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English 112B

17 May 2011

Unit of Study: Dystopias
The Abuse of Governmental Power

Introduction: Why teach works from the dystopian genre?

The dystopian genre is a very important class of literary works in which characters are living within various future scenarios in which they are robbed, in some way, of free will through governmental abuse of power. Everyone should, at some point in their lives, be exposed to such a work in order to broaden their views on the particular societies in which they live, as well as those societies that could very well exist at some point in the future. Young adults, especially teenagers, need to be presented with the idea of a society in which they have no ability to make personal choices. Many young adults often take what freedoms they have for granted, assuming it will always be theirs for the using. By exposing a high school classroom to a work, or works, of the dystopian genre, one is opening the door for them to think freely about their own futures and the role that the ever-growing governmental power will play in them, as well as how much they are willing to give in order to preserve their rights to freedom.

Specifically, I chose to launch a unit of study on the dystopian genre because this classification has always intrigued me. The idea of looking through a window into a world so drastically different from my own is fascinating. I also think that, given the political climate of today's world, these kinds of dystopian societies may not be as far off as some people would like to believe. The prevalence this genre has in the world of today is astonishing. Many of the dystopian works demonstrate the helplessness and desperation felt by those who have been robbed of all types of freedom, an important and powerful piece of the genre to recognize. By

introducing this genre to my high school students, I hope to inspire them to recognize and appreciate what democratic power they have in the United States, as well as provide my students with the inclination to resist and/or rebel against the abuse of governmental power if the need arises.

Launching the Unit

I have two different ideas on how to introduce this unit. The first one focuses specifically on the abuse of government power and its prevalence in the world of today. Below is a quote from an adult fiction novel by David Baldacci entitled *Deliver Us From Evil* I am currently reading that corresponds beautifully with my unit of study:

These days there are observational cameras everywhere. I'm not talking about people running around with their cell phones snapping away when a celebrity does something stupid and it gets posted online. I mean cameras at ATM sites, along streets, office buildings, courthouses, airports, train stations, and millions of other places...The result is there are literally trillions of bytes of images out there and it ends up on enormous servers...So much of this data is stored centrally at gigantic server complexes around the world. Think of it as massive file cabinets organized by countries, states, cities, towns, suburbs, or divided tactically into government buildings, banks, commercial office properties, even military facilities, and dozens of other subcategories. The images are typically saved for years, or even in perpetuity. It's not like you've got billions of photos stacked somewhere. It's all digital. The storage footprint is relatively small. And you never know when some of this data has value. Let's say there's an image of an employee meeting outside a building with the same person for weeks. It might not mean anything, but two years from now when business secrets are stolen it might very well aid in building a corporate espionage case against that employee (Baldacci 378-379).

To begin, I would read this to my class, and follow it by showing them the video clip entitled *1984 is Already Here*. This clip is found on YouTube, and is a recording of a *CNN: The Situation Room* that discusses the controversial installation of over five hundred security surveillance cameras around New York City. After this introduction, I would lead a discussion centering on the following questions:

- a. What problems are highlighted within these materials?
- b. Do you think privacy is being invaded due to public video surveillance?
- c. Do you think it is the government's right to set up camera systems like this? Why?
- d. Does this make you uncomfortable in any way? Why?

- e. What would your reactions be if San Jose were to set up a system like the one in place in New York City?
- f. Current privacy struggle that may be discussed: Body scanners at airports.

After the discussion, I would have them journal about whether or not they think the camera system in New York City is an abuse of government power and why. In this way, I will have introduced one of the major issues present in my centerpiece work through demonstrating the relevance of that issue in today's world.

The second idea I had to launch this unit focuses more on the resisting of abused governmental control rather than the actual problem the abusive control itself. If I used this method, I would start by playing the song entitled "Uprising" by the band MUSE for the class. I would also pass out the lyrics so that the students can follow along as the song plays:

The paranoia is in bloom, the PR
 Transmissions will resume, they'll try to
 Push drugs, keep us all dumb down and hope that
 We will never see the truth around, so come on
 Another promise, another scene, another
 Package not to keep us trapped in greed with all the
 Green belts wrapped around our minds and endless
 Red tape to keep the truth confined, so come on.

They will not force us
 And they will stop degrading us
 And they will not control us
 We will be victorious, so come on.

Interchanging mind control, come let the
 Revolution take its toll, if you could
 Flick a switch and open your third eye, you'd see that
 We should never be afraid to die, so come on
 Rise up and take the power back, it's time that
 The fat cats had a heart attack, you know that
 Their time is coming to an end, we have to
 Unify and watch our flag ascend, so come on.

They will not force us
 They will stop degrading us
 They will not control us
 We will be victorious, so come on.

They will not force us
 They will stop degrading us
 They will not control us
 We will be victorious, so come on (MUSE).

When the song is over, I would have them jot down notes on the following questions and then lead them in a discussion about their responses:

- a. What is your initial reaction to the lyrics? Why?
- b. What do you think the lyrics refer to, specifically?
- c. What do the lyrics demand of people?
- d. How do you think this song is prevalent in the world of today?

In this way, I will have introduced the idea of resisting abusive governmental control, which is also present in my centerpiece work.

Centerpiece Work

For my canonical, centerpiece work I chose *1984* by George Orwell. According to Enotes.com:

1984 is a dystopian novel written by George Orwell, about an oligarchical, collectivist society. Life in the Oceanian province of Airstrip One is a world of perpetual war, pervasive government surveillance, and incessant public mind control. The individual is always subordinated to the state, and it is in part this philosophy, which allows the Party to manipulate and control humanity. Protagonist Winston Smith is a civil servant responsible for perpetuating the Party's propaganda by revising historical records to render the Party omniscient and always correct, yet his meager existence disillusioned him to the point of seeking rebellion against Big Brother, ("1984").

Before beginning to actually read, I would want to acquaint the students with the major issues present in the novel. I would break them into four groups, and give each of the groups one of the following blurbs used as propaganda in *1984*:

“War is Peace” – “Ignorance is Bliss” – “Freedom is Slavery” – “Big Brother is Watching You”

(Orwell). After twenty to thirty minutes of discussion, each group would be required to make a mini-presentation addressing the following:

- a. What do you think the statement means?
- b. How could a statement like this function as government propaganda in a society?

As this work is very complex, especially for young adults, once we began to read I would break the reading assignments into smaller sections, (I am thinking this unit could last up to three weeks with all the young adult resources added in). In order to highlight the themes and messages within the novel, I would have my students write mini-essays on several personal questions throughout their reading of these smaller sections:

- a. *To highlight the relevance of abusive governmental control today*: What situations in the novel remind you of situations in today's world?
- b. *To highlight resistance of abusive governmental control*: What do you consider to be the most poignant and important word, phrase, or quote in the novel? Explain.
- c. *To highlight the utter lack of power and the crippling emotions that go along with this*: How did the end of the novel affect you? Would you chance it if you could? How so?
- d. *For all sections of reading*: What questions or confusions do you have in regards to the novel?

I read this dystopian novel as a sophomore, and think it would really benefit the students if it were taught in conjunction with many young adult resources. As John Bushman says in his article entitled "Dealing with the Abuse of Power in *1984* and *The Chocolate War*," "...because the novel [*1984*] focuses primarily on adults in an environment detached from the world of today's teenagers, bridging the gap with an effective young adult novel would provide a chance for greater success [in learning]" (Bushman 215). This novel is quite complex, and as Bushman states, really focuses on characters living within the world of adults. I would expand this unit using several different young adult resources in the hopes that it would make the novel, on the whole, easier to grasp.

Expanding the Unit

One of the ways in which I would expand my dystopian unit is by using young adult resources would be to make use of poetry to exemplify various themes within *1984*. One example would be William Wordsworth's poem, "The Tables Turned":

UP! Up! My Friend, and quit your books;
 Or surely you'll grow double:
 Up! Up! My Friend, and clear your looks;
 Why all this toil and trouble?
 The sun, above the mountain's head,
 A freshening lustre mellow
 Through all the long green fields has spread,
 His first sweet evening yellow.
 Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
 Come, hear the woodland linnet,
 How sweet his music! on my life,
 There's more of wisdom in it.
 And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
 He, too, is no mean preacher:
 Come forth into the light of things,
 Let Nature be your teacher.
 She has a world of ready wealth,
 Our minds and hearts to bless--
 Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
 Truth breathed by cheerfulness.
 One impulse from a vernal wood
 May teach you more of man,
 Of moral evil and of good,
 Than all the sages can.
 Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
 Our meddling intellect
 Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:--
 We murder to dissect.
 Enough of Science and of Art;
 Close up those barren leaves;
 Come forth, and bring with you a heart
 That watches and receives (Wordsworth).

I would use this poem as a way to expand upon the novel's theme of deviating from the norm in search of ways to better oneself. The main character in *1984*, Winston, does this in the novel. I would follow this poem with a short-answer sheet asking:

- a. What does this poem advocate?
- b. What is this poem asking the reader to do?
- c. In what ways can a person learn more from "one impulse from a vernal wood" than from all the sages of the world? (i.e. How can nature teach us things?)
- d. In what ways does Winston "Up! Up!...and quit your books!"
- e. What does Wordsworth mean when he says "We murder to dissect"? In what ways does this exemplify abusive power?

This is merely one example of a theme from my centerpiece work exemplified through poetry. There are many more resources to make use of in this way, as there are plenty of controversial themes within the canonical work.

Another way I would make use of young adult resources is through the accompanying of *1984* with the reading of a young adult dystopian novel. There are many to choose from. The website <http://www.bartsbookshelf.co.uk/2009/09/30/update-best-dystopian-ya-novels-redux/> lists over fifty dystopian novels for young adults. Among them are the following that I selected on the basis that I have read and enjoyed them:

