



Dystopian Futures 7-9 Syllabus

Course Goals

1 Develop genre-specific critical reading skills

Students will become fluent in the fundamentals of dystopian fiction by surveying a wide variety of texts from classic and contemporary authors. Instructor-lead close reading, individual writing and guided group activities will strengthen the student's understanding of each text, and how they fit within (and contribute to) the ongoing discussion of the genre as a whole.

2 Model the creative process

Students will carry over insights from their close reading to the creation of new worlds unique to their imagination. Each student will build their dystopian world portfolio over the course of the session as the instructor leads them through each step of creative production.

3 Strengthen writing skills

Students will spend a large portion of the session writing, and instructor feedback as well as peer-editing and workshop support will push each student to improve their writing in both specific (sentence level, grammar, spelling) and general ways (organization, structure, flow).

Course Topics

1 Genre Awareness

Students will familiarize themselves with the conventions of genre and how writers make decisions based on – and sometimes against – reader expectation.

2 World Building

Students will study how science-fiction, satire and dystopian authors construct their worlds and what considerations must be given when launching a new universe.

3 Oppression vs. Resistance

Students will study the ways in which totalitarian regimes exert authority over whole populations – and how those populations invariably rise up against them.

4 Workshop

Students will share their written work with their peers and learn to give considered feedback aimed at strengthening their fellow classmates' writing.

Course Schedule

Day 1

Day 1.1: Introduction / Discussion / Activity

Discussion: What makes a “dystopia”? What makes “science-fiction”? What makes something “post-apocalyptic”? How do these three genres overlap, and more importantly, what makes them different?

Ice Breaker-Utopia/Dystopia

Ice breaker/Activity #1: Create Your Own Utopia

Ice Breaker-Science-Fiction Names

Ice-breaker/Activity #2: Science-fiction/Dystopian names

Day 1.2: Activity / Reading (The Machine Stops)

DISCUSSION: Why do we read dystopian fiction?

"Kunos" & "Vashti" Debate

Students debate the world of Forster's story from its characters' point-of-view.

OPTIONAL: Machine Stops film

Optional video

HOMEWORK: Think about Dystopias

HOMEWORK: Go home and think about other dystopian worlds you've come across in your life – bring them to class the next day to talk about.

Day 2

FALL Day 1: Re-cap

Students discuss previous day's class and homework assignment.

FALL Day 1: "Omelas"

Students read Ursula K. Le Guin's classic short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and formally debate the pros and cons of leaving – or staying in – Omelas.

FALL Day 1: Introduction of The Fall

Introduce students to the concept of a "fallen world" and begin exploring ways societies can reach this stage.

FALL Day 1: Discussion/Writing about The Fall

Further exploration of the contours of dystopic social falls within literature.

FALL Day 1: Ending Discussion

Dull class discussion about excerpts/FALL

Day 3

FALL Day 2: Re-cap and discussion

Re-cap of the previous day's class/readings, and finishing up any readings left over from the day before.

FALL Day 2: Short reading & Discussion

READING: Consider Neil Postman's quote about Brave New World and 1984

FALL Day 2: Optional short video

OPTIONAL: Watch a classic 1984 Apple commercial

FALL Day 2: Solo Writing/Brainstorming

Solo writing/brainstorming: "What kind of Fall do YOU like the most?"

FALL Day 2: Optional Maps Creation

Study maps of exiting dystopian worlds and creating our own.

FALL Day 2: Sharing and Discussion

Sharing initial direction and ideas, brainstorming as class, offering suggestions

FALL Day 2: Mini-lecture

Deliver a mini-lecture to the class on playfulness in creativity.

FALL Day 2: Homework

Assign thinking homework activity

Day 4**FALL Day 3: Re-cap and Finishing Readings**

If students have yet to finish reading any FALL excerpts, have them finish those now – especially the foundational texts like "Brave New World", "Nineteen Eighty-Four" and "The Handmaid's Tale".

