

AXE 5

UNIT 17

**SHORT
CUT**

A NIGHTMARE CALLED DYSTOPIA

How does Margaret Atwood's dystopia reflect reality?



YOUR PROJECT

Write a letter in secret to a journalist from a foreign country about your new life in Gilead. 

Au menu de cette unité :

DÉCOUVERTES CULTURELLES

- ❸ Les caractéristiques de la dystopie
 - ❸ Trois extraits du roman *The Handmaid's Tale* de Margaret Atwood
 - ❸ Une interview de Margaret Atwood

OUTIL LINGUISTIQUE

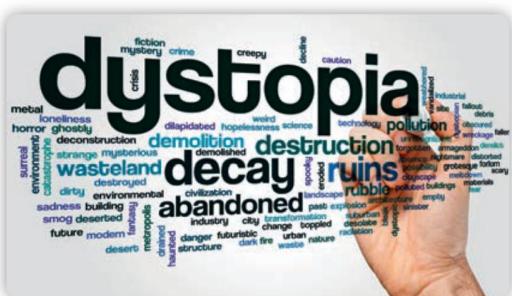
- ## 👁️ If clauses



BEFORE CLASS!

Flash to listen!

Listen to [MP3 n°92](#) about the dystopia genre. Be ready to talk about it in class!



Diving into the Story

What ingredients are needed to create a dystopian world?

1 Part one: How it all began

A ll those women having jobs: hard to imagine, now, but thousands of them had jobs, millions. It was considered the normal thing. Now it's like remembering the paper money, when they still had that. My mother kept some of it, pasted into her scrapbook along with the early photos. It was obsolete by then, you couldn't buy anything with it. Pieces of paper, thickish¹, greasy to the touch, green-coloured, with pictures on each side, some old man in a wig² and on the other side a pyramid with an eye above it. It said *In God We Trust*. My mother said people used to have signs beside their cash registers, for a joke: *In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash*. That would be blasphemy now.

15 You had to take those pieces of paper with you when you went shopping, though by the time I was nine or ten most people used plastic cards. Not for the groceries though, that came later. It seems so primitive, totemistic even, like cowrie shells³. I must have used that kind of money myself, a little, before everything went on the Compubank.

I guess that's how they were able to do it, in the way they did, all at once, without anyone knowing beforehand. If there had still been portable money, it would have been more difficult.

25 It was after the catastrophe, when they shot the President and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on the Islamic fanatics, at the time.

Keep calm, they said on television. Everything is under control.

I was stunned⁴. Everyone was, I know that. It was hard to believe. The entire government, gone like that. How did they get in, how did it happen?

That was when they suspended the Constitution. They said it would be temporary. There wasn't even any rioting⁵ in the streets. People stayed home at night, watching television, looking for some direction. There wasn't even an enemy you could put your finger on.



Look out, said Moira to me, over the phone. Here it comes.

40 Here what comes? I said.

You wait, she said. They've been building up to this. It's you and me up against the wall, baby. She was quoting an expression of my mother's, but she wasn't intending **45** to be funny.

Things continued in that state of suspended animation for weeks, although some things did happen. Newspapers were censored and some were closed down, for security reasons they said. The roadblocks began to appear, and **50** Identipasses. Everyone approved of that, since it was obvious you couldn't be too careful. They said that new elections would be held, but that it would take some time to prepare for them. The thing to do, they said, was to continue on as usual.

1 épais • **2 perruque** • **3 shiny shells of sea snails** •
4 shocked • **5 émeute**

The Handmaid's Tale,
Margaret Atwood, 1985



- A.** Read the text. Pick out the elements that used to be part of a normal world and the elements that are the norm now.
- B.** What was the turning point between "then" and "now"? Quote the text.
- C.** Write a short chronology of events.

- D.** Who was the main target of those changes?
How do you know?
- E.** Sum up the story in your own words.
- F.** What ingredients does the author use to turn normality into dystopia?

2 Part two: That day

We'd all got up in the usual way and had breakfast, granola, I remember, and Luke had driven [our daughter] off to school, in the little outfit I'd bought her just a couple of weeks before, striped overalls and a blue T-shirt. What month was this? It must have been September. There was a School Pool¹ that was supposed to pick them up, but for some reason I'd wanted Luke to do it, I was getting worried even about the School Pool. No children walked to school any more, there had been too many disappearances.