- a. *Matched*, by Ally Condie. According to Enotes.com: “Cassie has never doubted the choices of the Society, which decides what she eats, whom she'll love, where she'll work, and even when she'll die. She's thrilled to learn she's to marry Xander, her best friend. But then why does the face of her neighbor, Ky, flash on her Match microcard instead? The Officials tell her it was a rare mistake, but a tiny seed of doubt is planted. And as she grows to love Ky, she begins to see the darker truths of the Society. She embarks with him on a risky, dangerous path -- with the Society watching their every move” (“Matched”).
- b. *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins. According to Enotes.com: “The United States is gone. North America has become Panem, a TV-dominated dictatorship run from a city called the Capitol. The rest of Panem is divided into 12 Districts. The yearly highlight in this nightmare world is the Hunger Games, a bloodthirsty reality TV show in which 24 teenagers chosen by lottery — two from each District — fight each other in a desolate environment called the “arena.” The winner gets a life of ease; the losers get death. The only rule is that you can't eat the dead contestants. Katniss Everdeen, a resident of District 12, lives in a desperately poor mining community called the Seam. When her little sister's name is chosen as one of the contestants in the upcoming Hunger Games, Katniss volunteers to take her place, despite the fact that District 12 hasn't produced a Hunger Games winner in 30 years” (“The Hunger Games”).
- c. *Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley. According to Enotes.com: “The novel is set in A.F. 632, approximately seven centuries after the twentieth century. A.F. stands for the year of Ford, named for the great industrialist Henry Ford who refined mass production techniques for automobiles. World Controllers rule the world and ensure the stability of society through the creation of a five-tiered caste system. Alphas and Betas are at the top of the system and act as the scientists, politicians, and other top minds, while Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons are at the bottom and represent the world's industrial working class. A drug called soma ensures that no one ever feels

- pain or remains unhappy, and members of every caste receive rations of the drug. Pre- and post-natal conditioning further ensures social stability” (“Brave New World”).
- d. *The Chocolate War*, by Robert Cormier. According to Entoes.com, “When high school teen Jerry Renault refuses to sell chocolate during his school fundraiser, his decision kicks off a stream of events that cause the school to unravel. Is he a hero or a scapegoat? The school divides on the subject. The book has some terrifying characters including a vicious student and the corrupt temporary headmaster who controls the school, targeting freshman Jerry Renault when he quietly resists them. With the whole school against him, Jerry stands alone. The book raises deep questions of good, evil, independence, and compliance” (“The Chocolate War”).
 - e. *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury. According to Enotes.com, “Set in the 24th century, this novel tells the story of the protagonist, Guy Montag. At first, Montag takes pleasure in his profession as a fireman, burning illegally owned books and the homes of their owners. However, Montag soon begins to question the value of his profession and, in turn, his life. Throughout the novel Montag struggles with his existence, eventually fleeing his oppressive, censored society and joining an underground network of intellectuals. With his newfound friends, Montag witnesses the atomic destruction of his former city and dedicates himself to rebuilding a literate and cultural society” (“Fahrenheit 451”).
 - f. *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry. According to Enotes.com, “Meet Jonas, an eleven-year-old boy who lives in a rigidly controlled society some time in the future. In his ‘community,’ there is no suffering, hunger, war, and, as you will soon see, no color, sex, music, or love. Everything is controlled by “the Elders,” right down to who you will marry, who you receive as children, and what you will be “assigned” as a job. Individual identity has gone the way of cassette tapes, and everyone is essentially just like everyone else. It seems that no one has really left the area, except to visit other neighboring communities. To get “released” is a big deal. It only happens to sick infants or really old people, or to people who break the rules. In short...this world is a lame place to hang out” (“The Giver”).

As a way to compliment this unit, I would have each student sign up for one of the previous six young adult novels that each contains many of the same themes of *1984*. All contain the theme of the problems that arise from abusive governmental control. This young adult novel would be their “Outside Reading” book for the month. The students reading the same novel will then form a group. The only discussion on these novels that will take place in class will be in the group meetings that I will have the students do once a week. I will create reading schedules that correspond to these group meetings so that all students have read to a

certain point in their outside novel before meeting with their peers. At the end of each group session, I will have each group turn in a short summary of what they discussed about their outside reading novel, (for classwork points).

As a way to tie these resources in with the unit as a whole, their final project for the unit will have to do in part with the centerpiece work, in part with their outside young adult novel.

As a final assignment for this unit, I will have my students write an essay in which they compare their complementary novel to Orwell's *1984*. They can choose their topic, but some suggestions are:

- a. They can choose to compare the effects of abusive power on two particular characters within the novels.
- b. They can choose to compare the ways in which characters resist abusive power in each novel. Are the characters successful or not?
- c. Students can also choose to write about a situation in which they endured abusive power in some way, relating their experiences to those of the characters in their novels. Were there similarities in your situation? Differences? How did you cope with the loss of freedom?

Overall, I expect this unit to last two to three weeks, as we will not only be covering and discussing the novel, but also poetry and other young adult media in conjunction with their outside reading novel that they will use in their final paper for the unit.

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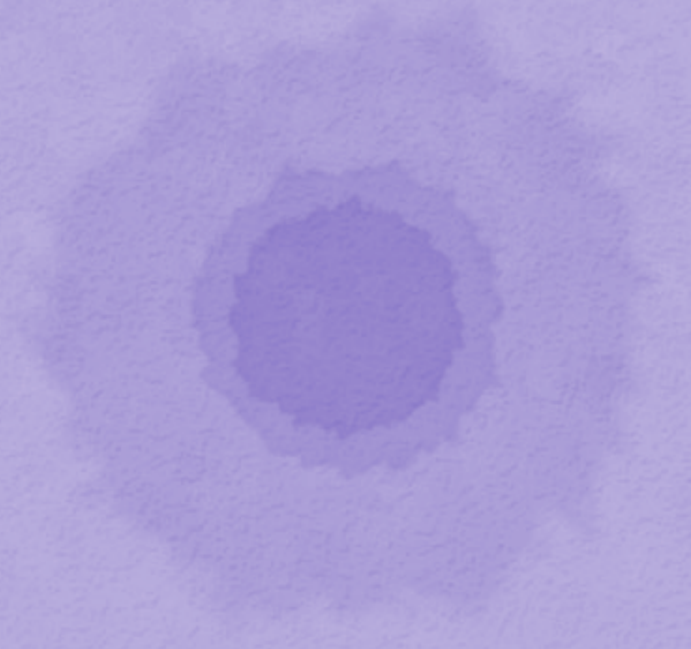
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Unit of Study

Genre: Dystopias

Theme: Abuse of Power, Specifically Governmental

By: Erin Hinshaw, English 112B, Spring 2011

Why Teach About Abuse of Power?

