# Dystopia

Dystopian literature has been characterized as fiction that presents a negative view of the future of society and humankind.  Utopian works typically sketch a future in which technology improves the everyday life of human beings and advances civilization, while dystopian works offer an opposite view.  Some common themes found in dystopian fiction include mastery of nature—to the point that it becomes barren, or turns against humankind; technological advances that enslave humans or regiment their lives; the mandatory division of people into castes or groups with specialized functions; and a collective loss of memory and history making mankind easier to manipulate psychologically and ultimately leading to dehumanization.  Critics have argued that several of the extreme historical circumstances took place during the twenty century have been conducive to the flourishing of dystopian fiction.  Such critics have noted that some of the finest dystopian works were produced during the Nazi era in Germany, during the Stalin era in Russia, in response to various wars over the decades, and as a commentary upon various totalitarian regimes.  Discussions regarding personal freedom, the role of free will, the value of individual resistance to dictatorships, and the power of technology to transform people’s lives are also typical characteristics of dystopian fiction. (1)

Here is more information on the characteristics of dystopian society in literature from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE):

**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

        • Propaganda is used to control the citizens of society.

        • Information, independent thought, and freedom are restricted.

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

        • Citizens are perceived to be under constant surveillance.

        • Citizens have a fear of the outside world.

        • Citizens live in a dehumanized state.

        • The natural world is banished and distrusted.

        • Citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality and dissent are bad.

        • The society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world.

Types of Dystopian Controls

Most dystopian works present a world in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through one or more of the following types of controls:

        • Corporate control: One or more large corporations control society through products, advertising, and/or the media. Examples include *Minority Report* and *Running Man*.

        • Bureaucratic control: Society is controlled by a mindless bureaucracy through a tangle of red tape, relentless regulations, and incompetent government officials. Examples in film include *Brazil*.

        • Technological control: Society is controlled by technology—through computers, robots, and/or scientific means. Examples include *The Matrix*, *The Terminator*, and *I, Robot*.

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

The Dystopian Protagonist

        • often feels trapped and is struggling to escape.

        • questions the existing social and political systems.

        • believes or feels that something is terribly wrong with the society in which he or she lives.

        • helps the audience recognizes the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective.

http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/234413-dystopian-literature-teacher-instructions-lesson-element.pdf