When I got to the corner store, the usual woman wasn't there. Instead there was a man, a young man, he couldn't have been more than twenty.

She sick? I said as I handed him my card.
Who? he said, aggressively I thought.
The woman who's usually here, I said.
How would I know, he said. He was punching my number in, studying each number, punching with one finger. He obviously hadn't done it before. I drummed my fingers on the counter, impatient for a cigarette, wondering if anyone had ever told him something could be done about those pimples² on his neck. I remember quite clearly what he looked like: tall, slightly stooped³, dark hair cut short, brown eyes that seemed to focus two inches behind the bridge of my nose, and that acne. I suppose I remember him so clearly because of what he said next.

Sorry, he said. This number's not valid.

That's ridiculous, I said. It must be, I've got thousands in my account. I just got the statement two days ago. Try it again.

It's not valid, he repeated obstinately. See that red light? Means it's not valid.



You must have made a mistake, I said. Try it again.

He shrugged⁴ and gave me a fed-up smile, but he did try the number again. This time I watched his fingers, on each number, and checked the numbers that came up in the window. It was my number all right, but there was the red light again.

See? he said again, still with that smile, as if he knew some private joke he wasn't going to tell me.

I'll phone them from the office, I said. The system had fouled up⁵ before, but a few phone calls usually straightened it out. Still, I was angry, as if I'd been unjustly accused of something I didn't even know about. As if I'd made the mistake myself.

You do that, he said indifferently. I left the cigarettes on the counter, since I hadn't paid for them. I figured I could borrow some at work.

I did phone from the office, but all I got was a recording. The lines were overloaded, the recording said. Could I please phone back?

The lines stayed overloaded all morning, as far as I could tell. I phoned back several times, but no luck. Even that wasn't too unusual.

¹ transport scolaire • ² boutons d'acné • ³ voûté •

⁴ hausser les épaules • ⁵ mess up, break down

The Handmaid's Tale,
Margaret Atwood, 1985



A. Read the text. What happened to the narrator?

Why was that day important to her?

B. Identify the elements of conversation.

Is there anything that surprises you?

What effect does this have on the reader?

C. Pick out the clues showing that the situation is only going to get worse.

3 Part three: Unemployed



About two o'clock, after lunch, the director came in to the discing room¹.

I have something to tell you, he said. He looked terrible; his hair was untidy, his eyes were pink and wobbling², as though he'd been drinking.

We all looked up, turned off our machines. There must have been eight or ten of us in the room.

I'm sorry, he said, but it's the law. I really am sorry.

For what? somebody said.

10 I have to let you go, he said. It's the law, I have to. I have to let you all go. He said this almost gently, as if we were wild animals, frogs he'd caught, in a jar, as if he were being humane.

We're being fired? I said. I stood up. But why?

15 Not fired, he said. Let go. You can't work here any more, it's the law. He ran his hands through his hair and I thought, he's gone crazy. The strain³ has been too much for him and he's blown his wiring⁴.

You can't just do that, said the woman who sat next to me. This sounded false, improbable, like something you would say on television.

It isn't me, he said. You don't understand. Please go, now. His voice was rising. I don't want any trouble. If there's trouble the books might be lost, things will get broken...

25 He looked over his shoulder. They're outside, he said, in my office. If you don't go now they'll come in themselves. They

gave me ten minutes. By now he sounded crazier than ever.

He's loopy⁵, someone said out loud; which we must all have thought.

30 But I could see out into the corridor, and there were two men standing there, in uniforms, with machine guns. This was too theatrical to be true, yet there they were: sudden apparitions, like Martians. There was a dreamlike quality to them; they were too vivid, too at odds with their surroundings.

Just leave the machines, he said while we were getting our things together, filing out. As if we could have taken them.

We stood in a cluster⁶, on the steps outside the library.

40 We didn't know what to say to one another. Since none of us understood what had happened, there was nothing much we could say. We looked at one another's faces and saw dismay, and a certain shame, as if we'd been caught doing something we shouldn't.

45 It's outrageous, one woman said, but without belief. What was it about this that made us feel we deserved it?

1 (ici) salle de composition éditoriale • 2 tremblants • 3 stress • 4 (ici) système nerveux • 5 crazy • 6 in group

The Handmaid's Tale,
Margaret Atwood, 1985



A. Read the text and pick out elements that show the director's state of mind.

B. Pick out the women's reactions and the comments that the narrator makes. How do the women feel?

C. What language and images are used to convey the surreal impression felt by the women?

D. Focus on the last sentence and use your previous answers to say how this extract accounts for the women's lack of rebellion.

