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Dr. Mary Warner

English 112B

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Exploring Dystopias in Film and Literature

One of my favorite quotes is by the late George Carlin, who once said, “Don’t just teach your child to read...teach them to question what they read, teach them to question everything.” According to goodreads.com, dystopian-themed literature is being consumed more than it has since George Orwell’s *1984* hit bookshelves back in 1949. With the resurgence of this popular genre in Young Adult novels such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Matched*, I feel it is important to jump on this trend and acknowledge its presence in the classroom. Dystopian-themed books are obviously being read by the masses as shown by the millions of copies sold. However, the question arises, are these books being read subjectively or are readers passively taking in the romanticized plots and not taking a look at the world the authors are critiquing?

I believe it is important to read critically and to relate concepts to the larger world. By pairing the film version of *The Hunger Games* with Aldous Huxley’s novel, *Brave New World*, I hope to enable students to do just that. *Brave New World* encompasses themes such as freedom of choice, oppressive government, as well as warning against the overreliance on technology - a wonderful reminder in our consumerist, gadget loving society. An important component of my unit of study would be a research essay critiquing one of the companion essays I have listed. This would further force students to question the society we are currently living in, and hopefully enlighten them to the privileges we do share as United States citizens. On the other hand, through the exploration on dystopian-themed literature, I also hope that students will see possible

avenues for improvement in our society, as there is always room for improvement. To manage this, I will have students create individualized, utopia billboards which will highlight key themes and ideas explored in the unit as well as give them an opportunity to show off some creativity. Perhaps in one of the student's self-created utopias, he or she will say there ought to be more funding for the arts in public schools!

Launching the Unit:

- I will hand out copies of the lyrics to John Lennon's song "Imagine" to accompany Pablo Stanley's artist rendition of the song on youtube.com. This will be the first handout to go in each student's folder entitled, "Utopia/Dystopia: Unit of Study." All sustained silent writings, SSW's, will be kept in this folder and will be collected at the end of every week's class period for feedback over the weekend.

-John Lennon- "Imagine" by Pablo Stanley

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsLWpBBw3WI>

On a separate piece of paper the student will start the first SSW answering the following three questions.

- While listening to "Imagine" write down how you feel about the message that is portrayed.
- Do you agree peace can be found with the abolishment of religion, nationality, and social class? Why or why not?
- Write out a couple sentences detailing 2-3 important concepts you would aim for if you could devise your own utopia. We will add to this periodically as we expand on the unit.

The Hunger Games (film):

- To ease into the reading of *Brave New World*, which should be read within two weeks, we will watch *The Hunger Games*. The following instructions will be given to the class.

- Answer the following questions in SSW 2 while you watch *The Hunger Games*. You will need to have written at least a page of notes at the end of the film. The final two questions will need to be explored within the in-class essay. You can use these notes as a reference for writing the essay, and to help you focus on specific details when comparing and contrasting *The Hunger Games* with *Brave New World*. (The first four questions are taken from this website, <http://www.kirkpca.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/The-Hunger-Games-Discussion-Questions.pdf>, which explores the film, *The Hunger Games*, instead of the novel in depth and would be a good resource for other questions exploring the film's themes.)

1. "To get sponsors, you have to make people like you," is a quote by Haymitch. How does *The Hunger Games* reflect our obsession with image? How does it show the way an image can be manipulated? In a popularity-driven, media-saturated society, can we be sure how 'real' any of our behavior actually is?
2. The Game-makers control the action in the arena, in order to get particular responses from the audience. How are writers and filmmakers able to influence our thoughts and feelings? How can we make sure we aren't being controlled by what we read and watch?
3. What makes reality television so popular? If you watch any reality shows, what is compelling about them, and what effect do they have on you? Why is watching 'real' people different to watching scripted drama, even when we know that events in reality

shows are often staged? (Keep this in mind when reading about the documentary *feely* in *Brave New World*.)

4. “Why do we have a winner? Hope. It’s the only thing stronger than fear,” is a quote by President Snow (Donald Sutherland). How do those in power use the Games to control the population, and why is it important that one tribute survives? Are we too easily satisfied by the kinds of ‘hope’ offered to us in the media and by our culture? What is our only true hope?
5. As a nation, does the United States have more similarities with the Capital’s citizens or the districts’ citizens? Explain your answer.
6. While reading *Brave New World*, ponder how the people in Huxley’s futuristic London are similar to the Capital’s citizens. Similarly, how are some of the characters from the Districts like those from the Reservation in *Brave New World*?

