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Dystopian YA Literature: A Whole New World

Dystopian novels are rapidly becoming a more popular genre within the YA Literature world. The definition of Dystopia is of a “futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control” (“Dystopias: Definitions and Characteristics”). Dystopian novels have always fascinated me as a reader because authors have such a vast imagination to create this futuristic world by coming up with all the rules that the characters have to follow and so much more. I have always wondered what it would be like if our world was of a Dystopian one, then I stop myself because I don’t think I would want to live in one.

Why Dystopian novels? It intertwines so much with the Fantasy genre that it may even be called a subgenre of the Fantasy genre. I have always loved reading to escape from the real world for as long as I can remember. Being able to delve into a whole new world inside that book and imagining myself being a citizen of that world, it was a safe haven for me. I am not only a reader, but also a creative writer and reading these novels that have new worlds in them has always expanded my imagination, which helps me write. I was always in awe of these authors that were able to come up with an entirely new world with just the stroke of their pen. Dystopian novels are all about the characters living in a futuristic world (futuristic having many meanings to it) and living under a leader who controls what they do and how they should act and feel. It’s very similar to fantasy novels because most fantasy novels explore fantastical worlds that don’t exist in reality. I am also a bit of a rebel, which makes me enjoy Dystopian novels even more because there is always that one person who rebels against that society and tries to save that society from collapsing due to having a corrupt leader.

To share my love of the Dystopian world, I have compiled a list of ten novels for young adults, most of these being pretty well known in the young adult literature world. A lot of these novels contain a lot of the same themes, which involves the main character willing to sacrifice everything for the greater good. It rings true in today’s society as well because there is always that one person that is willing to fight to make a change. My hope is to have young adults expand their imaginations and to believe that if an author can create an entire world just from their imagination then anything is possible.

Cass, Kiera. *The Selection.* New York: HarperTeen, 2012. Print.

Thirty Five girls, one Prince and a crown. Every girls dream, right? Not for America Singer. Her dream is to marry and build a life with her best friend, Aspen. With a war raging and a Prince with such desire. Can America make it back to her love? Or will she find something she thought she never wanted.

*The Selection* is not your typical dystopian novel because the girls in the story have to win the attention of the prince and aren't fighting for their lives like in the other Dystopian novels mentioned below. It teaches a powerful message, that all it takes is one voice to make a change. And to never give up on what you believe in and what is right. It also teaches young adults not to judge a book by its’ cover. This novel also relates to reality today because this novel is basically like The Bachelor, a modern television reality show, but with royalty. It can be relatable to young adults that watch this kind of stuff.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games.* New York: Scholastic Press, 2008. Print.

This well-known Dystopian novel takes place in a world where children of all ages are forced to fight one another to the death in an annual event called The Hunger Games. The main character, Katniss is forced to participate in this deadly event in the place of her sister and as each character gets killed off one by one, Katniss is forced to make the difficult decision of taking another life or to bring down the Capital once and for all.

*The Hunger Games* is a well-known novel that most young adults will know the story to, so it is more relatable. Collins creates an entire world where the citizens of that society are forced to be under the rule of a dictator, which in turn creates a collapsing society. The main character, Katniss teaches young adults to not be afraid to stand up for what you believe in because Katniss was not afraid to stand up for what she believed in and this makes her a good role model and a strong female lead.

Condie, Ally. *Matched.* New York: Razorbill, 2010. Print.

*Matched* by Ally Condie is about a world where the society chooses who you love. The main character, Cassia finally gets matched with her best friend, but when she sees another face flash on the screen, she starts to doubt the society’s decision on whether they made a mistake or not. Now Cassia is faced with the decision on whether to follow the life she has always known or to take a risk to follow her heart’s desires.

*Matched* is a great Dystopian novel for young adults to read because it shows a world where the citizens of that society is being controlled by the political government. It also gives out the powerful message that young adults have the ability to control their own lives and shouldn't follow what has been predetermined for them. It also teaches young adults that it is okay to break out of the norm and what you have always known to take that risk because we only have one shot in life.

Dashner, James. *The Maze Runner.* New York: Random House, 2009. Print.

This well-known Dystopian novel is set in a world where children are taken and put into this place called the Glade. The thing about the Glade is that there is an ever-changing maze just outside the walls and those who attempt to make it out...never make it out alive. The story starts off when Thomas, the main character, wakes up in the Glade and he has no recollection of any past memories, except for his name. As time goes by, Thomas starts to learn how this small community of boys start to live, but when the first girl ever is put onto the lift, the boys start to wonder if whoever put them there sent her as a message to them. Things start to change in the Glade and Thomas is suddenly forced with the difficult and dangerous task of leading them out of the Glade...hopefully, alive.

*The Maze Runner* is another well known book that got turned into a movie, like the Hunger Games, so most young adults might already know the story to this, which makes it more relatable to something young adults already know. Thomas is that game changer in *The Maze Runner* because he is the one that defies everything and he leads the group back into society instead of staying inside the Glade forever. Instead of just living in the Glade every day with fear, Thomas is determined to find out what really is going behind this operation.

Mafi, Tahereh. *Shatter Me.* New York: Harper, 2011. Print.

