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The Postmortal
Common Reading Assignment
Fall 2015

The Postmortal Value Line

Using a value line is a dynamic and inclusive way to engage students in class discussions. It is very simple and requires little preparation. It can be used across disciplines. It is also easy to adapt it to fit into many different time slots.

Here are the steps:

- Read a statement that relates to themes and larger ethical questions presented in the novel. You could also use selected quotes from the novel itself that lend themselves to agreement/disagreement.
- Ask students to arrange themselves in an ordered line from the person that agrees with the statement most to the student that agrees with the statement least. They must negotiate among themselves to determine who belongs where.
- Once the line has formed, call on several students at random to justify their positions on the line. For example: *Why do did you choose to be exactly in the middle? Explain why you are second from the left and not furthest to the left. Why do you think you agree with this statement more than Johnny?*
- Repeat the process with as many statements as is appropriate in your classroom situation.
- Optional: You can follow up with a short informal writing exercise where students choose one of the statements and write several paragraphs explaining their position.

Sample value line statements for *The Postmortal*:

- Aging is a natural process—human beings should not try to prolong their natural lives.
- I would like to live forever.
- The government has a responsibility to regulate science/medicine.
- I would take “the cure” if it were available to me.
- I would like to stay the age I am right now.
- If I could live forever, I would not want to get married.
- “Death is the mother of beauty.” –Wallace Stevens

Note: If you are teaching the entire novel in your course, it would work well to use this as both pre-reading and post-reading activity. You could take a picture of the lines at the beginning of the reading so that you can arrange students in the order they were originally. Then ask them to rearrange themselves in a new line. The goal here would be to assess how their views on the novel’s themes have/have not changed as a result of the reading.