Text Rationale for *Starship Troopers* by Robert Heinlein


“Heinlein always wanted to push his young readers into thinking, and in *Starship Troopers*, Heinlein had written a deeply felt, intellectually challenging book, which he believed the nation’s youth needed to read. Heinlein was increasingly troubled by the Cold War, and the poor decisions he considered the Eisenhower administration to be making. As he cast his role in writing the juveniles as one of educating the young, he wanted them to think about the nature of citizenship, and promote the essential qualities of freedom and self-responsibility in the next generation. He always made sure there was plenty of excitement and sense of wonder, and this was especially true of this novel – the battles, the powered armor – but he also included issues to chew on to make his audience think. Here, it was the responsibility of the citizen to make mature decisions when voting, and to keep in mind the need to think of others at the highest possible scale when casting a vote.”

**Summary:** *Starship Troopers* by Robert Heinlein takes place in the future as humanity fights against “the bugs.” It is written as a first-person narrative from a young recruit, Johnny Rico. The story begins with him aboard the Roger Young; he is performing a raid against “the skinnies,” a race allied with the bugs. He flashes back to his high school years during which he was intent on joining the military with his friend Carl. Rico joins the Mobile Infantry where he finds himself in one of the hardest boot camps in the world. He barely makes it through training where several of his fellow trainers die while on cap missions, but Rico doesn’t seem to lament their deaths.

He finishes training and begins the war itself against the bug planets. There are many “police actions” in which raids against the bugs are made, but no official declaration of war has occurred. The war formally begins when a raid from the bugs on Buenos Aires kills millions of people including Johnny’s mother. In direct retaliation, the Mobile Infantry raid Klendathu, the bug homeland. Unfortunately, heavy losses force them to take hit and run missions against the bugs. Rico joins “Rasczak’s Roughnecks,” named after their beloved lieutenant whose abilities saved their lives regularly.

He later decides that he wants to “go career” and begins with officer training, much like boot camp, only much more difficult and a steeper learning curve. Rico is commissioned as a temporary Third Lieutenant and partakes in Operation Royalty, the name of the plan to attempt capturing the “brain bug,” supposedly the one of the leaders of the bugs. Rico learns that his father had joined the Mobile Infantry after his wife’s death despite his opposition to Rico joining. The novel ends with Rico as lieutenant of the Roughnecks with his father serving by his side. Hints about their final victory against the arachnids develop as they actually invade Klendathu.

Adapted from the summary on Depauw University’s website

**Merit:** This classic, young-adult, award-winning (Hugo Award in 1960), science fiction novel adds a completely different genre and voice to the course, and it satisfies the need for a book about war dealing with *ethics* throughout.
Benefit to Students: This classic, young-adult, award-winning (Hugo Award in 1960), science fiction novel adds a completely different genre and voice to the course, and it satisfies the need for a book about war dealing with ethics throughout.

Brief description of proposed classroom activities generated by text: Together with War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, the core of the Ethics of War unit in the second semester of English III, AP-TaG, students will choose an outside reading title from the following modern classic pieces of American literature:

- *Slaughterhouse Five*
- *The Things They Carried*
- *Catch-22*
- *Starship Troopers*

While juniors study war through a historical lens in U.S. and World History, and they hear about war in the news, in order to be able to form educated arguments about war, especially focused on our nation’s role, they must understand how and why war is such an intrinsic part of human nature.

As Ron Sudol, Associate Provost and Professor of Rhetoric at Oakland University writes on AP Central, “for the AP English Language and Composition student, the whole world is the subject.” Thus, we will, as always, study current pieces of war rhetoric from various news outlets in addition to the core text and the student’s chosen outside reading title.

List of the TEKS the proposed text supports:

(1) Reading/Vocabulary Development. Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing. Students are expected to:

(A) determine the meaning of grade-level technical academic English words in multiple content areas (e.g., science, mathematics, social studies, the arts) derived from Latin, Greek, or other linguistic roots and affixes;

(B) analyze textual context (within a sentence and in larger sections of text) to distinguish between the denotative and connotative meanings of words;

(C) produce analogies that describe a function of an object or its description;

(D) describe the origins and meanings of foreign words or phrases used frequently in written English (e.g., *caveat emptor, carte blanche, tete a tete, pas de deux, bon appetit, quid pro quo*); and

(E) use a dictionary, a glossary, or a thesaurus (printed or electronic) to determine or confirm the meanings of words and phrases, including their connotations and denotations, and their etymology.
(2) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Theme and Genre. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

(A) analyze how the genre of texts with similar themes shapes meaning;

(B) analyze the influence of mythic, classical and traditional literature on 20th and 21st century literature; and

(C) relate the figurative language of a literary work to its historical and cultural setting.

