjoy their work, to the extent that a gang of them fulfill their quotas in brutal mass gleanings. It's this disturbing mindset that leads the Scythedom to retroactively decree that only one of Faraday's apprentices can be fully ordained. Whoever is chosen at the end of their training will be forced to immediately glean the other.

As you can imagine, this does wonders for their working relationship. The to-the-death contest is touted at the forefront of this book's promotions, but it actually serves as a microcosm of the larger schism splitting the Scythedom into warring factions. The ideological conflict between the old guard and the upand-coming aggressors takes this book from being a flippant assassination game to a well presented look at the value of a life fully lived and what society might lose as people gain near-immortality.
The futuristic world described in “Scythe” is distinctly different from the cookie cutter dystopias presented in many young adult novels. In a refreshing change of pace, the world of “Scythe” is actually closer to that of a utopia – world governing functions have all been surrendered to the Thundercloud, a massive artificial intelligence that stores everything, predicts everything and controls everything with near infallibility.

The problem is with the human element – humanity was willing to surrender everything to the Thundercloud except the power of death. The Scythedom is kept apart, subject only to its own laws. So when Scythe morality and objectivity becomes tainted by those who relish the kill, only other Scythes have the power to stop them.

That’s where Citra and Rowan come in. When things go south, Citra falls in with the conservative camp and Rowan gets a nasty taste of the sadistic side. Each camp begins jockeying to see their favored candidate ordained, because the final decision will provide a telling look at what direction the Scythedom is headed. The power of death is on unsteady ground, and everyone wants to see it shift in their favor. With “Scythe,” author Neal Shusterman once again proves his ability to masterfully explore an extremely disturbing premise.

Like in his “Unwind” series, he takes a topic most people would rather skirt around (be it retroactive abortion or end-of-life ethics) and deliver a compelling story that hits hard at how we value human life. The sci-fi elements, particularly revival and age-resetting technology, do not detract from how it correlates to modern life. 40 is the new 20? In “Scythe,” 400 is the new 20. But in both the real and fictional worlds, we have to ask the same questions — will it make you happy? How long is long enough? And who gets to make that call?

Hannah Ens is the communication specialist at the K-State Student Union.
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