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Reexamining our World through Dystopian Literature

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Introduction

Why is it that the dystopian/utopian genre has always filled the collections of young adult literature throughout our country's libraries and classrooms? Though the concepts included in dystopian literature are not new, they continue to attract and fascinate readers over the years. Sir Thomas More's classic *Utopia*, written in 1516, was the first of many narratives to explore dystopian societies. More recently works such as Orwell's *1984*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* or Isaac Asimov's *I Robot* examine challenges the modern world faces as it attempts to create a utopian society, causing plans that backfire, often leading to exhausting and debilitating results. More recently YA novels such as Jeanne DuPrau's *The City of Embers*, Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*, continue the tradition of examining our world through a lens that is at once well-meaning and critical, while at the same time misguided and destructive. What seems to link these classics and others like them, is the author's desire to fix a flaw in the world, to bring light to darkness, to attack political corruption, to reverse a wrong, all at a cost that may at first seem fair and sensible, but inevitably leads to a dysfunctional dystopian society.

George Orwell, arguably the father of the modern dystopian novel, seemed to base his work on the very real, dangerous society that can develop when "big brother" becomes too big. Are we moving closer to the dystopian nightmare that Orwell seemed to see in the twilight of World War II? Are we moving closer to a political world in which, as Orwell himself asserted, "All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia."¹ The literature seems to reflect not only our own very real desire for a utopian society, but also our very real demise into a darker society from which our heroes must help us survive, must help us to climb out of the mess we have created on our journey to a "more perfect union." Our fascination with dystopian literature, among the young and old, is a subconscious search for answers, a search for rescue in a world that, at times, seems to be barreling out of control toward a demise that we all want to avoid.

Rationale

For the past twenty plus years I have taught 7th /8th grade Language Arts in the New Haven school system, a system located in a city that itself would make a fine setting for a dystopian novel, where towering gothic towers hidden behind gated courtyards, weave their way in and out of blighted neighborhoods whose inhabitants live day to day trying to make ends meet.

I began my career in New Haven in a 5-8 arts magnet school, taught briefly in a neighborhood high school and since 2015 have been teaching at Roberto Clemente Leadership Academy, an urban neighborhood school which has struggled over the years to overcome grade level shortcomings among our K-8 population.

While for most of my teaching career I have taught seventh and eighth grade students, I currently teach grades five, six, seven and eight as a reading teacher in a Read180 classroom. The unit I am creating for the Yale Institute this year is designed to parallel a dystopian unit we study in Read 180 entitled "Life in Dystopia" in which students are challenged to answer the question, "*What causes people to go along with the crowd, despite the costs?*" Through a series of readings, including the short story "The Lottery," an excerpt from a Shirley Jackson lecture on the feedback she received after publishing her infamous story in *The New Yorker* and an excerpt from Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, students are introduced to a plethora of vocabulary words and questions that lead them to discover many aspects of dystopian literature while attempting to answer the guiding question. A typical day in the Read 180 classroom begins with fifteen minutes of whole group instruction followed by one or two rotations in which students split into three groups; one meeting with the teacher in small group text instruction, one utilizing the Read 180 app on computers in the back of the room and a third group focusing on sustained silent reading. At the end of our class period, students come together for class wrap up of the day's activities.

I feel fortunate to have become a reading teacher in the latter years of my career, as the program has rekindled my love for teaching as no other assignment ever has. I feel closer to my students as we meet weekly in small groups to discuss topics, sharing opinions and feelings related to the given units we are studying. While the Read180 program can be scripted and regimented in its presentation, it also allows for teachers interpretation of the topic which is why I think this unit on the dystopian novel will complement the program nicely, allowing students to explore the genre beyond the unit that will serve as an anchor for my Yale curriculum. Due to the gravity and mature nature of the content of a study of dystopian literature, I plan to use this unit with my eighth grade students.

Finally, I feel that this unit touches on a reality that we all want to understand and perhaps better navigate through as dystopian fiction and dystopian reality seem to overlap more and more in our world. Dystopian literature is fiction, but more and more, as Orwell himself seemed to see in the 1940s, the reality of our world seems more and more dystopian. His words from nearly seven decades ago still ring true as he commented on human nature; "As soon as fear, hatred, jealousy and power worship are involved, the sense of reality becomes unhinged."² His words are both fascinating and terrifying at the same time, while also so timely and relevant. Orwell's words repeatedly point to a reality which seems to travel throughout the heart of dystopian literature as characters repeatedly find themselves stuck in increasingly desperate situations.