“Ostracized or incarcerated her whole life, seventeen-year-old Juliette is freed on the condition that she use her horrific abilities in support of the Reestablishment, a postapocalyptic dictatorship, but Adam, the only person ever to show her affection, offers hope of a better future” (Mafi 2011).

*Shatter Me* is one of my personal favorites. I never knew why my friends loved it so much until I read it myself. The novel’s writing structure of crossed out lines make it much more intense and a more enjoyable read. Juliette is a strong female character that will do anything to keep those around her safe, even if it is from herself. Throughout the novel, readers see Juliette’s struggle on understanding more of where her powers come from and the struggle with her identity. It also shows the characteristics of a Dystopian novel because Juliette’s character faces the difficult task of trying to break free from the Reestablishment and to save those around her from a collapsing society.

Meyer, Marissa. *Cinder.* New York: Feiwel and Friends, 2012. Print.

“Humans and androids crowd the raucous streets of New Beijing. A deadly plague ravages the population. From space, a ruthless lunar people watch, waiting to make their move. No one knows that Earth’s fate hinges on one girl.

Cinder, a gifted mechanic, is a cyborg. She’s a second-class citizen with a mysterious past, reviled by her stepmother and blamed for her stepsister’s illness. But when her life becomes intertwined with the handsome Prince Kai’s, she suddenly finds herself at the center of an intergalactic struggle, and a forbidden attraction. Caught between duty and freedom, loyalty and betrayal, she must uncover secrets about her past in order to protect her world’s future” (Goodreads.com).

This Dystopian novel is a great take on the classic fairytale of Cinderella. Meyer creates an entirely new futuristic world and puts her own take into this story. This novel explores the theme of identity because Cinder is faced with the difficult task of revealing her past and finding out who or what she really is.

Roth, Veronica. *Divergent.* New York: Katherine Tegen Books, 2011. Print.

“In a future Chicago, sixteen-year-old Beatrice Prior must choose among five predetermined factions to define her identity for the rest of her life, a decision made more difficult when she discovers that she is an anomaly who does not fit into any one group, and that the society she lives in is not perfect after all” (Roth 2011).

*Divergent* is another popular book turned into a movie. Tris is a strong female character because she faces with the difficult decision of leaving the society she has known behind to join the Factionless. This is another message that teaches young adults that it is okay to stand up for what you believe in and that sometimes sacrifices are meant to be made for the greater good.

Simmons, Kristen. *Article 5.* New York: Tor Teen, 2012. Print.

Seventeen-year old Ember Miller lives in a world where there are no more police, but only soldiers to keep the peace in the society they live in and the Bill of Rights we once knew have been replaced with the Moral Statutes. Living in a world like this, Ember has learned how to keep a low profile in order to keep her and her mother alive. One day, her mother gets arrested for noncompliance with Article 5 of the Moral Statutes. And one of the arresting officers is none other than Chase Jennings—the only boy Ember has ever loved.

This Dystopian novel teaches young adults about self sacrifice on whether Ember saving her mother will end up her losing the boy she has loved her entire life. Sometimes family is worth the self-sacrifice, even if it means losing your true love.

Westerfeld, Scott. *Uglies.* New York: Simon Pulse, 2005. Print.

“Tally is about to turn sixteen, and she can't wait. In just a few weeks she'll have the operation that will turn her from a repellent ugly into a stunning pretty. And as a pretty, she'll be catapulted into a high-tech paradise where her only job is to have fun.

But Tally's new friend Shay isn't sure she wants to become a pretty. When Shay runs away, Tally learns about a whole new side of the pretty world-- and it isn't very pretty. The authorities offer Tally a choice: find her friend and turn her in, or never turn pretty at all. Tally's choice will change her world forever…” (Goodreads.com)

*Uglies* is a well known novel in the Young Adult literature world that teaches young adults that not everything is what it seems. Tally is faced with the difficult decision of whether to sacrifice her own personal happiness by becoming a pretty and protect her best friend or to turn in her best friend and getting the surgery that she has always wanted. This novel teaches young adults about self sacrifice and that sometimes thinking of others is more important than thinking of yourself.

Yancey, Richard. *The 5th Wave*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2013. Print

“After the 1st wave, only darkness remains. After the 2nd, only the lucky escape. And after the 3rd, only the *un*lucky survive. After the 4th wave, only one rule applies: trust no one.

Now, it's the dawn of the 5th wave, and on a lonely stretch of highway, Cassie runs from Them. The beings who only look human, who roam the countryside killing anyone they see. Who have scattered Earth's last survivors. To stay alone is to stay alive, Cassie believes, until she meets Evan Walker. Beguiling and mysterious, Evan Walker may be Cassie's only hope for rescuing her brother-or even saving herself. But Cassie must choose: between trust and despair, between defiance and surrender, between life and death. To give up or to get up” (Goodreads.com)

*The 5th Wave* was recently turned into a movie. It teaches young adults how family is really important because Cassie sacrifices everything on the line to save her little brother. This is a Dystopian novel because it takes place in an apocalyptic world where Earth’s citizens are in grave danger from these various unexplainable waves that happen. Later on, it is told that aliens attack in these waves to kill off the weaker people first, like survival of the fittest.

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