

Summer Reading

English 3EP

2019

In this packet, you will find an article that outlines the key features of Dystopian literature, many of which you will encounter this Summer while reading George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. This article will help you to make sense of these novels and to prepare for our study in the Fall. Completing the questions and annotations should prepare you well for class discussion, the Summer reading test, and first semester of 3EP, which will focus almost entirely on dystopian literature.

Please ***hand-write*** all responses to questions from the packet on loose-leaf paper, with clearly labeled sections. Any annotation should occur directly in your copy of the novel. Please use highlighter and pen, as pencil does not stand out well on a page full of text.

Bring this article and completed questions to class on our first meeting.

Enjoy!

1. "Dystopia" Study Questions..... p.2
2. "Dystopia" (Reference text)..... p.3-6

Study questions for the Definition of Dystopia handout:

- 1) After reading the first two paragraphs, write a clear definition of the word dystopia in your own words.
- 2) Characteristics of dystopia:
 - a) List **three general features of dystopian societies** as stated in the first two paragraphs
 - b) You have been given a list of historical dystopias, as well as a list of examples of dystopia in tv shows, games, and film. **Choose 2 examples and write 2-3 sentences indicating some elements of dystopia in each.** (If you have not seen/played any of the TV shows, films, or games, then choose 2 historical examples to look up. You don't have to choose the Nazis, Branch Davidians, or Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints groups mentioned on page 1; find your own if you prefer. If you don't know what the FLDS or Branch Davidians are, then look them up!).
- 3) Most dystopias in literature occur during the second half of the nineteenth century and later. What societal changes happened during these times that facilitated the growth of dystopian literature?
- 4) You are given four examples of dystopian literature. Answer the following questions about each example. Don't worry about a correct answer. Next year, you will be asked to demonstrate how you reach your answer through your reading of the text. Underline sentences/words from the passage that help you justify your answer. Quote that phrase or sentence in your answer. (each answer should be 2 sentences in length--at least 1 sentence with your response and another sentence incorporating your quote).
 - a) *1984*, by George Orwell (we will be reading this book in class): What did the Party claim about life before their Revolution, and how do you think they use this claim to justify their takeover?
 - b) *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury: How does this society teach people to view God? How does the society utilize this view of God to its own advantage?
 - c) *Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood (we will be reading this book in class): What do you think the women have to give up in order to have "freedom from," as Aunt Lydia tells them?
 - d) *Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins. How do the Hunger Games allow the government to assert its power over the people?

DYSTOPIA

Definition of Dystopia

Dystopia is a genre in literature that depicts a frightening society or community. The society can be frightening for many reasons, and generally has one or more of the following problems: a corrupt and/or totalitarian government, dehumanization due to technological advances, environmental disasters, eradication of the family, cultish religions, limited resources, and unchecked violence. Dystopias therefore usually have an abundance of human misery, though in some cases there are phenomena at work to make people believe they are not miserable (which is perhaps even more horrifying). For example, dystopian regimes often promote propaganda within the society to make the people think that it is, in fact, a utopia. It is usually the quest to make a society into a utopia—a perfect place—that ironically leads to such horrifying conditions.

The word dystopia is a combination of the Greek prefix *δυσ-* (*dys-*), meaning “bad” and *τόπος* (*topos*), meaning “place.” The definition of dystopia came about as an antonym to the word utopia, which philosopher Thomas More coined in 1516 for a work of fiction set on an imaginary ideal island nation.

Common Examples of Dystopia

There have been real examples of dystopias in history, such as Nazi Germany. Cults such as the Branch Davidians and the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints also qualify as dystopias due to brainwashing and their attempt to create a “perfect” society.

There are also plenty of dystopia examples in film, television, video games, and music. Here are some examples of dystopia in each of the different mediums:

Films:

- *Planet of the Apes*
- *V for Vendetta*
- *Wall-E*
- *District 9*
- *The Fifth Element*
- *Mad Max*
- *Gattaca*
- *I, Robot*
- *The Matrix*
- *RoboCop*

Television:

- *Firefly*
- *The Walking Dead*
- *Doctor Who*
- *Black Mirror*
- *Aeon Flux*

Video Games:

- *Final Fantasy VI and VII*
- *Resident Evil series*
- *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*
- *Warhammer 40,000*
- *Deus Ex*

Significance of Dystopia in Literature

It is interesting to note that there are very few examples of dystopian works written before the late nineteenth century. There are a few notable exceptions, such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, written in 1726. However, the great proliferation of dystopian works did not begin until the second half of the nineteenth century, while the majority of dystopian examples comes from the second of the twentieth century until the present day.

