

“The Machine Stops” by E. M. Forster: **Questions**

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the following information before answering the questions below:

Dystopia definition: 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 worshiped 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.

Begin answers 1, 2, and 3 below by stating the story title and the author. For example, In EM Forster's “The Machine Stops,”....

1. Using the characteristics of dystopian literature listed above, find three or more examples from the story that PROVE this is indeed a dystopian tale. (You do not have to cover all 9 characteristics). [3 paragraphs]

The story “The Machine Stops”, by EM Foster, is a dystopian piece of fiction that depicts a world where everyone is connected to technology in every aspect of life while having an emotional disconnect and alienating each other. For example, the people of the machine not only dislike the outside world, they condemn it. This is shown during the airship section in which Vashti and the other attendants are horrified and physically unable to look at the outside world. This is especially unnerving since they genuinely feel pain looking at the sun of the outside world.

When Vashti reaches her son’s house he explains to her that he made it to the outside world and loves it dearly. This is a reaction not accustomed to the people living in the machine, and is outcasted since it strays away from what is written in the book from the machine, so therefore he is sentenced to death. This is the machine's interference in stopping individualism because it threatens the machine’s existence. Which is a trope commonly referred to as dystopian as it shows an authoritarian style

of government, punishing those who disagree with the government.

Finally, the machine itself is conspiring to portray itself as a deity to gain long-standing power over its subjects. This is prevalent throughout the story as characters are consistently shown to caress the machine's guidebook and constantly say praise followed by, "Thanks to the Machine". Even at the end of the book when the machine shuts down, the section describes people saying prayers and worshipping the machine in their final moments. With them are also people bad mouthing the machine for such a catastrophe, and the story itself, labels them as blasphemers. This represents one of the characteristics as it

2. What elements of the society in "The Machine Stops" resemble elements in ours? Consider attitudes, technology, beliefs, etc. (Keep in mind that when this story was written in 1909, many of the innovations were not invented or in common usage at the time). [1 paragraph]

One element that holds up to this date is the ease with which people can contact and communicate with one another. It is not as exaggerated, but people do spend a lot of time on their phones. The element of religion affecting real world leadership is also prevalent, seeing as how a difference in religion resulted in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Finally, is the spread of propaganda. This can especially happen easily on the internet as information gets spread far and wide, whether the information is true or not. This can lead to a lot of misunderstandings or confusion towards events.

3. What is Forster's concern about society? Is this a valid concern? Is it too much of an exaggeration to be plausible? Explain. [1 paragraph]

Forster's main concern about society is that technology will grow to an extent that personal connections and relationships would change due to the reliance on technology. This is indeed a valid concern as nowadays, people are spending more and more time on their phones than ever. However, this does not mean that relationships are disappearing as a result. The events depicted are humans relying on technology so much so, they'd die without it. People use modern tech as a tool to assist day to day life, not replace it.