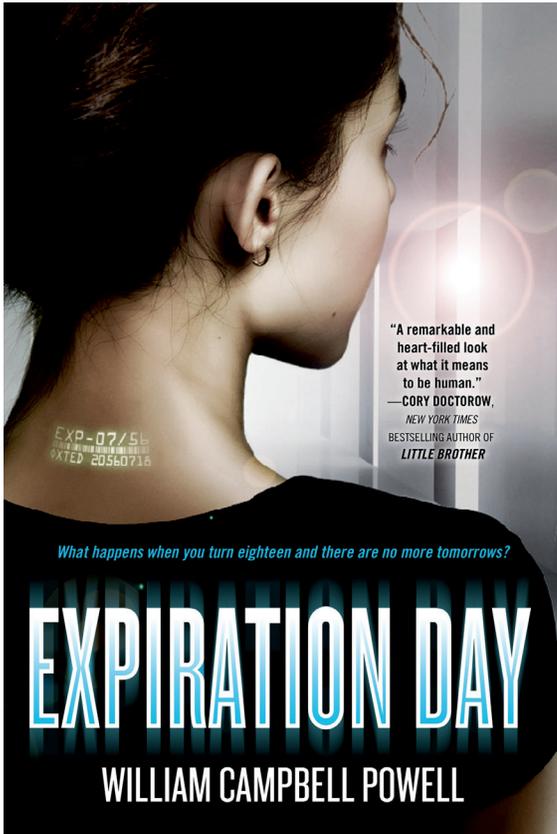


# ATOR TEEN

## TEACHER'S GUIDE



### About this guide

The Common Core State Standards-aligned questions and activities that follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Expiration Day*. Please feel free to adapt this content to suit the needs and interests of your students or reading group participants.

### About *Expiration Day*

*Expiration Day* is a young adult science fiction novel set in a dystopian future in which human fertility has drastically declined, and most families are given robot children to raise until the age of eighteen, at which point they must be returned to the factory.

When a serious accident reveals to eleven-year-old Tania Deeley that she is a robot, or Mekker, she must come to grips with the knowledge that her parents have been lying to her and that she only has seven years left before she has to be returned to Oxted, the factory that manufactured her. Told in diary format, *Expiration Day* is the poignant story of a young girl coming of age and discovering what it means to be truly human.

“This debut novel’s premise...raises very interesting and meaningful questions about philosophy, humanity, personal choice, and feminism, which could lead to rich discussions. Hand this title to fans of Margaret Atwood’s classic, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1986), and Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* (2011).” —*Booklist*

“This is an in-depth exploration into a dystopian society and what it truly means to be human, with many universal teen themes as well: music, romance, body image, family issues.” —*School Library Journal*

“An auspicious debut.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

A Junior Library Guild Selection  
Charlotte Award official nominee  
Compton Crook Award finalist  
Kiss the Book’s “Top 50 Secondary”  
Golden Duck Hal Clement Award  
for Young Adult 2015 (Winner)

“Tania’s creativity, pathos, and personality prove that she’s just as much a person as any flesh-and-blood human.” —*Publishers Weekly*

Ages 13 & up ★ Grades 8-12  
Lexile level: 760L  
AR level: 5.2 ▪ AR Points: 14  
AR Quiz: 165889 EN



Photo credit: Chris Wicks

**WILLIAM CAMPBELL POWELL** was born in Sheffield, England, and grew up in and around Birmingham, the “second city” of England. He attended King Edward’s School in Birmingham and won a scholarship to Clare College, Cambridge, where he initially studied Natural Sciences and subsequently majored in Computer Science. He now lives in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. *Expiration Day* is his first novel.



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# Pre-reading Activities

- Ask each student to write a short essay answering one or more of the following questions: Do you think humanity will destroy itself someday? Have you read any books or seen any movies featuring end-of-humanity themes? How did they make you feel? What do you think is the best thing we humans can do to save our race from possible destruction?
- Invite students to discuss the role(s) technology plays in their lives. What high-tech devices do they use to communicate, maintain health, do schoolwork or manage other tasks? What types of technology do they imagine will soon be common in modern life? Do they envision having robots in their home by the time they are adults? Do they ever feel worried about—or afraid of—certain types of technology? Why or why not?