A very real modern quandary that at its heart seems dystopian, is the rise of AI in our society. AI is destined to be the new technology explosion of the future and is already very much a part of our lives. But there is an underlying fear that many harbor as AI becomes more and more intertwined in our lives. How far will it go?

What are the dangers of developing such technology before we truly understand its limitations and flaws? As Orwell's work at times seemed to predict the chaos of politics gone awry, Isaac Asimov seemed to explore the same dangerous possible outcomes in regards to AI. *I Robot* explores a future, (his future, our reality) where the power of AI, with initial good intention, runs amuck and threatens the security of our world. Children marvel at these sort of quandaries and I believe that introducing them to this genre in a way that helps them to connect with and perhaps see more clearly the world that they will inherit going forward as they search for their own roles and those of their heroes. In *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar comments on how children interact with works of literature, asserting, "There, children, who invariably count themselves among the downtrodden and underprivileged, identify and empathize with the protagonist. The more Hansel, Gretel, Cinderella and Snow White are victimized by the powers of evil, the more sympathy they elicit and the more captivating they are for children."³ Dystopian literature, fairy tales and the YA genre in general, helps children find their way through our confusing and sometimes terrifying adult world, as they increasingly seek ways to identify with the mistreated protagonists cast out of the societies and social groups they need to be in to survive.

In "Here's Looking at You, Kids; The Urgency of Dystopian Texts in the Secondary Classroom," Michael Soars asserts, "Teachers and students are entering new territory as the headlines imitate our dystopian texts."⁴ In a world where lockdowns in our schools have become the norm, where shootings inside and outside our school buildings barely make the headlines, where the threat of contagions combined with the fear of a violent, angry and confusing world force children to cower beneath their covers with nothing but their phones to keep them company, perhaps dystopian literature may prove to be the genre most like our students' reality and most needing their attention as our students are forced to navigate through this world which many adults find impossible to understand, predict or manage. A new urgency and role for classroom teachers seems to be emerging in our society. Again, Soars comments, "Clearly, great responsibility lies with the teacher in the effective facilitation of dystopian text; the most important role a teacher can play is providing opportunity to interact with text in ways that promote students towards positive social and political change and/or action."⁵ Teachers do have many roles in and beyond the classroom. As we go forward into an unknown future these roles will certainly become more intricate and important in the raising of our children and the shaping of our world.

Objectives

I have several objectives that I would like to achieve through the implementation of this unit. While, as mentioned above, *Rediscovering our World through Dystopian Literature* is meant to accompany a unit I will be teaching in a Read180 classroom, I will also construct the lessons in a way that it will stand on its own in a language arts classroom.

Middle school students have wonderfully inquisitive and hyper-interested minds that seek to be filled with knowledge, experience and possibilities. Discussions on the realities of a dystopian and utopian worlds, fiction or non-fiction, will hypnotize students and hopefully lead to lively discussions and magnificent discoveries. Dystopian literature has a rich history filled with great novels and stories written by some the most well-known authors in literature. Characters in the stories risk their lives to save their worlds while learning life lessons as they struggle. Introducing students to this genre is introducing students to the richness of incredibly creative

and fascinating worlds full of inspiration and possibilities as well as horror.

On a more practical aspect, I want to spend some time reviewing short story structure and terminology with students. I believe middle school students should have a solid foundation on how a short story is built including a review of the various important parts of the story such as setting, exposition,, rising action, conflict, climax, resolution and others.

As students study the structure of a story, they will read various dystopian stories including “The Lottery” and those in Asimov’s *I Robot*. I want student to explore not only the worlds portrayed by Jackson and Asimov, but the structure of the stories and, in Asimov’s case, I want students to see the structure of his collection. What is the progression of the stories, how are they linked? What do authors consider when putting together a collection of short stories?

After reading the book in groups, I will challenge students to take a similar approach in writing their own dystopian short stories linked with a common thread as Asimov constructed in his book. Students will work together to come up their own short stories that will fit into a compilation that will be presented in a creative way to others in the class.

