



## Divergent

### Introduction to the novel

*Divergent*, by Veronica Roth, is the first of a trilogy, a series of young-adult dystopian novels set in a post-apocalyptic world. It explores themes related to individual and social identity as well as the use of science, and drugs in particular, as a means of social control. Citizens are divided into five factions based on their dispositions: Abnegation, for the selfless; Amity, for the peaceful; Candor, for the honest; Dauntless, for the brave; and Erudite, for the intellectual. Erudite scientists have designed a number of serums to be used in different ways for different populations for different reasons. At age 16, people must decide whether to stay with their family's faction or join the faction best matching their personal aptitude. But then there are the Divergents.

The prose is fast-paced but also provides a rich foundation for exploring many themes of interest to teens, including aspects of drug use and drug control.

### Instructional strategies

1. Provide opportunity for students to think critically and exchange ideas about issues raised in the novel. For example, you might ask:
  - a. How does the use of serums in the story compare and contrast with the way some medicines are used (or have been used) in our society?
  - b. How might we ensure that scientific discoveries are available to people for positive use but that they are not used by some people to unjustifiably control others? When, if ever, is it justifiable to control others?
2. The *Divergent* movie website features a fun "aptitude test." Have students complete the test and then arrange themselves according to their "factions." Have each group discuss the pros and cons of dividing the class into these groups for all future work. Each group should report back to the class their most important argument for their preferred position (i.e., either pro or con). Discuss.

### Curricular competencies

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking
- Think critically, creatively and reflectively to explore ideas within, between and beyond texts
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text and world
- Respond to text in personal, creative and critical ways
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking

### Drug literacy objectives

- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Recognize how official responses to drugs may have less to do with the drug than with other factors
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
- Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks and harms related to drugs