- Important for young adults to be exposed to settings, even fictional ones, in which people are deprived of the ability to choose anything for themselves.
- Demonstrates the helplessness and desperation felt by those who have been robbed of all types of freedom.
- Help students appreciate the democratic power that they have in the U.S., and hopefully inspire them to *take advantage* of said right. (Let's vote, people!)
- Provide students with the inclination to resist and/or rebel against the abuse of governmental power if the need arises.

Launching the Unit

As an introduction to the topics that will be discussed with the novel *1984*, have students watch short video clip **and/or** listen to the song “Uprising” by MUSE. Follow with a discussion regarding the students’ responses to the clip **and/or** song, guiding them towards discussion of the major themes in *1984*.

YouTube Video Clip of CNN: The Situation Room.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gokiHyokAzw&feature=related>



Follow Viewing with Discussion:

- Do you think the government has the right to set up cameras in this way in order to deter criminal or terrorist activity?
- Why or why not?
- Does this make you uncomfortable? In what ways?
- Why or why not?
- How would you feel if the city of San Jose set up cameras like this?

“Uprising” by MUSE

The paranoia is in bloom, the PR
Transmissions will resume, they'll try to
Push drugs, keep us all dumb down and hope that
We will never see the truth around, so come on

Another promise, another scene, another
Package not to keep us trapped in greed with all the
Green belts wrapped around our minds and endless
Red tape to keep the truth confined, so come on

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Interchanging mind control, come let the
Revolution take its toll, if you could
Flick a switch and open your third eye, you'd see that
We should never be afraid to die, so come on

Rise up and take the power back, it's time that
The fat cats had a heart attack, you know that
Their time is coming to an end, we have to
Unify and watch our flag ascend, so come on

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- What is your initial reaction to the lyrics? Why?
- What do you think the lyrics are referring to?
- What do the lyrics demand of people?

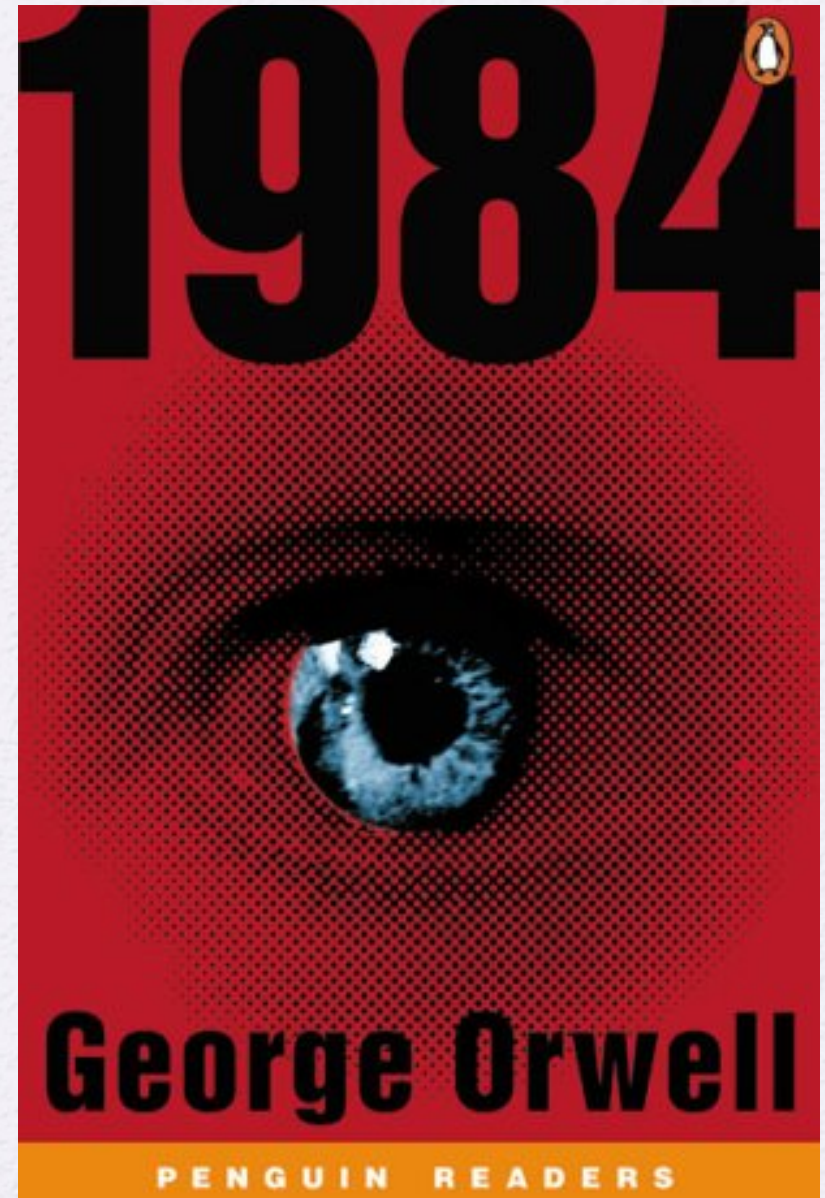


Centerpiece Work

1984

by: George Orwell

1984 is a dystopian novel written by George Orwell, about an oligarchical, collectivist society. Life in the Oceanian province of Airstrip One is a world of perpetual war, pervasive government surveillance, and incessant public mind control. The individual is always subordinated to the state, and it is in part this philosophy which allows the Party to manipulate and control humanity. Protagonist Winston Smith is a civil servant responsible for perpetuating the Party's propaganda by revising historical records to render the Party omniscient and always correct, yet his meager existence disillusioned him to the point of seeking rebellion against Big Brother.