Background

Read180

Read 180 is a research based reading program that is used in New Haven to boost reading levels of students who are below grade level readers. My students are from grades five through eight, but the program is available for high school students as well. My experience with the program has been quite positive as students who follow the program guidelines and faithfully engage in the Read 180 model show measurable positive growth. We always begin our days with students sitting in the rowed seats in the middle of the classroom followed by either one or two rotations to the three areas of my classroom. A small mobile white board in the back of my classroom helps us keep track of group movement on A days (one rotation) and B days (two rotations). I wear a whistle around my neck and utilize it to signal the movement of groups, much to the amusement of my fifth graders and much to the annoyance of my eighth graders. On a B day, when students go through two rotations, we spend about fifteen to twenty minutes at each station.

The software produced for the program adjusts to each students’ level. In my classroom I have a computer section against the back wall, set up with large screen Macs that I can see easily from the front of the room. When working on the computers students work on segments which include “zones” where they are able to practice reading comprehension, spelling, phonics, vocabulary building and writing. The reading area in my classroom is equipped with bookshelves, one large cushy reading chair and a rug where students can relax and enjoy their reading. In the reading area of my classroom students are able to read regular books, digital books or Ereads at their Lexile level. When students meet with me at the large round table in the front of the room, we utilize a textbook entitled *The Real Book*, which includes several units on different subjects meant to interest the students. Among the multiple segments available for students are; “Stand Up,” a look at young activists from around the world; “Water Fight,” a series of articles and stories on the growing water shortage; “Contagion,” a look at a topic we are all too familiar with; “The Hunt for Lincoln’s Killer”; and the unit I will create additional material for here; “Life in Dystopia.”

All of the units begin with a short video that generally introduces the topic, and provides some initial vocabulary for students. The two minute video introduces the concept of a dystopian world and introduces students to the two main examples of dystopian literature looked at in the unit; *The Hunger Games*, and *The Lottery*. A short informational text entitled *World's Gone Wrong* is also included early on in the unit.

“The Emperor’s New Clothes”

Using this classic children’s tale as an introduction to the unit seems like a fun and innocent way to begin discussion that could get heavy and a little scary as we go forward. The guiding question in the Read 180 unit is “What causes people to go along with the crowd despite the costs?” This simple question will come up again and again in our study of dystopian literature and our connections to the world we live in. It is ironic and somewhat fitting that the hero of this story is simply a child who sees and speaks the truth. It is this voice of simple wisdom that saves the day over and over in the works that we read.

“The Lottery”

Shirley Jackson’s classic tale is the perfect story to get students thinking about what the results of conformity can be. Written in 1948, right after the world witnessed the devastation of World War II, the story turns a small town tradition into a nightmare as the yearly ritual of choosing one of the townspeople to die is carried out in a heartless and matter of fact manner. Getting to the heart of dystopian literature, the story leads students back to the driving question of the unit, “What causes people to go along with the crowd, despite the costs?” Like Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four*, *The Lottery* seems to question the fragility of human nature under conditions that make us turn a blind eye so often. What makes us abandon our common sense of decency and common knowledge of good versus evil, allowing things to continue unchecked? Jackson herself seems to mock the utter blind conformity in the village when she writes, “Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones.”⁶ “The Lottery” is a great story to get students thinking about the price of conformity and the cost of remaining quiet in the face of wrongdoing, a lesson that many of us learn the hard way, including Shirley Jackson’s post World War II generation.

The Hunger Games

Another type of lottery brings Katniss Everdeen to the forefront of the dystopian world of Panem in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*. Every year a lottery among the thirteen districts of Panem select one boy and one girl from the districts to participate in the Hunger Games. These games, the government’s “yearly reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated” are a means of repression, ensuring the rebellions of the past not be allowed to happen again. The twenty six chosen children will fight to the death in a televised event that is mandatory for all to watch. Jane Beal writes in “Ending Dystopia; The Feminist Critique of Culture in Suzanne Collins’ *Hunger Games* Trilogy,” “For these viewers, violence is entertainment, exploitation of the working under-class enables the cake and privilege that they take for granted, and political awareness and responsibility evaporation the heat of their *panem et circensis* mentality.”⁷ Katniss, herself calls the forced viewing of the murderous games, “the Capitol’s way of reminding us of how totally we are at their mercy.”⁸ *The Hunger Games* brings the dystopian concept to a challenge in the minds of children as the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, unlike her counterpart Effie Trinket, refuses to accept what seems like fate. Beal writes in “Ending Dystopia,” “But in response to the big lie that women are living in utopia, when the actual conditions of their existence are mercilessly dystopian, authors send their female protagonists on a journey of personal and relational growth. The journey inevitably includes acquisition of new knowledge, new strength, and new, previously unknown, and virtually unimaginable freedom.”⁹ Perhaps, if not through examples from real life,

but with examples from literature, our young readers will find a way to fight any future dystopian reality.

I, Robot

I chose Isaac Asimov's classic science fiction text in order to highlight the rise of AI in our society among other reasons. One, I am a fan of Isaac Asimov's and feel that his science fiction fits perfectly in this unit. Also, AI, a topic very much in the news these days, was a dystopian element that was not represented in the readings associated with the "Life in Dystopia" unit which is a part of the Read 180 program. This timely topic is clearly a theme in the *I, Robot* collection of short stories. The exploration of robots which during Asimov's time as still a bit of a fantasy, is a very timely topic now and has developed over the last few years so rapidly that it cannot be ignored in an examination of modern dystopian literature.

Finally, the composition of the book attracted me the most. The book is a collection of nine short stories separately published by Asimov from the 50s to the 60s. The stories all explore the rise of robotics in our world and the adjustments that humans have to make in order to accommodate the change. Published as a collection in 1950, the stories range from cute stories of child and robot relationships to the catastrophic possibility of robots, now known as AI, challenging mankind in the management of life on earth.

Common threads that links the stories are not only the subject matter, but also the narration. The stories are based on an interview by the infamous "robo-psychologist" Dr. Susan Calvin. The interviews trace the development of AI in the fictitious portrayal of the future and are told in a chronological order starting off in 1998 and ending with the final story set in 2052. Finally, this collection of short stories is connected by the three "Fundamental Rules of Robotics" introduced in the story, *Runaround*. To paraphrase, a robot may not injure a human being, or, through interaction, allow human being to come to harm, two the robot must follow orders given by a human except when the order conflicts with the first rule and, three, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the previous rules.¹⁰ In the collection, the three rules serve as another thread that makes a connection for all the stories. We will review these connections and make up others as we explore our final project in which students will replicate Asimov's style by writing their own stories in small groups and connecting them with a common theme.

Teaching Strategies

Vocabulary Review

One of the key strategies in my unit is associated with making sure that students understand the vocabulary associated with the unit topic. I will utilize flash cards, word maps and concept webs to make sure that students understand the key terminology that will be associated with the concepts introduced in my unit. Words such as utopia, dystopia, genre, and point of view as well as numerous words associated with the structure of a short story, including but not limited to setting, rising action, falling action, climax, resolution and conflict, must be understood before my students will be able to participate in my unit. Words taken from the text must be understood as well as some science fiction terminology.

One basic way that I introduce and review vocabulary with students is with flashcards. As we come across new words in our reading, I will jot them down on colored flashcards, using different colors to indicate the part of speech the word is. For example all of the verbs may be written on yellow flashcards while all the nouns are

represented on red flashcards, etc. I will also write synonyms, definitions or examples of the word in a sentence on the back of the card. Throughout the unit I review the words, often through a game which I call "Vocab Faceoff." Either in small groups or as a class, I will hold up a card. The first student who hits the "buzzer," (usually simply tapping a book on a table between the contestants) gets a chance to define or use the word in a sentence. If they get it correctly, they keep the card. At the end of the game, the contestant with the most cards wins. Continuous building and review of vocabulary is so important to students' success in reading. This is one simple game, but there are dozens of ways to review vocabulary in a fun way with students.

Plot Diagrams are a great way to review vocabulary related to short stories specifically while also reviewing the structure of the story. There are dozens of different formats for plot diagrams. Most are built around the story arc and are very visual. The tent like diagram gives students a chance to review terms associated with literature by filling in setting, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution in the designated spots on the diagram. I plan to run through the diagram on a story we read together and then ask them to apply the diagram to their own stories.

Group Discussions/Reading

As mentioned previously, one thing that has really become key to my success as a reading teacher is the group work. Whether working on vocabulary review, reading comprehension, phonics or spelling, small group work (meaning the teacher sitting with four or five students while the rest of the class works independently) makes a big difference in students' success. I find that grouping students at similar Lexile or reading levels helps everyone improve at their own pace. Reading together in small groups, either as a whole group, or paired up, makes reading a group effort that all students can engage in, again to the best of their abilities. Utilizing graphic organizers such as Venn Diagrams, KWL charts or participation guides in small group or in the larger class setting are always helpful for struggling readers.

Journal writing

Journal writing has always been a mainstay of my language arts classroom. I ask students to purchase the soft cover black and white composition books which are inexpensive and can be found anywhere. Students keep the journals in my room so that we can use them throughout the school year. There are a variety of ways to set up the journals with different labeled sections depending on what you want to emphasize with your students. I usually have students create a table of contents and several sections within the journal including a vocabulary section, a section for response to literature, a free write section and a doodle section. There are many ways to set up journals in your classroom and there are numerous resources with great ideas for setting up journal as well. I recommend Ralph Fletcher's *A Writer's Notebook*, but there are numerous others.. Having journals in the classroom provides students with an easy access, low maintenance record for both reading and writing. Students should be encouraged to write in their journals often and in a variety of formats. Listings, time lines, free writes, vocabulary lists, responses to literature, doodling, drawing, personal entries (which I assure student I will not look at if they signal to me through folding the pages or some other means) questions, and note taking can all be encapsulated in students journals. The journals not only become a collection of student work, but individual reflections of personalities and writing styles. Some possible journal topics that might accompany this unit are:

- Brainstorm a list of common threads that might link your group stories
- Do a free write describing a dystopian setting, add a picture
- Write a new ending to *The Lottery*

- Design your own robot.
- Write your own fundamental Rules for Robotics
- Describe a problem in our society that you would use modern technology to fix. What could go wrong with your plan?
- Draw a Venn Diagram comparing utopian and dystopian societies
- List names for robots

If used often and in a variety of ways, your students' journals will become an important part of their learning experience and something that they will treasure.

Writer workshop

The writer workshop teaches helps students see writing as a process. By following the steps of a writer workshop, students learn that writing an essay or a story includes drafting and revising in order to complete a publishable piece. Students need to understand that unlike journal writing, essays and other publishable works need to go through the process of revision and redrafting. Often a writer workshop can begin with a seed taken from a journal writing assignment and turn it into a more complete written piece.

Basically, the steps of the writer workshop are prewriting or brainstorming, which can take place in journals; drafting, in which students write a first draft of their ideas; revising and editing, often with the help of a partner, rewrite/publish; depending on how many drafts your student needs to do you might have a draft revised and go right into publishing or you could do several drafts before the publishing step. Publishing is basically getting the piece into its best form, usually typed or printed out in decorative manner. The published piece is the one you want to hang on your wall or enter into student portfolios. The last step of writer workshop should be celebration. This is when students share their pieces and celebrate their hard work. The celebration can be as simple as a circle share with the desks all positioned in large circle in the room or as complicated as an open mic celebration with refreshments and guests such as other students, teachers or parents. Either way students should be encouraged to celebrate and share their hard work.

The more students practice this writing process and the earlier in the year that students get started with the process, the better off they will be when it comes to writing the short story for this unit as well as longer pieces, essays and reports in language arts and other classes. I always give students the option of revising their papers right up until the end of the marking period for a better grade. This helps students understand that even their final draft can be improved upon, and that they are responsible for their own writing and grade.

Art in the classroom

Having taught previously in an arts magnet school, I fully appreciate and advocate the incorporation of art into the middle school classroom. While in the magnet school, all of my academic units incorporated some sort of art project. Students would create sculptures, paintings, comic books, creative dioramas, skits and plays, performance poetry, colorful murals and the list goes on and on. It is fairly easy and very important to include arts in academic work. Art brings a fresh, enjoyable depth to lessons that allows teachers and students to tap into various learning styles and philosophies.

In this unit the culminating activity will be a group collection of short stories based on the style of Isaac Asimov's I Robot. As the students are writing their stories I will encourage them to add something to the collections that will captivate their audience's attention as they are sharing out their work. Students might

want to give their collection a title and make a movie poster portraying the theme examined. Others might make a recorded presentation or act out a scene from one of their stories. Still another might create a rap or poem, summarizing and celebrating the group's final project.

Conclusion

While this unit is designed to accompany a reading unit that I intend to complete with my middle school reading class, it can be adapted and utilized in a host of classes and levels of learning. The topic of dystopian and utopian societies is something that can be taught and examined on many levels and to varying depth. Where possible here, I have included resources and ideas that will aid teachers in implementing the unit to their particular students.

Finally, I think it is important to note that as teachers we not only want to examine and utilize different subject matter with our students, but we must also help them to interpret the material and similarly interpret life. Our students are inheriting an increasingly complicated and some might say dystopian world. In such a world it will be helpful for them to not only understand and interpret literature and lessons, but to incorporate those lessons into their lives and actions that will make a difference in their world.