E. Go further. Say how the two previous extracts build up to this one.

Inside the Writer's Mind

Can fiction help us to seek a better future?

1 A moment with Margaret Atwood



- A. Listen to an interview with Margaret Atwood on [MP3 n°93](#).
B. What does the author reveal about her writing process?
What were her sources of inspiration?

Cultural fact

Margaret Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1985 and since then, it has sold over 8 million copies in English. It became a hit television series when it was adapted in 2017.



2 The thin line between reality and fiction

- A. Read the article. What were Margaret Atwood's hopes when she wrote the book? Focus on the words "prediction", "antiprediction" and "wishful thinking".
B. Focus on paragraph 2 (l. 11). What elements of current events could inspire people to write about them?
C. From the extracts you have read, would you consider *The Handmaid's Tale* a prediction? Why (not)?
D. **Have your say.** How does reality inspire fiction, and how does fiction invite us to reflect on the real world?

YOUR PROJECT

You are the narrator (Offred). You want the world to know about what you are not allowed to do anymore. Write a letter in secret to a journalist from a foreign country about your new life in Gilead. Express your regrets about people's inaction (If we had...). Use [Worksheet n°49](#).

Is *The Handmaid's Tale* a prediction? That is the third question I'm asked – increasingly, as forces within American society seize power and enact decrees that embody what they were saying they wanted to do, even back in 1984, when I was writing the novel. No, it isn't a prediction, because predicting the future isn't really possible: there are too many variables and unforeseen possibilities. Let's say it's an antiprediction: if this future can be described in detail, maybe it won't happen. But such wishful thinking cannot be depended on either. [...]

In the wake of the recent American election, fears and anxieties proliferate. Basic civil liberties are seen as endangered, along with many of the rights for women won over the past decades, and indeed the past centuries.

In this divisive climate, in which hate for many groups seems on the rise and scorn for democratic institutions is being expressed by extremists of all stripes, it is a certainty that someone, somewhere – many, I would guess – are writing down what is happening as they themselves are experiencing it. Or they will remember, and record later, if they can. Will their messages be suppressed and hidden? Will they be found, centuries later, in an old house, behind a wall? Let us hope it doesn't come to that. I trust it will not.

Margaret Atwood, [\[REDACTED\]](#),
10 March 2017

LANGUAGE LAB



- Unit's vocabulary
- Audio words
- MP3
- Interactive Test

★ 1. Match the beginning of each sentence with its ending.

- A. When they heard that they were all fired,
 B. The politics of that society were intentionally divisive
 C. In retrospect, Offred thinks that
 D. In this dystopian society,
 1. people should have foreseen the consequences of the Identipass and Compubank.
 2. so that the population wouldn't unite and riot.
 3. the women were dismayed but didn't protest.
 4. the laws that are enacted by the government seem unfair and discriminatory.

★ ★ 2. Put the verbs in the appropriate tense

- A. If all the members of the government are killed, there (**be**) a civil war.
 B. If all that is described (**be**) true, it would be total chaos.
 C. If George Orwell had been right, the world (**collapse**) by now.
 D. If people lose touch with reality, they (**become**) a threat to themselves.
 E. If fiction catches up with reality, the worst (**be**) to come.

★ ★ 3. Word building. Add a prefix or a suffix to the following words to build new ones. If necessary, check your answers in a dictionary.

danger • foresee • scorn • shame • deserve

★ ★ ★ 4. Translate into French.

- A. If we could foresee future events, we would make fewer mistakes.
 B. If fake news prevails over the truth, democracy will be in danger.

5. Interactive test! What is your score?



OPEN YOUR EARS!

♪ PHONOLOGY ♪

L'accentuation des verbes préfixés

- Écoutez la liste des verbes suivants [MP3 n°94](#). Que remarquez-vous?
approach • approve • believe • consider • continue • declare • intend • prepare • remember • suspend
- Cherchez d'autres verbes avec les mêmes préfixes et entraînez-vous à les prononcer correctement.

❓ AUDIO MYSTERY ❓

Listen and solve the mystery. [MP3 n°95](#)



Picture challenge

- 3 sentences
- 4 to 6 sentences
- 7 sentences and +

How many sentences can you write using the opposite rules? Collect as many stars as possible!



