



PRESBYTERIAN YOUTH BOOK CLUB

Faith, explored through fiction, fantasy and fun.

Insurgent

BY VERONICA ROTH

90 minutes

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard and dry-erase markers or butcher paper and markers
- Notecards and pencils

Opening activities

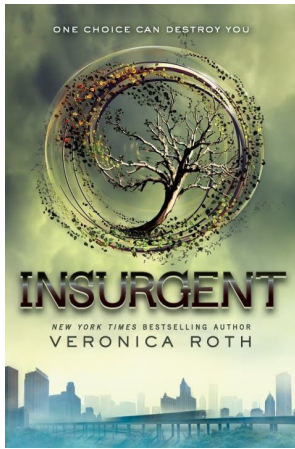
Choose for a variety of activities:

- **Play Psychiatrist.** Find directions for how to play this group game at youthgroupgames.com.au/games/268/psychiatrist/.¹ After playing one or two rounds, discuss the following: As the Dauntless try to escape capture and recognition throughout the book, they pretend to be in another faction. Tris says, “Pretending to be in another faction changes everything. Even the way we walk.”² When trying to fit in with other groups, do you change your appearance, your talk, your walk?
- **Two truths and a lie.** Find directions for how to play this group game at group-games.com/ice-breakers/two-truths-and-a-lie.html.³ Discuss telling the truth. When Tris and Caleb are put on trial by the Candor, they are put under truth serum. Why is Tris afraid of letting the truth out? Can the truth be freeing? Or hurtful? What is Tris really afraid of saying?
- **Play Three on a Couch.** Find directions for how to play this game at worshipleaderguide.blogspot.com/2012/12/three-on-couch.html.⁴ When Tobias is under the truth serum, he fights sharing his secret about his father’s abuse. When he allows the truth to come out, the Candor reply with the statement, “Thank you for your honesty.”⁵ How does that statement soften the blow of sharing the secret of his past?

Engage:

As a group, brainstorm the definition of *insurgent*. Write the answers people give on a whiteboard or large piece of butcher paper. What are some synonyms for the word *insurgent*? Fernando calls Tris an insurgent. He says an insurgent

1. “Psychiatrist,” youthgroupgames.com.au, February 19, 2009, accessed November 4, 2014, youthgroupgames.com.au/games/268/psychiatrist/.
2. Veronica Roth, *Insurgent* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Press, 2012), 77.
3. “Two Truths and a Lie,” group-games.com, accessed November 4, 2014, group-games.com/ice-breakers/two-truths-and-a-lie.html.
4. Maynard Pittendreigh, “Three on a Couch,” Church Leader’s Guide Book, December 7, 2012, accessed November 4, 2014, worshipleaderguide.blogspot.com/2012/12/three-on-couch.html.
5. Roth, *Insurgent*, 144.



is “a person who acts in opposition to the established authority, who is not necessarily regarded as a belligerent.”⁶ Explain to the group that as you discuss the book, you will pause periodically to note how Tris is acting against the leaders and whether or not she is viewed as being belligerent. You may need to define *belligerent*. Be sure to add these notes to the whiteboard or paper.

Discussion questions:

- Children sing a song with the lyrics, “Dauntless is the cruelest of the five. They tear each other to pieces.”⁷ How does this song foreshadow what is happening in the book? “Erudite is the coldest of the five. Knowledge is a costly thing.”⁸ Does this make Erudite and Dauntless a powerful combination?
- Tris tries to inhabit the mind of her enemy. She does this for strategic reasons, to try to find out why they are injecting the Dauntless. Should we try to inhabit the minds of those we consider to be our enemies? Not for strategic reasons, but to have compassion?
- Tris believes that Tobias’s action of beating Marcus publicly is calculated. Why do you think Tobias feels he needs to publicly strike out against his father? Is it to end the ridicule caused by others knowing he is afraid of his father or to help him stop being afraid? Or is it for another reason?
- Tobias tells Tris, “The value of a sacrifice lies in its necessity.”⁹ She thinks she is making sacrifices for others. He thinks she is being reckless. Is sacrificing yourself for others a reckless act? Is it ever necessary?
- Can Tris choose to be whatever she wants to be even though she has an aptitude for Dauntless? Can she still make her own decisions about how she acts? Can we? We may have certain tendencies because of our genetics or upbringing, but can we change who we are and decide who we want to be or what we become?
- Tris chooses Dauntless “because they are alive because they are free.”¹⁰ What does it mean to be free? What does “free” look like? Is freedom the same as finding reconciliation and forgiveness? When Evelyn tells Tobias that she was exiled, she explains that Marcus had more influence over the Abnegation. Tobias struggles with this concept because the Abnegation are inclined to forgiveness and reconciliation. Can power and influence be stronger than forgiveness and reconciliation?
- How does Erudite use fear to get the divergent to turn themselves in? Is fear a negotiation tool?

6. Roth, *Insurgent*, 458.

7. *Ibid.*, 182.