“The Lottery” By Shirley Jackson:

- For access to the short story follow this link: <http://www.gs.cidsnet.de/englisch-online/originals/lottery.htm>. Printed copies will be handed out to the students to be stored in their folders.
- We will read this short story during class. I will assign portions of the text to individual students in an attempt to bring the text alive. My goal is also to give everyone a chance to read out loud.
- As a class, we will answer the following eleven questions, found from the following teaching website <http://www.learner.org/workshops/conversations/conversation/support/lottery.pdf>, and

then complete the second half as a SSW prompt. Answers to these questions should be written down and stored in our Unit of Study folder.

1. Why do you think so much time is spent describing the black box?
2. What do you think the purpose of the lottery is in the village?
3. Why do you think people continue to participate in it?
4. Why do you think the lottery is such a long-standing tradition in the village?
5. Does this compare to anything you know in real life? Explain. How do you think the village people feel about the lottery? Explain and cite at least one quote to support your assertion.
6. What would you have done in Tessie Hutchinson's situation? Explain.
7. How did you feel about the lottery at the end of the story? What was your reaction?
8. Do you think this sort of lottery could take place in your own community? Why or why not?
9. Are there any events that have occurred in your community that remind you of the events in "The Lottery?"
10. How did your initial understanding of the term "lottery" compare to the lottery in the story?
How did your initial understandings help or confuse your interpretation of the story?
11. Do you think this story has a message for readers? Explain your view.

- SSW Prompt for "The Lottery" - aim for a full page of writing

- How is the lottery similar to the reaping in *The Hunger Games*? Why do children partake in both the lottery and the reaping? In other words, how does including children in violent acts help subdue them and maintain 'tradition?' How might the black box in "The Lottery" be a symbol of the deteriorating tradition of both the lottery and the reaping?

- Other possible short stories to explore as well in this unit are “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut and “There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury.

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley:

- This whole unit of study will probably take about four to five weeks to complete. In between reading at least two novels, the canonical text and an accompanying novel, the research for the researched paper, an in-class essay, at least one SSW per week, and a final oral project/presentation, there will also be grammatical lessons dispersed throughout the unit. These lessons will include, but are not limited to, vocabulary tests, parts of speech lessons, correct MLA formatting and research methods, and incorporating quotes into essays.
- Questions pertaining to *Brave New World* were taken from the following website:
<http://lessonplanspage.com/lassbravenewworldstudyguide11-hm/>. The questions are broken up in chapter sections, which will enable a closer reading of different parts of the texts. The questions should be answered in complete sentences and stored in our folders. I recommend answering the questions individually and then breaking off into groups for collaboration, and then eventual full-class discussion. These answers will serve as essay topics for both the in-class essay and for reference on other projects.
- Questions for Chapters 1-5 (The answers to these questions should be in paragraph form. Each question should be answered with at least three complete sentences.)
 - 1 Explain and analyze the caste system: how it is achieved and what are its uses and benefits to this society? Cite any contemporary parallels in our society.
 - 2 Explain and analyze the significance of consumerism in this culture. Cite any contemporary parallels in our society.

- 3 Explain how morality and values are instilled and controlled in this population.
Cite any contemporary parallels in our society.
- 4 Analyze the dramatic effect of Huxley's use in Chapter 3 of interfacing fragments of dialogue, independent of setting or explanation, from varying scenes. What is the main idea being conveyed through this cacophony?
- 5 How are natural instincts/human nature regulated in this society? Cite any contemporary parallels in our society.

- Questions for Chapters 6-10

- 1 Explain and analyze how (and why) Bernard Marx is so different from his fellows.
- 2 Explain and analyze the role of individualism in this society.
- 3 Explain and analyze Linda's experience on the reservation. Although raised by Linda, a product of "civilization," John has taken on the characteristics of a "savage." Explain and analyze why this is so, and analyze these characteristics that make John "uncivilized."

- Chapters 10-15

- 1 Explain the irony contained in the scene in Chapter 10.
- 2 Explain and analyze the choice that Linda makes when she returns to civilization. How does her choice benefit this society? Are today's medical advances to prolong the lives of terminally ill patients, as well as assisted suicide, parallels to the path Linda chooses? Explain.

3 Compare and contrast Helmholtz Watson to Bernard Marx (you may need to look at Helmholtz's introduction in Chapter 4 as well). Explain and analyze the disturbance that his original rhyme creates (Chapter 12).

4 Based on what you know about John, explain his reaction to Lenina in Chapter 13, and his reaction to Linda's fate in Chapter 14.

- Chapters 15-18

1 Describe Mustapha Mond and explain why, given his knowledge and instincts, he chose the path he has taken.

2 At the end of Chapter 15, Mond explains how and why this society came into being. Do you agree or disagree with his assessment? Explain your position and how Mond's conclusions apply to our contemporary society.

3 In Chapter 17, God and humankind and their relationship to one another are discussed. Explain John's and Mond's positions and provide your opinion(s) on this topic.

4 Explain and analyze what happens to John at the end of the novel. Compare and contrast the choices he makes in Chapter 18 to the choice his mother Linda makes on her return to civilization.

Essay Writing Goals:

- In-class essay comparing and contrasting *The Hunger Games* and *Brave New World*.

- Researched essay comparing one of the companion novels with issues the youth faces today or in the past century. I will include possible directions for this research at the end of the listed companion novel's synopsis.

- Oral project/presentation: Students will need to design a billboard depicting their ideal utopia. I will want students to follow their artistic strengths with this project. Possible ideas will be a composed song like John Lennon's "Imagine," a poem (rhyme or free-verse), mini-graphic novels (these can be computer generated as well), or an infomercial. The billboard must include a printed copy of the student's proposed method for "selling" his/her utopia as well as bulleted points (with complete sentences) explaining why the utopia would be a better place than where we are currently living. I will want at least four issues that are brought up in the dystopian literature we have been reading addressed like how to keep a population as a whole happy, surveillance and freedom of speech/press, religion, weapon control, or crime and punishment.

Expanding the Unit (Companion Novels):

- a. *Matched*, by Ally Condie. According to Amazon.com, "Cassia has always trusted the Society to make the right choices for her: what to read, what to watch, what to believe. So when Xander's face appears on-screen at her Matching ceremony, Cassia knows he is her ideal mate . . . until she sees Ky Markham's face flash for an instant before the screen fades to black. The Society tells her it's a glitch, a rare malfunction, and that she should focus on the happy life she's destined to lead with Xander. But Cassia can't stop thinking about Ky, and as they slowly fall in love, Cassia begins to doubt the Society's infallibility and is faced with an impossible choice: between Xander and Ky, between the only life she's known and a path that no one else has dared to follow." A possible research topic to pair with this novel could be on arranged marriages.
- b. *1984*, by George Orwell. According to Amazon.com, "*1984* presents a startling and haunting vision of the world, so powerful that it is completely convincing from start to finish. No one can deny the power of this novel, its hold on the imaginations of multiple generations of

readers, or the resiliency of its admonitions—a legacy that seems only to grow with the passage of time.” A couple research topics to pair with this novel could be a comparison with the USA Patriot Act President George W. Bush passed on October of 2001 or a comparison of surveillance conducted in the United States today with the surveillance in *1984*.

c. *The House of the Scorpion*, by Nancy Farmer. According to Amazon.com, “Matteo Alacrán was not born; he was harvested. His DNA came from El Patrón, lord of a country called Opium--a strip of poppy fields lying between the United States and what was once called Mexico. Matt's first cell split and divided inside a petri dish. Then he was placed in the womb of a cow, where he continued the miraculous journey from embryo to fetus to baby. He is a boy now, but most consider him a monster--except for El Patrón. El Patrón loves Matt as he loves himself, because Matt is himself.” Explore the theme of cloning with research on the issue.

d. *Feed*, by M.T.Anderson. According to Amazon.com, “For Titus and his friends, it started out like any ordinary trip to the moon - a chance to party during spring break and play with some stupid low-grav at the Ricochet Lounge. But that was before the crazy hacker caused all their feeds to malfunction, sending them to the hospital to lie around with nothing inside their heads for days. And it was before Titus met Violet, a beautiful, brainy teenage girl who has decided to fight the feed and its omnipresent ability to categorize human thoughts and desires.”

Research topics exploring our overreliance on the internet and the effects it is having on our civilization in comparison to the novel, *Feed*.

- I will also be open to other Young Adult novels for the student’s companion novel if the student gives me a good written pitch summarizing the proposed novel along with a research topic, so I can see how the student plans to relate themes found in the book to the wider world.

I want to allow my students to embrace their strengths if they are confident in their own abilities.

Works Cited

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<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsLWpBBw3WI>>.

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Unit of Study: Dystopias



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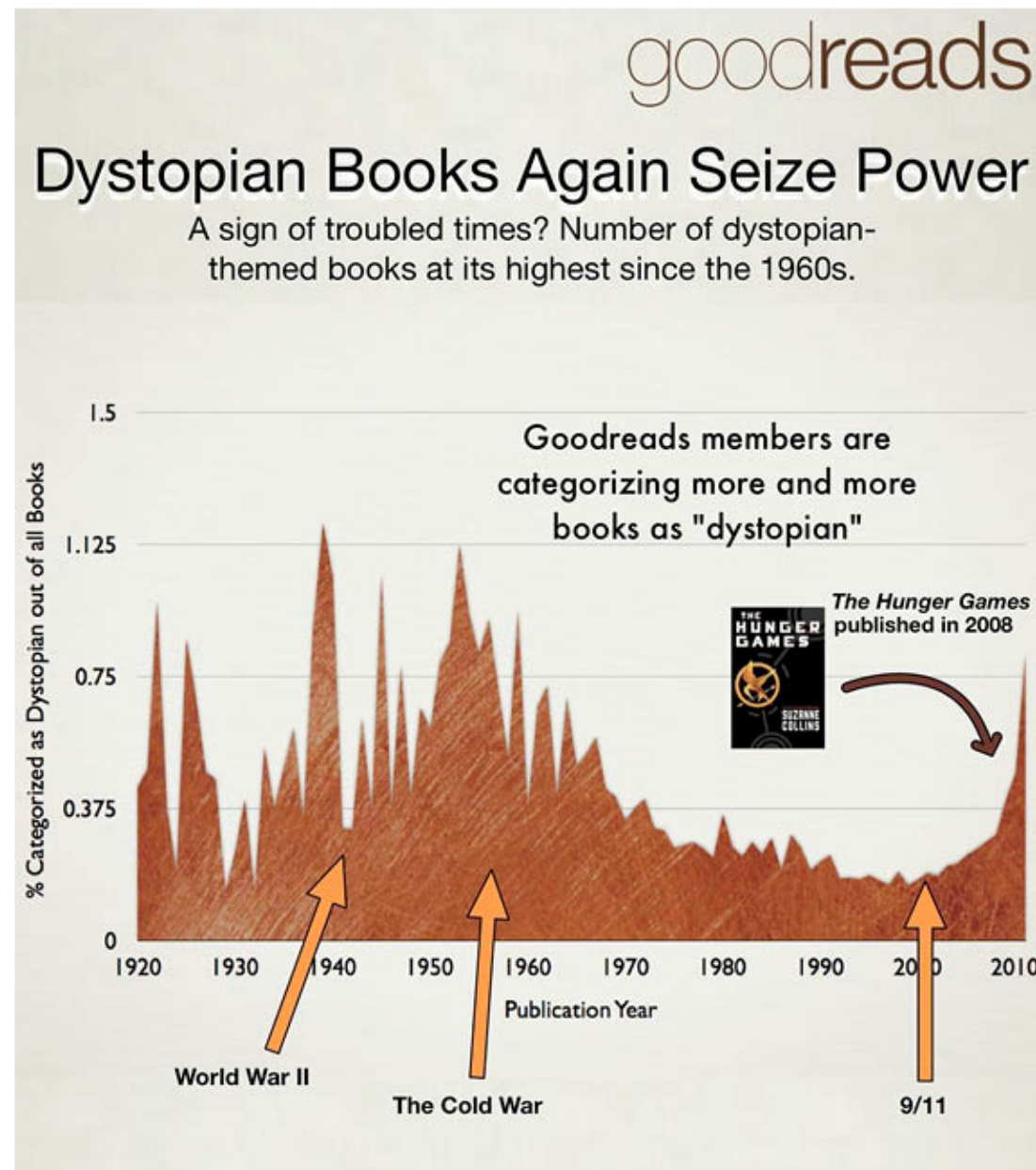
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Why Dystopia? Literature

*the following three slides are from www.goodreads.com



A Guide to Dystopian Literature

The dystopian novel is as popular as it's been in 50 years. What's changed?

The latest crop of books to tackle the subject add a dash of romance to their troubled worlds. Here's a guide to the history of this fascinating genre.

1930s-1960s: Fear of the State

Inspirations: World War II, communism, fascism

Dystopic Traits: Controlling governments, loss of freedoms

Gender Split: Men tend to rate these books higher than women

A Handy Key

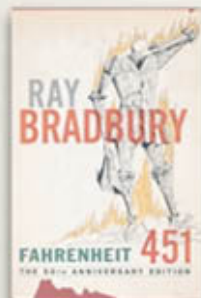
-  Lack of freedom/choice
-  Biological/reproductive Issues
-  Oppressive government
-  Which gender likes it more
-  Post-apocalypse
-  Romance



Brave New World
Aldous Huxley
1932



1984
George Orwell
1949



Fahrenheit 451
Ray Bradbury
1950



A Clockwork Orange
Anthony Burgess
1962



A Second Wave: Anxiety About the Body

Inspirations: Environmental crises, the Cold War, identity politics

Dystopic Traits: Still a distrust of the state, increased anxiety about the human body

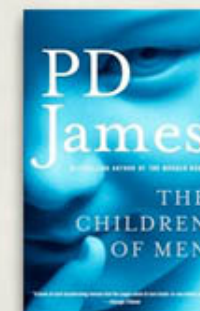
Gender Split: Women and men both rate these books highly



The Handmaid's Tale
Margaret Atwood
1985



V for Vendetta
Alan Moore & David Lloyd
1988



The Children of Men
P.D. James
1992



Never Let Me Go
Kazuo Ishiguro
2005

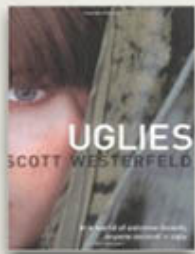


The Young Adult Explosion: Romance!

Inspirations: The vapidness of pop culture, 9/11, the War on Terror

Dystopic Traits: Romance, tough heroines, anti-conformist, written for a teen audience

Gender Split: Women rate these books more highly than men



Uglies
Scott Westerfeld
2005



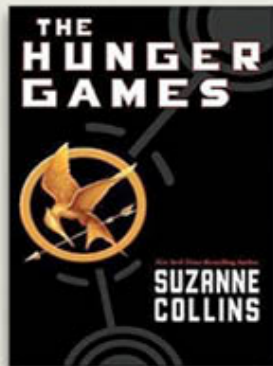
Matched
Ally Condie
2010



Delirium
Lauren Oliver
2011

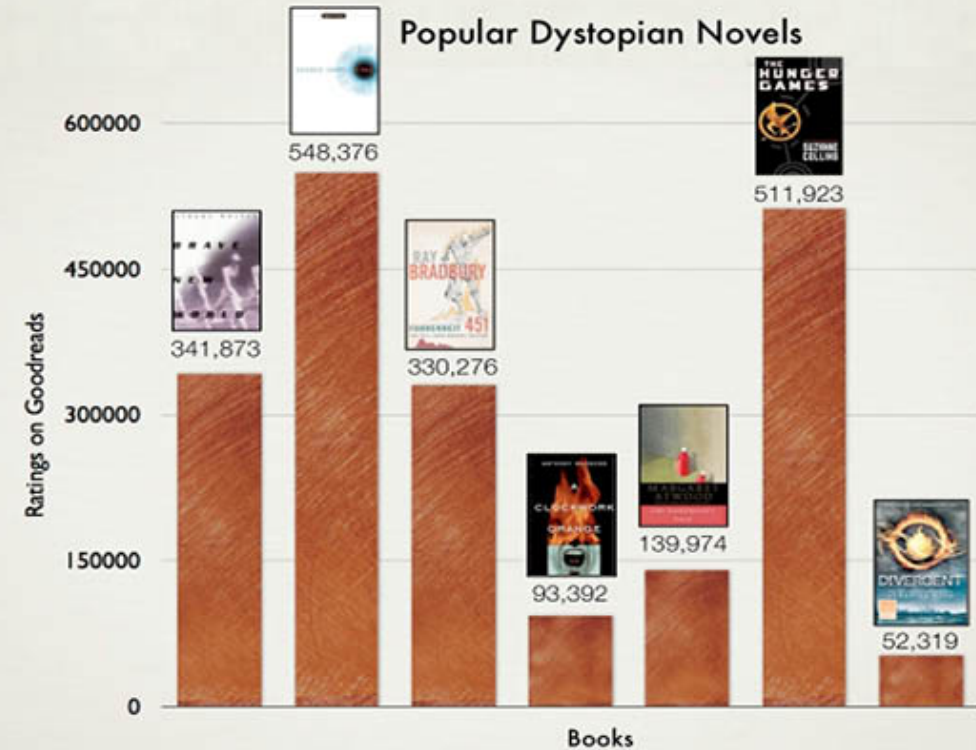


Divergent
Veronica Roth
2011



The Hunger Games: The Most-Popular Dystopian Novel Ever?

