Definitions

Utopia: A place, state, or condition that is ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions.

Dystopia: A futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control. Dystopias, through an exaggerated worst-case scenario, make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system.

Characteristics of a Dystopian Society

Control- Information, ideas, choices, and freedoms are restricted or removed.

Surveillance- Citizens are constantly monitored and watched by those in control.

Propaganda- Biased messages are used to control the ideas and attitudes of the citizens of society.

Idolatry- A figurehead or concept is worshipped by the citizens of the society.

Limited World View- Citizens have little knowledge of and fear the outside world.

Dehumanization- Citizens are forced to live in a dehumanized or “animalistic” state.

Controlled Environment- The natural world is banished and distrusted.

Conformity- Citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality and dissent are bad.

Perfect World- The society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world.

Types of Dystopian Controls

Corporate control: One or more large corporations control society through products, advertising, and/or the media.

Bureaucratic control: Society is controlled by a mindless bureaucracy through a tangle of red tape, relentless regulations, and incompetent government officials.

Technological control: Society is controlled by technology—through computers, robots, and/or scientific means.

Philosophical/Religious Control: Society is controlled by philosophical or religious ideology often enforced through a dictatorship or theocratic government.

The Dystopian Protagonist

The main character or hero of a dystopian novel often feels trapped and is struggling to escape from their society. They believe or feel that something is terribly wrong with the society in which he or she lives. This causes them to question the existing social and political systems. The purpose of the protagonist is to help the audience recognizes the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective.

Common Themes Explored in Dystopian Literature

The Danger of a Particular Type of Government

The Importance of Knowledge and Truth

The Dangers of a Particular Policy

The Dangers of Allowing One Group Too Much Power

The Importance of Free Will and Individuality

The Danger of Technology

The Danger of Desensitization

The Importance of Humanity

The Danger of Human Nature

Examples of Dystopian Literature

*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins

*Divergent* by Veronica Roth

*Among the Hidden* by Margaret Peterson Haddix

*The Maze Runner* by James Dashner

*Uglies* by Scott Westerfield

*The 5th Wave* by Rick Yancey

*Matched* by Ally Condie

*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

*Delirium* by Lauren Oliver

*Legend* by Marie Lu

*The City of Ember* by Jeanne DuPrau