Tom Gauld (British cartoonist), 2017

AXE 5

167

UNITS

13
14
16**Évaluation**  **Compréhension de l'oral** 

"Why is Hollywood obsessed with mythical characters and historical biopics?" 

Listen to the audio recording three times and recap what you have understood.

Expression écrite 

Choisissez l'un des deux sujets.

Sujet 1 : Hollywood loves making biopics. How can you explain this success worldwide?

Sujet 2 : Which of these two statements do you agree with? Develop your answer and give examples.

1. *"I love historical series. I love watching history unfold before my eyes!"*
2. *"Please. Stop making so many historical series. They are often far from the truth and are misleading."*

UNIT 15

Évaluation  **Compréhension de l'oral** 

"Dragons  in Literature"

Listen to the audio recording three times and recap what you have understood.

Expression écrite 

Choisissez l'un des deux sujets.

Sujet 1 : How can you account for the fact that dragons and other mythical creatures have always inspired literature and cinema? Give examples.

Sujet 2 : Write an email to convince a friend to celebrate with you "Appreciate a Dragon Day" in a library or a museum.

UNIT 17

Évaluation  **Compréhension de l'oral** 

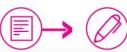
"A golden age for dystopian fiction" 

Listen to the audio recording three times and recap what you have understood.

Expression écrite  **Choisissez l'un des deux sujets.**

Sujet 1 : Discuss the following quote and give examples to illustrate your opinion: *"Dystopian societies that we read in books or watch in films are closer to reality than ever before. The warning signs they have sent for decades have not been seen. It may already be too late."*

Sujet 2 : There has been a growing popularity for dystopian worlds in TV series and films recently. Do you share this interest? Why (not)?

UNIT 17**Évaluation**

Like the Kingdom of God, the Republic of Gilead is both now and not yet. Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* conjures a theocratic dystopia — a version of the United States taken over by fundamentalist Christians after a terrorist attack on Washington. Women are now divided into rigid classes determined by an idiosyncratic interpretation of the Bible. Atwood's protagonist, Offred, is a Handmaid — a fallen woman who is forced to bear children for righteous couples — and the book follows her sufferings under the Gilead regime. Atwood paints in garish strokes intended to shock: This new society calls homosexuality “gender treachery” and forbids women to read, own property, or choose their own clothing. Since the novel's publication three decades ago, Gilead has existed as a paper nightmare that gains or loses dimension based on the state of our national politics. Of course, we don't divide women into classes of Marthas, Handmaids, Econowives, and Wives; we call them “the help,” “surrogates,” the working class, and the one percent. [...]

Set in the very near future, Hulu's new adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* subtly updates Atwood's dystopia. [...] In the show, as in our moment, it is not just men, but crucially some women, too, who fervently wish for a society where women are no longer free or equal. Women known as Aunts initiate the Handmaids into their new roles; Wives terrorize Handmaids with little restraint. These women midwife Gilead into the world, though it's not clear what they stand to gain from any of it.

Most contradictory and recognizable of all these female collaborators is Serena Joy, the wife of Offred's commander. Before Gilead, she graced American television screens as a preternaturally blond evangelist. (Serena Joy was her stage name, a nom de guerre for the culture wars.) Even though she occupies the highest rank for a woman in this new world, she is now legally inferior to her sad-sack husband and, finding herself childless, has to employ Offred as a surrogate. Rage roils the edges of her ice-princess restraint. “She doesn't make speeches anymore,” Offred notes in the book. “She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word.” [...]

But *The Handmaid's Tale* does more than present a possible future: it asks us to consider how we'd end up there. A form of feminism that celebrates power for power's sake, instead of interrogating how it is concentrated and distributed, will usher us into fascism. Feminism means something. Some choices oppress the women who make them, and some beliefs, if enforced, would oppress everyone else, too. Allow an anti-choice woman to call herself a feminist and you have ceded political territory that you cannot afford to lose. Stripped of political meaning, “feminist” becomes an entirely subjective term that anyone with any agenda can use. [...]

Margaret Atwood makes a perfect cameo in Hulu's series. She plays an Aunt, and she slaps the side of Offred's head during her re-education. Pay attention, she seems to say. Wake up.

