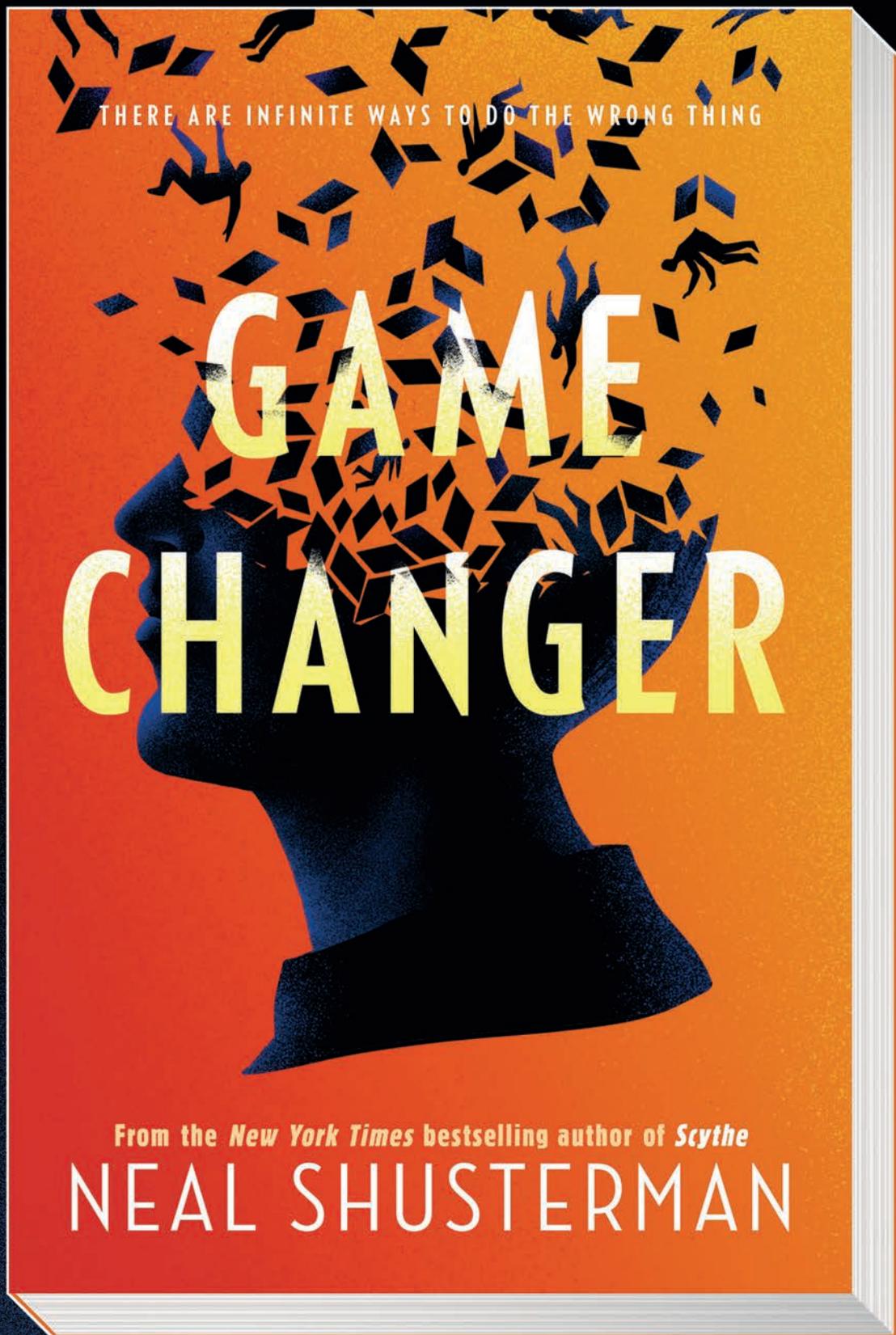


# DISCUSSION GUIDE



An ambitious and magnetic novel from the  
*New York Times* bestselling **NEAL SHUSTERMAN**

# GAME CHANGER

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Scythe*

# NEAL SHUSTERMAN

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Game Changer*, the latest novel from best-selling author Neal Shusterman, is a book of immense scope and imagination. In it, Shusterman transposes some of the most pressing social issues of our time – race, gender, sexuality and civil rights – into a far-reaching and multi-dimensional exploration of humanity itself, where Ash must learn to understand the universe around him in order to find a way to save it. At times tender, funny, eye-opening and challenging, *Game Changer* has the rare gift of forcing the reader to reimagine a world from the perspective of others.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Neal Shusterman is a *New York Times* bestselling author whose books include the acclaimed Arc of a Scythe series (*Scythe*, *Thunderhead* and *The Toll*) and *Dry*, as well as the Unwind series and *Challenger Deep*, which won a National Book Award. He also writes screenplays for film and television, for shows such as *Goosebumps* and *Animorphs*. He lives in Florida and has four children. Follow him on Twitter: @NealShusterman

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Within *Game Changer* are myriad themes, topics, issues and ideas that can be discussed. While the science fiction element of the narrative may provide some boundaries and hypothetical scenarios through which to explore the text, the realities of the characters are very much rooted in the present world. As such, any discussion should be led sensitively and with respect for the audience members, many of whom may have first-hand experience of some of the situations depicted relating to gender identity, sexuality and race. As always, members of the discussion group should be made comfortable and given licence to express themselves and their feelings without fear of reprisal.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### Getting started:

Begin by asking the group for their thoughts on the novel. Did anyone have any particularly strong feelings towards it? Have members of the group read other Shusterman novels? If so, how does this compare? Was anyone reminded of any other novels or works of fiction? Discuss one or two of the broad elements of interest members found in the book.

#### 1. Identity

'Who are we, really?' – p. 69

In all realities, there are some common threads in Ash's life, despite the changes. Consider the passage from page 69 beginning 'Who are we, really?' up to 'nature versus nurture'. Discuss these ideas as a group. Is Ash the sum of his experiences? Is there a 'spark' that exists separately? From what do we create a sense of who we are?

## 2. Narrative voice

'I'm going to pause here and give you a chance to process this...' – p. 191

What is the effect of Shusterman's choice to narrate this story in Ash's voice? Did it affect the way group members responded to the book? Discuss the possible impact on the novel if it had been written in the third person, or from another perspective.

## 3. Change

'The crystalline form of solid water is less dense than the liquid. ... But it's only slightly less dense.' – p. 46

'If you want it different, you have to be the one to change it.' – p. 274

Why is the novel called 'Game Changer'? Discuss the nature of change within the novel. Are all changes forceful and aggressive, like Ash's tackles, or are some changes subtle and slight? Why does Shusterman make a football tackle the event that causes Ash to shift between dimensions, or versions of reality?

## 4. Control

'Even the tiniest loose thread in the fabric of your world cannot be tolerated. Either everything works, or nothing works.' – p. 29

'Even if they begin with good intentions, in their heart of hearts abusers believe love is about control.' – p. 329

How important is the idea of control in the novel? Discuss this theme through the different characters' perspectives. What can they control? What can't they control? What should and shouldn't they try to control?

## 5. Perspective

"You, Ashley Bowman, have become the center of the universe." – p. 130

"What were we like in this wonderland world of yours?" – p. 174

What does the novel say about the way in which we see the world as individuals, and the way in which we operate as a society? Is Ash being the centre of the universe a metaphor for how he feels, before it becomes reality? Discuss the way in which perspectives change as the novel develops, and the way in which Shusterman introduces or uncovers new perspectives from other characters.

## 6. Choice

'So where was my choice, then, that took me down the path to the tweaked places I ended up?' – p. 13

What do group members think of the choices Ash makes in the novel? Discuss the idea that *Game Changer* is a book about choices – choices we make, choices other people make, and choices that are denied to us.

## 7. Privilege

'...there's a big difference between "shouldn't" and "doesn't". Privilege is all about not seeing the gap.' – p. 15

'The idea of basic human dignity being stripped away was way on the edge of my radar.' – p. 161

How important is privilege within the book? Why is the central character a straight, white, able-bodied cisgender young man, at the novel's beginning? Discuss how this theme develops, with particular reference to race, gender, sexuality and disability.

## 8. A sentient universe

'Isn't it strange how we take for granted that the universe works? That the gears all fit together?' – p. 369

"We quell disturbances, let's just leave it at that..." – p. 132

What do members of the group think of the concept of the Edwards, and of sentient forces operating within the universe? How does Shusterman portray our place within that universe? You might like to compare this with other science fiction narratives that group members are aware of, or other books they have read or films they have seen.



## 9. Active vs passive

'I did what I always do when faced with a challenge. I beat it.' – p. 78

Discuss the idea of activity and passivity in the novel. Which characters are passive to the things that affect them? Which actively change them? Are the characters always aware that they are doing this? Do you think that being active or being passive is an important feature of the novel? If so, why? Does being active or passive relate to privilege?

## 10. Humanity

'...when you're facing a vast unknown, company is the only thing that makes it bearable.' – p. 91

How does Ash cope with the situations he finds himself in? Discuss the importance of Ash's various changing relationships throughout the novel – with Leo, Katie, Hunter, Paul, his parents, even Layton. What stays the same? What doesn't?

## 11. Growth

'All the terrible tomorrows that, by and large, never arrive.' – p. 92

Look at the opening paragraph to chapter 6. What do members of the group think of this statement? Discuss the ways in which this statement comes to reflect Ash's state as the novel develops. What might Shusterman be trying to convey in this idea? Is there anything that group members feel they disagree with, or have learnt or come to realise, through reading *Game Changer*?

## 12. Cause and effect

'History forked in a different direction.' – p. 106

'...anything we desire, and anything we achieve, comes at a cost, and with consequences we didn't care enough to consider.' – p. 119

How does Shusterman explore the nature of cause and effect in the novel? What does the novel say about the course of history, or events in any universe, and our power to influence them? Do some people have more power of influence than others? If so, how does the novel suggest people should use this power?

