

## Reading Guide for *Ender's Game*

Grade: 8-12

### About the Author

Orson Scott Card is one of the most highly acclaimed writers of science fiction. An author of fantasy and contemporary fiction as well, Card has taught writing at the university level and been an instructor at several writing workshops. *Ender's Game* and its sequel, *Speaker for the Dead*, each won both the Hugo and the Nebula awards, the two most prestigious awards for science fiction, in 1986 and 1987 respectively.

Card's novels take a powerful and provocative approach to the question of good versus evil. Although religion plays a small role in *Ender's Game*, it is present to some degree in all of his work as part of the backdrop against which his dramatic stories take place. His ability to draw the reader into seemingly impossible environments, such as *Ender's Game's* Battle School with its pre-teen soldiers-in-training, is one of his greatest storytelling strengths.

### Book Summary

*Ender's Game* is often presented as a science fiction novel for people who don't read science fiction. It uses many of the standard tropes, including spaceships, aliens, and peculiar physics, but the story Card tells with these tropes is anything but standard.

Ender Wiggin is a Third—a third child born on an Earth where families are normally limited to two children each. Ender's parents were allowed a Third as part of a governmental strategy to produce a brilliant commander in the ongoing war against the buggers, an alien race with which humanity has been at war for decades.

Ender is whisked away to the Battle School as a child, and almost immediately isolated from his classmates. Nonetheless, he quickly masters the skills and strategies he is taught, graduating and moving on to Command School more quickly and at a younger age than anyone has before. There, he engages in more advanced simulations and more brutal tactics, culminating in a final test with explosive results.

Card examines a number of questions with this unconventional novel; to say that it is a story of good against evil is both accurate and an oversimplification. The reader is never sure, just as Ender is never sure, who is good and who is evil, including himself, up to and including the novel's final pages. *Ender's Game* calls the concept of childhood into question, and asks whether the ends achieved in the story justify the means by which they are reached. Enmity is caused equally by a lack of communication, and by communicating too well, a more sophisticated approach than is usually found in stories of this kind.

### Challenging Content

The story is often quite violent, especially considering that the principal characters are children, but not gratuitously so.

### Suggested Vocabulary

Abject

Acquiescence

Adulation

Albedo

Alliteration

Annihilation

Apathy

Arcane

Archaic

Ascetic

Astroglation

Attrition

Autonomy

Commiserate

Compassion

Contempt

Corroborate

Court martial

Demagogue

Denunciation

Derisive

Desiccated

Dirigible

Disingenuous

Empathy

Errant

Excruciating

Exhilarated

Exigencies

Extenuating

Extraneous

Extricate

Fastidious

Feint

Fiat

Flotilla

Hegemony

Helot

Immobility

Impassive

Improvise

Incognito  
Incredulous  
Ineptitude  
Inscrutable  
Insubordinate  
Intelligentsia  
Invective  
Itinerant  
Littoral  
Maladroit  
Malicious  
Malleable  
Martyr  
Megalomania  
Melodramatic  
Mockery  
Negligent  
Nonchalance  
Oblivion  
Optimum  
Ostentatious  
Oust  
Percolate  
Peripheral  
Petulant  
Preemptive  
Prostrate  
Provocateur  
Pseudonym  
Puerile  
Pupa  
Reprisal  
Requisition  
Rictus  
Sadism  
Skirmish  
Stalemate  
Subservient  
Tactician  
Tepid  
Unconscionable  
Unstintingly  
Vertigo  
Vestigial  
Vivisect

### Discussion Questions

(Note: the page numbers referenced here are from the 1986 Tor mass market paperback edition. Page numbers may differ in other editions.)

### **Questions to Think About as You Read**

What are the science fictional elements of this novel? Why is it categorized as science fiction?

What is the dialogue opening each chapter? Who are these people and why are they discussing Ender? Does their relationship change during the story?

What is the state of religion in this society? Why does it matter to the story? What impact does it have on the ending?

What does it say about Ender that he consistently finds the flaw in his commanders' strategies?

What can you tell about this society based on the fact that it has produced a place like the Battle School?

Why is this novel titled *Ender's Game*?

Is Ender a hero?

