

Impostors

By Scott Westerfeld

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 Recommended for readers aged 13+ years / YA

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author
 SCOTT WESTERFELD
IMPOSTORS



Summary

Frey was raised to take a bullet.

She's the body double for her twin sister Rafia—the precious heir of the first family of Shreve—and her existence is a closely guarded secret. So, while Rafi was schooled in poise and diplomacy, Frey was drilled in weapons and combat. Her purpose: to protect her sister from their tyrannical father's many enemies.

When Frey is sent in Rafi's place as collateral in a precarious business deal, she becomes the perfect impostor—as elegant and charming as her sister. But Col Palafox, the son of a rival leader, is getting close enough to spot the killer inside her. As layers of deceit peel away, can Frey become her own person, and risk everything in a rebellion?

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Scott Westerfeld is a master of worldbuilding—the art of creating an imaginary world with its own complex political and social conventions, history, geography and technical innovations. In his *Uglies* series he created a future-world in which teenagers are forced to undergo extreme cosmetic surgery to conform to society's standard of beauty—until one teen rises up and rebels. Readers loved it, making it one of the most successful YA series to be published in recent years. While *Impostors* expands the *Uglies* universe, it is a standalone read. Fresh and thrilling, it introduces terrific new characters, superb new tech and a scary new city.

Use in the curriculum

While not a pure allegory, *Impostors* is a post-apocalyptic dystopia—a genre that has become increasingly popular with young adult readers and writers in the 21st century. Scott Westerfeld was in the vanguard of these writers.

Sitting inside the science fiction and fantasy genres, dystopias often create future worlds in order to critique our own modern world. They are often thrillers or fast-paced adventures. A number have been filmed, allowing cross-media study.

In the English classroom, study of *Impostors* can focus on the 'Big Questions' about ourselves and our society that are posed in the book, such as social hierarchy, social control, self-determination and free will, sibling rivalry, conceptions of beauty, the corruption of power, violence as a means to an end, or an end in itself. This genre of novel appeals to the enquiring, questioning minds of adolescents and can provoke excellent discussion and writing on sophisticated themes, overlapping with Philosophy, Social Studies and Psychology.

Impostors is suitable for close literary study as a novel. Characters, plot, setting and themes are interwoven brilliantly and the style rewards analysis.

Impostors can be used as part of a reading circle based on the author's other books or based on books of the same genre by other authors.

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Themes

- urban futures
- technology
- surveillance
- privacy
- sibling relationships
- power
- dictatorship
- self-knowledge and being true to oneself

Discussion questions

- The language used in the first chapter of *Impostors* works subtly to set the tone of the novel and sketch a portrait of a highly skilled and ruthless assassin who will do anything to protect her twin sister. Examine closely the literary techniques used by Scott Westerfeld to achieve this. Some prompts might include looking at the effect of:
 - The first sentence of the story and the use of the first word 'We're'.
 - Starting the novel *in media res* or mid-action sequence. (Note that there is no explanation of setting, characters or what has gone on before to help the reader adjust to the story.)
 - Use of *zoomorphism* to describe the pulse knife.
 - The general lack of dialogue.
 - The preponderance of short, sharp sentences within the chapter.
- Find as many interesting adjectives, adverbs, similes and metaphors in this chapter and the next and look at how the use of these words 'intensify' the drama of the scene. (One interesting exercise is to choose a few paragraphs from the chapter and remove all of the above. Examine what effect this has on the language that remains.)
- Does Frey's character change over the course of the novel? Has she fundamentally changed from bodyguard to rebel, or is she as much of a cold-hearted killer at the end of the novel as at the beginning?
- Consider the sibling relationships in the book. Is the relationship between Frey and Rafi a metaphorical exaggeration of the way some people feel they have always lived in the shadow of their sibling? Brainstorm books, plays and films which pursue this theme and the related theme of sibling rivalry.
- What literary genre/genres would you use to describe *Impostors* best? Use examples of events, settings, power structures and characters to support your choice of genre/genres.
- *Impostors* is broken into three parts, each part featuring a quote. Write a brief description of the people quoted—Sun Tzu, Machiavelli and Jean de la Fontaine—and explain how that person and their quote relates to the corresponding part in the novel.
- *Impostors* is the first book of a planned quartet. What is the effect of the last line of the novel on the reader? Ask students to come up with some ideas of what might happen in the sequel to *Impostors*. Do you think that Rafia will be loyal to Frey as the story develops? What clues in this book might point to her being a more complex character in the next book than in this one?
- **Group Discussion:** Scott Westerfeld said of the original *Uglies* books, '[they] were about revolution, the overthrow of an oppressive regime. But getting rid of the powers-that-be is just the beginning. What happens next? History is full of revolutions that falter, revolutionaries who wind up becoming what they fought against. Progress

is undone. The question of "what next" kept whispering to me—especially in light of what's happening in the real world.'

- If the *Uglies* series was a commentary on the 'real' world's obsession with beauty, is *Impostors* a commentary on anything else in our society?
- After reading *Impostors* turn to the cover of the novel. Consider the title and cover design. Ask students why they think the designer and publisher decided to use that particular mix of font, colour, composition and framing. What mood is evoked by the cover and is this an appropriate mood for the novel that follows? Ask students to devise an alternate title for the novel and to design a new cover.

Author's inspiration

Scott Westerfeld has said:

'In the decade since the original *Uglies* books ended, I've had thousands of fans tell me how reading the series changed them—and these messages have also changed me. All that fan fiction, fan art, cosplay, and those critiques have transformed the *Uglies* world in my head. It's gone from something smooth, pristine, and clean into something more organic, less sterile. Fans brought my world to life. So, when the idea for *Impostors* struck, it seemed like the perfect opportunity to apply what my readers have taught me.

'The original *Uglies* books were about revolution, the overthrow of an oppressive regime. But getting rid of the powers-that-be is just the beginning. What happens next? History is full of revolutions that falter, revolutionaries who wind up becoming what they fought against. Progress is undone. The question of "what next" kept whispering to me—especially in light of what's happening in the real world. I had to return to the world of the *Uglies* to find the heroes ready to take up Tally Youngblood's fight. *Impostors* is about one of those heroes, Frey, trying to find her true nature in a world where almost everything is false.'

The author

Scott Westerfeld is best known as the author of the *Uglies* series, a number-one New York Times bestseller, and the *Leviathan* and *Zeroes* trilogies, both New York Times bestsellers. His standalone novels include *So Yesterday*, and *Afterworlds*. His other works include the *Midnighters* trilogy, the *Peeps* and *Risen Empire* duologies, and the eponymous first book of the *Horizon* multi-platform series. His novels have won the Philip K Dick Special Citation, the Aurealis Award (twice), the Victorian Premier's Award, and have been named New York Times Notable Books and Best Books for Young Adults' Top Ten Children's Books of the Year.

Scott co-wrote the *Shay's Story* *Uglies*-based graphic novels with Devin Grayson. He is also the author of the graphic novel *Spill Zone*, illustrated by Alex Puvilland.

Scott was born in Texas, but now splits his time between New York City and Sydney, Australia.