Lesson Plans

The following sample lesson plans are provided for key moments in this unit. I have tried to include a sample from what I envision as the beginning, middle and end of the unit. The lessons are based on fifty minute class periods.

Sample Lesson Plan One-Dystopian vs. Utopian/Where is the love?

Objectives

- Students will be able to identify and understand the terms dystopian and utopian societies
- Students will be able to compare the concepts of dystopian and utopian
- Students will be able to make a judgement about the various representations of the state of our own society

Materials

- Journals (for Venn Diagram)
- Music videos, clips (including but not limited to Black Eyed Peas official music video, *Where is the love?!*, Gene Wilder in *Charley and the Chocolate Factory* clip singing *Pure Imagination*, *What a wonderful World* by Louis Armstrong, *Imagine* by John Lennon, *We Didn't start the fire* by Billy Joel, remake by Fall Out Boy (lyric video)

Initiation

Write the words, dystopia and utopia on the board, ask students to define them. Lead students in a discussion of the words and the differences between them pointing out that what is intended to be a utopian society can quickly digress into a dystopian one.

Procedure

After the initial discussion of the vocabulary, share some of the videos or lyrics from songs listed above and ask students to identify which types of societies are being depicted in the videos or songs. Alternate the presentations, for example, play the Gene Wilder scene in Charlie and the Chocolate factory and ask students why they think this is a portrayal of a utopian society. Next put play both versions of the Billy Joel song, *We Didn't Start the Fire*, and ask what type of society is being portrayed in those videos.

Closure

After students have had ample time to practice identifying the differences between the presentations, pass out the Venn Diagrams and allow students to work in pairs on the graphic organizer comparing the terms utopian and dystopian. End the class by calling on students and creating a class Venn diagram together. Review findings.

Sample Lesson Plan Two-To Go Along or Not; Re-enacting Shirley Jackson's The Lottery

And Hans Christian Anderson's The Emperor's New Clothes

Objectives

- Students will be able to write a journal entry about a time when they or someone they know went along with the crowd.
- Students will review reading by re-enacting the short story in a short skit
- Students will develop a deeper understanding of the stories The Lottery and The Emperor's New Clothes.
- Students will be able to empathize with the characters.

Initiation

Students will respond to one of the following writing prompts in their journals; Write about a time that you went along with a group even though you knew it wasn't the right thing to do or the correct way to act OR What makes people do things that are not right just to go along with the crowd? When writing journal entries it is always good to give some choice to students if possible. Ask students to share what they have written.

Procedure

Explain to students that today they will be putting on a one act play depicting either The Emperor's New Clothes or The Lottery. Divide the class in half, one group for the Lottery, the other for the Emperor's new clothes. Have students meet in groups to discuss the plans for their depictions of the stories. Provide students with some guidelines; who will be the director; what props will be needed? Give students some space (a hallway, an empty classroom) where they can practice for their presentation. In a fifty minute class, students will have to present on the second day.

On the day of presentations, I will remind students of a feedback technique we often use. It is called TAG. After viewing a presentation I will ask students to T-Tell something they liked; A-Ask a question about the presentation; and G-Give a suggestion for the next presentation. This helps keep the audience focused and allows all students to participate in giving and reviewing positive feedback.

Closure

After the presentations and the TAG session, have a group conversation about the two stories. What made the stories different? Why does one seem almost comical and the other tragic? What would have changed in the stories if the endings were reversed? What do the stories say about human nature?

Sample Lesson Plan Three- Finding the thread; starting the final project

Initiation

Class discussion-What were some of the common threads Asimov used in connecting his stories in I Robot. Possible answers may be the different robots, the chronological order, the robo scientist being interviewed, the journalist, setting, others.

Procedure

After the class has discussed the threads that ran through Asimov's stories, it is time for them to determine what threads each group can agree on that will link their stories. As a class brainstorm some of the categories that could be threads and write them down on the board. For example settings could be a thread, characters, AI, robots, conflicts and others. After brainstorming with the whole class, have small groups determine what their common thread will be. Each group should choose one or two to work on. For example group one might choose settings and conflict. Another group might choose characters and robots

The teacher should make sure every group has chosen at least one thread before continuing. Once the groups have chosen, they must work together to devise a more specific element or thread that they will use in each of their stories. For example for the group who chose settings as their thread, they might choose Mars in 3025 or New York City in 2050, whatever setting they agree on should be included in their individual story which they will create.

