

2023 UnCommon Reads

Professor: Ms. Patti Takacs (Ta-Ka-Ch)

Book: Scythe by Neal Shusterman (Required Text)



Course Description:

1. “Thou shalt kill.
2. Thou shalt kill with no bias, bigotry, or malice aforethought.
3. Thou shalt grant an annum of immunity to the beloved of those who accept your coming, and to anyone else you deem worthy.
4. Thou shalt kill the beloved of those who resist.
5. Thou shalt serve humanity for the full span of thy days, and thy family shall have immunity as recompense for as long as you live.
6. Thou shalt lead an exemplary life in word and deed, and keep a journal of each and every day.
7. Thou shalt not kill fellow scythes beyond thyself.
8. Thou shalt claim no earthly possessions, save thy robes, ring, and journal.
9. Thou shalt have no spouse nor spawn.
10. Thou shalt be beholden to no laws beyond these.” -Scythe Commandments

Shusterman, N. (2016). *Scythe*. Simon & Schuster.

In Neal Shusterman’s *Scythe* he dives into a future where there is no disease, no death, no aging. A future where artificial intelligence is everywhere and there is no need for government. A society where Scythes play an essential role in population control. The story travels with two teenagers who are apprenticed to become a Scythe. This novel will inspire you to read farther than the assigned pages, and question your ethics. Within the course we will examine questions of power, ethics (population control),

utopias, and individuality. We will be using chatgpt and other AI forms within this class as we imagine how close the Thunderhead is to being a reality.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will be able to analyze and examine the ethics behind artificial intelligence.
2. Students will be able to think critically about their own perspectives as they pertain to the themes within such as life and death, power, justice, and human nature.
3. Students will discuss the role that power plays within the world and their own viewpoints around technology and utopian societies.

Course Goals:

Developing critical thinking, writing, and discussion skills. Using literacy tools to examine the text (exploration of themes, imagery, and symbolism, figurative language). Discussions around power, ethics, and artificial intelligence. Students will explore their own ideas on individuality and utopias through their “gleaning journal” modeled off of the books’ journal entries.

Course Assignments

Weekly Class Participation 10% – Support for your peers and promoting public speaking. In addition, this class only meets weekly and attendance is critical.

Discussion Leader/s – 20% – Coming with questions prepared to promote peer interaction and class

Discussion paper – 20% – Choose one of the following or a question from one of our class discussions. Paper should be 2-3 pages in length.

Discuss Scythe as a utopian society, why it works or why it doesn’t work.

Discuss the Thunderhead and why it works or doesn’t work.

Discuss how power plays a role in personal and societal development.

Discuss the use of AI in our lives.

Creative “Gleaning Journal” 12 total entries – 20% – 500 word response to the book/section read each week. You may take on the perspective of if you were a Scythe, you can discuss it from a secondary character perspective, you can even write from the

Thunderhead perspective if you would like. Please note any symbolism, imagery, or figurative language you see throughout the book.

Final Presentation – 30% – You will have to create your own scythe who will be appearing at the annual conclave conducted within the last two weeks of our class. This final consists of creating your own unique scythe robe, name, gleaning strategy, and personal history. You may create this character in person, via digital characterization, or in any other art medium you would like. The only requirement is that you justify the decisions you make for your character. (why you choose the colors, what name and why name, means for gleaning and why you choose to glean that way) In addition to this you have to design a “new technology” to be debated and voted on during the conclave as well as a “task” for the apprentices to perform. These examples are clear within the book, but we will talk more about each of them in class.

Interview with Neal Shusterman: Sellers, J. (2018, January 9). *Four Questions for Neal Shusterman*. Publishers Weekly.

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/75774-four-questions-for-neal-shusterman.html>

If you are disabled, I welcome a conversation to discuss your learning needs. I want to make sure you succeed in our course. I welcome everyone and I am more than happy to work with you.

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Class Expectations

This is a safe space, this is a space where we can all give freely of our ideas and opinions and expect that they will be welcomed with open minds. It is ok to discuss differing opinions, but everyone needs to be respectful and kind. Different opinions is what makes class and the world interesting, and kindness is what allows for democracy and freedoms to live on. I want this class to be fun, for you to meet new people, for this to be a time of enjoyment and exploration and that can not happen if anyone ever feels they are being judged.

Office Hours:

You can find me at Library West in office 541. You can get to my office via the main elevators 8am-5pm Monday-Friday. I am happy to meet with you anytime. I would recommend sending an email as I do have lots of meetings throughout the day.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Conduct Code.](#) If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Campus Resources: Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources:

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information. On-Line Students Complaints: View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.

Additional but not required reading:

The other two books in this series:

Shusterman, N. (2018). *Thunderhead*. Simon & Schuster.

Shusterman, N. (2019). *The Toll*. Simon & Schuster.

A followup to the series:

Shusterman, N. (2023) *Gleanings: Stories from the Arc of a Scythe*. Simon & Schuster.

Weekly Schedule:

Week 1:

August 29th

Syllabus discussion, class overview

Due week 2–Pages 1-46

Creative Gleaning Journal #1

Week 2:

Sept 5th

Class Discussion

Due week 3–Pages 47-75

Creative Gleaning Journal #2

Week 3:

September 12th

Class Discussion

Due week 4–Pages 76-109

Creative Gleaning Journal #3

brief proposal for your Scythe

Week 4:
September 19th
Class Discussion

Due week 5–Pages 110-143
Creative Gleaning Journal #4

Week 5:
September 26th
Class Discussion

Due week 6–Pages 144-174
Creative Gleaning Journal #5

Week 6:
October 3rd
Class Discussion

Due week 7–Pages 175-211
Creative Gleaning Journal #6

Week 7:
October 10th
Class Discussion

Due week 8–Pages 212-251
Creative Gleaning Journal #7

Week 8:
October 17th
Class Discussion

Due week 9–Pages 252-294
Creative Gleaning Journal #8

Week 9:
October 24th
Class Discussion

Due week 10–Pages 295-330
Creative Gleaning Journal #9

Week 10:
October 31st
Class Discussion
Mock Conclave to refine your final Scythe project

Due week 11–Pages 331-368
Creative Gleaning Journal #10

Week 11:
November 7th
Class Discussion

Due week 12–Pages 369-396
Creative Gleaning Journal #11

Week 12:
November 14th
Class Discussion

Due week 13–Pages 397-435 (end)
Creative Gleaning Journal #12

Week 13:
November 21st
Class Discussion

Week 14:
November 28th
Conclave Presentations

Week 15:
December 5th
Conclave Presentations

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.