

RESEARCH LESSON SEQUENCE - TREASURE HUNT FOR INFORMATION

UTOPIA / DYSTOPIA

A) GENERAL OVERVIEW - THE BIG PICTURE

1. Find an adequate definition for the terms *utopia* and *dystopia*.
2. Choose one film that deals with the future and explain what is utopian or/and dystopian about it.
3. What should be the ideals and values of a utopian society?

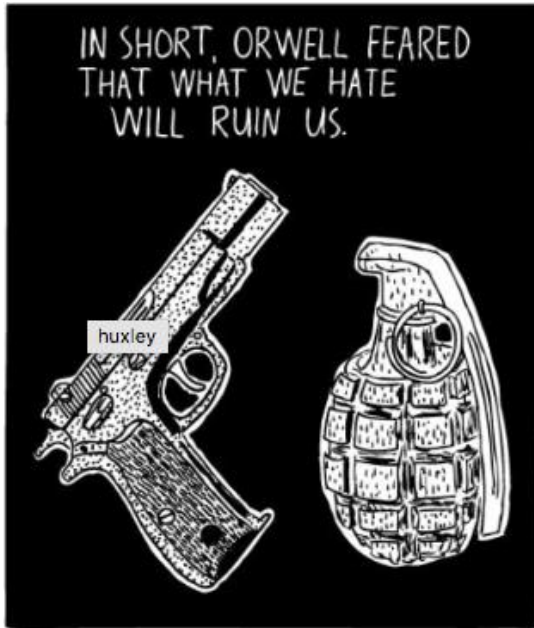
B) THE FUTURE IS NOW - CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of capitalism?
2. What do you think about the introduction of an unconditional basic income for everybody?
3. Does technology liberate us or enslave us? In what ways?
4. What are the three biggest challenges humanity is facing right now? How would you go about solving these problems?

C) OTHER PROJECTS

1. Choose 1 threat that could mark the end of humanity as we know it. Describe that end of the world scenario in detail.
2. For the past ten years you have been an alien observer on earth. Your leader wants a full report on the human race. This report will help your leader to decide whether your alien race should make contact with humans or not. Write a report to state your case. (200-300 words)
3. List 5 things that one should have done before one's death in order to have been a good human being.
4. Make a DINA3 poster about your vision of the future and present it to the class.
5. Choose one person, concept or idea that gives you hope for the future. Explain your choice.
6. Choose 1 film and explain what is dystopian about it.

D) CAN YOU PUT THESE PICTURES INTO THEIR CONTEXT?



THOMAS MORE - UTOPIA



Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), also known as Saint Thomas Morus, was an English lawyer, scholar, author, statesman, and a saint within the Catholic Church. Sir Thomas More wrote *Utopia* in the years 1515-16, when men's imaginations were stirred by the sudden enlargement of their conceptions of the world, and Amerigo Vespucci's account of his voyages westward, first printed in 1507, was fresh in every scholar's mind. In More's *Utopia*, a mariner tells of a distant island he has visited, describing its organisation and society. The

work was not printed in England during the reign of Henry VIII, and could not be, for its satire - which mocked English policy with ironical praise - was too direct to be misunderstood.

PRE-READING TASKS

1. Who was Amerigo Vespucci?
2. In what way did Vespucci stir the imagination of an entire generation?
3. Find definitions for the following words: satire, irony, sarcasm and euphemism
4. What do you think did More criticise about politics in England at the time?
5. What do you know about Henry VIII and his reign?