There are several possible explanations for this phenomena. First is rise of technology associated with the first and second industrial revolutions, as well as the dehumanization of the worker at this time, especially in factories with assembly lines. Second was the very real experience of a dystopia in the Third Reich, which pledged to create a perfect race and society that would go on for a thousand years. The nightmare of Nazi Germany has loomed large in literature for more than a half century in different ways. Third, and most recently, is the terrifying speed at which we humans are extinguishing the world's resources and contributing to climatic changes that may very well prove to be incompatible with human life.

Examples of Dystopia in Literature

Example #1

The Party claimed, of course, to have liberated the proles from bondage. Before the Revolution they had been hideously oppressed by the capitalists, they had been starved and flogged, women had been forced to work in the coal mines (women still did work in the coal mines, as a matter of fact), children had been sold into the factories at the age of six. But simultaneously, true to the Principles of doublethink, the Party taught that the proles were natural inferiors who must be kept in subjection, like animals, by the application of a few simple rules.

(*1984* by George Orwell)

George Orwell's *1984* is one of the most famous examples of a dystopia in all of literature. The protagonist, Winston, becomes aware of the hypocrisy of the ruling Party, and fights to overthrow it. In this excerpt, he explains how the Party brainwashed the majority of working-class citizens, called Proles, to believe they're better off now than before.

Example #2

"Christ is one of the 'family' now. I often wonder if God recognizes His own son the way we've dressed him up, or is it dressed him down? He's a regular peppermint stick now, all sugar-crystal and saccharine when he isn't making veiled references to certain commercial products that every worshipper absolutely needs."

(*Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury)

In this short quote from Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* we see many different elements of a dystopian society: the erasure of the real family, the perversion of religion, and the dehumanization that is brought on by technology. There are many more dystopian themes in the novel such as totalitarian rule and brainwashing.

Example #3

Now we walk along the same street, in red pairs, and no man shouts obscenities at us, speaks to us, touches us. No one whistles.

There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it.

(*The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood)

In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, women are appropriated by the ruling class to bear their children for them. In a classic case of brainwashing as part of a dystopia, the character of Aunt Lydia explains that there are certain freedoms these women have now that they didn't have before.

Example #4

Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch – this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. "Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen."

(*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins)

Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy is a popular contemporary example of dystopia. There is a ruling class who lives in the Capitol which forces the rest of the country to send children to compete in the blood-soaked Hunger Games. Here we see the pervasiveness of technology, the unmitigated violence, and the totalitarian government so common to dystopia examples.

THE REAL REASON DYSTOPIAN FICTION IS ROARING BACK (EXCERPTED BY WIRED MAGAZINE) 2.22.2017

FROM THE "EVERYTHING old is new again" files: Bygone dystopian fiction is officially back in vogue. As reported last month, Penguin Random House has seen a 9,500 percent sales increase for George Orwell's 1984 since Trump's inauguration; that was enough to propel the book to the top spot on Amazon's bestseller list.

Nor is this newfound popularity a reflection of blue-state tastes. At Brazos Bookstore in Houston, Texas, general manager Ben Rybeck says copies of 1984 and other titles are "flying" off the shelves. Iconoclast Books in Ketchum, Idaho sold eight copies of 1984 in January—compared to one in January 2016. And at Book Loft in Columbus, Ohio, sales manager Glen Welch has seen unprecedented demand. "All of a sudden, these books started taking off," says Welch, who describes the store's customers as an even split between liberal and conservative. "I haven't seen this before, in my 10 years here."

Part of the appeal of these classics, of course, is a morbid strain of escapism: Dystopian fiction enables readers to taste a darker timeline, albeit one that a protagonist invariably triumphs over. The world could be a lot worse, you think while reading. But the thrill goes beyond the vicarious. A dystopian worldview, whether derived from fiction or real-world events, can have therapeutic value—no matter which side of the aisle your politics belong on.

"We're Saturated With Dystopia"

Dystopian literature has long given writers a means of interrogating the world around them. Orwell conceived of 1984 under the looming threat of the Soviet Union, and Margaret Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale* after the elections of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. "We can work our way through problems by telling stories better, at times, than by writing philosophical treatises," says Chris Robichaud, an ethicist at Harvard who teaches a course on utopia and dystopia in fiction and philosophy. "You look to fiction to see how people are wrestling with serious problems." That's valuable for readers as well, especially in a politically divided climate like today's. "We can't look at dystopias as merely some bad slippery slope argument," says Robichaud. "Rather, they challenge us: What are the values in this dystopia, and what do they say about our values right now?"

People naturally gravitate toward a narrative that validates their own worldview. For some, President Trump's tweets about a conniving elite and a corrupt media echo their feelings that the odds are against them. For others, George Orwell's chronicle of totalitarian doublethink provides comfort that we've fought "alternative facts" before, and we're still standing. Either way, people are reaching out to dark visions to make sense of an increasingly unrecognizable country. A well-told narrative, truthful or not, can awaken a reader's imagination and push them to action—and a neat dystopia is often more satisfying than a complicated truth.

ADD ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, NOTES BELOW.