

Culminating ESSAY TOPICS for The Giver

Topics: Conformity, use of language, disobedience, utopian communities (in US, or China, or USSR), euthanasia, censorship, and family relationships. Choose one topic.

<p>Conformity/Sameness/Choices/Freedom -- <i>The Giver</i> describes a community in which every person and his experience is precisely the same. The climate is controlled and competition has been eliminated in favor of a community in which everyone works only for the common good.</p>	
<p>Questions pertaining to conformity in the <i>The Giver</i></p>	<p>Questions relating this topic to our world</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Define conformity, sameness, diversity, tolerance. ∞ Why is it important to make choices? Why does the community in <u>The Giver</u> not allow their citizens to make many of their own choices? ∞ What are the arguments members of the community in <u>The Giver</u> cite in favor of sameness? In other words, what are the advantages of sameness and conformity in <u>The Giver</u>? ∞ What arguments does the author suggest against sameness in <u>The Giver</u>? In other words, what are the disadvantages of and problems with sameness and conformity in <u>The Giver</u>? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Why does it matter in our world to learn to make choices? ∞ What advantages might "sameness" yield for real communities? For our community or school? ∞ In what ways do our differences make us distinctly human? ∞ Is the loss of diversity worthwhile?
<p>Use of Language</p> <p>Lois Lowry creates an alternate world by having the community use words in a very specific way. Though the community if the novel stresses what it calls "precision of language," the entire community is built upon language that is not precise, but that deliberately clouds meaning.</p>	
<p>Questions pertaining to use of language topic in the <i>The Giver</i></p>	<p>Questions relating this topic to our world</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ What does Jonas's community really mean by words such as: <i>released</i> (p. 2), <i>feelings</i> (p. 4), <i>animals</i> (p. 5), <i>Nurturer</i> (p. 7), <i>Stirrings</i> (p. 37), <i>replacement child</i> (p. 44), and <i>Elsewhere</i> (p. 78). ∞ Define euphemism. ∞ Examine the ways that Jonas's community uses euphemism to distance itself from the reality of the act they call "Release." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ How does our own society use euphemisms to distance ourselves from the realities of death, bodily functions, aging, and political activities? ∞ What benefits and disadvantages are there to such a use of language?
<p>Disobedience to Society's rules and order: Jonas chooses to runaway from the community. In his absence, the community has to figure out how to handle all the memories that will come back to them when he leaves.</p>	
<p>Questions pertaining to disobedience in the <i>The Giver</i></p>	<p>Questions relating this topic to our world</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Will Jonas's departure and the memories that return to the people of his community help them or hurt them in the long run? Will the community change for the better or worse? ∞ Should Jonas or the Giver have tried to change the society from the inside instead of leaving it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Research some examples of positive social change brought about by civil disobedience in our own world: Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King, Jr., Thomas Jefferson, Rosa Parks, Gandhi, Susan B. Anthony, or others. ∞ What are the dangers of disobeying society's rules? ∞ Under what circumstances, if any, do you think it is okay to break society's rules?

Utopian Communities: United States Throughout history people have tried to create perfect or utopian communities. Examine the utopian community of the novel and compare it to a “utopian” community created in the U.S. in the past.

Questions pertaining to the utopian community in <i>The Giver</i>	Questions relating utopian communities to our world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Define utopia. ∞ List the principles that guided this “perfect” or utopian community in the novel. ∞ Explain the assumptions behind those principles. ∞ Would you want to live in this community? ∞ How does Lowry suggest that the community isn’t ideal, but is deeply flawed? Explain. 	<p>A number of utopian communities were established in the U.S., such as the Shakers in the eighteenth century, or Fruitlands, led by Bronson Alcott (father of Louisa May Alcott) in the mid-nineteenth century.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Choose one of these communities (or another that you know about) and become an expert on it. Explain what the community’s goals were and how well it worked. ∞ Compare this community to the one in <u>The Giver</u>. ∞ What generalizations can you make about why utopian communities tend not to last?

Utopian Communities: China or USSR Throughout history people have tried to create perfect or utopian communities. Examine the utopian community of the novel and compare it to “utopian” social structure created in either Communist China under Mao in the mid-twentieth century, or the former Soviet Union (USSR).

