
UTOPIA / DYSTOPIA

UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS OF UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS; THINKING ABOUT WHY WE TELL DYSTOPIAN STORIES



SIR THOMAS MORE: UTOPIA (1516)

- In More's book, a European character returns from a trip to fictional island called '**Utopia**' and raves about how great it is.
- Utopia's policies were radically different from 16th Europe; it is likely that the book was written as a **critique of contemporary politics**.
- E.g. All religions are tolerated; men *and* women allowed to be priests; everybody does equal work; divorce is permitted.
- From this book we get the word *Utopia*.

Utopia (n): a community or society possessing near-perfect qualities

GROUP ACTIVITY

- In groups, come up with four qualities for a new, utopian society.
- For each quality, make a note of how you would make it work (e.g., if nobody had to go to work, how would you make sure your people could get food and housing?)
- All group members must agree on each element.
- Hold on to your utopia for now...

FROM UTOPIA TO DYSTOPIA

- From the word Utopia, we get its antonym

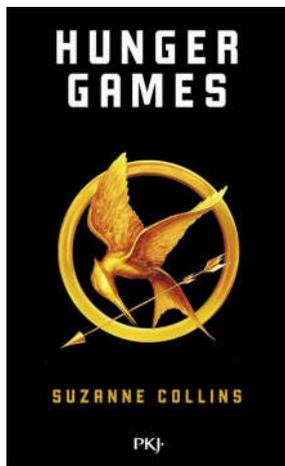
Dystopia (n): an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad; a society characterized by human misery.

Dys ('bad') **topia** ('place')

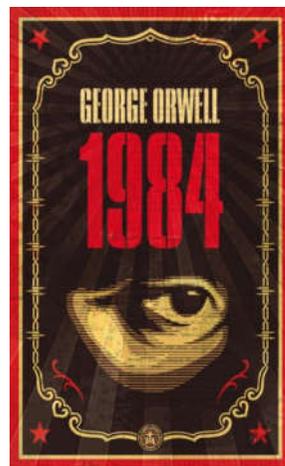
- Dystopias often form in one of two ways:
 1. Society adopts a new policy/technology/system etc. to solve a real-world problem or to make a better society
 2. Some kind of apocalyptic event happens that forces us to change society as we know it to ensure human survival

DYSTOPIAN NOVELS

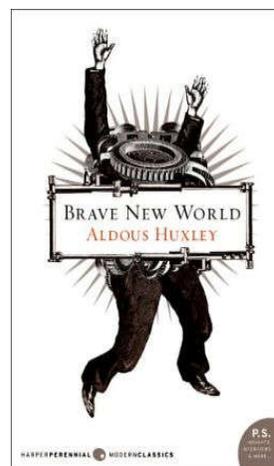
- Have you read any of the following dystopian novels?
Do you know any other examples (including movies and games)?



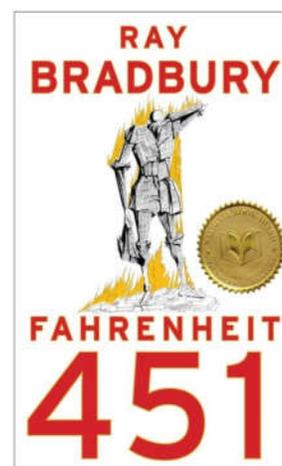
Hunger Games
Suzanne Collins



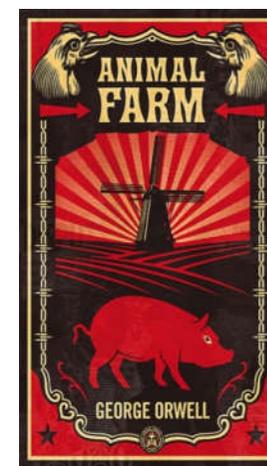
1984
George Orwell



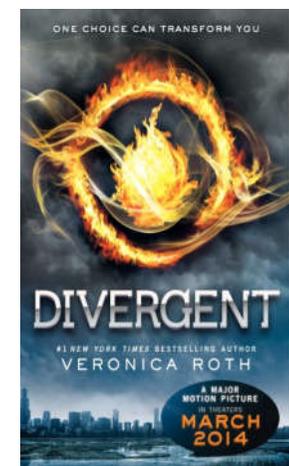
Brave New World
Aldous Huxley



Fahrenheit 451
Ray Bradbury



Animal Farm
George Orwell



Divergent
Veronica Roth



**BRAINSTORM: WHAT ARE THE
CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSTOPIAS?**



CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSTOPIA

1. **Propaganda is used for control:** People live under strict control—of the government, religion, philosophy, a corporation, technology or some other means
2. **The illusion of Utopia:** The “truth” about the world is usually hidden. The society might portray itself as a **utopia**, hiding how dystopian it really is
3. **A common figurehead or idea:** Someone or *something* is at the center of the dystopian society.
4. **Expectations of conformity:** People are expected to conform; individuality is seen as bad.
5. **Fear of the outside world:** People in the dystopia are taught to believe any other place is worse than their own.
6. **Constant surveillance:** Someone always watching; cannot attempt rebellion.
7. **Dehumanization:** Making citizens feel less than human/depriving basic rights to maintain control.

YOUR UTOPIA

- Swap your utopia sheet with another group, and figure out how to make their utopian elements *dystopian* instead.
- How easy was it for your utopia to become a dystopia?
- Can a society ever be perfect?

U ('no') **topia** ('place')

THEMES OF DYSTOPIAN STORIES

Most dystopian stories share common themes:

- The importance of knowledge and truth
- The danger of a particular type of government or policy
- The danger of allowing particular groups to have too much power
- The importance of individuality and free will
- The danger of losing our humanity
- Ideas about freedom vs. safety
- The dangers (and the importance) of human nature

HOMEWORK

- Choose any dystopian story and write at least 2 paragraphs to explain: which dystopian characteristics it features, **and** what real-world issues (either current or historical) it connects to.

