

The Dispossessed

by Ursula K. LeGuin (1974)

Approved for use in: Honors English III

Summary of the Work

On the planet Anarres, an independent colony was founded by the visionary Odo, with goals of peace, coexistence, harmony, and cooperation. Odonianism is anarchy, a philosophy opposed to having a State as either a capitalistic or socialist entity. Anarres functions as a mining colony for its mother world, Urras. No communication takes place between the two worlds, however. The brilliant physicist Shevek wishes to share his far-sighted theories, but must go to Urras to do so. His attempt to reconcile the two opposing worlds causes him to undergo a long and difficult journey; on the way Shevek must make difficult choices as he seeks the truth.

Rationale:

The Dispossessed is a challenging, thoughtful science fiction work by one of the best science fiction and fantasy writers we have. As social criticism, it challenges conventional ideas of ownership, the role of government, and the responsibility of the individual in society. According to LeGuin, “My novel The Dispossessed is about a small worldful of people who call themselves Odonians. The name is taken from the founder of their society, Odo, who lived several generations before the time of the novel and who therefore doesn’t get into the action – except implicitly, in that all the action started with her. “

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays

Wilson's Fiction 04/01/01

Noted Distinction

- The Hugo Award (1975)
- LeGuin’s awards include The Boston Globe Horn Award (1975); the National Children’s Book Award, (1973); the Nebula Award (1990 & 1995); four Hugo Awards, and the Newbury Honor Book Award (1972)

Readability

- Lexile Score: 820
- Readability Level: 7.1

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption: Approved 1999 or earlier.

Notes on the Text

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Readers identify with Shevek’s struggle to make right choices in the novel The Dispossessed. They recognize that his choice to seek and share the truth reflects their own. Students also can identify the characteristics of the two worlds Anarres and Urras as embodying concepts already in our society. Materialism, accepted so easily by the society of Urras, is heartily rejected by Anarres, a society in which individuals are much freer. Yet, as Shevek finds, Anarres itself is not perfect. Readers are challenged to relate the truths in this novel to their own lives.

Connection to the Curriculum:

As social criticism, The Dispossessed comments on American society and government. It fits well with the themes of junior literature, including the American dream and the choices of Americans to frame a responsible government. Finally, in studying the work of Ursula K. LeGuin, students read a highly acclaimed and respected writer’s work.

Additional Connections: AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

LeGuin’s short stories, including “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.”

At the sophomore level, The Wizard of Earthsea, by Ursula K. LeGuin.