Questions pertaining to this topic in the <i>The Giver</i>	Questions relating this topic to our world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Define utopia. ∞ List the principles that guided this “perfect” or utopian community in the novel. ∞ Explain the assumptions behind those principles. ∞ Would you want to live in this community? ∞ How does Lowry suggest that the community isn’t ideal, but is deeply flawed? Explain. 	<p>In the 1800s, Karl Marx and Fredrick Engel wrote <i>The Communist Manifesto</i>. They proposed an ideal society in which all property was held in common. Research what the ideals (goals) of communism were and how they were implemented (carried out) in either China or the USSR.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ What were the main goals of communism? ∞ How did Communism affect the lives of its citizens in China or the Soviet Union (USSR)? Rich citizens? Poor citizens? Young people? Old people? Highly educated people? Poorly educated people? ∞ Compare communist China under Mao to the community in <u>The Giver</u>. How is it similar? How is it different? OR ∞ Compare communist Soviet Union under Stalin to the community in <u>The Giver</u>. How is it similar? How is it different?

Euthanasia/Death -- Underneath the placid calm of Jonas's society lies a very orderly and inexorable system of euthanasia or targeted killings, practiced on the very young who do not conform, the elderly, and those whose errors threaten the stability of the community.

Questions pertaining to euthanasia in the <i>The Giver</i>	Questions relating this topic to our world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Describe who is “released” and why they are killed in <u>The Giver</u>? ∞ How are they released? ∞ What is Jonas’s reaction to release once he understands what it is? ∞ How does Lowry suggest this is either necessary and moral OR unnecessary and immoral? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ What are the current US laws about euthanasia? ∞ What are the arguments in favor of euthanasia? What are the arguments against it? ∞ What are the disadvantages and benefits to a community that accepts such a vision of euthanasia? ∞ Do you think euthanasia should be legal?

Censorship-- Many groups have lobbied school districts to ban The Giver. In The Giver itself, the community strictly limits access to books.

Questions relating censorship to <i>The Giver</i>	Questions relating censorship to our world and our lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Who has access to books in the novel? ∞ Why don't most people have books? ∞ What advantages does this yield for the community in the novel? ∞ What disadvantages does Lowry suggest censorship causes for this fictional community? 	<p>Some of the issues in the book that groups who want to ban this novel have objected to are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Children challenging the authority of government and their parents ➤ Challenging social values: conformity versus individualism ➤ Violence—euthanasia and execution ➤ Sexual maturation/puberty --“stirrings” ➤ Judeo-Christian symbolism (characters have biblical names, fruit as symbol of quest for knowledge) ➤ Absence of organized religion in the community (Note: Some think the book is too religious and others think it dismisses religion.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Choose one or two of these censorship topics and explain why people might object to how this topic is presented by Lowry in this novel. ∞ Then look at that same issue from the eyes of those who oppose censorship. Opponents of censorship cite the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that “exposure to ideas does not compel belief.” The court made this ruling when they supported the right of Hawkins County, Tennessee schools to assign students reading texts, (National Coalition Against Censorship, 1987). Such opponents of book banning argue that censorship violates students’ first amendment rights. They cite the Supreme Court’s ruling in <i>Tinker vs. Des Moines</i> to support the argument that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” Explain how those who believe <u>The Giver</u> is an appropriate book for middle school students would use these court rulings and the novel itself to persuade people that seventh and eighth graders should be allowed or required to <u>The Giver</u> in school.

Family and Relationships -- In *The Giver*, each family has two parents, a son, and a daughter. The relationships are not biological, but assigned through observation and a careful handling of personality. In many societies around the world marriages are still arranged.

Questions relating this topic to <i>The Giver</i>	Questions relating this topic to our world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Explain how families are created in <u>The Giver</u>. ∞ Describe the advantages and disadvantages of this system for the community in the novel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Find out about cultures that have arranged marriages. What are the disadvantages and advantages of arranged marriages? ∞ In our own society, how are families defined? ∞ How are families changing? How are they remaining the same? ∞ Are families important for our society? Explain.