Study Guide Theme: Human Rights

Featured Photos: in order of below: Blue Sky Sign; Darkening Skies; Refugee Camp; Sao Paulo, Brazil; Water Well; Sorting Garbage

Overview: This one-day lesson offers an introduction to dystopian literature that works well just before beginning a novel, short story, or film study. The lesson draws out students’ prior knowledge and assumptions about dystopian literature by having them classify images as “dystopian” or “utopian.” Students then use the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) as a framework to better understand the reasoning behind their classification of the images and both the themes and purposes typical of dystopian literature. In the end, students will gain a functional definition of dystopian literature as a genre that explores threats to human rights and encourages action to combat those threats, and they will be better prepared to think critically about the dystopian text they are studying.

Grade level(s): 9-12

Subject(s): English Literature

Corresponding National Standards:

NCTE / IRA Standards for the English Language Arts (http://www.ncte.org/standards/ncte-ira)

- Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts to acquire new information and to respond to the needs and demands of society
• Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

• Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

• Students conduct research on issues and interests and synthesize data from a variety of sources to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

• Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

• Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7 / 11-12.7
• Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**Corresponding Global Competency Skills:**

Investigate the world--Students investigate the world beyond their immediate environment by examining issues of local, global, and cultural significance.

Recognize perspectives--Students recognize, understand, and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others.

**Essential Question(s):** What do the terms utopia and dystopia mean? What characterizes dystopian literature? What makes an ideal society and what are some hindrances to our achieving it?

**Materials:** Intro to Dystopian Lit Slideshow, UN SDG Icons handout, means to access UN SDGs online for each group (optional, but preferred; otherwise, hard copies of “Progress & Info” and “Targets & Indicators” from UN SDG website needed-- https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs)

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<th>Day 1</th>
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<td>5-10 mins</td>
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This study guide was created by Jack Hudson from Providence Day School (Charlotte, NC) as part of the 2018 World View Fellows Program: The OVERBook Project on the Environment and Sustainability
For more information about the program, please visit: www.worldview.unc.edu/
**Working definition of dystopia, for purposes of this lesson:** A work of fiction that presents an alternate reality “considerably worse” than contemporary or historical reality (Sargent, 1994). By exaggerating some flaw in humanity/society or a negative consequence of current human action, dystopian literature encourages action to improve the present. Also, in popular usage, a place so bad we hope it can never exist.

- Be sure to mention dystopia as the opposite of a utopia/eutopia/positive utopia: A work of fiction that presents an alternate reality “considerably better” than contemporary or historical reality and offers a commentary on how such an improved reality might be achieved (Sargent, 1994). Also, in popular usage, a “perfect” place, one too good to be true.

| 5-7 minutes | Place class into groups and have them sort images offered into representations of dystopia or utopia. Students should sort images so that their groupings can be easily viewed by others--putting them side-by-side on a table/desks or taping them into different columns on a classroom wall/whiteboard. |
| 3 minutes | Allow students to circulate around room and take note of classifications offered by different groups. |
| 5-10 minutes | Coming back together as a whole class, discuss rationale for categorization of each image. Spend particular time focusing on images about which there is any type of disagreement or ambiguity. |
| 10 mins | Introduce United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and explain how they can be used to contextualize dystopian literature: |

The UN and has a utopian mission--it seeks an ever-improving world with an ever-improving quality of life for all.

In 2015, the UN put forth a 2030 Agenda that included 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The goals provide a pathway to a world where “no one will be left behind” and a “world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination . . . and equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential” (United Nations, 2015).

Working towards these goals is a pathway towards an improved society--a pathway towards Utopia, if taken to an extreme. Those things that don’t help progress towards achieving them are potentially dystopian elements. Anything that hinders progress to the goals can be exaggerated and critiqued in dystopian literature, as defined above.