This book was published in 1985. It predicts the spread of what technology-based phenomenon? Have things worked out as it predicted?

Why do Ender's friendships fade as his authority grows?

### **Questions by Chapter**

#### *Chapters 1-3*

What does the monitor do? Would Ender have taken the same action to defend himself in chapter 1 if he'd still had it?

Why does Ender think that he is "just like Peter"?

Why is Peter jealous of Ender?

Why is Ender's being a Third considered negative? What does this tell you about society on Earth?

Why is Ender suited to be an officer?

### *Chapters 4-6*

Ender is not an ordinary six-year-old. What's different about him? Is everyone's Battle School experience like his?

Why does Ender like Graff at first? Why does Graff single him out?

Why is Ender so isolated? Is it all due to Graff? What is planned for him?

Why does Ender think that the security system on his desk is deliberately easy to break?

What are the buggers? What do you know about them at this point in the story?

Why does Ender keep trying to get past the Giant's Drink in his game?

### *Chapters 7-9*

Why does Ender get transferred when he does?

If Ender has never "just lived," why does he want to? How do you suppose he knows what that is?

How and why does Ender disobey Bonzo's orders in the battleroom? What important discovery does he make?

Read the conversation between Ender and Dink on pp. 120-121. What do you think of Dink's point of view? Do you think he's right?

What does the status of Russia as described on p. 136 say about when this book was written?

The people of Russia are described more than once in the book as "helots". What does this word mean and why do the characters use it in reference to the Russians?

Why is the fantasy game so important to Ender?

On pp. 165-66, read Ender's reaction to Val's letter. Do you think that Graff predicted this reaction?

### *Chapters 10-12*

Read Ender's internal monologue on p. 184. Does it remind you of someone else in the story and how they think? Who and why?

The title of chapter 11 is "Veni Vidi Vici," which means "I came, I saw, I conquered." Why is the chapter titled this?

Why do you think the details of Mazer's strategy are omitted in the invasion videos?

Why is the fight with Bonzo in chapter 12 important?

### *Chapters 13-15*

On p. 253, Val thinks, "Perhaps it's impossible to wear an identity without becoming what you pretend to be." How does this apply to Val, and to other characters in the story?

In chapter 13, how has Ender changed? How much of his personality as shown in this chapter was there all along?

Why does Ender want Peter to love him?

Why is the attack on the buggers being carried out the way it's described in chapter 13?

Is Graff Ender's friend? Do you think he's lying in chapter 13 about how the war started?

What is different about Ender's new teacher in chapter 14?

Why do you think Mazer's attack worked? What does it say about the buggers?

What do you think of the conversation that opens chapter 15? Do the ends justify the means?

Read what Val says on p. 345 about control. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Why do you think the book ends the way it does?

### Suggested Activities

Look up the historical Locke and Demosthenes, and compare them to the personae adopted by Peter and Val. In a short essay, discuss why they chose those names as pseudonyms.

Research the effects of warfare on children. Do you see parallels between these and the Battle School students in the novel?

Write an essay arguing whether or not Ender is responsible for his actions in concluding the game. Is he a hero or a monster? Can either term apply to him? Why or why not?

### Further Reading

(Note: these links lead off of the Science Fiction Museum website. SFM is not responsible for their content.)

Hatrack River: The Official Website of Orson Scott Card: <http://www.hatrack.com/>  
(includes additional discussion questions and background information on *Ender's Game*)

Reading Strategies and Unit Plan from BYU:

<http://english.byu.edu/Novelinks/reading%20strategies/EndersGame/Ender%27s%20Game.html>

Enotes on *Ender's Game*: <http://www.enotes.com/enders-game/>

SparkNotes on *Ender's Game*: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/endersgame/>

Addison Public Library Readers' Guide: <http://www.addison.lib.il.us/6card.asp>

Some other books by Orson Scott Card:

*Speaker for the Dead*

*Xenocide*

*Children of the Mind*

*Ender's Shadow*

*Shadow of the Hegemon*

*Shadow Puppets*

*Seventh Son*

*Red Prophet*

*Prentice Alvin*

*Alvin Journeyman*

*Heartfire*

*Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus*