

Adi Salanieta Waqanivalu

Rationale Paper

English 112B

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### Unit of Study: Dystopias

#### **Rationale**

Young adults usually begin to view the world and all its imperfections during their high school years. Books about dystopian and utopian societies offer students with the opportunity to experience societies that drastically differ from the ones they are used to. By offering young adults a different genre of novels, students are also able to read a variety of novels that break the redundancy of textbook materials. Many times while in school, young adults read books that do not promote growth in the imagination and further deter students from wanting to read.

For example, as a young adult in high school there were many times while reading Shakespeare and history textbooks when I began to hate reading in school. These moments led to a lack of expressed excitement over the novels I was assigned to read, and ultimately ruined the joy of reading I had. However when I opened up Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, I fell in love with the way Atwood used diction to capture an intricate society within her pages. Atwood's novel was the very first dystopian novel that I had ever read, and it made me question the society I lived in. Dystopian novels like *The Handmaid's Tale* are so simple, yet so complex. The novel itself is very short with only three hundred and eleven pages. However, it is the simplicity that offers young adult readers easy to understand literature which can be truly

enjoyed. Simple diction is used to draw the readers in leading to vivid images that come alive in readers imaginations.

Reading novels in this particular genre is especially important for students in high school because dystopian novels encourage readers to question the world they live in. In the book *AITSM*, Dr. Mary Warner writes that “adolescents face such a variety of pressures, many far more external than internal, they are not necessarily attuned to their inner world” (XIX). This is especially true for young adults in high school, so it is important to read novels that make students think and feel. Dystopian novels lead to students asking questions which lead to awareness of problems that many people around the world face. Opening up the dystopian unit with the novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a great way for students to get acquainted with reading novels in the dystopian genre. *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a very short novel that is easy to read for students, so it wouldn't take too long for students to get through. Having a shorter novel as the centerpiece of this unit also provides students with room to reread the novel so they can understand the content better.

### **Introducing the Unit: *The Hunger Games* (movie)**

#### **Movie:**

I will be introducing my unit of study with the movie *The Hunger Games*, directed by Gary Ross. The movie is a film adaptation of the popular series written by Suzanne Collins. I read all the novels in the series and really enjoyed all of them. The novels follow the story of a young girl named Katniss Everdeen. Katniss, a young adult herself, lives in a dystopian society which

sections people off into different sanctions. There are 12 sanctions, and an annual hunger game is the main attraction. The hunger games is a competition by members of different sanctions, who must kill one another in order to win the game. The consequences of having a society where the citizens are oppressed through the creation of ranks is a prime example of the way dystopian novels are created and the problems they can incite. Watching a movie will ease the students into the unit and create excitement for the novel we will be reading. The movie is also a very popular movie that is widely known in America, so many students will have either heard of it or watched it. The class will only be watching the first half of the movie and end off when Katniss Everdeen enters the competition. Too much time would be lost if the whole movie were to be watched, and the beginning of the movie covers the history of the dystopian society in *The Hunger Games*, introducing our topic of dystopias.

#### In class activity 1: Free write

After the class watches the movie, there will be a short 20 minute free write session followed by class discussion. The questions that the class will write on include, “What is a dystopia?” and “Why are dystopias created?”. These two questions will allow students to write down what their initial thoughts are about dystopias and opens up the window to a class discussion. It is important to have this free write, because students can gain a better understanding of what dystopias are and why they are created before diving into the centerpiece novel.

## **Centerpiece: *The Handmaid's Tale***

### **Homework:**

Once the class begins the centerpiece novel, reading will be assigned for homework. Students will be assigned three chapters a day, which is not too taxing since the novel only has twelve chapters. Having students read at home encourages them to read on their own, and it also helps them to come in prepared for the next class period. After reading the assigned materials at home, students will be able to have a class discussion about the assigned chapter, and it's significance.

### **In class Activity 2: SSW**

Before having any sort of class discussion about the chapters that were assigned for homework, students will need to write out a half a page to a page in length answering a question about the assigned chapters. Doing this will allow me to assess how well the students understand the reading, and how many students are doing the reading. Students are also more motivated to read if they know they will have to turn in an SSW every day after reading is assigned. This activity also promotes responsibility on the student's part to get their readings done, which will help them if they choose to go to college. Some of the questions that can be asked for the SSW's include:

- Who is Offred and what is her role?
- What are the three epigraphs, and what are their functions?
- What is the name of the dystopian society that Offred lives in, and who are in control?
- What is the symbolism behind the red coats that the Handmaid's wear?

- What is the significance of a Handmaid's role in their society?
- How is the Republic of Gilead a dystopian society?