Closure

Have each group share out the specific thread that they have determined will link all of their stories. Students should next proceed to actually drafting their stories.

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Lynskey, Dorian. *The Ministry of Truth; The Biography of George Orwell's 1984*. New York; Doubleday, 2019. This brilliantly written examination of 1984 reveals much about Orwell and the book that made him the father of modern dystopian literature.

Packer, George. *Doublethink is Stronger than Orwell Imagined; What 1984 Means Today*. July, 2019, *The Atlantic*. The author examines George Orwell's classic in today's information age and the management of the concept of political truth.

Soares, Michael A. "Here's Looking at You Kids: The Urgency of Dystopian Texts in the Secondary Classroom" in *Worlds Gone Awry: Essays on Dystopian Fiction*, edited by John J. Han, C. Clark Triplett and Ashley G. Anthony. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Incorporated, 2018.

Tatar, Maria. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2003. A fascinating study of the Grimm Brothers' world through a lens examining the darker side of the infamous fairy tales.

Student Reading List

Asimov, Isaac. *I Robot*. New York: Del Ray, 1950. This classic dystopian work of science fiction includes Asimov's infamous Three Laws of Robotics and becomes a cornerstone in my students' final projects.

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 2019. This 60th anniversary edition of the classic Bradbury novel is complemented with an introduction by YA author, Neil Gaiman.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2008. This popular dystopian novel, the first in the trilogy, is utilized several times in my unit.

Dashner, James. *The Maze Runner*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2009. In this critically acclaimed dystopian novel, inhabitants of a fictional world race to escape an apocalyptic illness known as the Flare.

DuPreau, Jeanne. *The City of Ember*. New York: Random House, 2003. The protagonist in this dystopian novel races to unlock the secret that will save the world from darkness.

Jackson, Shirley. *The Lottery and Other Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. This collection of Shirley Jackson stories includes *The Lottery*, a classic tale utilized in this unit.

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 1993. This classic YA novel provides another fictional view of a society's attempts to create a utopian society leading instead to a dystopian one

More, Thomas. *Utopia*. New York, Penguin Classics. 1965. This fictional depiction of utopian society is a cornerstone for the study of utopian philosophy and literature.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Penguin Clothbound Classics. London, England: Penguin Classics, 2021. This classic novel is a mainstay for any study of dystopian literature.

Classroom Resources

Fundforteachers.org-This unique organization offers opportunities for teachers to study and research in settings related to curriculum needs.

Teacherspayteachers.com-This site has a plethora of teacher resources provided by fellow teachers.

Readwritethink.org-This site, run by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) provides endless resources for teachers including lesson plans and more designed to help educators "recharge their teaching."

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL8.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text. *Students are asked to analyze and summarize several texts throughout the unit.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL8.4

Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style *Students compare and contrast the Lottery and the Emperor's New Clothes during and after dramatic presentations of the stories.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY RL8.6

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Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor. *Students' analysis of The Lottery, The Emperor's New Clothes, I Robot.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY W8.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. *Students write their own dystopian story.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY W8.3.A

Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. *Students write their own dystopian story.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY W8.3.B

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters *Students write their own dystopian story.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY W8.3.C

Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events. *Students work together to put own stories in group anthologies.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY W8.3.D

Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events. *Students write their own dystopian stories.*

Notes

¹ Lemann, Nicholas. "The Limits of Clear Language" in Columbia Journalism Review. https://www.cjr.org/essay/the_limits_of_language.php

² Lyskey, Dorian. *The Ministry of Truth; The Biography of George Orwell's 1984*, 118.

³ Tatar, Maria. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, 21.

⁴ Soares, Michael A. "Here's Looking at You Kids: The Urgency of Dystopian Texts in the Secondary Classroom" in *Worlds Gone Awry: Essays on Dystopian Fiction*, 227.

⁵ Soares, "Here's Looking at You Kids," 231.

⁶ Jackson, Shirley. "The Lottery," 149.

⁷ Beal, Jane. "Ending Dystopia; The Feminist Critique of Culture in Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games Trilogy," in *Worlds Gone Awry: Essays on Dystopian Fiction*, 132.

⁸ Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*, 18.

⁹ Beal, "Ending Dystopia; The Feminist Critique of Culture in Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games Trilogy," 123.

¹⁰ Asimov, Isaac. *I Robot*, 37.

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