Sarah Jones, *The New Republic*, 2017

Compréhension de l'écrit

- A.** Write in your own words what life in Gilead is like.
- B.** Explain the following quote:
“*The Republic of Gilead is both now and not yet.*” (l. 1)
- C.** What parallel does the journalist draw between Gilead and the United States?
- D.** In Gilead, how do women accept their fate?

Expression écrite**Choisissez l'un des deux sujets.**

Sujet 1 : From what you have read or from what you know about Margaret Atwood's novel or the series based on her novel, could Gilead exist in the future? Why (not)?

Sujet 2 : Comment on the last sentence of the article: “*Margaret Atwood makes a perfect cameo in Hulu's series. She plays an Aunt, and she slaps the side of Offred's head during her re-education. Pay attention, she seems to say. Wake up.*” (l. 31)

AXE 5

Evaluation



Odea Donahue has been able to travel through people's dreams since she was six years old. Her mother taught her the three rules of walking: Never interfere. Never walk the same person's dream more than once. Never be seen.

Dea was six years old the first time she ever walked a dream.

It was an accident.

They'd been living on the outskirts of Disney World then, 5 in a large condo¹ meant to look like a castle, with turrets on the roof and flags hanging above the doorway. [...] There was a girl, Mira, who lived in 7C. Like Dea, she was too sick to go to school. She had bad asthma and legs that were kind of collapsed, so she walked really 10 slowly [...]. She was one of Dea's first friends. Dea and Mira made up elaborate stories about the other residents of the condo, invented a new language called Inside Out, and buried treasure in the potted plants so that aliens would someday find it. [...] 15 The day it happened, they'd spent the morning pretending to be scientists, inventing names for every flower they could think of, drawing them carefully with crayons in a big book of heavy-duty artist's paper Mira's dad had bought her [...]. [...] At some point, they fell asleep, lying next to each other in their shorts and T-shirts, their feet just 20 touching. And Dea found herself walking down a narrow stone corridor, open to the air on both sides and half collapsed, as in a castle gone to ruin. As she moved forward, the stone shifted and reformed into individual doorways. Later, she learned from her mom that this wasn't uncommon. The dreamer, sensing an intrusion, builds walls, buildings, sometimes whole cities, to prevent the strange element, the walker, from getting in [...]. But Mira's mind wasn't very practiced, and so Dea passed easily through 25 one of the doorways and ended up in the open, standing on a vivid stretch of green grass. Walking someone else's dream was like moving through a stranger's house. Everything was unfamiliar, and Dea knew instinctively not to disturb or touch anything. On a tennis court several hundred feet away, Mira was playing. She was running back and forth on legs that were both strong and straight, and each time her racquet connected with the ball, there 30 was a satisfying thwack. Then, midair, each ball turned into a bird and soared² away. Soon there were dozens of birds, circling overhead, as though waiting for something. Even at six, Dea knew that she was trespassing³ on something very private. All at once the birds converged and became an enormous kite⁴, so large it blotted⁵ out the sky. Then the court was swallowed in shadow and she knew it was time to wake up. [...] 35 Her mom knew what she'd done. At the time, Dea didn't think that was strange. She was Mom. She knew everything. [...]. That day, Miriam sat at the kitchen table, gripping a mug of tea so tightly Dea could see individual veins in her hand, and explained the rules of walking. The first rule, which Dea had already intuited, was that she must never try to change anything or intervene in another person's dream. The second rule, related to the first, was that she might walk as many dreams 40 as she wished if she was careful, and followed all the rules, but she must never walk the same person's dreams more than once. And the third rule was that she must never, ever be seen.



Robert L. Anderson, *Dreamland*, 2015

¹ immeuble en copropriété • ² s'envoler • ³ pénétrer illégalement • ⁴ cerf-volant • ⁵ hid

Compréhension de l'écrit

- A.** How similar are Dea and her friend Mira?
- B.** In whose dream has Dea just walked?
Justify by quoting elements from the text.
- C.** Explain Mira's dream in the light
of her situation.
- D.** Sum up the story in 50 words.

Expression écrite **Choisissez l'un des deux sujets.**

Sujet 1 : Would you build a machine that allows people to walk into someone's dream? Why (not)?

Sujet 2 : On one of her walks, in spite of all her efforts to hide, Dea is seen, thus breaking the third rule.
Write a continuation of the story.

Expression orale**en continu**

Do you think that science will enable us to enter people's minds?
What consequences would it have on humans?
You can use the poster to elaborate your answer.

