



The Fault in Our Stars

by John Green

Supplies

- whiteboard and dry erase markers or butcher paper and markers
- a poster of *Serenity Prayer* by Reinhold Niebuhr
- quotes from the book
- gift bags
- tissue paper
- tissues, lip balm, tea bags, hard candy, gum, mints, hand lotion, etc.

Optional:

- photos of Amsterdam scenery
- photo of *Funky Bones* in Indianapolis
- photo of Rik Smits
- orange markers
- cheese sandwiches or other orange foods.

Setting the Atmosphere (Optional)

- Have orange foods for snacks (cheese sandwiches, tomatoes, etc.)
- Decorate with tulips.
- Only write with orange markers.
- Have pictures of items mentioned in the story: the Anne Frank House, Netherlands, the Hotel De Filosoof, Funky Bones artwork found in Indianapolis, Rik Smits, etc.

Entering Questions

5 – 10 minutes

On pieces of butcher paper or on the whiteboard, put the following open ended statements for students to respond to as they enter:

- What was your favorite “encouragement”¹ used in the book?
- What was your least favorite “encouragement”¹ used in the book?
- The encouragement, “without pain, how we know joy,”² makes me feel . . .
- Create your own encouragement that might accompany the ones posted throughout Augustus Water’s home.

Serenity Prayer

2 minutes

Once the majority of the students have arrived, circle up and open with the Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr. Say: *At the beginning of the book, Hazel meets Gus at a support group for teens with cancer. They begin each meeting with the Serenity Prayer. Let’s pray this same prayer. (You may want to have the prayer written for all to see.) ‘God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.’*

1 Green, John. *The Fault in Our Stars*. (United States: Dutton Books, An Imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc, 2012), 27.

2 Green, 35.

Introductions

10 – 15 minutes

In the book, the main characters attend a support group where at the beginning of each meeting each teen says their name, age, diagnosis, and how they're doing today. Instead of diagnosis, ask each person to introduce themselves by name, age, grade, and how they are doing today.

The Stare Down (Optional)

5 – 10 minutes

At Hazel and Gus's first meeting, you may remember that Gus engaged Hazel in somewhat of an informal staring contest. Have all participants find a partner. On the count of three, have students stare into each other's eyes until one person looks away. Once a staring contest has been terminated by someone looking away, each person should find a new partner and try again. Students may make faces to try to get the other person to look away.

Favorite Quotes

10 – 20 minutes

Have students choose their favorite quote from the quotes posted around the room (see list below). Ask students to explain why the chosen quote is their favorite. What resonates with them?

- "I'm not in the business of denying myself the simple pleasures of saying true things."³
- "It would be a privilege to have my heart broken by you."⁴
- "You say you're not special because the world doesn't know about you, but I know about you."⁵
- "I fell in love the way you fall asleep: slowly, then all at once."⁶
- "My thoughts are stars I cannot fathom into constellations."⁷
- "That's the thing about pain...it demands to be felt."⁸
- "Some infinities are bigger than other infinities."⁹
- "The marks humans leave are too often scars."¹⁰
- "The world is not a wish-granting factory."¹¹

3 Green, 153.

4 Green, 176.

5 Green, 240.

6 Green, 125.

7 Green, 311.

8 Green, 63.

9 Green, 189.

10 Green, 311.

11 Green, 182.

- “You are so busy being YOU that you have no idea how utterly unprecedented you are.”¹²
- “The real heroes anyway aren’t the people doing things; the real heroes are the people NOTICING things, paying attention.”¹³

Discussion Questions

20 – 30 minutes

- The lead character, Hazel, is suffering from cancer. Her mother makes her go to a support group for teens with cancer. Hazel says her support group “featured a rotating cast of characters.”¹⁴ Why does this happen?
- When Hazel tried to get out of going to the support group, her mother said, “You deserve a life.”¹⁵ What was Hazel’s mother implying? What does she want for her daughter? (for her to be healthy, for Hazel to have friends and a social life)
- Hazel gives a description of her favorite book, “Sometimes, you read a book and it fills you with this weird evangelical zeal, and you become convinced that the shattered world will never be put back together unless and until all living humans read this book.”¹⁶ Do you have a book like that? What is it? Why do you think Hazel feels so strongly about *An Imperial Affliction*?
- The mantra of the support group is “Living our best life today.”¹⁷ What do you think that statement means to those in the support group? What does it mean to you? How could you live out that mantra?
- What is hamartia? (a fatal flaw) What did Hazel perceive Augustus’ fatal flaw to be? (cigarettes) Why did Augustus pretend to smoke? Why was a cigarette a metaphor? (“It’s a metaphor, see: You put the killing thing right between your teeth, but you don’t give it the power to do its killing.”¹⁸)
- Throughout the book, Hazel and Augustus refer to “cancer perks”¹⁹. What are they? What were some cancer perks they each received?
- Anna, in *An Imperial Affliction*, is “honest about all of it in a way that no one else really is.”²⁰ She refers to cancer kids as “side effects . . . of the diversity of life.”²¹ This resonates with Hazel. What effect does this statement have on Hazel and the way she views her life and her illness?

