

# Leaving Simplicity

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written by Claire Carmichael

**genre:** FUTURISTIC FICTION

**themes:** MEDIA  
MODERN SOCIETY

**suitable for:** GRADES 9–10

Barrett grew up in Simplicity, a secluded community that has turned its back on the technology- and media-obsessed society of the not-too-distant future. When the uncle who raised him dies, Barrett leaves Simplicity to live with his Aunt Kara, Uncle Adrian, and cousin Tayler. As he struggles to adjust to a world in which even his school classes have corporate sponsors, Barrett discovers that he has been made the subject of a top-secret research project. Then he and Tayler stumble onto a plot that exposes exactly how far powerful corporations are willing to go in order to maximize their profits.

## The following activity ideas ...

... are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

## Before

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### STARTING THE BOOK

*Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest.*

1. As a class, have students brainstorm a list of all the ways that advertising enters their lives each day. Then ask them to predict what kinds of changes they might see in advertising in the next 20 years.

## READING THE BOOK

*Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.*

### SECTION 1: CHAPTERS 1–9

1. Ask students why they think people are so interested in Barrett's reactions to advertising. Do they find it ethical for people to use Barrett as a research subject without his knowledge? Why or why not?
2. Invite students to imagine they are Barrett and write a letter to a friend in Simplicity, describing Barrett's reactions to the very different society he is encountering.
3. Have students write a character sketch of Taylor. Remind them to include specific examples of her behavior to support the characteristics they identify.

### SECTION 2: CHAPTERS 10–18

4. Ask students to find examples of how the society depicted in the novel thrives on collecting personal information about citizens. In what ways is this information used? How might it be misused?
5. Point out to students that characters need not be likeable in order to catch and hold the interest of readers. Invite students to discuss their responses to the characters of Aunt Kara and Senator Rox. How do these characters help to keep the plot engaging?
6. Have students consider how Taylor would react to life in Simplicity. Students could imagine that they have moved from Taylor's world to Simplicity, and write journal entries reflecting on their experiences and reactions after one day, one week, and one month in Simplicity.

## SECTION 3: CHAPTERS 19–26

7. Invite students to review the persuasive techniques used in corporate advertising in the novel. Does ADA use any similar techniques in order to persuade the public? If corporations and ADA do use similar techniques, does this mean that ADA is no better than the corporations?
8. The “About the Author” information at the back of the book states that Claire Carmichael's books “explore the meaning of personal identity, the impact of technology, and how we deal with the ceaseless rain of information that impinges on us every day.” Students could work in small groups to discuss how this novel deals with any one of these themes.

## After

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### READING THE BOOK

*Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.*

1. In a journal entry, students could reflect on whether reading this novel has affected their appreciation of the importance of becoming a more critical consumer of media.
2. Have students work in small groups to plan an advertising campaign for this novel, using advertising techniques and media represented in the novel.
3. Invite students to debate the following proposition: Because of the importance of corporations to our society, their needs should be considered more important than the needs and rights of individual citizens.