Supports English Language Arts Common Core Writing Standards: W.8.2, W.9-10.2, W.11-12.2

Supports English Language Arts Common Core Speaking & Listening Standards: SL.8.1, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1

## AFTER READING THE BOOK

### Developing Research & Discussion Skills

#### Character: Structure and Point-of-View

- *Expiration Day* is written in a diary format. Over what time period are the entries logged? Are all of the journal entries directed to the same reader? Who is the reader to whom Tania directs her thoughts and why might this be important?
- On page 46, what happens to Tania that causes her to experience a major shift in her sense of self? Does her journaling style change? At what other moments in the novel must Tania dramatically re-envision herself and her society? How does this affect the structure of the novel?
- In her diary, how does Tania describe Amanda Taylor, Sian, John, Kieran, and Mike? What five words do you think each of these characters would use to describe Tania? Where would “teknoid” fall on this list (if at all)?
- At a few points in the novel, Tania’s “reader” (“Zog”)

responds. Describe these instances and the responses. How do you imagine Zog’s world in terms of how the journal was found, and the time period and setting in which the journal is being read?

#### Character: Relationships

- Early in the novel, how would you describe the relationship between Tania and her classmates? Do you think her attitude toward them is nice? How do Tania’s opinions of her mother and father change through the story? Would Tania and her mother love each other more if Tania had been a human? Why or why not?
- Describe the relationship between Tania and John. Do you believe they love each other? Do you think Sian minds that Tania in a teknoid? Explain your answers.
- What inspires Tania’s father to start fighting for her rights? Has something, beyond the loss of Tania’s mother, changed in their relationship? Has Tania’s father’s perception of his relationship to his community changed?

#### Structure: Setting and Plot

- The science fiction premise of *Expiration Day* is that in 2049 humanity is nearing extinction. What has happened to human fertility and human disease resistance to create this situation? How does the author reveal each of these situations to readers?
- Do you imagine the physical world of Tania’s 2049 Earth resembles our own? How might it be different? What elements seem very familiar? Compare and contrast the structures of government and social classes today and in Tania’s 2049.
- Consider *Expiration Day* in three parts: Tania’s childhood believing she is human, Tania’s adolescence knowing she is a teknoid, and Tania’s teenhood when her father embarks on his lawsuit. What are Tania’s greatest concerns in each of these thirds of the story?
- Do you think most people really can’t tell the difference between humans and teknoids or is it a sort of unspoken fact—an open secret? What might be some similar “open secrets” in our world today? Is it dangerous to allow such secrets to remain undiscussed?
- On page 290, Tania’s dad tells the court, “Oxted is peddling a drug called Parenthood.” Does this notion, the need to parent, drive the plot of the novel? What actions and behaviors does “parenthood” govern? What other “drugs” do you think the government is using to keep the human species from panicking over its impending extinction?



## Theme: What makes us human?

- How would you define the word “human”? How does your definition compare to a dictionary definition of “human”?
- On page 181, Tania and her dad exchange the following dialogue:

*“Speaking as your father, I’d say, you’re human.”  
“Thanks. Unfortunately, that’s not what the law says.”  
We always come back to that.*

Is being human simply a matter of fitting a specific definition? Explain your answer.

- On page 227, Tania writes to her future reader, “Nobody truly dies who shapes another person.” What does this say about Tania’s sense of humanity? How might this quote be read as a central theme of the novel?
- Reconsider your own definition of the word “human.” Would you change it based on your reading of *Expiration Day*? Why or why not?
- What choice does Tania make at the end of the novel? What does her choice prove to the scientists of Oxted? Is this the outcome you expected for the story? How does it make you reconsider your understanding of teknoids?
- As you reach the end of the novel, to whose “expiration day” do you think the title refers? Explain your answer.

## Theme: Creativity

- In her diary entry for January 2, 2050, Tania comments on the absence of new music and new literature. She says: “Art is dying. Why?” How would you answer this question? Do you think that the government’s attempt to control a species on the brink of panic is to blame? Are teknoids incapable of making art? Or is there another reason?
- Amanda Taylor, the musician who first inspires Tania, explains why she makes music. “I need to create...If I can’t create a baby, then I’ll create a song. It’s not much; it only lives for three minutes and it’s gone. But...” Finish her sentence.
- On page 191, Sian mourns her fate as a career mother, birthing baby after baby and not being allowed to raise one. Tania muses, “...it all made a ghastly kind of sense, in a totally clinical, inhuman way.” How can the creative act of conception seem inhuman?
- In attempting to preserve the species, do you think the leaders of Tania’s world are making mistakes that cause some key elements of “humanity” to be lost? What are the mistakes and what is being lost?