(3) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Poetry. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of poetry and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze the effects of diction and imagery (e.g., controlling images, figurative language, understatement, overstatement, irony, paradox) in poetry.

(4) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Drama. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to explain how dramatic conventions (e.g., monologues, soliloquies, dramatic irony) enhance dramatic text.

(5) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Fiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of fiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

(A) analyze non-linear plot development (e.g., flashbacks, foreshadowing, subplots, parallel plot structures) and compare it to linear plot development;

(B) analyze how authors develop complex yet believable characters in works of fiction through a range of literary devices, including character foils;

(C) analyze the way in which a work of fiction is shaped by the narrator's point of view; and

(D) demonstrate familiarity with works by authors from non-English-speaking literary traditions with emphasis on classical literature.

(6) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Literary Nonfiction. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about the varied structural patterns and features of literary nonfiction and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to analyze how literary essays interweave personal examples and ideas with factual information to explain, present a perspective, or describe a situation or event.
(7) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Sensory Language. Students understand, make inferences and draw conclusions about how an author's sensory language creates imagery in literary text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to explain the role of irony, sarcasm, and paradox in literary works.

(8) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to explain the controlling idea and specific purpose of an expository text and distinguish the most important from the less important details that support the author's purpose.

(12) Reading/Media Literacy. Students use comprehension skills to analyze how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in various forms to impact meaning. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater depth in increasingly more complex texts. Students are expected to:

(A) compare and contrast how events are presented and information is communicated by visual images (e.g., graphic art, illustrations, news photographs) versus non-visual texts;

(C) compare and contrast coverage of the same event in various media (e.g., newspapers, television, documentaries, blogs, Internet); and

(D) evaluate changes in formality and tone within the same medium for specific audiences and purposes.

(13) Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:

(A) plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea;

(B) structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices used to convey meaning;

(C) revise drafts to improve style, word choice, figurative language, sentence variety, and subtlety of meaning after rethinking how well questions of purpose, audience, and genre have been addressed;
(D) edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling; and

(E) revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

(15) Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts. Students write expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes. Students are expected to:

(A) write an analytical essay of sufficient length that includes:

(i) effective introductory and concluding paragraphs and a variety of sentence structures;

(ii) rhetorical devices, and transitions between paragraphs;

(iii) a controlling idea or thesis;

(iv) an organizing structure appropriate to purpose, audience, and context; and

(v) relevant information and valid inferences;

(C) write an interpretative response to an expository or a literary text (e.g., essay or review) that:

(i) extends beyond a summary and literal analysis;

(ii) addresses the writing skills for an analytical essay and provides evidence from the text using embedded quotations; and

(iii) analyzes the aesthetic effects of an author's use of stylistic or rhetorical devices; and

(16) Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write an argumentative essay to the appropriate audience that includes:

(A) a clear thesis or position based on logical reasons supported by precise and relevant evidence;

(B) consideration of the whole range of information and views on the topic and accurate and honest representation of these views;

(C) counter-arguments based on evidence to anticipate and address objections;
Clarification of any potentially controversial segments and why the text remains a suitable choice, despite being potentially controversial: A common complaint about *Starship Troopers* is that it glorifies war along with the military. Alexei Panshin, a veteran of the peacetime military, argued that Heinlein glossed over the reality of military life, and that the Terran Federation-Arachnid conflict existed simply because, "Starship troopers are not half so glorious sitting on their butts polishing their weapons for the tenth time for lack of anything else to do." Joe Haldeman, a Vietnam veteran and author of the anti-war Hugo and Nebula winning science fiction novel *The Forever War*, said that he "disagreed" with *Starship Troopers* because it "glorifies war," but added that "it's a very well-crafted novel, and I believe Heinlein was honest with it."

Defending Heinlein, George Price argued that "[Heinlein] implies, first, that war is something 'endured,' not enjoyed, and second, that war is so unpleasant, so desolate, that it must at all costs be kept away from one's home." In a commentary on his essay "Who Are the Heirs of Patrick Henry?" Heinlein agreed that *Starship Troopers* "glorifies the military ... Specifically the P.B.I., the Poor Bloody Infantry, the mudfoot who places his frail body between his loved home and the war's desolation – but is rarely appreciated... he has the toughest job of all and should be honored." The book's dedication also reads in part "... to all sergeants everywhere who have labored to make men out of boys." Heinlein also received some complaints about the lack of conscription in *Starship Troopers* (the military draft was the law in the United States when he wrote the novel).

Similar Works:

*The Forever War*, Joe Haldeman