

# Killers Among Us: Course Plan

Spring 2017

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## Week 1: What is a Serial Killer?

- Class Introductions: Name, Year, Reason for taking the class
- Syllabus handout - point out specific grading criteria as well as explaining EEE reading assignments and expectations of the class

### Group Ice Breaker (15 Minutes)

Students will be given butcher paper and markers and asked to make a group of 2-3 people. Once in the group, they will be asked to draw what they think a serial killer looks like for 5 minutes. In the last 15 minutes of class, students will present their drawings and asked questions about what they've drawn and why they think it represents the "general image of a serial killer".

Questions about gender and race may enter student's minds, stimulating thoughtful discussion on media portrayal and stereotypes of serial killers and how this kind of stereotype is dangerous.

### Presentation (30 Minutes)

- What is the definition of a serial killer?
  - Serial murder is not a modern nor is it uniquely an American crime
  - According to the FBI: "There has been at least one attempt to formalize a definition of serial murder through legislation. In 1998, a federal law was passed by the United States Congress, titled: Protection of Children from Sexual Predator Act of 1998 (Title 18, United States Code, Chapter 51, and Section 1111). This law includes a definition of serial killings:
    - *The term 'serial killings' means a series of three or more killings, not less than one of which was committed within the United States, having common characteristics such as to suggest the reasonable possibility that the crimes were committed by the same person or people.*
    - Even though federal law provides a definition of serial murder, it is "limited in its application." This law was created not to act as a generic definition of serial murder, but rather to help the FBI assist local law enforcement on cases.

Across the world, criminologists agree that a Serial Killer is a murderer who kills two or more people with a temporal separation between killings. This may mean that the murders could happen on separate occasions or have a “cooling-off period”

- *What is the difference between serial murder and mass murder? (Ask class)* Mass murder is described as killing four or more people killed at the same time, typically in the same location where the murderer attacks people in an ongoing incident (2007 Virginia Tech “School Shooting” Murders)
- Terrorism vs. Serial Murder
  - What is an act of terror and how is it different from serial murder?
  - International and Domestic Terrorism is defined as “violent acts” that endanger human life or violate federal/international law. They may be intended to intimidate civilians, influence government policy through coercion, or to affect government policy through mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping
  - Terrorism is a form of mass-murder--and since it doesn't have a cooling off period, it is not considered by the FBI to be a form of serial murder
- In a Symposium created by the FBI and the National Center For the Analysis of Violent Crime, experts were gathered in order to understand these horrific acts
  - There were general observations made at this symposium, which came to the conclusion that:
  - Predispositions to serial killing is “biological, social, and psychological in nature” and not limited to any one factor
    - The development of a serial killer includes a combination of these factors
  - There is no generic template for a serial killer
  - Serial killers are difficult to classify because they are driven by their own motivations or reasons
  - Serial killers are not limited to a single demographic of race, gender, social class, or religion
  - More research is needed in order to understand the development of serial killer pathology

Are There Archetypes of serial killers? How Can we Classify Them?

- While there is no generic “Serial Killer” Profile, there are archetypes that appear in both real and fictional serial killers. These 5 Archetypes are:
  - 1. “The Bragger” or egotistical serial killers who brag about their horrific murders publically either to taunt their victims, the press, or the investigators following them. They are often attention seeking individuals who can't keep their crimes to themselves. (Ie: The Zodiac Killer and Jack the Ripper)
  - 2. “The Expert Manipulator” These serial killers are known for being able to expertly manipulate their victims. The main objective of these killers is to gain power and control over their victims. Many of these killers may sexually abuse their victims, but they are different from hedonistic killers who rape their victims out of lust. (Ie. Charlie Manson)
  - 3. “The Charmer” These Serial killers understand their victims and use it against them. These “charming” killers may seek out vulnerable victims to use their

weakness' against them. (ie. Jeffrey Dahmer, also known as the Milwaukee Cannibal, who lured seventeen men and boys into his house where they killed them.) These killers often kill for lust or thrill.

- 4. "The Power Junkie" These killers kill for power, and power alone. When caught, these killers may refuse to give up crucial information about where they buried the bodies of victims in order to maintain power over them and the victim's families.
- 5. "The Average Joe" This is often one of the biggest classifications because--these serial killers are impossible to detect. They are terrifying in that they are just like everyone else.

*Conclusion:* Although serial murder only makes up less than 1% of murders in America, understanding the archetypes that appear in mass media can help us understand how turning serial killers into celebrities is dangerous.

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## **Week 2: "The Bragger"**

### Myth and Reality (10 Minutes)

Before introducing students to the first archetype, I will propose a series of myths and ask students to move to the left side of the room if they think it's true or false.

1. Serial Killers are all dysfunctional loners
  - i. False! The majority of serial killers aren't reclusive misfits who live alone. Many times serial killers hide in plain sight with families, have careers, and are able to blend in with society, making them difficult to find.
  - ii. • The BTK killer, Dennis Rader, killed ten victims in and around Wichita, Kansas. He sent sixteen written communications to the news media over a thirty-year period, taunting the police and the public. He was married with two children, was a Boy Scout leader, served honorably in the U.S. Air Force, was employed as a local government official, and was president of his church.
2. Serial killers are all white males.
  - i. False! The demographic of serial killers in the U.S is reflective of the overall population.
3. Serial killers are only motivated by sex.
  - i. False! Many serial killers have multiple motivations, either for thrill, power, lust, comfort (money), or psychotic breaks with reality.
4. All serial killers are insane evil geniuses.
  - i. False! While media outlets have created the trope of the "Genius" serial killer who are capable of outsmarting the police, not every killer is like this. Just like other population demographics, serial killers range in

intelligence. Many killers suffer from personality disorders, such as psychopathy and antisocial personality disorder.

### “The Bragger” Presentation (40 Minutes)

Although Jack the Ripper isn't an American serial killer, his murderous outbreak led to the first example of the celebrification as a mass murderer as a hero in society. By murdering prostitutes in the streets of Whitechapel, The Ripper was able to keep an image of “cleaning up the streets” of crime; moreover, his tauntings of the police in his letters “From Hell” and apparent cannibalization of his victims made him a celebrity killer.

- Explain the history of the murders and how The Ripper targeted prostitutes who wouldn't be missed

Watch video (5 minutes) <https://youtu.be/PwblAEU6qg0>

“Jack the Ripper -- Introduction to the Murders”

- This video discusses the population of White Chapel where the murders were found
  - The area was “overcrowded” and people lived in “dire poverty” and brewing anti-semitism with the influx of Jewish immigrants from Europe
- Jack the Ripper came at the right time and the right Place, embodying the people's anxieties and becoming a “celebrity” that took advantage of their fear the way an “ordinary murderer” hasn't done before
- Why didn't the police catch the Ripper?
  - Forensics in 1888 wasn't effective
  - Police had to rely on eyewitness accounts in a city that was designed like a labyrinth, with many alleyways and unmapped routes
- This Case was so bizarre because of the letters sent to the police supposedly from “Jack the Ripper”
- Pass out copies of the letter: “DEAR BOSS”
  - This letter was written to the police. Although it is uncertain whether or not the author of the letter was truly Jack the Ripper, it held chilling details of the case
  - Up until this point, police called the serial killer “red fiend” or the “leather apron,” but since the letter was signed, “Jack the Ripper,” the police named him that
  - The gloating letter was ignored at first, but was passed to the police. Soon after the writer declared that he will get to work, the Ripper killed two more women, leading the police to believe it was the actual killer
  - The police released the letter to the news, and soon hundreds more letters came in from people pretending to be the ripper, preventing them from finding the culprit.
  - Discussion Questions: Do you think the killer really sent the letters? Is the language in the letters the same? If he didn't really send the letters, than who did?

- Jack the Ripper in modern adaptations: show clip of “Black Butler,” a Japanese anime where the Ripper was portrayed as a female doctor who took revenge on prostitutes who could have children when she could not

Homework Assignment: Read Jack The Ripper’s Letter “From Hell” and respond on EEE

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### **Week 3: The Expert Manipulator**

#### Presentation (45 Minutes)

Who is Charlie Manson?