FALL Day 3: Finishing Falls

Devote big time chunk to finishing FALL (both any art or writing that is required)

FALL Day 3: Sharing Falls

Students share their world FALLs with class, brief presentations, explanation of all details

FALL Day 3: Ending Discussion

End class discussion tying back our own FALL with those from relevant texts

Day 5**AUTHORITY Day 1: Re-cap and Introduction**

Re-cap of the day before and the entire concept of the FALL; segue into introduction of the concept of AUTHORITY.

AUTHORITY Day 1: Discussion of Authority

Discussion of AUTHORITY (Emphasize that "authority" can mean a single human character or a faceless bureaucratic organization or even an inhuman machine or alien presence)

AUTHORITY Day 1: Solo Reading/Writing + Small-Groups

Solo reading/writing about excerpts from works showcasing AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY Day 1: Ending Discussion

Full class discussion about excerpts/ AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY Day 1: Optional Hunger Games videos

If you have time / students need a break, watch these videos from the Hunger Games movies showing off the authority figure, President Snow.

Day 6

AUTHORITY Day 2: Re-cap and discussion

Re-cap of the previous day's class/readings, and finishing up any readings left over from the day before.

AUTHORITY Day 2: Continue reading/finish up

Finish reading main AUTHORITY-Excerpts, including any left over from previous day or any excerpts students haven't gotten to yet that they wanted to.

AUTHORITY Day 2: Solo Writing/Brainstorming

Solo writing/brainstorming: What kind of AUTHORITY do you find the most interesting?

AUTHORITY Day 2: Sharing and discussion

Sharing initial direction and ideas, brainstorming as class, offering suggestions

Day 7

AUTHORITY Day 3: Finish all reading

Full class reading of any un-finished AUTHORITY excerpts.

AUTHORITY Day 3: Finishing AUTHORITY

Devote big time chunk to finishing AUTHORITY (both art+writing)

AUTHORITY Day 3: Sharing

Share AUTHORITY with class, brief presentations, explanation of all details

AUTHORITY Day 3: End Discussion

End class discussion tying back our own AUTHORITIES with those from Arc2 texts

Day 8

RESISTANCE Day 1: Intro to The Resistance

Discussion of THE RESISTANCE (Emphasize that "resistance" can a single hero character, an underground movement, or even an opposing army or great force.)

RESISTANCE Day 1: Solo Reading/Writing + Small-Group

Solo reading/writing about excerpts showcasing RESISTANCE

RESISTANCE Day 1: Ending Discussion + Homework

Full class discussion about excerpts/RESISTANCE

RESISTANCE Day 1: OPTIONAL Movie Clips viewing

Play some movie clips of famous resistances in film to illustrate the concepts of the class.

Day 9

RESISTANCE Day 2: Re-cap and Discussion

Refresher discussion of RESISTANCE

RESISTANCE Day 2: Continue reading/finish up

Finish reading main RESISTANCE-Excerpts, including any left over from previous day or any excerpts students haven't gotten to yet that they wanted to.

RESISTANCE Day 2: Solo Writing/Brainstorming

Solo writing/brainstorming: What kind of RESISTANCE do you like the most?

RESISTANCE Day 2: Sharing, Discussion and Homework

Sharing initial direction and ideas, brainstorming as class, offering suggestions

Day 10**RESISTANCE Day 3: Re-cap and Finishing Reading and**

Full class read of exemplary passages

RESISTANCE Day 3: Finishing RESISTANCE

Devote big time chunk to finishing RESISTANCE (both art+writing)

RESISTANCE Day 3: Sharing and Wrap-up Discussion

–Share RESISTANCE with class, brief presentations, explanation of all details

RESISTANCE Day 3: Final Class Portfolio Presentation

Each student presents their complete dystopian future, including written narrative of their world's FALL, the rise of an AUTHORITY, and the work of the RESISTANCE.

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