<http://classic-literature.findthebest.com/sites/default/files/655/media/images/1984-book.jpg>

Before having students start to read 1984, break them into four groups and have them give a mini-presentation on their initial thoughts about each of the following statements presented within the dystopian setting of the novel. In this way, students are introduced to the central issues present in the text.

Ignorance is Bliss

War is Peace

Freedom is Slavery

Big Brother is Watching You

Expanding the Unit

Making Use of Young Adult Resources: 6 YA Companion Novels

Each student will choose ONE companion novel that they will read as their “Outside Reading” for the month. The novel will not be discussed in class, but rather used in the final essay as a comparative tool.

Matched

By: Ally Condie

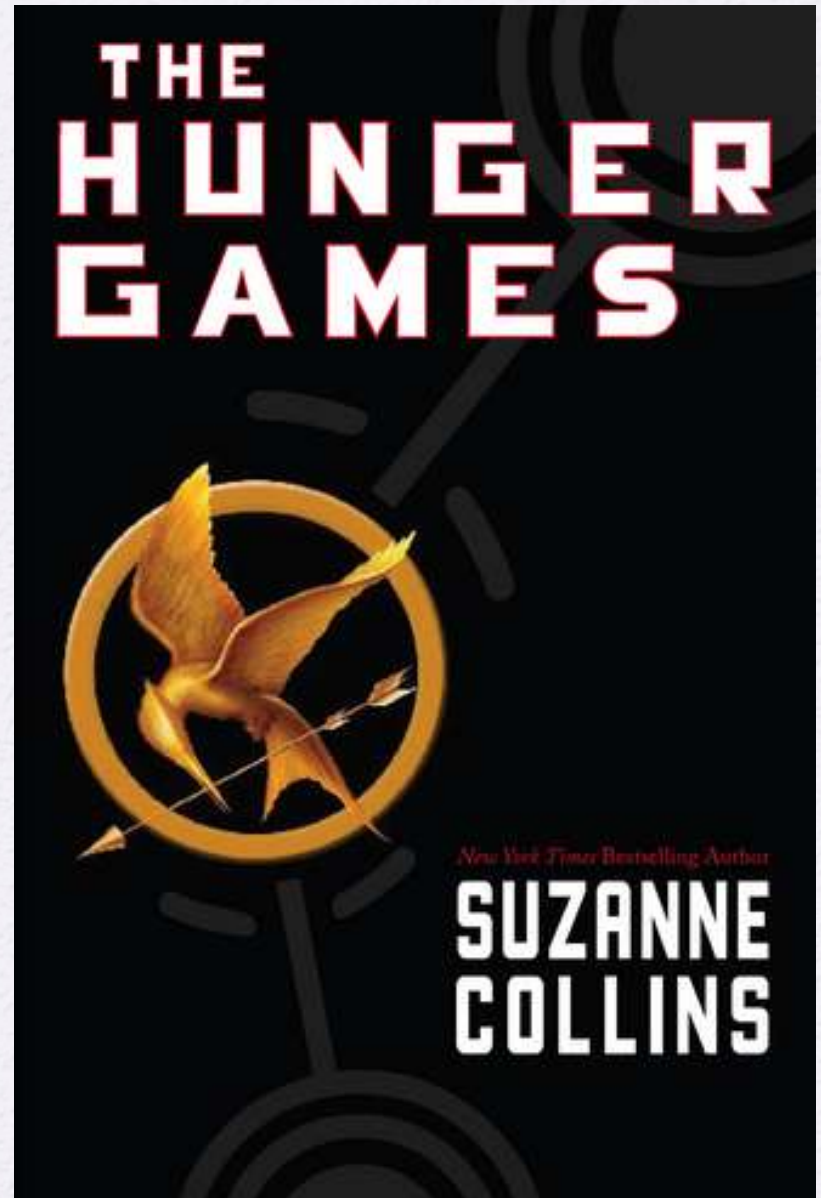
Cassie has never doubted the choices of the Society, which decides what she eats, whom she'll love, where she'll work, and even when she'll die. She's thrilled to learn she's to marry Xander, her best friend. But then why does the face of her neighbor, Ky, flash on her Match microcard instead? The Officials tell her it was a rare mistake, but a tiny seed of doubt is planted. And as she grows to love Ky, she begins to see the darker truths of the Society. She embarks with him on a risky, dangerous path -- with the Society watching their every move.



