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Teen Volume Book Discussion Kit: Uglies by Scott Westerfeld

ANNOTATIONS:

When Tally is forced by Special Circumstances to choose between becoming a Pretty like everyone else and betraying a friend, she starts a journey to the Smoke, that could end up not only changing her life, but the world.

BOOK TALK:

Everyone in 15 year-old Tally's world is ugly, that is, until their sixteenth birthday when they get the operation that turns them pretty. Tally is just 3 months away from her big day when she meets Shay, another ugly who doesn't believe in their society's rules and wants both of them to escape to a tribe of rebels living in the wild called "The Smoke."

ICEBREAKERS AND ACTIVITIES:

- Depending on the size and willingness of the audience, ask teens if anyone wants to volunteer to perform the Reader's Theater piece (attached)
- Shay gave Tally complex coded directions to The Smoke that she knew only Tally would understand. She used phrases like: "Take the coaster straight past the gap..." and "4 days later take the side you despise". Take 10 minutes and create coded directions from the library to your home. You can make it difficult—something only a friend or family member would understand—or more simple—something anyone could decipher. Write down your message on the index card and be prepared to share it with the group. What coded phrases can you come up with for terms like "turn right" or "cross the street" or "go east", etc.? Are there any landmarks, buildings, sights or sounds you could include that might help someone find their way to your home?
- Tally's futuristic world is filled with amazing inventions and timesaving devices including hover boards, toothpaste pills, and wall panels that produce clothes and food instantly. What high tech gadget would you like to see in the future? Take 5 minutes to come up with a timesaving device or fantasy machine that would make life easier, more interesting or more fun. Will you invent a new toy? Something that makes school more fun? Some new way to get around?



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- Tell us about a time when you went camping or had some kind of adventure. Or turn this into an "I've never..." exercise.
- In small groups, take a few minutes to "invent" a hover_____ (i.e. something that we use today, that in the *Uglies* would be changed in some way, like the hoverboards and hovercars in the book). It doesn't have to be a vehicle, so think outside the car. For example, I want a hoverbroom that would float above the floor and use "super" static energy to attract every bit of dust and (sigh) cat hair.
- Opposites Attract: have every one write down 5 words on 5 small pieces of paper -- all adjectives. Shuffle them all together and deal five out to each person. The person to the left of the dealer is the first judge. The judge puts one paper in the center of the table and reads it aloud. Now each player puts in *the one* of their five words that they think is most opposite of the judge's word. The judge chooses a winner and a point is awarded. The person to the left of the judge is the new judge and so on, until all words are used.
- Talk about the current trends of plastic surgery and people like Michael Jackson and his idea of what is beautiful.
- Use some of the activity, discussion and extension ideas from the "Beauty" lesson plan on the Peace Corps web site (www.peacecorps.gov/www/educators/lessonplans). This site has a curriculum for grades 9-12 about beauty from different perspectives and many of the ideas can be adapted for your program.

POSSIBLE BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What are some details author Scott Westerfeld gives us that make the **setting** of *Uglies* seem futuristic? (modern inventions, unusual architecture, even names that sound different than names of today (on page 71, Tally mentions that the name "David" sounds made up.)
- The futuristic society in *Uglies* places extreme importance on physical beauty. Do you think that our society places too much emphasis on physical beauty? In what ways do you think our society makes us feel we are ugly? What are some extremes that people go to in order to look "pretty"? Have you ever felt discriminated against because of how you look?
- What do you think it would be like to live in a society in which everyone gets to choose exactly how they look? Would most people choose to look different? Why or why not? What would you choose?



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- Are there some ways that people in our society rebel against what is commonly considered to be pretty and choose to look “ugly” on purpose? Why do you think they make this choice?
- Some people think we are headed toward a society where everyone looks the same—a natural result of diverse societies, with people meeting and mixing. Is this different than making everyone “Pretty” like they do in the book?
- Tally and Shay become fast friends in part because they both enjoy playing tricks and sneaking around the rules of Uglyville and New Pretty Town. Why do you think they enjoy *almost* getting into trouble so much? Do you like playing tricks on people? Did you enjoy it more when you were younger?
- Tally is faced with a difficult decision: betray her close friend or stay “ugly” forever. What would you do in Tally’s situation? Imagine that you grew up in the same society. How hard would it be to leave and never have the operation?
- We are part of “The Rusties” society that seems so outdated and wasteful to Tally and Shay. What are some aspects of our modern society that might be baffling to future generations? Are there things we depend on that might not be necessary in the future?
- How do you think “The Rusties” society ended? Are there clues about the demise of these people in the book?
- The ending of *Uglies* leads right into the upcoming sequel *Pretties*. What do you think will happen in this next book? Will Tally stay pretty? Will she resist the pills that Maddy has created or be swayed by her own written submission to the experimental drugs?
- How many times have you heard someone say, “don’t judge a book by its cover?” How much do you think looks play into how people are judged by others? Take a look at p. 44 -- Shay and Tally argued about the origins of the pretty operations? Is it better to be pretty and equal, or ugly and different? Who would you agree with and why?
- Tally and the other uglies are taught that human reactions to “ugly” and “pretty” are basically hard-wired into the human brain. Then, on p. 104, Tally describes Dr. Cable as a cruel pretty. Instead of making her feel protective, Tally is revolted by her coldness. Later on when she and David are talking (p. 249), she says, “but the moonlight and the setting, or maybe just the words he was saying, had somehow turned David into a pretty. Just for a moment.”
- How do you think it works? Are uglies taught to be ugly and become pretty, and separate others into ugly and pretty? Or do they change because of the operation?



- Why do you think the Smokies kept the Smoke so secret? Why didn't they make themselves more visible until the end? Do you think that helped or hurt them?
- Which do you think was harder for David to handle -- the end of the Smoke, the death of his father, or Tally's betrayal? Why?
- Most of the names seem to be either a misspelling or a shortened form of a name we might use today. David and Dr. Cable are the only ones who have a "whole" name. Why do you think their names are different? What would your pretty name be?



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SELECT QUOTES TO READ ALOUD:

“Any other summer, a sunset like this would have been beautiful. But nothing had been beautiful since Peris turned pretty. Losing your best friend sucks, even if it’s only for three months and two days. Tally Youngblood was waiting for darkness.” (p 1)

“At school, they explained how it affected you. It didn’t matter if you knew about evolution or not—it worked anyway. On everyone.

There was a certain kind of beauty, a prettiness that everyone could see. Big eyes and full lips like a kid’s; smooth, clear skin; symmetrical features; and a thousand other little clues. Somewhere in the backs of their minds, people were always looking for these markers. No one could help seeing them, no matter how they were brought up. A million years of evolution had made it part of the human brain.

The big eyes and lips said: I’m young and vulnerable, I can’t hurt you, and you want to protect me. And the rest said: I’m healthy, I won’t make you sick. And no matter how you felt about a pretty, there was a part of you that thought: *If we had kids, they’d be healthy too. I want this pretty person...*

It was biology, they said at school. Like your heart beating, you couldn’t help believing all these things, not when you saw a pretty face like this. A pretty face. A face like Peris’s.” (pp 16-17)

INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

See Scott Westerfeld’s website: www.scottwesterfeld.com

READ-ALIKES AND BOOKS TO DISPLAY:

Other books fro the Uglies trilogy
Be More Chill by Ned Vizzini
The Skin I’m In by Sharon Flake
The Garden by Elsie V. Aidinoff
Beast by Donna Jo Napoli

