SUN TZU AWARD

(Complete and submit to your respective Platoon Commander upon finishing a book on the Commandant's Reading List)

United States Marine Corps Commandant's Professional Reading List Discussion Guide *Updated 14 DEC 2012*

This guide is intended to help Marines think about and discuss the books they read. All answers or responses should be embraced as *relevant*; there is no single right answer. All Sun Tzu Award submissions will be reviewed and boarded at the end of each month.

Date: 20140914

Rank: [redacted]

Name: [redacted]

Platoon/Section: [redacted]

Book: Ender's Game

Author: Orson Scott Card

1. In as few words as possible, what is this book about?

Leadership and excellence thrust upon a young boy.

2. What made you want to read it?

I have read this book as a civilian twice before—once when I was in middle school, and once after I had graduated from college. I wanted to see if being in the military would have changed my perception of the book. The opportunity for doing the Sun Tzu award also motivated me to read it.

3. Did it live up to your expectations? Why? Why not?

Ender's Game lived up to, exceeded, and did not meet my expectations throughout parts of the book. Having read *Ender's Game* before, I expected an enjoyable read, which I received. Before joining the military, leadership was something about which I knew little, and could appreciate even less. While reading it this time, I was more able to appreciate Orson Scott Card's display of leadership styles in various characters and the way the main character of the novel, Ender, vicariously learned the leadership principles via the failures and successes of those around him. The only disappointment I have with the novel is the way the tactics of the Battle Room are completely one-dimensional until Ender "revolutionizes" the game by utilizing warfighting tactics that have been known for thousands of years. This, I feel, isn't necessarily Orson Scott Card's fault since he was writing about a character who was supposed to be much smarter than himself in a unique environment of war despite being a civilian.

4. Did you learn anything new? If so, what?

Reading Orson's prose, I realized a lot of quoted thought patterns in books could be omitted completely and that first and third person perspectives can be switched between fairly freely, consistently, and still be understandable.

5. Which part of the book did you find most interesting?

"They must talk to each other directly, Ender, mind to mind. What one thinks, another can also think; what one remembers, another can also remember. Why would they ever develop language? Why would they ever learn to read and write? How would they know what reading and writing were if they saw them? Or signals? Or numbers? Or anything that we use to communicate? This isn't just a matter of translating from one language to another. They don't have a language at all. We used every means we could think of to communicate with them, but they don't even have the machinery to know we're signaling. And maybe they've been trying to think to us, and they can't understand why we don't respond."

"So the whole war is because we can't talk to each other."

I remembered reading the book before and the buggers (the villains of the story) were able to communicate directly via their minds. As a civilian, this was an interesting plot point, but I didn't even think of the implications it would have on a defense linguist. Everything I've done for the past year and nine months has been to prepare myself to learn another language to possibly communicate or steal information in a targeted language. The prospect of being so utterly unable to communicate with another being, to the point that signals aren't even able to be registered is not only frightening, but it's a tragedy. A tragedy because when there is such a basic breakdown in the ability to communicate personhood is taken out of the equation and it becomes a fight. A fight for survival.

6. Did this book inspire you to want to do more research on the subject? Why? Why not?

The book has inspired me to think about how one could try and communicate without language, at least with symbols, but unfortunately, I don't think much research can be done on signalless communication.

7. Would you recommend it to a friend or another Marine? Why? Why not?

Ender's Game is a quick, enjoyable read that I have and would continue to recommend to my friends and fellow Marines, simply on the virtue of it being entertaining. The wonderful thing about *Ender's Game* is that there are bits and pieces of the Marines' combat mindset, combat philosophies, leadership traits, and principles dispersed throughout the book, any Marine could gain something from reading it.

8. Does the subject of this book affect your life? If so, how? If no, why not?

Depending on how one interprets the subject of the book, whether it be about leading others, or fighting an alien species, the answer could be different, but as a Marine, small unit leadership is paramount in accomplishing the mission. Learning how to handle your units in accordance with their capabilities is an important skill, one which even a genius can mismanage. As a linguist, how could I communicate with another person, or more broadly, an alien species? Of course, while this is fictional, it still has practical applications.

9. What evidence does the author use to support their ideas?

When the buggers are attack the human race during their "first wave" they're unable to realize that they're autonomous beings—persons. During the second wave, the buggers discover that humans are also autonomous beings and quit their attack. Humans then pursue the buggers in a third wave and destroy the bugger homeworld because they perceive buggers to be an unfeeling, unrelenting enemy force. Without communication, the wars are impersonal. They're about survival.

10. Are the issues raised in the book controversial? Why?

The protagonist of the story is introduced to us at the age of six. He is then taken by the government and submitted to grueling exams, both physically and mentally. To many people, this would be considered child abuse regardless their parents signing consent waivers or the child agreeing to it, as they are not legally able to consent.

Others also find it controversial that the main character is a child since it instills the idea of personhood into children—something not truly legally obtained until one is eighteen.

11. Does the author offer solutions to the problems raised in the book? How probable is their success? Can you think of additional solutions?

Rather than presenting direct solutions to the problems presented in the book, the author focused on the main character coping with the consequences of his actions. Even though at times he didn't like what he was doing, Ender reconciled it with knowing that he had to do what he was doing, for the good of those around him, even if he was sacrificing himself in the process.

12. If you were to talk with the author, what would you ask him or her?

I would ask him what his inspiration for the buggers was, how they came to be able to use interstellar travel, and the inspiration for making them telepathic and unable to recognize symbols.

13. Have you read the author's other books? Can you discern a similarity (in theme, writing style, structure, etc.) between them, or are they completely different?

I have read some of the author's other books: *Speaker for the Dead, Xenocide, Children of the Mind,* and *Ender's Shadow*. There is consistency of theme between *Ender's Game* and *Speaker for the Dead* and *Xenocide* and *Children of the Mind*; however, *Xenocide* and *Children of the Mind* didn't feel as though they should have been part of the series to me.

14. After reading this book, have your views on the subject changed? Why? Why not?

My views on this subject haven't really changed too much. I still enjoy *Ender's Game* as a novel, and I feel like I am better able to appreciate it now that I have had some life experiences similar to Ender's.

15. Why should Marines read this book?

I think this is a wonderful book for Marines to read because a lot of the things the Marine Corps holds dear, like small unit leadership, are displayed in a way that is tangible. It's one thing to think about "knowing yourself and seeking self-improvement" and "knowing your Marines and looking out for their welfare" versus actually contextualizing them when Ender seeks extra training in a null-gravity environment or when he pushes his platoon commanders too far and ends up breaking one in the critical moment of a mission. Every Marine who reads this book can grow vicariously through Ender's experiences and grow not only as a leader, but a person.