Supports English Language Arts Common Core Reading Literature Standards: RL.8.2, 9-10.2, 11-12.2; RL.8.5, 9-10.5, 11-12.5; RL.8.6, 9-10.6, 11-12.6

Supports English Language Arts Common Core Speaking & Listening Standards: SL.8.1, 3, 4, 6; SL.9-10.1, 3, 4, 6; SL.11-12.1, 3, 4, 6

## Developing Writing Skills

### Text Type: Narrative

- In the character of Tania, write a series of journal entries exploring the following moments from the story: Seeing the silver threads in your ankle; Going back to school after being repaired; Being with John; Working with your father to research your case.
- In the character of Tania’s mother or father, write a letter explaining how you felt the day you received her from Oxted and how you imagine your relationship might have been different if you’d disobeyed the Oxted guidelines and told her she was a teknoid when she was small.
- In the character of John, write a long email to Tania explaining why you’ve been out of contact, the truth about your identity as a teknoid and how you found out. Conclude the email with a thought as to whether you will or will not hit the “send” button.
- In the character of Sian, write a letter to Tania describing your new life as a mother, what you wish for the children you will not raise, and what you hope for your friend.

### Text Type: Opinion Piece

- Should adults keep secrets from children and teens? For example, is it all right not to tell a kid they are adopted or at high risk for a genetically transmitted disease? Is it right to keep family financial or job stress secret from kids? How old is too old not to be in on such secrets? What secrets are probably not okay?
- Should the government keep secrets from its citizens? For example, is it all right to send troops after a terrorist, and not let the public know until the operation is complete? When should a government tell citizens about outbreaks of diseases such as influenza? What argument could you make for keeping citizens “in the dark”? As a citizen, do you want to know everything?

## Research & Present: Cognitive Robotics

- Online or at your library, find definitions for cognitive robotics, artificial intelligence



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and sentience. Imagine you are a reporter who has infiltrated Oxted. Write a newspaper-style article discussing what you have found there. Make sure to include all of the terms you have researched. Share your article with friends or classmates.

- Divide into small groups to research Cognitive Robotics programs at colleges and universities around the world. Select one program that appeals to your group and create a PowerPoint or other multi-media style presentation to entice friends or classmates to apply to the program. Include the location of the program, degrees you can receive, the focus or philosophy of the program, and other details as desired.

- Tania's classmates are rehearsing *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare. While Tania feels emboldened by working with Sian on the Portia role, another character in the story also resonates. Read Act III, scene one of the play, paying particular attention to Shylock's speech. Imagine Tania giving this speech as part of the testimony during the lawsuit against Oxted. Adapt the speech for this purpose and present it to friends or classmates.

Supports English Language Arts Common Core Writing Standards: W.8.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7; W.9-10.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7; W.11-12.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7

Supports English Language Arts Common Core Literacy Standards RL.8.9, 9-10.9; RL.11-12.7

## Research & Create: Tribute Bands

- William Campbell Powell uses the notion of "tribute bands" to show the way creativity is devolving. Make a list of the bands from the 1970s featured in the novel. Select a band from twenty-five or more years ago and make a playlist of at least four songs that you think might be popular in Tania's world. Write 2-3 sentences explaining each song selection. Play your list for friends or classmates.
- Imagine you are a musician forming a tribute band. Select any band (does not have to be old) to cover. Use colored pencils, paints, or other craft materials to create a poster advertising your band. Give your band a tribute-style name (not the same as the original).

## Research & Perform: Shakespeare & Classic Children's Tales

- In the course of the novel, Tania makes subtle references to *Pinocchio* and *Alice in Wonderland* to describe her own experiences. Imagine you are creating a film or television adaptation of *Expiration Day*. Using colored pencils, sketch a scene from your adaptation that incorporates images or ideas from one of these stories in your design. Or, write a new page for the novel in which Tania further explains how she sees herself as Pinocchio or Alice.
- As she is trying to help Sian learn her lines for the school play, does Tania's ability to inhabit the character of Portia affect your sense of her creative capacity? How might the ability to act—to take on another character—show us something about her humanity? Go to the library or online to learn more about the art of acting. Then, in the character of an Oxted scientist, give a presentation explaining what Tania's acting ability reveals to your research community. Cite moments from the story and information from your research in your presentation.