The Hunger Games

By: Suzanne Collins

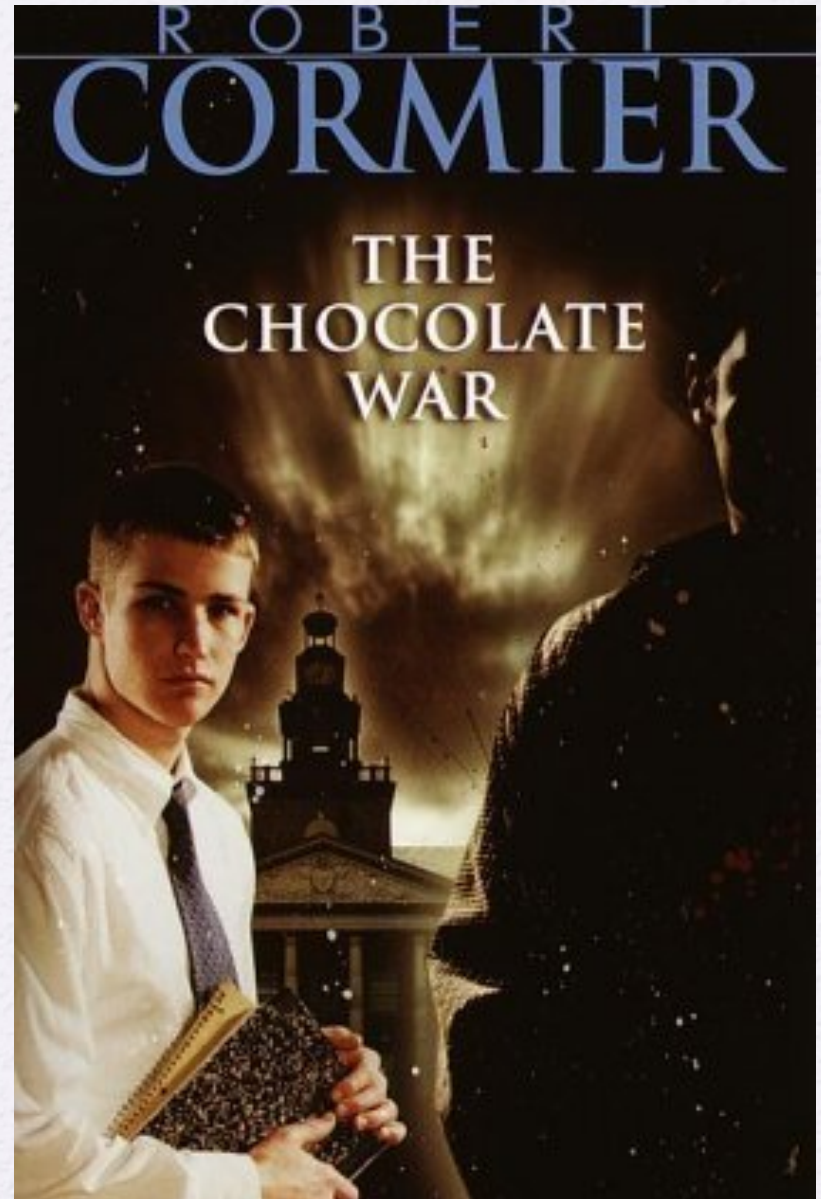
The United States is gone. North America has become Panem, a TV-dominated dictatorship run from a city called the Capitol. The rest of Panem is divided into 12 Districts. The yearly highlight in this nightmare world is the Hunger Games, a bloodthirsty reality TV show in which 24 teenagers chosen by lottery — two from each District — fight each other in a desolate environment called the “arena.” The winner gets a life of ease; the losers get death. The only rule is that you can't eat the dead contestants. Katniss Everdeen, a resident of District 12, lives in a desperately poor mining community called the Seam. When her little sister's name is chosen as one of the contestants in the upcoming Hunger Games, Katniss volunteers to take her place, despite the fact that District 12 hasn't produced a Hunger Games winner in 30 years.



