



Book club 9: Utopia & dystopia

The Stranded
by Sarah Daniels



Rules

In this book club you will discuss *The Stranded* by Sarah Daniels in a group of 4-6 readers. You will start a conversation by responding to discussion questions about the text. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 quiz questions about the text. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of genuine questions that you have. Each group member consults the group about a part of the text that they thought was unclear. Together, you try to find answers to the questions that are raised. After everything has been cleared up, your group is ready to proceed to the next round.
- 3 Round 3 consists of questions for discussion. There are two categories to choose from. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is when you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit www.litlab.nl. A teachers' manual and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at www.litlab.nl/docenten.



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Introduction

'Aboard the Arcadia, news is strictly packaged and sanitized. Anything that doesn't come from the Federated States is propaganda or hearsay or outright lies. Writing it down will get you arrested. Giving it to other people will get you arrested. Reading it, holding it in your hand, standing next to it will get you arrested.' (p. 9)

The Stranded by Sarah Daniels tells the story of life on a ship, but not an ordinary ship. *The Arcadia* is a big cruise ship that has been stranded in front of The Federated States for over 40 years. It is kept in quarantine because of The Virus, which was unleashed onto the world as a part of biological warfare in Europe. The people on the ship have created a new life while waiting to be allowed on land. What are we to make of this ship's society and its relation to The Federated States? What do this society and the characters tell us about the balance between the greater good and individual sacrifice, social safety and individual freedom, the structure of societies, and people's opportunities to make a better life for themselves? What does it mean to lead a good life? This book club helps you connect these topics to your own ideas about the book.

Round 1: Understanding the plot

Take turns turning over a card and answering the question. After the person whose turn it is has answered, the rest may add to that answer or share their own views.

Round 2: Initial questions

Take turns selecting one of the excerpts (fragmenten/stukjes) from the book listed below. Formulate a question you would like to ask one of the characters, and work together to find an answer to that question.

1. Nik and May find out what the consequences are for the leaflet drop: "I think I ... to one another." (p. 151-153)
2. Hadley tells Corp how he really feels about her: "Couldn't care less ... ship kid." (p. 277)
3. It turns out Alex could not be trusted after all: 'His lips brush ... I say breathlessly.'" (p. 312)
4. Nik and Ester have made it to land, without May: 'Esther cowers on ... wet-nosed and sniffing.' (p. 324)

Round 3: Discussion

Take turns turning over a card from a pile of your choice and answer the discussion question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

Round 4: Opinion

Review *The Stranded* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



Question 1

What message is spread through the leaflet drop?

Question 2

Who are the leaders of the two gangs and what is their territory called?

Question 3

What does May bring back on board of The Arcadia?

Question 4

What does Nik do when they are on land to get rid of the tracker?

Question 5

Where was the ship supposed to go as part of The Rebellion's plan and what happened instead?

Answers

1. That another cruise ship, the Oceania, was cleared and hundreds died.
2. Silas runs the Neaths and Enid runs the Flotilla.
3. A worm with a code (to block the drone system)
4. He wraps Esther's conglome around a bottle and throws it in the river.
5. It was supposed to go to international waters (and then Maine), but ended up on the shores of the Federated States.



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



Personal connections? **1**

Esther has a very difficult decision to make: take the test that is now suddenly their very last exam and possibly fail, thus losing her opportunity to leave the ship, or cheat and beat Kara. What are Esther's arguments for deciding whether or not she should cheat? What would you do if you were Esther?

Personal connections? **2**

Hadley experiences emotional pain because of events in the past. To deal with it, he takes a drug that can erase his memories. Can you understand his motivations? Do you think we should try to develop such a drug? Explain your thoughts.

Personal connections? **3**

The captain is given a surveillance bot and Hadley says; 'For your own safety and security, of course. That way, I can send help if you need it.' Do you think having surveillance cameras in our society in as many places as possible is a good thing? Explain your thoughts.

Personal connections? **4**

Many characters keep secrets from each other. What is May's motivation for not telling Esther about what she does? Why do you think so many people on the ship keep secrets? Is that a good or a bad thing?

Personal connections? **5**

Esther is called a 'collaborator'. What does this word mean in times of war? Do you agree she, and the other medics, are collaborators?

Personal connections? **6**

List three to five characteristics that you think describe a 'good' person. Which character embodies most of those characteristics? Explain.

Personal connections? **7**

Alex loves Esther and wants to take care of her and make sure she is safe. Would you describe their relationship as healthy? (Why) not?

Personal connections? **8**

The Rebellion comes with its own rules and punishments for 'insubordination'. Do you think it could become just as repressive as the current Federated States government?



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4

Personal connections?

8

Personal connections?

7



Food for thought? 1

Look up what 'worldbuilding' means in relation to storytelling. The illegal leaflet drop takes place in the very first chapter. How does this event contribute to the 'worldbuilding' of *The Stranded*?

Food for thought? 2

Nik is clearly in love with May and Esther is in a relationship with Alex. However, a storyline involving Nik and Esther is already created early on as well. How is the reader given the feeling that Nik and Esther might become romantically involved? What is the intended effect on the reader given the fact that *The Stranded* is part of a series?

Food for thought? 3

The Stranded switches narrative perspectives between Esther, Nik and Hadley. Why do you think these three characters were chosen? Whose point of view would you also like to read? What would that add?

Food for thought? 4

What makes Hadley the antagonist (*tegenstander*) of the story? Describe his role in the plot and his character traits. Is he fully a villain or could a reader also still feel sympathy for him? Explain your answer.

Food for thought? 5

The Stranded shares the announcements given by the captain, but Esther makes the last announcement. How does the repetition, and final break in repetition, of these announcements contribute to both plot development and mood of the story?

Food for thought? 6

Look up the most important characteristics of dystopian literature. Which elements do you recognise in *The Stranded*? Explain your answer.

Food for thought? 7

On the ship, different social classes live on different decks. You could see this separation of social groups as a metaphor for the segregation within our own society. Can you explain this?

Food for thought? 8

Some say that *The Stranded* has a political message. Can you identify elements that seem to comment on our own world's border politics and distribution of wealth (*verdeling van rijkdom*)? How would you describe the novel's perspective on these issues?



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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