### Final Paper

There will be a two page essay that students will turn in at the end of the unit. Students will write an essay centered about a prompt that ties the unit together. This take home essay is a smaller writing assignment, because it is just meant to tie up the unit. Students have already spent time in class discussing the chapters and writing SSW's, so they are prepared to write a short essay responding to a quote.

### Prompt:

Analyze this quote from the novel, "A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze". Write a two page essay that explains the significance of this quote with examples from the book. Remember to state whether or not you agree with this quote and why.

### **Extending the Unit: Suggested readings**

To extend the unit, I will pass out a list of dystopian and utopian novels that students can read during their free time. Doing so will help kids find books that spark their interest, and also give them examples of novels they can read during their free time.

Book List:***1984* by George Orwell**

“The year 1984 has come and gone, but George Orwell's prophetic, nightmarish vision in 1949 of the world we were becoming is timelier than ever. *1984* is still the great modern classic of "negative utopia" -a startlingly original and haunting novel that creates an imaginary world that is completely convincing, from the first sentence to the last four words. No one can deny the novel's hold on the imaginations of whole generations, or the power of its admonitions -a power that seems to grow, not lessen, with the passage of time.”

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/5470.1984?from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/5470.1984?from_search=true)

***Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman**

“An all-female society is discovered somewhere in the distant reaches of the earth by three male explorers who are now forced to re-examine their assumptions about women's roles in society.”

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/531509.Herland?from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/531509.Herland?from_search=true)

***The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins**

“ The nation of Panem, formed from a post-apocalyptic North America, is a country that consists of a wealthy Capitol region surrounded by 12 poorer districts. Early in its history, a rebellion led by a 13th district against the Capitol resulted in its destruction and the creation of an annual televised event known as the Hunger Games. In punishment, and as a reminder of the power and grace of the Capitol, each district must yield one boy and one girl between the ages of 12 and 18 through a lottery system to participate in the games. The 'tributes' are chosen during the annual Reaping and are forced to fight to the death, leaving only one survivor to claim victory.”

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2767052-the-hunger-games?ac=1&from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2767052-the-hunger-games?ac=1&from_search=true)

***The Maze Runner* by James Dashner**

“Outside the towering stone walls that surround the Glade is a limitless, ever-changing maze. It’s the only way out—and no one’s ever made it through alive.”

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6186357-the-maze-runner?ac=1&from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6186357-the-maze-runner?ac=1&from_search=true)

***Uglies* by Scott Westerfield**

“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...”

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/24770.Uglies?ac=1&from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/24770.Uglies?ac=1&from_search=true)

### ***The Host* by Stephenie Meyer**

“Melanie Stryder refuses to fade away. The earth has been invaded by a species that take over the minds of human hosts while leaving their bodies intact. Wanderer, the invading "soul" who has been given Melanie's body, didn't expect to find its former tenant refusing to relinquish possession of her mind. As Melanie fills Wanderer's thoughts with visions of Jared, a human who still lives in hiding, Wanderer begins to yearn for a man she's never met. Reluctant allies, Wanderer and Melanie set off to search for the man they both love.”

### ***The City Of Ember* by Jeanne DuPrau**

“Many hundreds of years ago, the city of Ember was created by the Builders to contain everything needed for human survival. It worked...but now the storerooms are almost out of food, crops are blighted, corruption is spreading through the city and worst of all—the lights are failing. Soon Ember could be engulfed by darkness...”

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/307791.The\\_City\\_of\\_EMBER?from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/307791.The_City_of_EMBER?from_search=true)

### ***Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card**

“Andrew "Ender" Wiggin thinks he is playing computer simulated war games; he is, in fact, engaged in something far more desperate. The result of genetic experimentation, Ender may be the military genius Earth desperately needs in a war against an alien enemy seeking to destroy all human life. The only way to find out is to throw Ender into ever harsher training, to chip away and find the diamond inside, or destroy him utterly. Ender Wiggin is six years old when it begins. He will grow up fast.”

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/375802.Ender\\_s\\_Game?ac=1&from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/375802.Ender_s_Game?ac=1&from_search=true)

### ***Divergent* by Veronica Roth**

“In Beatrice Prior's dystopian Chicago world, society is divided into five factions, each dedicated to the cultivation of a particular virtue—Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful), and Erudite (the intelligent). On an appointed day of every year, all sixteen-year-olds must select the faction to which they will devote the rest of their lives. For Beatrice, the decision is between staying with her family and being who she really is—she can't have both. So she makes a choice that surprises everyone, including herself.”

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13335037-divergent?from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13335037-divergent?from_search=true)

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