The Chocolate War

By: Robert Cormier

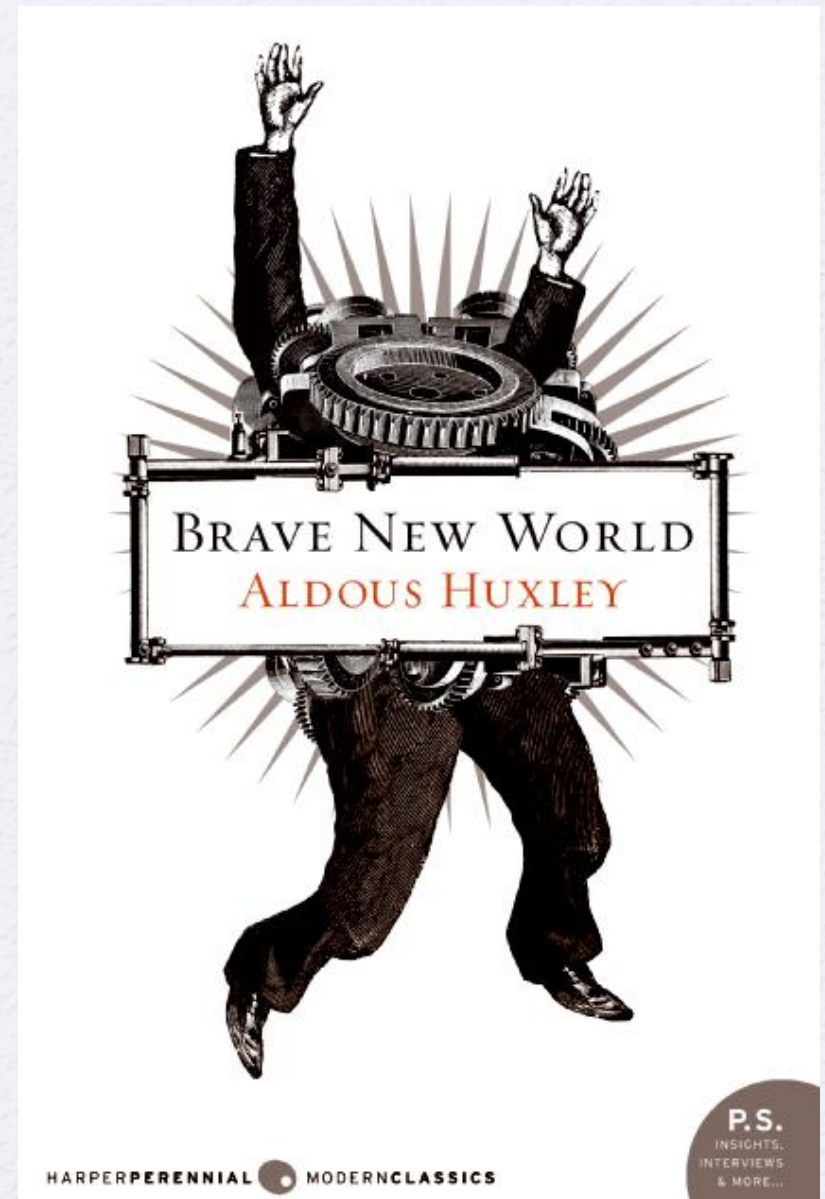
When high school teen Jerry Renault refuses to sell chocolate during his school fundraiser, his decision kicks off a stream of events that cause the school to unravel. Is he a hero or a scapegoat? The school divides on the subject. The book has some terrifying characters including a vicious student and the corrupt temporary headmaster who controls the school, targeting freshman Jerry Renault when he quietly resists them. With the whole school against him, Jerry stands alone. The book raises deep questions of good, evil, independence, and compliance.



Brave New World

By: Aldous Huxley

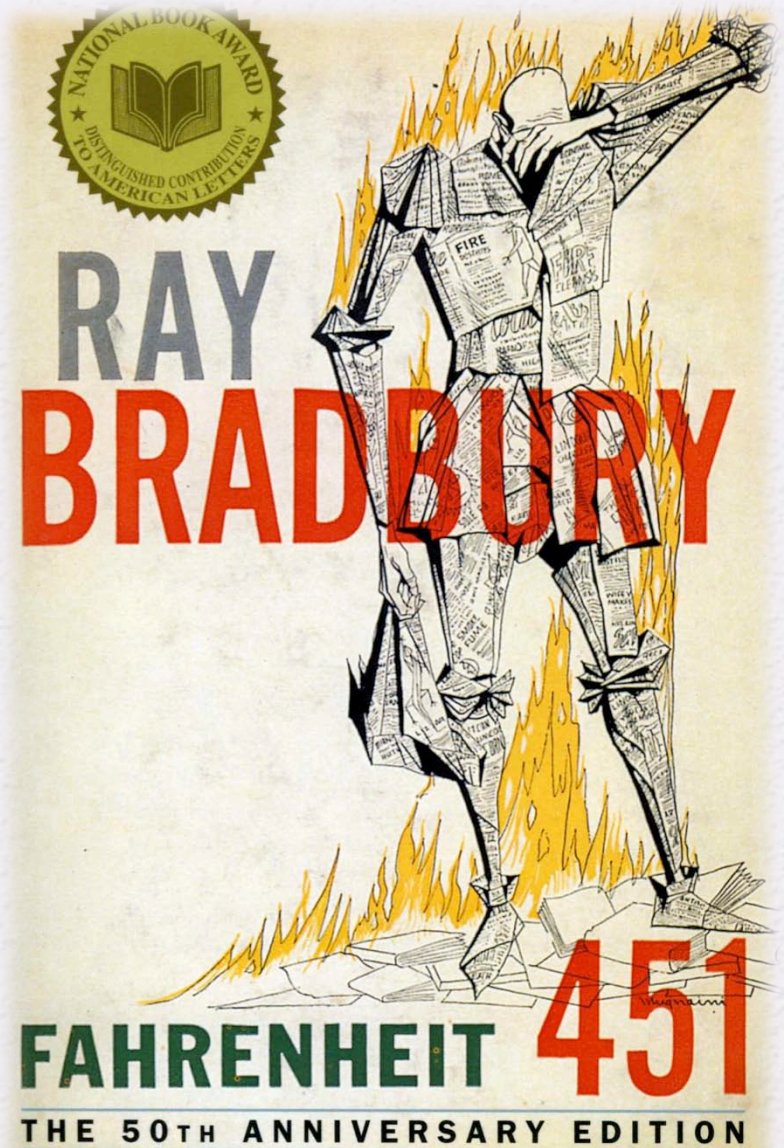
The novel is set in A.F. 632, approximately seven centuries after the twentieth century. A.F. stands for the year of Ford, named for the great industrialist Henry Ford who refined mass production techniques for automobiles. World Controllers rule the world and ensure the stability of society through the creation of a five-tiered caste system. Alphas and Betas are at the top of the system and act as the scientists, politicians, and other top minds, while Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons are at the bottom and represent the world's industrial working class. A drug called soma ensures that no one ever feels pain or remains unhappy, and members of every caste receive rations of the drug. Pre- and post-natal conditioning further ensures social stability.