8. *Ibid.*, 182.

9. *Ibid.*, 260.

10. *Ibid.*, 283.

- Periodically, Tris introduces herself as a little girl. Jeanine called her out on this and says that she chooses “different ways to refer to herself depending on what is convenient.”¹¹ Do we do this also? Do we choose different ways of behaving and viewing ourselves depending on the crowd we are around at the time and what we can gain from it? How do you really see yourself?
- When Tris is arguing with Caleb about why he is siding with the Erudite, Caleb says, “Evil depends on where you’re standing.”¹² What does this quote mean?
- In an effort to find out the truth about what lies beyond the fence, Tris truly believes she is doing the right thing by going against the factionless and Dauntless plan. Does this make her a traitor? Define *traitor*. Define *trust*. How can people trust one another when they have differing views?
- Tobias needed to be reminded of who Tris truly is. What serves as reminders for who we really are?

Bible connection:

Grace is God choosing us, claiming us, and naming us. Grace is God’s love for us, free and known through Jesus Christ. Only because of this gift of grace can we respond with faith and a life of service and goodness.

Grace is described in 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”¹³ First comes God’s action toward us, and then we can respond.

As Tris faces her death in Erudite, she faces the reality of acknowledging God’s grace in the reality of her broken world and life. It is described in the book, “I suppose that now would be the time to ask for forgiveness for all the things I’ve done, but I’m sure my list would never be complete. I also don’t believe that whatever comes after life depends on my correctly reciting a list of my transgressions—that sounds too much like an Erudite afterlife to me, all accuracy and no feeling. I don’t believe that what comes after depends on anything I do at all.”¹⁴

- As described in 1 Peter, Tris, too, is God’s own people called out of darkness into light. How does Tris begin to acknowledge God’s grace in her life?
- Do you agree with what she is saying? Or disagree? Why?
- How is grace freeing for us?
- How do you see God working in Tris’s life at this point?

11. Ibid., 343.

12. Ibid., 368.

13. *Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 1 Peter 2:9.

14. Roth, *Insurgent*, 379.

Later in the book, Tris glimpses the impact of God’s grace again when she is in Amity. An old woman in a peace religious tradition says to Tris:

“May the peace of God be with you,” she says, her voice low, “even in the midst of trouble.”

“Why would it?” I say softly, so no one else can hear. “After all I’ve done . . .”

“It isn’t about you,” she says. “It is a gift. You cannot earn it, or it ceases to be a gift.”¹⁵

- The peace of God or God’s grace is named as a gift. How does it feel to know God gives us this gift? How is this different than a gift we may receive from someone else?
- How do you see God’s grace in your life?
- Like Tris, can you think of a time when it was important to be reminded that you, too, are a receiver of God’s grace?
- How can you remind others of God’s grace for them?

Closing:

To prepare to close the time together, take another look at the Amity worship tradition where members shake hands and exchange peace.

“We believe in a God who gives peace and cherishes it, so we give peace to each other. May the peace of God be with you,” she says, her voice low, “even in the midst of trouble.”¹⁶

In our faith tradition, the Passing of the Peace is described in the *Book of Common Worship* as a time where “in sharing the peace, we express the reconciliation, unity, and love that come only from God, and we open ourselves to the power of God’s love to heal our brokenness and make us agents of that love in the world.”¹⁷ Before closing with the Passing of the Peace, read the following excerpt from *Book, Bath, Table and Time* by Fred Edie:

Consider the gesture of “sharing Christ’s peace” in worship preliminary to receiving the Eucharistic bread and cup. Worshipers usually speak to one another words something like these: “The Peace of the Lord be with you,” which prompts the response, “And also with you.” In addition they may shake hands or hug as well. Through this small ritual, worshipers are invited to practice peace and reconciliation. Now admittedly, this is the humblest of gestures. It lasts only moments. And it is possible for individual worshipers to participate in passing the peace without meaning what the gesture intends for and from them. But the public intention remains—reconciliation and peacemaking—and congregations that pass the peace regularly consistently practice this public intention.

15. Ibid., 440.

16. Ibid., 440.

17. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 36.

Meanwhile, out there in the tough world, I recently read about a school district that banned its high school athletes from lining up to shake hands after games. It seems that this ritual had become an occasion to spit at, curse, and even fight with opponents. Might it have turned out differently if all the Christian players were being properly formed into their vocations as peacemakers at Sunday worship? Might youthful bodies formed by expressions of Christ's peace in the liturgy be capable of resisting sinful inversions of this practice elsewhere?¹⁸

Allow participants to Pass the Peace with one another.

Optional closing activity: Go see the movie! It comes out on March 20, 2015. Set your book club around the release date. Consider meeting at the church or a nearby restaurant or coffee shop to discuss the book prior to seeing the film.

Quick form adaptation: Use the Discussion Questions only for a simpler book debriefing/conversation guide.

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18. Fred P. Edie, *Book, Bath, Table, and Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 23–24.