12 Green, 123.

13 Green, 312.

14 Green, 4.

15 Green, 7.

16 Green, 33.

17 Green, 14.

18 Green, 20.

19 Green, 23.

20 Green, 49.

21 Green, 49.

- When Hazel visits with Gus and Isaac in the midst of Isaac's mental breakdown, Isaac and Gus were playing a video game where they were trying to save school children. Gus states that saving the children is only temporary because "Salvation is temporary. I bought them a minute. Maybe that's the minute that buys them an hour, which is the hour that buys them a year. No one's gonna buy them forever, Hazel Grace, but my life bought them a minute. And that's not nothing."²² How does this statement about the fictitious children in a video game relate to the lives of the three cancer surviving teens? Why is Gus always so willing to sacrifice himself when playing Counterinsurgency? (He wants to leave his mark on this world.)
- Hazel says, "I'm a grenade and at some point I'm going to blow up and I would like to minimize the casualties, okay?"²³ What is she referring to? (Dying and destroying the people's lives around her.) Later in the book, Gus sends a letter asking Van Houten, the author of *An Imperial Affliction*, to write a eulogy for Hazel. In that letter he states, "You don't get to choose if you get hurt in this world, old man, but you do have some say in who hurts you. I like my choices. I hope she likes hers."²⁴ What is Gus trying to say to Hazel through this statement?
- What does Gus mean when he says he believes "in Something with a capital S?"²⁵ (Heaven? Some form of afterlife?)
- Why did Hazel want to know what happens to Anna's mom? (She wanted to know what would happen to her mom after she died.) Why is Hazel worried about her mom not having a life? Why is it important for Hazel to know her mom is working on her Masters in Social Work? Earlier in the book, Hazel states, "Her primary reason for living and mine were awfully entangled."²⁶ What does she mean?
- What was symbolic about the visit to the Anne Frank house? Would Anne like that they kissed? Why do you think people were clapping when they kissed?
- Hazel and Gus go to Amsterdam in anticipation of Van Houten sharing the end of *An Imperial Affliction* with them. After this miserable meeting with Van Houten, Gus and Hazel recount the story to Hazel's mom. Hazel thinks, "You have a choice in this world, I believe, about how to tell sad stories, and we made it funny."²⁷ Why did they choose to make the story humorous?

22 Green, 59.

23 Green, 99.

24 Green, 316.

25 Green, 168.

26 Green, 143.

27 Green, 209.

- When Gus dies, Van Houten shows up not only at the funeral, but a week after the funeral and tells Hazel of Antonietta Meo. He quotes her saying, “Pain is like fabric: the stronger it is, the more it’s worth. Half of marriages end in the year after a child’s death. Grief does not change you, Hazel. It reveals you.”²⁸ What does Van Houten’s grief reveal to you about his character?
- Hazel’s dad says, “Sometimes the universe wants to be noticed.”²⁹ What does he mean? In response, Hazel later thinks, “Thinking about the universe wanting to be noticed, and how I had to notice it as best I could. I felt that I owed a debt to the universe that only my attention could repay, and also that I owed a debt to everybody who didn’t get to be a person anymore and everyone who hadn’t gotten to be a person yet.”³⁰ How is this a change in Hazel’s thinking?
- What was significant about Gus’s pre-funeral? How was it different from his actual funeral? Hazel thinks, “Funerals . . . are for the living.”³¹ How did this realization change what she said in Augustus’ eulogy at his actual funeral?
- If you could write an ending to *An Imperial Affliction* for Hazel, what would you tell her about Anna’s mom? Does she marry the Dutch Tulip Man? Is the Dutch Tulip Man a con-man?
- What does this book teach us about cancer? After reading this book, will you approach those who are suffering with cancer differently? Why or why not?

Closing Activity

5 - 10 minutes

Before the book club, encourage students to gather supplies for bags to be given to those going through chemotherapy. These bags may include: lip balm, hand lotion, gum, hard candies, mints, tea bags, etc. Close with a prayer for those who are battling cancer and/or for those families who are grieving the loss of someone who has died of cancer.

Written by: Shannon Guse Edited by: Gina Yeager-Buckley

28 Green, 284.

29 Green, 223.

30 Green, 294.

31 Green, 273.