EXTRACT FROM MORE'S *UTOPIA*

Thus I have described to you, as particularly as I could, the constitution of that commonwealth, which I do not only think the best in the world, but indeed the only commonwealth that truly deserves the name. In all other places it is evident that, while people talk of a commonwealth, every man only seeks his own wealth; but there, where no man has any property, all men zealously pursue the good of the public. In other commonwealths every man knows that unless he provides for himself, how flourishing soever the commonwealth may be, he must die of hunger, so that he sees the necessity of preferring his own concerns to the public but in Utopia, where every man has a right to everything, they all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full, no private man can want anything; for among them there is no unequal distribution, so that no man is poor, none in necessity; and though no man has anything, yet they are all rich; for what can make a man so rich as to lead a serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties; neither apprehending want himself, nor vexed with the endless complaints of his wife? He is not afraid of the misery of his children, nor is he contriving how to raise a portion for his

daughters, but is secure in this, that both he and his wife, his children and grandchildren, to as many generations as he can fancy, will all live both plentifully and happily; since among them there is no less care taken of those who were once engaged in labour, but grow afterward unable to follow it, than there is elsewhere of these that continue still employed.

I would gladly hear any man compare the justice that is among the Utopians with that of all other nations, among whom may I perish if I see anything that looks either like justice or equity. For what justice is there in this, that a nobleman, a goldsmith, a banker, or any other man, that either does nothing at all, or at best is employed in things that are of no use to the public, should live in great luxury and splendour upon what is so ill acquired; and a mean man — a carter, a smith, or a ploughman — that works harder even than the beasts themselves, and is employed in labours so necessary that no commonwealth could hold out a year without them, can only earn so poor a livelihood, and must lead so miserable a life that the condition of the beasts is much better than theirs? [...]

Therefore I must say that, as I hope for mercy, I can have no other notion of all the other governments that I see or know, than that they are a conspiracy of the rich, who, on pretence of managing the public, only pursue their private ends, and devise all the ways and arts they can find out; first, that they may, without danger, preserve all that they have so ill-acquired, and then, that they may engage the poor to toil and labour for them at as low rates as possible, and oppress them as much as they please; and if they can but prevail to get these contrivances established by the show of public authority, which is considered as the representative of the whole people, then they are accounted laws; yet these wicked men, after they have, by a most insatiable covetousness, divided that among themselves with which all the rest might have been well supplied, are far from that happiness that is enjoyed among the Utopians; for the use as well as the desire of money being extinguished, much anxiety and great occasions of mischief is cut off with it, and who does not see that the frauds, thefts, robberies, quarrels, tumults, contentions, seditions, murders, treacheries, and witchcrafts, which are, indeed, rather

punished than restrained by the severities of law, would all fall off, if money were not any more valued by the world?

COMPREHENSION

Title illustration / first edition of *Utopia* (1516)

1. Explain what is meant by “the only commonwealth that truly deserves the name”.
2. Make two lists of key words contrasting the conditions to be found in Utopia and those existing in the real world of More’s time.
3. Examine the connection between human behaviour and economic security in Utopia. According to the author, what effect does the guarantee of material welfare have on the attitudes and behaviour of the Utopians?
4. What, according to More, is the major source of injustice in society?
5. For what reasons does More despise noblemen, goldsmiths and bankers?
6. Discuss More’s ideal society. Do you think his model could really work?
7. Would you like to live in More’s perfect world? Why? Why not?



ESSAY TOPICS

1. Do you think More would arrive at the same conclusions if he lived in our time? Discuss and give solid evidence for your claims!
2. “More’s utopian ideals are incompatible with human nature”. Discuss!

Literary Theory – Theories of Reading



Literature and history

Dystopian novels often have a closer connection to reality than their utopian counterparts. This is because they are based on the principle of extrapolation. Hence, exploring the historical background that influenced and shaped an author's work leads to a deeper understanding of it. Most literary critics argue that literature and history cannot be separated.

Activity 1:

Try and work out the most relevant economic, social and political forces that could have influenced the following novels, based on the information below. Then guess what dystopian fears might be dealt with in these literary works.

Author	Novel	Published
Aldous Huxley	<i>Brave New World</i>	1932
George Orwell	<i>1984</i>	1949

Gender, class and roots

According to literary theorist Wolfgang Iser, literature generates effects of meaning for the reader in a virtual space created between reader and text. In this virtual space, the worlds of the text and the reader clash. So, what the reader brings to a text is just as relevant as what the author offers. Our gender, class and roots automatically influence the way we read and have an impact on our meaning-making process. As a result, each reader experiences literature differently.



