

A Reading Group Guide to

Dry By Neal Shusterman and Jarrod Shusterman

About the Book

How often do we take our water supply for granted? Sometimes we're asked to conserve water, but it's hard to remember to do so when you can turn on the tap and water pours out. Until one day, it doesn't. Nobody in California expects the Tap-Out, so when the water supply cuts off, most people are not prepared. Panic ensues as stores sell out of bottled water and all other beverages. There's hope that the government will provide relief, but as the days pass and not enough help arrives, people become angrier and even savage. For Alyssa, Garrett, and Kelton, separated from their respective parents and attempting to leave town toward safety, this anger puts their lives in danger. The unwelcome addition of Jacqui and Henry complicates the journey to Kelton's family's bug-out location in the woods. How will they find the strength to survive?

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the Tap-Out situation first ignored by the media? What kind of news does the media tend to report? When the national news does start to report on the Tap-Out, how do they cover it? Why is the tone of the coverage important to the residents affected by the event? Do you think that the media calling the drought a "flow crisis" affects the public's level of preparedness? Why does Kelton think newscasters continue to tell residents to remain calm? What is the alternative? What are the risks to both sides?
2. Alyssa notes the time of the water shut-off "like they do in the emergency room: 1:32 p.m., June 4th." What has occurred when emergency room workers note the time like this? How is that situation similar to what Alyssa is facing?
3. The Shustermans alternate between four different narrators—Alyssa, Kelton, Jacqui, and Henry—and brief "snapshots" that focus on other people. Why do you think they chose to use this format? What do the different voices add to your understanding of the story? What do the snapshots add to the overall narrative of the book? Which characters or snapshots did you find most compelling?
4. According to Kelton's dad, what are the three types of people in the world? Do you agree with his analysis? How do you think he would classify Alyssa, Garrett, Jacqui, and Henry? When the neighbors come into the night to look at the McCrackens' lights, Kelton says, "'And I'm scared to the bone, because right now I can't tell if I'm looking into the eyes of sheep, or wolves.'" Which do they end up being? Why do you think people are acting this way?
5. Why are the water-zombies such a threat? Were you surprised to see such rapid moral and physical decline in a community without water? What does this say about human nature and civilization? How might the spread of water-zombies transform society? Explain your answers. How would you have handled the water-zombies? Do you think they're beyond help? Do you think once water access was restored, water-zombies could return to the lives they led before the Tap-Out?
6. Uncle Basil goes to Daphne's house so that he won't be a burden on Alyssa's family. Why would Uncle Basil think of himself as a burden? Does his absence end up helping his family? What does Uncle Basil contribute toward Alyssa's survival? How do you think the story might have changed if Uncle Basil had stayed?
7. Describe Kelton's upbringing, including his family's efforts to protect themselves. How did the neighborhood, particularly Alyssa's family, view Kelton's family before the Tap-Out? Are you surprised by any of Kelton's behaviors or beliefs? Think about comments such as "winning the affection of a girl is a lot like shooting a deer" and "girls love a guy with lots of pockets." Do you think his upbringing impacted his social instincts? Is he the kind of person you'd want with you during a Tap-Out? Explain your answer.
8. Explain why Kelton's dad doesn't think his family should share their supplies with their neighbors, and describe other characters' reactions. Do you believe in this "either you share nothing or you share everything" mentality? What are the

consequences of both actions? Why do some characters change their minds about sharing resources?

9. When Alyssa and Garrett set out with Kelton to find their parents, she's surprised to see that her neighborhood looks the same, noting that "the wreckage is more internal." At what point does the damage from the Tap-Out begin to reflect on the outside world? How does the level of visible wreckage relate to the breakdown of polite society? Are there other sorts of internal wreckage shown in this story? Do you think you would have been more afraid of the internal or external impact? Which factors would you have let guide your actions?

10. Garrett and Alyssa have very different reactions to the scene on the beach. Would you have continued walking on the beach to find out what happened? What other clues might you have found? Why do you think the authors made the object in the water ambiguous, rather than saying that it was a body?

11. When Kelton draws his gun on Dalton, he is unable to pull the trigger. With all his survivalist training, why do you think he's unable to kill Dalton? Do you think he would have been able to shoot the marauders who overran his house? What is the difference between the confrontation with Dalton and the situation with Benji and Kyle? Why do you think the outcome is so different later in the story? How has Kelton changed between the two events?

12. What does the "call of the void" mean to Jacqui? How does her familiarity with risk help or hinder her as she tries to survive the Tap-Out? Does her attitude toward the call of the void change during the course of the story?

13. Why does Jacqui decide against going back to the house where she is squatting after witnessing the scene at the beach? Do you agree that her chances of survival are better with people rather than hiding from them? Think about the state of the beach when Garrett and Alyssa arrived, and the evidence that something terrible had occurred there. Did Jacqui's description of her beach experience match what you thought had happened based on Garrett and Alyssa's observations? What made Jacqui realize it was going to turn into a riot? What would you have done in the situation? What could have been done to prevent the situation?

14. It is difficult for the different members of this group to trust one another. What alliances form as they move toward the bug-out? How do the different characters lose or gain the confidence of others? In the end, who do you think proves themselves worthy of that trust? How might outcomes have changed if someone had shown more or less trust toward the others?