The standard-bearer for this latest crop of dystopian fiction incorporates many common dystopian themes, such as a strong heroine and a post-apocalyptic setting. Will it eventually overtake George Orwell's *1984* as the most popular dystopian novel on Goodreads?



What Will Be the Next
POPULAR TREND
in Dystopian Literature ?

Robotics?
Climate Change?
Insect Overlords?

goodreads

Launching the Unit

- * <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsLWpBBw3WI>
- * While listening to “Imagine” by John Lennon write down how you feel about the message that is portrayed.
- * Do you agree peace can be found with the abolishment of religion, nationality, and social class? Why or why not?
- * Write out a couple sentences detailing 2-3 important concepts you would aim for if you could devise your own utopia. We will add to this periodically as we expand on the unit.

The Hunger Games (film)

- * Answer the following questions while you watch *The Hunger Games*. You will need to have written at least a page of notes at the end of the film. The final two questions will need to be explored in the in-class essay. You can use these notes as a reference for writing the essay and to help focus when comparing and contrasting *The Hunger Games* with *Brave New World*.




image from

www.imbd.com

* (the following four questions are from www.kirkpca.org because I felt they were worded perfectly)

- * “To get sponsors, you have to make people like you,” is a quote by Haymitch. How does *The Hunger Games* reflect our obsession with image, and show the way that it can be manipulated? In a popularity- driven, media-saturated society, can we be sure how ‘real’ any of our behavior actually is?
- * The Games-makers control the action in the arena, in order to get particular responses from the audience. How are writers and filmmakers able to influence our thoughts and feelings? How can we make sure we aren’t being controlled by what we read and watch?
- * What makes reality television so popular? If you watch any reality shows, what is compelling about them, and what effect do they have on you? Why is watching ‘real’ people different to watching scripted drama, even when we know that events in reality shows are often staged? (Keep this in mind when reading about the documentary feely in *Brave New World*)
- * “Why do we have a winner? Hope. It’s the only thing stronger than fear,” is a quote by President Snow (Donald Sutherland). How do those in power use the Games to control the population, and why is it important that one tribute survives? Are we too easily satisfied by the kinds of ‘hope’ offered to us in the media and by our culture? What is our only true hope?
- * As a nation, does the United States have more similarities with the Capital’s citizens or the districts’ citizens? Explain your answer.
- * While reading *Brave New World*, ponder how the people in Huxley’s futuristic London are similar to the Capital’s citizens. Similarly, how are some of the characters from the Districts like those from the Reservation in *Brave New World*?



- * “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson

- * <http://www.gs.cidsnet.de/englisch-online/originals/lottery.htm>

- * We will read this short story in class. I will assign portions of the text to individual students in an attempt to bring the text alive. My goal is also to give everyone a chance to read out loud.

- * As a class, we will answer the following eleven questions and then complete the the second half as a SSW prompt.

- 3. Why do you think people continue to participate in it?
- 4. Why do you think the lottery is such a long-standing tradition in the village?
- 5. Does this compare to anything you know in real life? Explain. How do you think the village people feel about the lottery? Explain.
- 6. What would you have done in Tessie Hutchinson's situation? Explain.
- 7. How did you feel about the lottery at the end of the story? What was your reaction?
- 8. Do you think this sort of lottery could take place in your own community? Why or why not?
- 9. Are there any events that have occurred in your community that remind you of the events in "The Lottery?"
- 10. How did your initial understanding of the term "lottery" compare to the lottery in the story? How did your initial understandings help or confuse your interpretation of the story?
- 11. Do you think this story has a message for readers? Explain your view.

- * In-class essay comparing and contrasting *The Hunger Games* and *Brave New World*

Essay Writing Goals

- * Researched essay comparing one of the companion novels with issues the youth faces today or in the past century. I will include possible directions for this research at the end of the listed companion novel's synopsis.
- * Oral project: Students will need to design a billboard depicting their ideal utopia. I will want students to follow their artistic strengths with this project. Possible ideas will be a composed song like John Lennon's "Imagine," a poem (rhyme or free-verse), mini-graphic novels (these can be computer generated as well), or an infomercial. The billboard must include a printed copy of the student's proposed method for "selling" his/her utopia as well as bulleted points (with complete sentences) explaining why the utopia would be a better place than how we are currently living. I will want at least four issues that are