Activity 2:

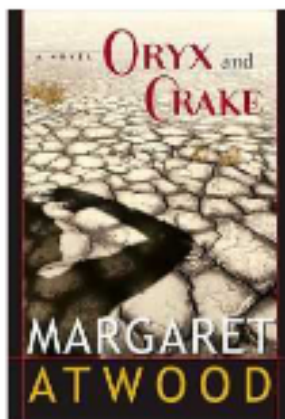
Set up a timeline with 6 events of the 21st century that you think were the most relevant ones for the course of human history. Justify your choice.

Make a list of 5 people who you believe to have had the biggest impact on our society in the last 15 years. Justify your choice.

Compare your findings in class. Draw conclusions.

WORKING WITH BOOK EXTRACTS
TOPIC: DYSTOPIA

SAMPLE 1: ORYX AND CRAKE BY MARGARET ATWOOD



Margaret Atwood, born in 1939, is a Canadian author and one of the most-honoured fiction writers in recent history. She wrote lots of successful novels such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, which was turned into a popular Netflix series. *Oryx and Crake* is a dystopian novel. Dystopian novels are always dealing with imaginary future worlds and the author uses those future worlds to criticise something about our present society. As a dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) investigates and shows the consequences of developments in science and technology. In this extract, Crake is talking to Jimmy about a hypothetical scenario that involves a pharmaceutical company called HelthWyzer.

On the second to last evening, Crake said, "Let me walk you through a hypothetical scenario."

"I'm game," said Jimmy. Actually he was sleepy—he'd had too much popcorn and beer—but he sat up and put on his paying-attention look, the one he'd perfected in high school. Hypothetical scenarios were a favourite thing of Crake's.

"Axiom: that illness isn't productive. In itself, it generates no commodities and therefore no money. Although it's an excuse for a lot of activity, all it really does moneywise is cause wealth to flow from the sick to the well. From patients to doctors, from clients to cure-peddlers. Money osmosis, you might call it."

"Granted," said Jimmy.

"Now, suppose you're an outfit called HelthWyzer. Suppose you make your money out of drugs and procedures that cure sick people, or else—better—that make it impossible for them to get sick in the first place."

"Yeah?" said Jimmy. Nothing hypothetical here: that was what HelthWyzer actually did.

"So, what are you going to need, sooner or later?"

"More cures?"

"After that."

"What do you mean, after that?"

"After you've cured everything going."

Jimmy made a pretence of thinking. No point doing any actual thought: it was a foregone conclusion that Crake would have some lateral-jump solution to his own question.

"Remember the dilemma of the dentists, after that new mouthwash came in? The one that replaced plaque bacteria with friendly ones that filled the same ecological niche, namely your mouth? No one ever needed a filling again, and a lot of dentists went bankrupt."

"So?"

"So, you'd need more sick people. Or else—and it might be the same thing—more diseases. New and different ones. Right?"

"Stands to reason," said Jimmy after a moment. It did, too. "But don't they keep discovering new diseases?"

"Not discovering," said Crake. "They're creating them."

"Who is?" said Jimmy. Saboteurs, terrorists, is that what Crake meant? It was well known they went in for that kind of thing, or tried to. So far they hadn't had a lot of successes: their puny little diseases had been simple-minded, in Compound terms, and fairly easy to contain.

"HelthWyzer," said Crake. "They've been doing it for years. There's a whole secret unit working on nothing else. Then there's the distribution end. Listen, this is brilliant. They put the hostile bioforms into their vitamin pills—their HelthWyzer over-the-counter premium brand, you know? They have a really elegant delivery system—they embed a virus inside a carrier bacterium, *E. coli* splice, doesn't get digested, bursts in the pylorus, and bingo! Random insertion, of course, and they don't have to keep on doing it—if they did they'd get caught, because even in the poor neighbourhoods they've got guys who could figure it out. But once you've got a hostile bioform started in the poor population, the way people slosh around out there it more or less runs itself. Naturally they develop the antidotes at the same time as they're customizing the bugs, but they hold those in reserve, they practise the economics of scarcity, so they're guaranteed high profits."