- Manson was an American cult leader who never committed any murders by himself; yet, he was able to expertly manipulate those in his cult to murder for him.
- The Manson family terrorized Hollywood and carried out a series of about 35 brutal murders. Most of the murders were never tried as a result of the cult members receiving life sentences from the Tate-LaBianca murders.
- Manson was denied parole in 2012 for the 12th time
- Charlie Manson was born the son of a 16 year old prostitute and a man named William Manson. Charlie Manson was abandoned by his mother, who didn’t want anything to do with him. As a result, he lived on the streets committing petty crime.
- He spent the majority of his 32 years of life behind bars, learning the benefits of being “model prisoner”
- When he finally got out in the 1960’s, he created a cult based around the Beatles’ song “Helter Skelter”. He believed that Helter Skelter was “coming,” and was a sign of the apocalypse. He created a cult of people that shared his delusions about the end of the world whom he called “The Manson Family”.
- His 100 followers believed that he was Jesus the prophet
- Manson picked his closest followers and targeted the Polanski household, who believe they were targeted because of their celebrity status which represented the way society rejected Manson
- Manson eventually revealed that he believed that a “war of the races” was coming, and that the African-American community would take over the world and that he would be there to guide them
- Although Manson never killed directly, he was finally found guilty of 1st degree murder for “Directing” the deaths of the victims and orchestrating his followers to kill them
- Charlie Manson’s story has been made into a popular TV Show that illustrates his expert manipulation of people (show video) <https://youtu.be/KWwucJrVWds>

- How does this TV trailer romanticize the life of Charlie Manson? How does it glorify his manipulation? Do you want to watch this show after seeing this
- Contrast it with actual video of one of Manson's followers testifying against Manson  
[https://youtu.be/qgj3\\_7MAWOg](https://youtu.be/qgj3_7MAWOg)
  - How does this steeply contrast the romantic TV show? How does the show pervert the reality of the murders? Do you think these kind of shows can inspire other serial killers to be like Manson?

Final notes: Show this youtube clip - Who is Charlie Manson? <https://youtu.be/o2oZWpqtNi4>

Homework Assignment: Read "Where Are You Going, Where Have you Been?" By Joyce Carol Oates and respond on EEE with analysis of theme and characterization of the murderer "Arnold Friend." (100 Words or Less)

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## Week 4: The Charmer

Students will read "Where Are You Going, Where Have you Been?" by Joyce Carol Oates and analyze the prevalence of the "prince charming" archetype of serial killers popularized by newspapers and the media. Through literary analysis, we will study the characterization of the killer "Arnold Friend" as well as his hypnotizing charm that eventually leads Connie to her downfall.

### Presentation/Discussion (50 Minutes)

Desks will be organized in a circle so that we can have a Socratic seminar discussing the rhetorical devices (theme, metaphor, characterization, symbolism). A powerpoint presentation will display some quotes I have picked out on the screen for in-class discussion and analysis.

- Joyce Carol Oates Backstory
- Connie is introduced to the story as a vain 15 year old girl
  - "she knew she was pretty and that was everything." (1)
- Characterization of Arnold Friend "It was a boy with shaggy black hair, in a convertible jalopy painted gold. He stared at her and then his lips widened into a grin. Connie slit her eyes at him and turned away, but she couldn't help glancing back and there he was, still watching her. He wagged a finger and laughed and said, "Gonna get you, baby," and Connie turned away again without Eddie noticing anything.
  - How did the tone shift at this point in the story? Did the mood change when Arnold Friend appeared?

