**VARIANT**

ROBISON WELLS

LOUISIANA YOUNG READERS’ CHOICE NOMINEE 2012

GRADE 6-8

*Study guide submitted by Erin Korosi, Youth Services Coordinator, Jefferson Parish Library, Metairie, LA.*

**Title: *Variant***

**Author: Robison Wells**

**Publisher: HarperTeen**

**Pages: 373**

**SUMMARY**

Benson Fisher is seventeen and fed up with his life in foster care, so when he has the opportunity to accept a scholarship to the exclusive Maxfield Academy, he jumps at the chance. What he doesn’t anticipate is a prisonlike atmosphere where the teachers are nonexistent, his every move is monitored by cameras and a razor-wire fence makes leaving an impossibility. The students at Maxfield have divided themselves into three rival gangs: Society (those who play by the rules), Havoc (those who want power) and Variant, aka the “V’s” (those who want out), and they maintain an uneasy truce that keeps order. Benson joins the V’s, but his only thought is of escape. The only problem is that no one ever has.

From the very first page, *Variant* is a thrill ride of a novel that will keep even reluctant readers frantically turning the pages to find out what happens next. Through the myriad of twists and turns to the exciting cliffhanger ending, readers learn that nothing is what it seems.

**AWARDS**

Publisher's Weekly Best Books of 2011

Publisher’s Weekly and VOYA Magazine gave it *Starred Reviews*

**AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY**

Robison Wells currently lives in Holladay, Utah with his wife and three children. He graduated from the University of Utah with a degree in political science and earned an MBA in marketing from Brigham Young University. While *Variant* is his first nationally published novel, Wells has also written three locally published previous novels that are now out of print. He is the brother of author Dan Wells.

<http://www.robisonwells.com>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robison_Wells>

**OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR**

*Blackout* (October 2013)

*Going Dark* (September 2013)

*Feedback* (2012)

**RELATED TITLES**

*Divergent* by Veronica Roth. Katherine Tegen Books, 2011. 487p.

*Gone* by Michael Grant. HarperCollins, 2008. 576p.

*Lockdown* by Alexander Gordon Smith. Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2009. 273p.

*Maze Runner* by James Dasher. Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2009. 384p.

**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

**Science**

Introduce students to robotics using one of the lesson plans below.

* “This web site is designed to help K-12 and other educators in developing or improving courses that use robotics as a tool for teaching STEM topics or as a topic in itself.” <http://robotics.usc.edu/~agents/k-12/index.php>
* A lesson plan designed to help learn how robotics can be used to help the disabled:<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/lessonplans/programs/robbie/index.html#obj>

**Social Studies**

In *Variant*, the gangs act like labor unions to negotiate for contracts. Have students research unions in the United States. They can investigate how and why labor unions first formed, their role today, and the pros and cons of having unions.

**Language Arts**

* Pick one of the gangs and write a persuasive speech encouraging a new student to join your gang.
* Variant is told entirely from Benson’s point of view. Have students choose an alternate character and retell a scene from his or her point of view. Scenes that they can choose from could include:
* The war between the gangs before Benson arrived
* Benson’s arrival
* A paintball game
* Walnut, Jelly or Rosa being taken to detention
* Benson showing the students that Jane is a robot
* The escape at the end

Alternately, students could each be assigned a different character and all write about the same scene from their character’s point of view.

* Compare and contrast characteristics of the three gangs: Havoc, the Society and Variant.
* Read a synopsis of *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding and compare and contrast what is going on with the students at Maxfield Academy to what happened in *Lord of the Flies*.

**P.E.**

Throughout the novel, the school forces students to play paintball games. The same teamwork and strategy can be used to play a similar game, Capture the Flag. The following link provides instructions for this game: <http://www.ehow.com/how_311_play-capture-flag.html>.

**ART**

Using the description of the school from the book, draw Maxfield Academy. You could make it an aerial view of the school, grounds, paintball field, track, walls, etc. You could select to draw a blueprint layout of a part of the school or even details of a certain room. The possibilities are endless.

**VOCABULARY**

Boarding School Scandal Bunker

Intimidate Aesthetics Ghillie suit

Disregard Malfunction Imprint

Disobedience Outcropping Silhouette

Tolerate Gnarled Infirmary

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Which gang would you choose to belong to and why?
2. List some differences between the school classes at Maxfield Academy and your school? (no grades, no dividing students by grade level, no test scores, no report cards)
3. While discussing escape on page 173, Benson suggests that all of the students should try escaping together and Isaiah asks “How many of us have to escape to make the deaths of the others worth it?” How would you respond?
4. Was Benson selfish for wanting to escape? Would you have tried to escape?
5. What contract would you most like to have? Why?
6. At the end of the book, it is revealed that the robots are the ones being tested. What do you think they are being test for?
7. What are your thoughts about the ending? How would you explain Benson finding Jane alive?

**WEBSITES**

**Robison Wells Official Website – Variant Stuff**

<http://www.robisonwells.com/2012/09/variant-bonus-features-chapters-1-3/>

This section of the website provides additional content for each chapter. The author discusses thought process while writing and his rationale for certain narrative decisions. At the end, he also provides pictures of the characters as he envisioned them.