Pass out copies of the SDGs (handout “UN SDG Icons”) or direct students to access them online: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs). (Note: Online is preferred method, as interactive icons quickly provide additional information on...
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<td>10-15 mins</td>
<td>Have students revisit the images they classified and identify which of the SDGs are most directly relevant to each image—which of the SDGs are being ignored or even undermined, in other words.</td>
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| 5 mins | Debrief following work with the SDGs.  
- Did you find matching SDGs to images difficult? Why?  
- Were there any images for which more than one SDG was relevant? Discuss.  
  - Note that these Goals, like elements of society, are interconnected. For instance, you’re unlikely to have a clean environment in the absence of rule of law, unlikely to have universal education in a society with extreme gender inequality or extremely unequal distribution of wealth.  
  - Time permitting, share captions for OVERBook images (located in slideshow) with students so that they gain understanding of reality that these images depict. |
| HW | Begin reading [chosen work of dystopian literature]. Make note of ways the society/setting in the text seems to counteract the hopes of the UN SDGs, thus making it dystopian. |
| Next Day Follow-up | Examine the SDGs students found relevant in their reading in greater depth, accessing them online in order to discuss the “Progress & Info” and “Targets & Indicators” sections and the similarities between those sections and the text class is studying. |
| Lesson Extension | Give several days for students to take a picture of something in the world around them that could lend itself to a dystopian setting. Have them present picture to class with discussion of what dystopian element of society it highlights and how it relates to UN SDGs.  
- Write a diary entry from the perspective of a character in one of the dystopian images. Be sure to highlight the dystopian theme at issue in the image.  
  - You can also ask students to pair a dystopian and utopian image for this activity. They should explain how the character’s world changed from utopian to dystopian, or vice versa, in their writing. |

**Attestations & Documentation**


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I-5 Design & Manufacture. (2007, December 6). Supermarket Interior Decor | Produce Area | Hanging Trellis | Greenfresh Market [Photograph]. Retrieved from http://www.flickr.com/photos/i5design/4886682532. This photograph licensed through the Creative Commons: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/legalcode


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Intro to Dystopian Lit Slideshow

Jack Hudson created this slideshow, October 2017. Individual photograph credits noted on slides.
OVERBook caption:

(China) Blue Sky Sign: The ultimate irony- a giant LED screen on Tiananmen Square… The LED screen shows the blue sky on the Tiananmen Square at dangerous levels of air pollution on January 23, 2013 in Beijing, China. [credit: Feng Li]
(Iraq) Refugee camp: At the end of the first Persian Gulf War in April 1991 the Kurdish people of northern Iraq rose up against Saddam Hussein but the insurrection was quickly and brutally suppressed by the Iraqi Republican Guard and fearing for their lives hundreds of thousands of Kurds fled from Northern Iraq into the mountains bordering Turkey where they were held by the Turkish army in a massive makeshift refugee camp near Isikveren. There was no, food no sanitation, no fuel, and the situation soon grew into a grave humanitarian crisis. April 17, 1991. [credit: Roger Hutchings]
OVERBook caption:

(Brazil): Sao Paulo, Brazil: The Paraisopolis favela borders the affluent district of Morumbi. In 2004, photographer Tuca Vieira captured the image of the Paraisópolis favela next to its wealthy neighbour, Morumbi, that came to symbolise the gap between São Paulo’s rich and poor. [credit: Tuca Vieira]
(Guatemala) Sorting Garbage: To eke out a living… In this Oct. 19, 2011 photo, people search for scrap metal in contaminated water at the bottom of one of the biggest trash dumps in the city, known as "The Mine," in Guatemala City. [credit: Rodrigo Abd]
(India) Water Well: Crowding around a communal well in India People gather to collect water from a huge well in the village of Natwarghad in the western Indian state of Gujarat on June 1, 2003. Natwargadh is in the midst of the worst drought in over a decade. Dams, wells and ponds have gone dry across the western and northern parts of Gujarat forcing people to wait for hours around village ponds for the irregular state-run water tankers to show up as the temperature sores to over 111 degrees Fahrenheit. [credit: Amit Dave]
Brave New Films. (2005, June 23). *Photos [Photograph].* Retrieved from [http://www.flickr.com/photos/walmartmovie/21191040](http://www.flickr.com/photos/walmartmovie/21191040). *This photograph licensed through the Creative Commons: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/legalcode*
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