

# Simpson Street Free Press Book Review Lesson Plan

## Guidelines for Staff Writers

**\*Remember:** Book reviews bring **BIGGER** paychecks. Book reviews are also a way to encourage staff writers to read more books. Staff writers writing book reviews should consider themselves a role model for other students.

As you begin to read, use this worksheet to help you actively participate in the reading. Keep running notes about the characters and their personality traits and how important events affect the characters. Note any new or unknown words.

**\*Tip:** While plot summaries are a good way to describe a book, reflecting on the book's content is even better. Great book reviews, or any article for that matter, use descriptive words and sentences to keep the reader interested.



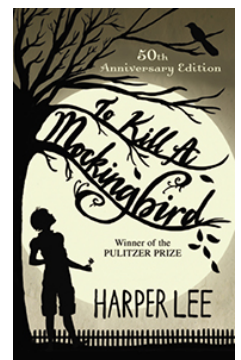
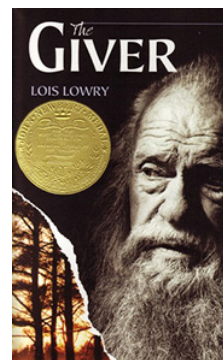
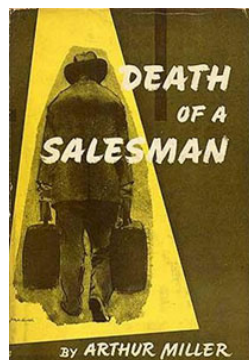
To complete a book review, writers will do the following:

1. Read a full-length book at their grade level, or above their reading level.
2. Reflect on how characters evolve in the book.
3. Consider how a particular audience will respond to the book and to the writer's review.
4. Encourage peers to read.
5. Evaluate the quality of the book and its literary elements.
6. Look for and examine larger literary themes.
7. Perform sentence-level and paragraph-level revision on their own and with at least one editor.



## General Overview

All Simpson Street Free Press programs emphasize and encourage reading. Our programs and this book review lesson plan encourage young people to read—an activity directly related to improving a student's writing and thinking skills. Book reviews give our writers the opportunity to explore and comment on their favorite book or books assigned to them through school. We encourage students to think about and note their reactions and thoughts on a particular book. Book reviews are also an important part of our newspaper. Most are published in a special "Book Talk" section, although these writing assignments can be planned to accompany articles or columns that share similar subject matter. Free Press book reviews encourage reading and push our staff writers (especially older students) to use in-depth literary analysis and reflection skills.



## Reading

- Writers can use books from school or books recommended by editors at the Free Press. The book must be approved by an editor prior to inclusion on the Free Press slug sheet. Student writers should have the book in their possession and in the newspaper office when they are writing the book review. We encourage all of our students to write book reviews, and monitor the number of book assignments completed by each student during each trimester.
- Before beginning the book, students should review the attached worksheet and consider using it as a guide while forming their ideas.
- Teachers and editors should review some of the goals for the review and encourage students to think about what they will write, and do so as they are reading. In addition, editors and teachers will periodically check with the student to make sure that they understand the plot and that they are looking for larger themes in the book.

## Writing

- In following standard literary conventions, the plot summary should be written in present tense. Writers should understand that the characters in the stories in books are considered living beings rather than inanimate objects. Just as we do not talk about our living family members or friends in the past tense, we do not talk about the people in books in past tense.
- In addition to plot summary, staff writers should include information about the characters in the story. Writers should also offer some personal reflection about the book without giving the audience too much information about the story. Students should refer to the book-review guidelines for additional ideas.





## Book Review Lesson Plan Cont.

- One primary goal of the book review is to encourage our young audience to read. With this in mind, writers should try to keep their reviews positive and uplifting. It might also be appropriate to encourage other readers to read the same book.
- At the Free Press book reviews do tend to differ from standard articles. Teachers, editors, and adult volunteers should consider applying a teaching strategy used successfully at the Free Press for many years: Assist the student you are working with by looking together at examples of strong book reviews from past issues. Teachers can point out important elements in these reviews and encourage writers to include these elements in their reviews. This aspect of the Free Press Book Review Lesson Plan is intended to equip student writers with practical skills they can put to use in completing assignments for school.
- As always, writers should choose one of the outlining techniques described in the standard lesson plan. It is also an excellent idea for writers to jot down some main points while reading so that they have examples and ideas to refer to when writing.
- After the student completes a draft, the book review will go through the same editing process as a standard article. Writers should first do their own sentence-level and paragraph-level revision. Then they participate in writing conferences with a teacher or editor before submitting the review for further editing.
- Once the review is placed in the appropriate editor's tray, the review becomes a part of the regular newspaper production pipeline.
- Book reviews are placed on the newsroom's staff assignment boards and on the SLUG sheet so that editors and students can track works in progress.



## Join the Young Lions Club

The "Young Lions Club" is part of a large and growing network of youth book clubs organized by Simpson Street Free Press. Young Lions members, grades 4-8, read the same books and meet on Friday evenings. Club members discuss their current books, watch classic films, and play 1970s board games. They also organize field trips and assist each other with school assignments. The Friday evenings Young Lions Club is one of many age-appropriate activities available for kids and families at our South Towne newsroom, and why this site is Dane County's first all-academics youth center.