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English 112B

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Unit Of Study: Why is Dystopian Fiction relevant to your life?

**Centerpiece Text:**

It is easy to forget who you are when you are constrained from forming part of a free community. Individualism is being free to do what you want and striving for goals that are set by oneself. When a government or any form of authority takes away a person’s rights, they can no longer control their lives. While it is hard to imagine a world where the democratic government loses its power in the United States, recent events prove otherwise. While terrorist attacks and lying leaders threaten our government, there is no telling what our future holds. Propaganda through social media and news is now more influential than ever; while this may seem ideal, it hinders some from forming their ideas. In more dramatic cases, we see countries like Venezuela and Columbia going through hardships due to their government’s missteps. The use of propaganda and believing what is posted online brings us closer to a dystopian society like that in *1984* by George Orwell.

As extreme and unlikely it is that we end up in a situation with “Big Brother,” there is still a lot to learn and teach from this novel. In the text, we meet Winston, who is living through a totalitarian government and is experiencing the effect of living in a dictator state. Dystopian literature is essential to teach in high school since politics and human rights are topics that are becoming relevant. Orwell’s book is high paced and contains a lot of secrecy which is an important factor of YA literature. The secrecy behind “Big Brother” and the treatment of Winston and his fellow citizens. Also, introducing real-world problems prepares a teen for the harsh reality that some people may face. (Exeter Study Qualities of Good YA Books) Since there is a protagonist who stands up for what is right, he can represent activism against a corrupt system. Winston becomes an example for readers to learn from by highlighting his individualism as a positive event,

The theme introduced within the dystopian novel creates a lasting effect on students, which critically helps them think about this issue. The risk of a totalitarian government applies to any person, so it speaks to many different people. (Literature for Today's Young Adults, Ch. 4) These are important factors that make the novel intriguing to young adults. Due to his human nature of exploring and learning more about oneself, Winston is able to experience more than any other individual in his community. He can also show a glimmer of hope of throwing over the totalitarian in place since it took so much to break Winston. If this were a group of people, the outcome would have been different. The novel enables young readers to speak up about inequalities while compelling a young adult’s urge to go against authority. Since we can draw parallels between the book and current political events, it shows the relevance of the novel.

**Introduction to the Unit:**

The purpose of this unit is to help students through depressing and stressful times like those in a dystopian fiction novel. Also, these types of books can parallel modern concerns like government power, global warming, police brutality, inequality, and pandemics. After reviewing some of these concerning themes, students will have time to do a quick write to get their ideas and thoughts in order. After the writing exercise, we will discuss which future problem is most likely to occur as a class. In order to make this unit not as stressful, we will discuss which system is in place to avoid the problem and if there isn’t, what could be a solution to the problem?

In order to thoroughly understand the purpose of dystopian fiction literature, we will analyze a helpful article; Someone [Might Be Watching - An Introduction To Dystopian Fiction, by Shelby Ostergaard](https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/someone-might-be-watching-an-introduction-to-dystopian-fiction). As we go through the article, the students will develop their own helpful worksheet with key definitions of words like distort, sociopolitical, industrialization, totalitarianism, and transfix. Also, in the notes, examples of common themes and stylistic choices will be highlighted to comprehend the author’s intention.

After the helpful article, I will present a song to the students which have similar themes as *1984* by George Orwell. Analyzing as if it were a poem and looking for metaphors while discussing the importance of the setting is good practice for the main novel. The song I choose that we will listen to and analyze is Testify by Rage Against The Machine. The primary conversations will be around how countries can deceive world events utilizing media. The song also symbolizes the power people have when they join forces for a cause they choose to fight against government rule.

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Link to song: <https://youtu.be/sqs5T6p3t0M>

Link to lyrics:<https://genius.com/Rage-against-the-machine-testify-lyrics>

Follow up questions from the song for discussion or journal writing:

1. What influence does the genre of the music have on the feelings that it inflicts on the listener?
2. What message is the singer attempting to convey as he sings, "We found your weakness, and it's right outside your door, now testify"?
3. In what way does the song relate to the genre of dystopian fiction? (Use notes from Ostergaard’s article for reference)

**Group Discussion:**

Reading will be assigned as homework which will be set for 2 to 4 chapters depending on what section is discussed in class the next day. To have a productive discussion with classmates, I will ask students to write notes and highlight essential quotes to utilize for the next day’s discussion. Questions discussed in class will be the same throughout the story to know what to look for in every text. The questions will be presented to the class by a group member who has not spoken yet.

Questions for class discussion:

1. Which quote stood out to you the most?
2. Are there any literary devices that stand out to you? (Ex. Allegory, Metaphor, Imagery, Symbolism, etc.)
3. Develop a question to further the class discussion.

Keeping the same questions encourages students to read the night before to take part in the class discussion. Also, they can express how they feel about the text in smaller groups, so they are comfortable sharing their original thoughts. Coming up with your ideas surrounding a dystopian text is crucial since it builds connections to the real world.

**Supporting text:**

1. *The Chocolate War* by Rober Cormier: The book takes place in an all-boys Trinity high school where students are often forced to do school activities like fundraisers. It deals with being a teenager trying to fit in while sticking up to what you believe. In the book, the protagonist deals with a conflict where he challenges the authority that runs his school. (goodreads.com)
2. *Black Boy* by Richard Wright: In this autobiography, we meet Richard Wright, who is a young boy growing up in the South of the United States in the 1920s. This book deals with oppression and doing what is suitable for yourself, and not following societal norms. Wright is expected to grow up in an oppressing environment and not get a career or even go to college. His rebellious nature gets him into a lot of trouble, but it also benefits the outcome of his life situation. Going against authority and society’s rules, he can defy the system that is put in place to fail people like him. (commonsensemedia.org)
3. *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood: Through this dystopian novel, we are introduced to a world where a kind of dictatorship has taken over the democracy of the United States. Touching on topics like class and gender, the concept of the story takes the reader into a society that oppresses women. (britannica.com)
4. *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury: In this dystopian future, literature in books is burned and erased from public access. The burning of books is done by the ruling group, who does not want society to develop their intelligence. The protagonist who is forced to burn the books goes through dramatic changes that shape him into a person who complies with dictatorship. (thoughtco.com)
5. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding: During a war, a group of British boys crashes into a deserted island; it is up to them to decide which political system will help their chance of survival. The desire for power is a conflict in the book since each naive teen believes they can do better. Decisions made out of frustration and possibly fatigue go into play and eventually determine the children’s future. (sparknotes.com)

**End of Unit Assessment:**

To measure a student’s understanding of dystopian fiction and common themes within the genre, I selected an article that contains important passages from the book on which they can use for their end-of-unit essay.

Essay: After reading the text, indicate how technology is used to the advantage of totalitarian governments? Is there a parallel between the book and reality in the sense of using technology to control people? Is it okay for the government to have control over its citizens?

Analyze one of the passages from the article below. Is there a parallel between the passage and current issues? What literary devices are used and why did the author use them? What makes the passage relevant to your life?

(Utilize your worksheets, journal entries, and the report by Emily Temple to answer either prompt.)

Article: [All of the Passages In 1984 That Relate To You Right Now](https://lithub.com/all-of-the-passages-in-1984-that-relate-to-you-right-now/)

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