Fahrenheit 451

By: Ray Bradbury

Set in the 24th century, this novel tells the story of the protagonist, Guy Montag. At first, Montag takes pleasure in his profession as a fireman, burning illegally owned books and the homes of their owners. However, Montag soon begins to question the value of his profession and, in turn, his life. Throughout the novel Montag struggles with his existence, eventually fleeing his oppressive, censored society and joining an underground network of intellectuals. With his newfound friends, Montag witnesses the atomic destruction of his former city and dedicates himself to rebuilding a literate and cultural society.



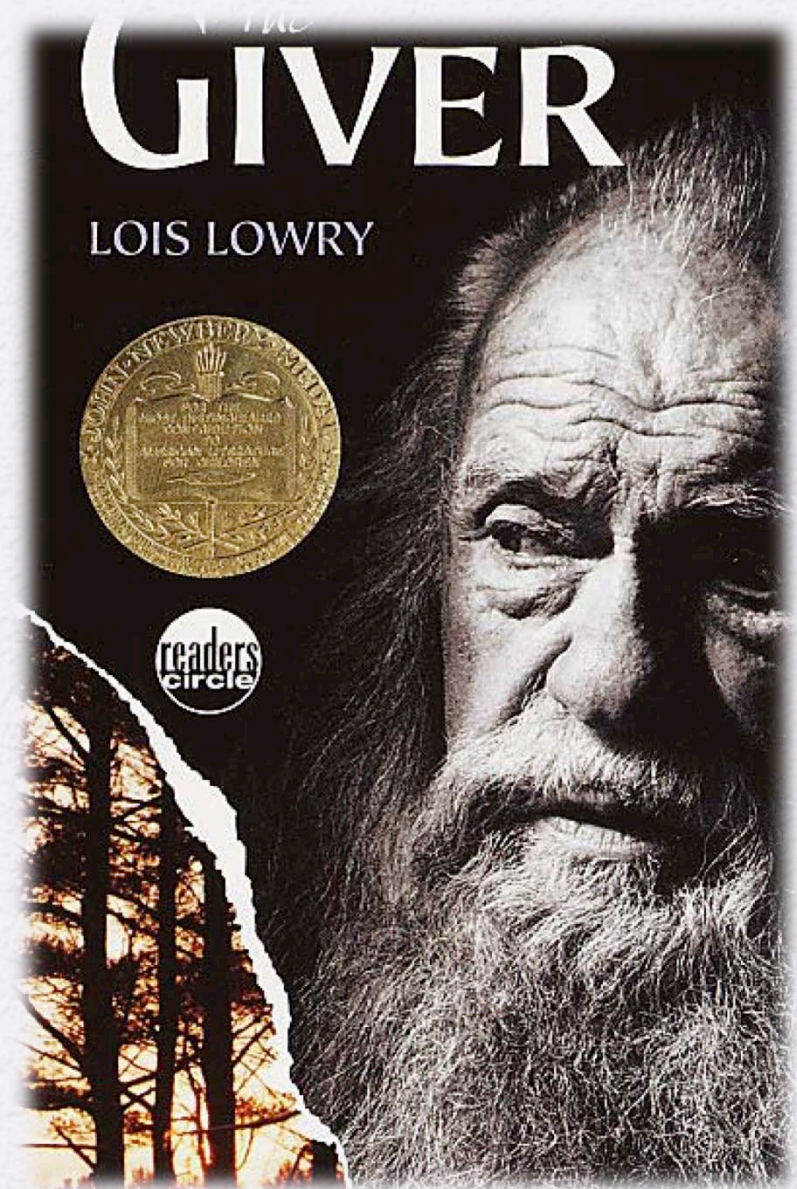
The Giver

By: Lois Lowry

Meet Jonas, an eleven-year-old boy who lives in a rigidly controlled society some time in the future. In his 'community,' there is no suffering, hunger, war, and, as you will soon see, no color, sex, music, or love.

Everything is controlled by "the Elders," right down to who you will marry, who you receive as children, and what you will be "assigned" as a job. Individual identity has gone the way of cassette tapes, and everyone is essentially just like everyone else. It seems that no one has really left the area, except to visit other neighboring communities. To get "released" is a big deal. It only happens to sick infants or really old people, or to people who break the rules.

In short... this world is a lame place to hang out.



<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-2Sx4lhTo94U/TV4fGrb5PkI/AAAAAAAAADro/MoA4jJjmsOQ/s1600/the-giver.jpg>

So Many Resources...

<http://www.bartsbookshelf.co.uk/2009/09/30/update-best-dystopian-ya-novels-redux/>

This is a website that lists over fifty Dystopian Young Adult novels.

To Tie It All In...

- As a final assignment for this unit, have students write an essay in which they compare their complementary novel to Orwell's *1984*. I am flexible with topic choice. However, some ideas:
 - They can choose to compare the effects of abusive power on two particular characters within the novels.
 - They can choose to compare the ways in which characters resist abusive power in each novel. Are the characters successful or not?
 - Students can also choose to write about a situation in which they endured abusive power in some way, relating their experiences to those of the characters in their novels. Were there similarities in your situation? Differences? How did you cope with the loss of freedom?