- Pass out a Characterization chart for students to discuss indirect and direct characterization
- Ask the Question: What kind of Serial killer do you think Arnold Friend was? What did he want with Connie?
- "My sign." And he drew an X in the air, leaning out toward her. They were maybe ten feet apart. After his hand fell back to his side the X was still in the air, almost visible.
  - Who else cut an x on their forehead and made it their sign? Charlie Manson!
  - What does this allusion tell you about Arnold?
- "She's too fat. I don't like them fat. I like them the way you are, honey," he said, smiling sleepily at her. They stared at each other for a while through the screen door. He said softly, "Now, what you're going to do is this: you're going to come out that door. You're going to sit up front with me and Ellie's going to sit in the back, the hell with Ellie, right? This isn't Ellie's date. You're my date. I'm your lover, honey."
  - How does Arnold Friend eventually charm Connie to come outside?
  - How does the style of his dialogue change the mood?
- Is Arnold Friend real? Is he a devil, or just an earthly psychopath that acts like a pied piper to lure Connie outside?
- How do you interpret the title? Where is Connie going?
- Discuss motifs: The constant music described through the story, and Arnold Friend's "sing-song voice". How does Arnold use music to charm Connie into believing he is safe?
- Arnold Friends' "Golden Jalopy" has a bunch of script written in "Tar-like" paint on the side, including a biblical allusion. What does the car symbolize in American pop culture? What happens once Connie gets into it?
- Although Connie is never shown being explicitly killed, her free will is killed when she is "stabbed over and over" by Arnold Friend when she tries to call the police. Is this attack literal or figurative, and what is the effect?
- Final notes on analysis of the "Charming" Archetype shown in pop culture serial killer fiction
- Question: Can you think of any other killers who you think were "Charming"? Ie. Jeffrey Dahmer or Ted Bundy

Homework Assignment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoR2ymL6J50>

Watch this documentary on how "Hannibal Rising" was made to explain how a sophisticated man with high IQ became a serial killer. Write a response on EEE. How did he evolve into a monster? Since his family was murdered and eaten, does it somehow justify how

Hannibal takes revenge on the murderers of his family? Does he seem like any other serial killer you've seen before?

*Optional: Watch Silence of the Lambs or Hannibal Rising before class to get the full benefit of lecture! You can choose to analyze one of these scenes on EEE instead of the video clip provided if you choose to do this.*

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## **Week 5: The Power Junkie**

In this class, we'll study the film character, "Hannibal Lecter," and analyze the romanticization of Hannibal taking justice into his own hands. This will be the first introduction of the idea that modern serial killers in American pop culture are perhaps a connection to the people's desire for self-justice.

### Presentation (10 Minutes)

- Background/History of Hannibal in film and TV
- Hannibal Lecter is a serial killer who has been made and re-made into multiple different franchises. Why can't people get enough of this super-genius cannibal?
- Dr. Lecter was first introduced as a forensic psychiatrist in a thriller novel "Red Dragon," who was a cannibalistic serial killer whom used wit to outsmart his victims and the investigators who looked for him
- Hannibal is constantly characterized in all media as having a high IQ and enjoying gourmet food and music. He turns his victims into gourmet meals.
- Silence of the Lambs
- While Silence of the Lambs shows Hannibal as a full-time serial killer, Hannibal Rising is a documentary of Hannibal's corruption and explores his psychopathy and what ultimately made him into a serial killer in his young life

### Film (20 Minutes)

### Compare/Contrast Characterization (20 Minutes)

- Students will see clips from both the film "Hannibal Rising" and "Silence of the Lambs," and draw a compare/contrast circle in order to compare the two
- While "Red Dragon," claims that no one can catch Lecter because he fits "no known psychological profile," is he a complete "pure psychopath"? What are his motivations for killing? Do we see any?



- Show clips from “Hannibal Rising” where Hannibal is portrayed as a very handsome killer simply taking revenge
  - Are you able to sympathize more with a handsome serial killer?
  - How does it make you feel to think Hannibal is purposefully portrayed as attractive?
  - In contrast, Hannibal as a full-time serial killer is portrayed older, more sophisticated, but considerably less attractive. How does this affect your perception of him?
  - Which are you more horrified by?
- After writing down how the two films portray the same character, students will break into groups to discuss Hannibal’s characterization and why the directors might’ve chosen the portrayals and their purpose in doing so.

Homework Assignment: Watch “Epic Rap Battles of History: Jack the Ripper vs. Hannibal Lector” and respond on EEE (100 words or less).

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfkR5o\\_bcSg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfkR5o_bcSg) Who do you think won? Who do you think is worse? One killer is real, while the other is fiction--but how are they similar and how are they different?

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## **Week 6: The Average Joe**

Dexter is a serial killer that slips under the radar: he’s intelligent, average looking, and appears to be on the side of “justice” in his TV series “Dexter.” This lecture will focus on the “average joe” archetype. Often times, once an ‘average joe’ killer is revealed in the media, people will focus on the fact that they had “no idea” he could’ve been a killer. While other flashier archetypes consume popular TV shows and media, it’s the “average joe” that is the most common archetype in reality.

