Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.

2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.

3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

Winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards

**Book Review – *Ender’s Game***

In order to develop a secure defense against a hostile alien race's next attack, government agencies breed child geniuses and train them as soldiers. A brilliant young boy, Andrew Ender Wiggin lives with his kind but distant parents, his sadistic brother Peter, and the person he loves more than anyone else, his sister Valentine. Peter and Valentine were candidates for the soldier-training program but didn't make the cut — young Ender is the Wiggin drafted to the orbiting Battle School for rigorous military training.

Ender's skills make him a leader in school and respected in the Battle Room, where children play at mock battles in zero gravity. Yet growing up in an artificial community of young soldiers Ender suffers greatly from isolation, rivalry from his peers, pressure from the adult teachers, and an unsettling fear of the alien invaders. His psychological battles include loneliness, fear that he is becoming like the cruel brother he remembers, and fanning the flames of devotion to his beloved sister.

Is Ender the general Earth needs? And what if Ender is merely the brilliant result of genetic experiments? The war with the Buggers has been raging for a hundred years, and the quest for the perfect general has been underway for almost as long. Ender's two older siblings are every bit as unusual as he is, but in very different ways. Between the three of them lie the abilities to remake a world. If, that is, the world survives.

An increasingly popular and relevant novel that risks and achieves and delivers more than most anything else within the science fiction genre, Ender's Game is a contemporary classic — a work, as Gene Wolf has written, that will still be finding new readers when 99 percent of the books published this year are completely forgotten.

"Card has taken the venerable sf concepts of a superman and interstellar war against aliens, and, with superb characterization, pacing and language, combined them into a seamless story of compelling power. This is Card at the height of his very considerable powers — a major SF novel by any reasonable standards." *Booklist*

"'Intense' is the word for *Ender's Game*." *The New York Times*

"An affecting novel full of surprises that seem inevitable once they are explained. The key, of course, is Ender Wiggin himself. Mr. Card never makes the mistake of patronizing or sentimentalizing his hero. Alternately likable and insufferable, his is a convincing little Napoleon in short pants." *Gerald Jonas, The New York Times Book Review*

"A gripping tale of adventure in space and a scathing indictment of the military mind." *Library Journal*

About the Author

Orson Scott Card is a bestselling science fiction and fantasy author. His novels *Enders Game* and *Speaker for the Dead* both won Hugo and Nebula Awards, making Card the only author to win these two top prizes in consecutive years. There are seven other novels to date in The Ender Universe series. Card has also written fantasy: *The Tales of Alvin Maker* is a series of fantasy novels set in frontier America; his most recent novel, *The Lost Gate*, is a contemporary magical fantasy. Card has written many other stand-alone sf and fantasy novels, as well as movie tie-ins and games, and publishes an internet-based science fiction and fantasy magazine, *Orson Scott Cards Intergalactic Medicine Show*. Card was born in Washington and grew up in California, Arizona, and Utah. He served a mission for the LDS Church in Brazil in the early 1970s. Besides his writing, Card directs plays and teaches writing and literature at Southern Virginia University. He lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, with his wife, Kristine Allen Card, and youngest daughter, Zina Margaret.

**Book Review – *Divergent***

Imagine the publishing world as it might look in a dystopian universe in the distant future. In this world, college English majors — call them “Englies” — aspire to write only one kind of book: the dystopian young adult novel set in the distant future. (Englies of a certain status are permitted to write about dystopias populated by vampires.) Another subset of the population — “the Fans” — provides a kind of slave labor, posting endlessly to dedicated blogs and recording podcasts, providing free marketing for an unceasing succession of aspiring best-seller trilogies.

I couldn’t help imagining this world as I read “Divergent,” the first in a planned trilogy of young adult novels set in a dystopian future and written by Veronica Roth, who sold the book in a major pre-­emptive bid before she even graduated from Northwestern last year. With “Divergent,” Roth adds to a genre that has crossed over from having a vague cultural moment to being a full-bore trend, much of it driven by the wild success of Suzanne Collins’s “Hunger Games” trilogy.

“Divergent” holds its own in the genre, with brisk pacing, lavish flights of imagination and writing that occasionally startles with fine detail. As the mother of Beatrice, the main character, cuts her daughter’s hair, the young narrator notices “the strands fall on the floor in a dull, blond ring.” Beatrice sees her reflection only when her hair is cut — the second day of every third month — because she has been born into Abnegation, one of five factions that make up the population. Those who belong to Abnegation believe selflessness begets world harmony; those who choose Candor see honesty as the path to the same goal.

The other groups are Amity, Erudite and Dauntless, and it is this last group that calls out to Beatrice when she is given the opportunity either to stay with her family’s group or to choose another allegiance. As part of the initiation process for Dauntless, Tris (a nickname Beatrice adopts to reflect her new self) must prove her mettle with adolescent feats of bravado, like jumping off a moving train onto a rooftop. She endures simulated death traps and jacks up her adrenaline with breathtaking leaps into the unknown.

“Divergent” clearly has thrills, but it also movingly explores a more common adolescent anxiety — the painful realization that coming into one’s own sometimes means leaving family behind, both ideologically and physically. It is not a coincidence that Tris falls in love while undergoing initiation into her new tribe. It is precisely the moment when young people discover romance that family life all but evaporates, at least in terms of its emotional significance.

Terrible things happen to the people Tris loves, yet the characters absorb these events with disquieting ease. Here, somehow, the novel’s flights from reality distance the reader from the emotional impact that might come in a more affecting realistic (or even fantasy) novel.

In this way, though Roth’s “Divergent” is rich in plot and imaginative details, it suffers by comparison with Collins’s opus. The shortcoming would not be so noticeable were there less blatant overlap between the two. Both “Divergent” and “The Hunger Games” feature appealing, but not conventionally pretty, young women with toughness to spare. Both start out with public sorting rituals that determine the characters’ futures. And both put the narrators in contrived, bloody battles that are in fact competitions witnessed by an audience. Even the language sounds familiar: the Hob is a central geographic point in “The Hunger Games”; in “Divergent,” it’s the Hub in the remnants of what was once the Sears Tower. For a book that explores themes about the right to be individual and the importance of breaking away from the pack, “Divergent” does not exactly distinguish itself.

“Now isn’t the time for debates about ethics,” Tris tells her father at one point, when she feels compelled to hurt someone for the greater good. Billboarding of this sort can interrupt the moment by announcing its own significance: now actually *is* the time for such a debate. In a novel that takes on the problem of conformity and questions the certainty of narrow-minded ideologues, such circuit-breaking is nonetheless useful, forcing the reader to pause and think in the middle of that dauntless break for the plot’s conclusion.

**Reflection Prompt:** How does the review of your summer reading novel compare to your interpretation of the text? What do you agree with, and where do you disagree? Be specific!