15. What is Kelton's dad trying to avoid with his end-of-the-world prepping? Is he able to achieve his goal of protecting his family? Do you think Kelton's ability to see his father as human is a consequence of the situation at hand or of shifting perceptions on Kelton's part?

16. Are you surprised that Jacqui leaves the antibiotics for Uncle Basil and Daphne? What does it say about who Jacqui really is? Do you think she would have done this at the beginning of the story? Explain your answer.

17. Why do the others allow Henry to travel with them? Are there points at which they could have gotten what they needed without him? Why do you think no one thought to look inside the packaging to make sure Henry was really carrying a full case of water? Why is it so much easier for Alyssa to trust him than it is for her to trust Jacqui or even Kelton?

18. As the group travels down the aqueduct, Kelton says, "It feels to me like the world has torn in two, and we're traveling the seam of that tear. The chasm between what was, and what will be." Do you think the world has torn in two? Explain your answer. Why do you think Kelton feels this way? Why is an aqueduct such an appropriate place to act as the seam between the old world and the new? Can you think of a time in your life where you've faced a big transition? If so, can you relate to Kelton's statement? How would your feelings have impacted your actions if you were in Kelton's situation?

19. Why does Brady leave home? Do these reasons have anything to do with his family's inability to reach him after the Tap-Out? How does his death change the way that Kelton reacts to the events around him? In what way do Brady's

actions endanger his family as well as himself?

20. What allows the Water Angel's group to work together without turning on one another or falling prey to outside dangers? How much of this has to do with Charity's personality? What keeps the group from staying on the highway with Charity? Can you come up with other places that water can be found where others may not have thought to look?

21. Why was Kelton's drone spying on Alyssa inappropriate and unacceptable? Do you think Kelton now understands the seriousness of his actions?

22. As Alyssa steals water to save Garrett, Jacqui says, "I won't take [the water]. Because even though I've seen everyone around me lose their humanity today, I realize that in this moment, I have finally found mine." What evidence does she have that everyone else has lost their humanity? What has caused her to find hers? Think about how Alyssa said she would never become a monster, yet she's taken water from an old woman to save her brother. Would you do the same to save yourself or someone you love?

23. Do you think Alyssa would have been able to shoot Garrett, Kelton, and herself? Would this have been an act of bravery or of cowardice? Have you or anyone you know ever faced an impossible decision? If so, how was it handled? Did you come to a solution? What did you learn about yourself or your values?

24. Why does Henry take credit for saving people from a burning building? How does this relate to his actions throughout the story? Do you think he views the Tap-Out as a tragedy or an opportunity? Often characters grow throughout a novel, while others fall or simply don't change at all. Which kind of character is Henry? When you learn his age at the end of the book, does it change your opinion of him? Explain your answer.

Extension Activities

1. The citizens of California had made some halfhearted efforts to conserve water, but they were not enough to prevent the chaos of a shutdown. What is your community doing to conserve this precious natural resource? Research what water-saving ordinances exist in your town, and if there is a plan for providing water during a drought. If there is not, talk to local leaders about your concerns or draft a letter urging them to create some.

2. Individuals and families can also help conserve water in their own homes and yards. What efforts have you made toward conservation? Come up with a plan for your household that will allow you to save a gallon of water per day. When you have mastered these techniques, see if you can decrease your water usage even further.

3. The scarcity of natural resources made it prohibitively difficult for Alyssa and the others to share with their neighbors. Help prevent this sort of situation by collecting non-perishable food and beverages for a local food pantry. Get your classmates or neighbors involved in the cause.

4. Kelton and his family had prepared both their home and their bug-out for survival in case of a crisis like the Tap-Out. What would be in your survival kit? Decide what you would need to carry with you in case of an emergency, and gather the items together in a sturdy bag or backpack. Keep it on hand in case anything happens. What items should everyone have in an emergency kit?

5. There are a number of skills that Alyssa and the others find handy during their journey, including first aid, martial arts, and map reading. Choose one of these skills that you don't currently possess, and learn more about it. Take lessons or visit your local library for books and videos on the topics.

6. The group has to navigate mountains, forests, and river beds to reach safety. Using google earth or satellite map pictures, plot out the actual path they took from South Orange County to the Angeles National Forest. What would you have found most challenging? Most thrilling?

7. Though the desalination machines do not end up producing any potable water, you can learn to make your own

simple desalination machine or water purifier. Find an article, book, or YouTube video to help you build your own lifesaving device. Then research where desalination is currently being used. Are there any plants in the US? Are there plants that were being built, but were never finished? Write a letter advocating for additional plants to be built or any partial construction to be completed, and research who best to send it to.

8. Dehydration is not the only risk during a disaster of this size. What other illnesses can take hold during a catastrophe? How do we safeguard against this? What might happen if an illness spreads as quickly as the packs of water-zombies? Research natural disasters and plagues throughout history to trace the diagnoses, evolution, consequences, treatment, and efforts for future prevention. What important lessons were learned? What kinds of technology do we have today that might help us to better fight the spread of contagious diseases?

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