### Find the Murderer Game Introduction (15 Minutes)

Students will participate in an group activity where one student is chosen before class to be the “Average joe” killer. Much like the party game mafia, this student will participate in games until the class figures out who they are.

- I will act as the moderator to make sure everyone follows the rules and isn’t confused
- Each student will draw a slip of paper from a hat. The person selected is the “Average Joe Murderer” and we will start the game.
- If students figure out who the murderer is, then they win the game.

- Rule 1: You must shake hands with every person you talk to.
- Rule 2: To kill someone, the murderer must shake hands with their victim, and then tap a finger twice against the victim's hand. The person is then "killed" and plays dead.
- Rule 3: The victim who is killed must wait 10 seconds or until the murderer walks away before being killed.

*Objective:* This game emulates how serial killers are often able to seamlessly blend in society. Many don't fit a single psychological profile, making it difficult for investigators to find the killer. This teaches students to evaluate the value of serial killer archetypes and tropes which are often exaggerated in media.

#### Dexter (TV Show) Episode (24 Minutes)

- Students will watch the first episode of the popular TV Show "Dexter".
- In this pilot, Dexter reveals that he is a forensic scientist that helps the police find serial killers by day, and by night he kills criminals who the justice system either ignored or couldn't punish.
- In this episode, we discover Dexter is a sociopath and is fully aware of his mental inability to empathize with people. He was orphaned at the age of 3 when his mother was killed with a chainsaw.
- Despite his sociopathy, he is in love with a woman named Rita, who was a victim of abuse and mother of two kids that he calls his own.
- In this episode, Dexter kills a pedophile and reveals that his mantra is to only kill the most heinous criminals.

#### Dexter Discussion (10 Minutes)

- After watching the episode, students will analyze and discuss among themselves what they thought about the episode.
  - Prompts: Is there such a thing as moral murder?
  - If Dexter only killed criminals, wasn't he just speeding up the death penalty?
  - If murdering criminals is morally wrong, why does the death penalty exist?
  - What common tropes are starting to appear in popular TV shows about serial killers?

Homework Assignment: Students will read the first chapter of "Darkly Dreaming Dexter," the novel that came before the TV show. They will compare and contrast the portrayal of Dexter in the show and in the novel in order to talk about how he represents the average joe type with a vigilante agenda. Students will respond on EEE with 100 words or less.

## Week 7: Gender and Killing

### Presentation Female Serial killers (20 minutes)

- Why is it that women are almost completely invisible in creative media? From horror movies to detective shows, it seems the “standard” portrayal of a serial killer is that of a male.
- For this class, students will watch film clips from the Hollywood’s movie “Bonnie and Clyde”.
- This meeting will analyze the phenomenon of Bonnie and Clyde and their “romantic” killing spree during the Great Depression.
- Furthermore, a discussion about gender who does the killings and who is killed.
- Myth: All victims killed by serial killers are women
  - According to the FBI, 70% of serial murder victims are female
  - On the other hand, only 22% of homicide victims are female
  - Victims of serial murderers are 3.5 times more likely to be female, why is that?
  - Serial murderers tend to premeditate targets more
  - “The presence of a sexual motive often leads a male serial killer to prey on women. As noted by special agent Mark Hilts, chief of the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit No. 2 that profiles serial killers, a “large number” of male serial killers have a sexual motive for their crimes. In fact, it is estimated that sex is a leading motive for approximately 50 percent of all male serial killers”
  - While sex/lust is rarely the motivation for serial killings, it is sometimes one motivation but usually conjoined with another (like thrill seeking or power/control). These hedonistic killers often fall under the “power junkie,” “Charmer” or “Expert manipulator” archetypes
  - “Specifically, a deep lust for the sheer act of killing combined with a sexual motive, and perhaps a third motive such as thrill seeking, normally leads a male serial killer to target female victims.”
  - Show research findings that analyzes women as serial killers
    - 92% of female serial killers (FSK’s) are white, female, knew their victim. Many were upper or middle class women.
      - Primary motive was for money
        - Conversely, studies show that men tend to kill more for sex
      - Almost all killed with poison
        - Conversely, most male serial killers inflicted violent body damage to their victims
    - 100% of the women in this case study of 64 FSK’s were Christian
    - Most were married at some point
    - Most of these women had college degrees or other forms of higher education. 40% of women worked in health related jobs such as nurses or doctors. 22% worked in caregiving roles such as babysitters
    - Nearly two-thirds of the 64 FSK’s knew their victims or were related to them in some way. 44% killed their own biological children.