"Are you making this up?" said Jimmy.

"The best diseases, from a business point of view," said Crake, "would be those that cause lingering illnesses. Ideally—that is, for maximum profit—the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out. It's a fine calculation."

COMPREHENSION

1. What is your initial response to this sample? Explain.
2. What happened to the dentists in the new world described by Crake?
3. What exactly has HelthWyzer been doing all these years and why? Explain in detail.
4. What diseases are the best ones according to the business principle?
5. What is shocking about the ideas presented in this excerpt?
6. Can you see any parallels to our world today?

SAMPLE 2: JENNIFER GOVERNMENT BY MAX BARRY



Max Barry (born in 1973) is a contemporary Australian author. His novel *Jennifer Government* (2003) introduces the reader to a dystopian society in which the world order has drastically changed.

Until she stood in front of them, Hayley didn't realize how many of her classmates were blond. It was like a beach out there. She'd missed the trend. Hayley would have to hotfoot it to a hairdresser after school. "When you're ready," the teacher said. She looked at her note cards and took a breath. "Why I Love America, by Hayley McDonald's. America is the greatest group of countries in the world because we have freedom. In countries like France, where the Government isn't privatized, they still have to pay tax and do whatever the Government says, which would really suck. In USA countries, we respect individual rights and let people do whatever they want."

The teacher jotted something in his folder. McDonald's-sponsored schools were cheap like that: at Pepsi schools, everyone had notebook computers. Also their uniforms were much better. It was so hard to be cool with the Golden Arches on your back.

"Before USA countries abolished tax, if you didn't have a job, the Government took money from working people and gave it to you. So, like, the more useless you were, the more money you got." No response from her classmates. Even the teacher didn't smile. Hayley was surprised: she'd thought that one was a crack-up."But now America has all the best companies and all the money because everyone works and the Government can't spend money on stupid things like advertising and elections and making new laws. They just stop people stealing or hurting each other and everything else is taken care of by the private sector, which everyone knows is more efficient." She looked at her notes: yep, that was it. "Finally I would like to say that America is the greatest group of countries in the world and I am proud to live in the Australian

Territories of the USA!"

A smattering of applause. It was the eighth talk this period: she guessed it was getting harder to work up enthusiasm for capitalism. Hayley headed for her seat.

"Hold it," the teacher said. "I have questions." "Oh," Hayley said. "Are there any positive aspects to tax?" She relaxed: a gimme question. "Some people say tax is good because it gives money to people who don't have any. But those people must be lazy or stupid, so why should they get other people's money? Obviously the answer is no."

The teacher blinked. He made a note. That must have been an impressive answer, Hayley thought. "What about social justice?"

"What?" "Is it fair that some people should be rich while others have nothing?" She shifted from one foot to the other. She was just remembering: this teacher had a thing about poor people. He was always bringing them up. "Um, yeah, it's fair. Because if I study really hard for a test and get an A and Emily doesn't and fails" -- renewed interest from the class; Emily raised blond eyebrows -- "then it's not fair to take some of my marks and give them to her, is it?" The teacher frowned. Hayley felt a flash of panic. "Another thing, in non-USA countries they want everyone to be the same, so if your sister is born blind, then they blind you, too, to make it even. But how unfair is that? I would much rather be an American than a European Union... person." She gave the class a big smile. They clapped, much more enthusiastically than before. She added hopefully, "Is that all?"

"Yes. Thank you." Relief! She started walking. A cute boy in the third row winked at her. The teacher said, "Although, Hayley, they don't really blind people in non-USA countries." Hayley stopped. "Well, that's kind of hypocritical, isn't it?" The class cheered. The teacher opened his mouth, then shut it. Hayley took her seat. *Kick ass*, she thought. She had aced this test.

COMPREHENSION

1. What is your initial response to this passage? Explain.
2. How has the world order changed in *Jennifer Government*?
3. Describe Hayley's character based on this passage.
4. What makes Hayley love America so much?
5. Analyse the dynamics between Hayley, the teacher and the class. What do you notice?
6. Schools are privatized and sponsored by corporations like McDonald's and Pepsi. Do you see any danger in that?

EXTRACT 1: ALDOUS HUXLEY – *BRAVE NEW WORLD*



Aldous Leonard Huxley (1894-1963) was a British writer widely known for his novel *Brave New World* (1932). The story is set in London in the year 2540 and is concerned with the impact of developments such as reproductive technology, social conditioning and sleep-learning on a future society. In the following extract, the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning (D.H.C.) is conducting his new students round the various departments.

MR. FOSTER was left in the Decanting Room. The D.H.C. and his students stepped into the nearest lift and were carried up to the fifth floor.

INFANT NURSERIES. NEO-PAVLOVIAN CONDITIONING ROOMS, announced the notice board.

The Director opened a door. They were in a large bare room, very bright and sunny; for the whole of the southern wall was a single window. Half a dozen nurses, trousered and jacketed in the regulation white viscose-linen uniform, their hair aseptically hidden under white caps, were engaged in setting out bowls of roses in a long row across the floor. Big bowls, packed tight with blossom. [...]

The nurses stiffened to attention as the D.H.C. came in.

"Set out the books," he said curtly.

In silence the nurses obeyed his command. Between the rose bowls the books were duly set out—a row of nursery quartos opened invitingly each at some gaily coloured image of beast or fish or bird.

"Now bring in the children."

They hurried out of the room and returned in a minute or two, each pushing a kind of tall dumb-waiter laden, on all its four wire-netted shelves, with eight-month-old babies, all exactly alike (a Bokanovsky Group, it was evident) and all (since their caste was Delta) dressed in khaki.

"Put them down on the floor."

The infants were unloaded.

"Now turn them so that they can see the flowers and books."

Turned, the babies at once fell silent, then began to crawl towards those clusters of sleek colours, those shapes so gay and brilliant on the white pages. As they approached, the sun came out of a momentary eclipse behind a cloud. The roses flamed up as though with a sudden passion from within; a new and profound significance seemed to suffuse the shining pages of the books. From the ranks of the crawling babies came little squeals of excitement, gurgles and twitterings of pleasure.

The Director rubbed his hands. "Excellent!" he said. "It might almost have been done on purpose."

The swiftest crawlers were already at their goal. Small hands reached out uncertainly, touched, grasped, unpetaling the transfigured roses, crumpling the illuminated pages of the books. The Director waited until all were happily busy. Then, "Watch carefully," he said. And, lifting his hand, he gave the signal.

The Head Nurse, who was standing by a switchboard at the other end of the room, pressed down a little lever. There was a violent explosion. Shriller and ever shriller, a siren shrieked. Alarm bells maddeningly sounded. The children started, screamed; their faces were distorted with terror.

"And now," the Director shouted (for the noise was deafening), "now we proceed to rub in the lesson with a mild electric shock."

He waved his hand again, and the Head Nurse pressed a second lever. The screaming of the babies suddenly changed its tone. There was something desperate, almost insane, about the sharp spasmodic yelps to which they now gave utterance. Their little bodies twitched and stiffened; their limbs moved jerkily as if to the tug of unseen wires.

"We can electrify that whole strip of floor," bawled the Director in explanation. "But that's enough," he signalled to the nurse.

The explosions ceased, the bells stopped ringing, the shriek of the siren died down from tone to tone into silence. The stiffly twitching bodies relaxed, and what had become the sob and yelp of infant maniacs broadened out once more into a normal howl of ordinary terror.

"Offer them the flowers and the books again."

The nurses obeyed; but at the approach of the roses, at the mere sight of those gaily-coloured images of pussy and cock-a-doodle-doo and baa-baa black sheep, the infants shrank away in horror, the volume of their howling suddenly increased. "Observe," said the Director triumphantly, "observe." Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks—already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly. What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder.

"They'll grow up with what the psychologists used to call an 'instinctive' hatred of books and flowers. Reflexes unalterably conditioned. They'll be safe from books and botany all their lives." The Director turned to his nurses. "Take them away again." Still yelling, the khaki babies were loaded on to their dumb-waiters and wheeled out, leaving behind them the smell of sour milk and a most welcome silence.

