

Delirium:

Introduction to Dystopian Literature

Summary	This lesson introduces students to dystopian literature as a genre: we address common ideas in dystopian literature, imagined ideal societies (utopias), imagined worst societies (dystopias), student-generated ideas on dystopia, and author opinions on dystopia. Students will then link these core ideas to a variety of dystopian book covers, which we will analyze as a class.
Objectives	Students should leave this lesson with a sense of the common themes and ideas in dystopian literature, as well as a few ideas as to why dyslit is so popular right now. They should also begin thinking about themes and symbols and how the two are related. Students should also practice pulling ideas from non-fiction texts (“Dark Materials”) and determining whether or not they agree.
Outcomes Met	<ul style="list-style-type: none">1.1 reinforce or develop new understanding from what others share during a discussion1.2 ask questions for clarification, elaboration, to qualify, or question relevance, accuracy2.1 contribute to small-group and whole class discussions using a variety of strategies for effective talk6.1 go beyond initial response to give more thoughtful interpretations by questioning, connecting, evaluating, and extending6.2 support personal response to the issues, themes, and situations in texts and give personal examples and evidence from text with increasing sophistication
Materials	Chart paper, markers, journals for distribution, poker chips
Pre-Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Photocopy “Dark Materials” articles for distribution<input type="checkbox"/> Prep list of dystopian texts to discuss (if necessary)<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare dystopian book cover slideshow (poker chips if necessary)

Plan

- Warm-Up**
(1.5 classes)
1. Split students into groups with chart paper and markers. Ask them to draw a line down the middle. On one side, have students write “Best.” Explain: *Imagine you’re a space explorer who has discovered a new habitable planet. Because you’ve discovered the planet, you get to decide how to set up your society so that everyone is happy and healthy (please don’t pretend you’re the supreme ruler and everyone needs to grovel at your feet!). What would your society look like? Try to think of descriptive words such as organized or free, with a brief explanation (1-2 sentences) of how that description would manifest in the society.* Briefly model.
 2. Allow class time for students to generate a list. Circulate.
 3. Once all groups have three or four descriptors down, reconvene. Have them share with the class, keeping track of items. Do we see any patterns or are our ideas about an ideal society very different?
 4. Next, ask students to label the other side of their chart “Worst.” Prompt them: *Look at your list of descriptors. If that descriptor (“organized”) is characteristic of the best society, what would the worst society look like (“chaotic”)? Include a brief explanation (1-2 sentences) of how your “Worst” column descriptor would manifest in a society.* Briefly model.
 5. Allow class time for students to translate utopian ideals to dystopian standards. Circulate.
 6. Once the groups have their dystopian lists, reconvene and share. Write down descriptors and see if you can notice any patterns
 7. Explain that students have essentially created *utopian* and *dystopian* societies. Ask each group to create a definition of *utopia* and a definition of *dystopia* based on our findings. Write these definitions on the bottom of each column on chart paper. Post around the room.
 8. Bring up the definition of dystopia from *After*. Give them time to circulate and evaluate the other definitions.
 9. Introduce students to final portfolio and conversation journals (split journal pages; student writes on top, teacher responds below). Ask them to describe their impressions of the idea of dystopias. Do they notice any patterns? Do they disagree with any definitions? Have they read any dystopian literature or seen any dystopian movies? Collect.

- Main Act**
(2 classes)
1. As a class, do a brainstorm of all of the dystopian texts we can think of (movies, television shows, comics, novels, short stories, video games). Ask students to include a one sentence summary and what they think the main theme is. If students are unfamiliar with dyslit or they need to get into the genre more in-depth, break into groups and assign each group a dystopian text to research on smart phones, iPads, or computers. Good texts would be *The Hunger Games series (books)*, *Divergent (book)*, *V for Vendetta (film or comic)*, *Revolution (TV)*, *Bioshock (game)*, and *Dollhouse (TV)*. Reconvene and share. Video clips from YouTube could be very helpful.
 2. Once students have a solid idea of similarities between dystopian texts, have them break into groups to think about why dystopian literature is so popular -- trends don't arise in a vacuum! Ask each group to come up with two reasons they think dystopian literature might be so popular and why it might appeal to each student individually.
 3. After students have generated their two reasons, collect their thoughts and distribute "Dark Materials" texts -- assigning each group a different text. Have groups read through, highlighting and summarizing what their author thinks about dystopian literature; encourage each student to create a concept or idea map.
 4. Jigsaw: Form groups so that each new group has one member from each of the old groups. Have students share what their author thought and discuss. What do they find most believable? How do the authors' reasons compare to their own?
 5. Have students stand up and read key statements from each text and from student-generated reasons as spectrum questions.
- Conclusion**
(0.5 class)
1. Put up a series of dystopian book covers. Have students predict what they think each story will be about, its theme or "big idea," based on the cover and the title. Have students work in groups; discuss ideas as a class.
 2. This can be made into a game: each group starts out with ten red poker chips (guesses) to use throughout; they need to spend a red chip to guess. Any group that's close gets a white chip in return. Each red chip remaining counts as one point; each white chip counts as two. The group with the highest total is declared victorious; the group with the lowest is "exiled to the barren wastelands!" Students may point out that some peers may have read some of the books I'm putting up; explain that, in our dystopian dictatorship, fairness is not a concern. This is just a fun way of getting students 'into the mood' for actually reading dyslit.

Assessment

Formative: respond to conversation journals.

Also circulate and monitor student discussion and make note of whole-class discussion. If students appear to be having difficulty with the concepts, rework lesson plans to support student learning.

Adaptations

Students with exceptionalities will be given visual organizers to help brainstorming processes. Cause and Effect chart would be useful for the first activity ("Best" and "Worst" societies). Students who struggle with reading should find jigsaw groups helpful -- be sure they have adequate time to read/process/learn from peers.

Extensions

Extra time can be filled by moving on to the next lesson -- "The Examination" is a fairly short story to read aloud and we could do the initial read-through in one class and the second read-through (with notes, annotations) the next day.

**Research/
Resources**

Hambouz, Annissa and Schulten, Katherine. "Dark Materials: Reflecting on Dystopian Themes in Young Adult Literature." *The New York Times: The Learning Network*. 6 January 2011. Web.

After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia. Eds. Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling. New York: Hyperion, 2012. Anthology.
"The Dark Side of Young Adult Fiction." Room for Debate. *The New York Times*. 26 December 2011. Web.