- Conversely, previous research shows that Male serial killers target strangers

### Bonnie and Clyde Presentation (20 minutes)

- Using the FBI case file database, I will open up the presentation showing the strict, formal language the FBI uses to describe the details of the case.
  - Students will gain factual knowledge of the Bonnie and Clyde murders without media bias
- Afterwards, I will show them a news article about Bonnie and Clyde that emphasizes their romantic spin.
  - Even in modern times, people will call couples “Bonnie and Clyde” if they show traits of a close partnership
  - Even if it’s meant as a compliment, most people make this statement without knowing how Clyde abused Bonnie, nor about the brutality of their murders
- In order to further demonstrate the romantic lens placed on the murderous couple, I will show clips on youtube from the 1967 film “Bonnie and Clyde” which started their romantic infamy in pop culture
- As a result, students will learn to criticize mass media romanticization of violence, as well as discuss why it exists and how it affects society today.

### Final Project Group Work (10 Minutes)

Students will be given 10 minutes to meet with their groups and possible serial killers they want to analyze for their final group presentation. Students will turn in a list of potential serial killers at the end of class.

Homework Assignment: Reflect on today’s class discussion and respond on EEE with a thoughtful analysis of gender, killing, or something you found interesting about the romanticization of Bonnie and Clyde.

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## **Week 8: American Identity and True Crime: The Debate**

Are the amount of serial killers increasing or decreasing? Researchers can’t seem to agree. This class will wrap-up all the lessons from before in a group debate that analyzes the statistical data from both the FBI and other sources that will be presented at the beginning of class.

Students will go to the left side of the room if they “Agree” with the prompt and to the right side of the room if they “Disagree”.

Debate (20 minutes)

1. Nature vs. Nurture: We some some cases where serial killers had a troubled childhood, and some who didn't. Are serial killers born or created?
  - a. Nature side moves to the left, nurture side moves to the right
2. Do you think Violent video games, films, and tv shows are making serial killers increase?
  - a. Agree side moves to left, disagree moves to right side.
3. Should Terrorism be considered a form of serial killing?
  - a. Agree side moves left, disagree moves right
4. Are serial killers more dangerous than military dictators (like hitler?)
5. Is the death penalty a form of serial killing?

Objective: Students will learn how to evaluate and construct arguments using the material they've learned throughout the quarter.

Final Project Group Presentation Practice (30 minutes)

- Students will be given 30 minutes to meet up with their groups for their final group project presentations.
- **STUDENT SIGN-UPS FOR PROJECT TIME-SLOTS**

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## Week 9: Final Group Project Presentations

Students will be given 10 minutes to prepare and practice one last time before going up for project presentations.

Prompt: Have you ever seen a murderer in pop culture that isn't labeled as a serial killer? From fictional serial murderers like Voldermort to mass murderers like the Pulse Club shooter, these culprits are not labeled as "serial killers" in media despite their vulgar crimes.

In this project, students will choose a serial killer who is not conventionally considered by the public or labeled as a serial killer but commits serial murders. Students will pair up into 2-3 person groups and will give 10 minute presentations on their killer in front of the class giving a biography of the killer, where they came from, who they are and what they've done. Moreover, they will discuss the significance of their crimes as well as propose analysis for why they aren't labeled by media and fans as "serial killers".

Students may come up with their own projects and pick characters that aren't conventionally considered "serial killers". For example, the Hunger Games is a dystopian novel where the government holds games where children are expected to systematically

kill one another until none survive. The student may analyze the popularity of this film series despite it's gorey material; moreover, they may bring up what they think this says about American society using the knowledge learned in class.

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**Week 10: Finishing Group Project Presentations**

Students will finish project presentations. End of Class.