One of the students held up his hand; and though he could see quite well why you couldn't have lower-cast people wasting the Community's time over books, and that there was always the risk of their reading something which might undesirably decondition one of their reflexes, yet ... well, he couldn't understand about the flowers. Why go to the trouble of making it psychologically impossible for Deltas to like flowers?

Patiently the D.H.C. explained. If the children were made to scream at the sight of a rose, that was on grounds of high economic policy. Not so very long ago (a century or thereabouts), Gammas, Deltas, even Epsilons, had been conditioned to like flowers—flowers in particular and wild nature in general. The idea was to make them want to be going out into the country at every available opportunity, and so compel them to consume transport.

"And didn't they consume transport?" asked the student.

"Quite a lot," the D.H.C. replied. "But nothing else."

Primroses and landscapes, he pointed out, have one grave defect: they are gratuitous. A love of nature keeps no factories busy. It was decided to abolish the love of nature, at any rate among the lower classes; to abolish the love of nature, but not the tendency to consume transport. For of course it was essential that they should keep on going to the country, even though they

hated it. The problem was to find an economically sounder reason for consuming transport than a mere affection for primroses and landscapes. It was duly found.

"We condition the masses to hate the country," concluded the Director. "But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport. Hence those electric shocks."

"I see," said the student, and was silent, lost in admiration.

COMPREHENSION

1. What is your initial response to this excerpt? Explain.
2. Who was Ivan Petrovich Pavlov?
3. Outline the different phases of the conditioning process presented in this extract.
4. Analyse the language that is used in this extract. What do you notice?
5. Which caste do the children belong to? What does this mean for their future?
6. What is the purpose of the conditioning process?
7. What is implied with the sentence "What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder"?
8. What is the secret of happiness in the society Huxley depicts here?

DO WE NEED A SYSTEM CHANGE? POLITICS AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Listen to two renowned political activists and their thoughts on society and the future.
Go to: www.lce-english-department.yolasite.com => TOPICS => UTOPIA

1) Interview with George Monbiot *(British writer - political and environmental activist)*

1) KEY CONCEPTS

a) The old story: Keynesian economics *(developed by John Maynard Keynes in the 1930s)*

Keynesian economics is a theory based on the principle that the market is imperfect and not self-sustaining. (selbsterhaltend)

Unemployment

Changes in aggregate demand (Gesamtnachfrage) may have a big impact on employment. If there is not enough demand, unemployment rises.

Role of the government

When economic growth is lacking, the government should stimulate demand. In other words, the government should increase demand to boost growth. **Keynesians** believe that consumer income stimulates demand, which causes economic growth.

b) What is a social democracy?

Social democracy is an ideology that has similar values to socialism, but within a capitalist framework. The ideology, named from **democracy** where people have a say in government actions, supports a competitive economy with money while also helping people whose jobs don't pay a lot.

ACTIVITY 1:

Summarise the narrative and the message of the old story in your own words

c) The new story: Neoliberal economics
(developed in the 1930s by economists around Ludwig Erhard)

"**Neoliberalism**" is contemporarily used to refer to market-oriented reform policies such as "eliminating price controls, deregulating capital markets, lowering trade barriers" and reducing state influence in the **economy**, especially through privatization and austerity. It is based on the concept of individualisation and characterised by a shift away from state welfare provision.

d) What is social welfare provision?

When a government gives provisions of economic assistance to persons in need. For example: unemployed, injured, aged people are financed by contributions from employers, employees and government revenue.

e) What is the laissez faire theory?

The driving principle behind **laissez-faire**, a French term that translates as "leave alone" (literally, "let you do"), is that the less the government is involved in the economy, the better off business will be—and by extension, society as a whole. **Laissez-faire** economics are a key part of free market capitalism.

ACTIVITY 2:

Summarise the narrative and the message of the new story in your own words

ACTIVITY 3:

Why does Monbiot believe that both stories are detrimental to our society?

