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Unit of Study: The Deprivation of Human Needs in Dystopian Literature

Rationale:

Attaining individuality ensures that a person can freely express, think, and make their own decisions in their life. Having no right to express and make decisions is a result of people taking advantage of them without them knowing. This concept applies to the potential the government has to fully control the lives of their citizens known as “totalitarianism.” The media or the distribution of information can also have a controlling power over its consumers. Both or either one of these institutions can result in the dysfunctioning of humanity due to them preventing people from thinking on their own and achieving their desired lifestyle. With that, these characteristics pertain to the book genre of Utopias and Dystopias.

Even though there is no such thing as a real-world utopian or dystopian society, there are countries that have taken a similar route. Countries such as Cuba, China and Vietnam all have a communistic government that restricts the rights of its citizens by controlling the population count, the distribution of resources and what information they can consume. The abundant amount of control the government and the media have in these countries is what the United States needs to prevent from being. Otherwise, the freedoms that every citizen in this country will be at risk. It is important to not let the future generation of citizens take their individual freedoms for granted because these rights will not always be safely ensured at the hands of all elected leaders. Through this unit of study, students will learn the importance of being well-rounded citizens and understand the serious threat that totalitarianism poses to the United States.

George Orwell's *1984* will be the main focus of this unit because it illustrates a dystopian outlook of a unified state. The novel elucidates the negative effects that totalitarianism has on the individuals' intellectuality, physical resources, freedom to explore, and, most importantly, the individuals' right to act on their desires. The novel is in a third-person narrative that focuses on Winston, the main character. Winston serves as an allegorical figure that represents the individual curiosity within a corrupted system. Because of his curiosity, he is able to free himself from the restraints of his mundane and controlled life by wanting more than what the government can provide him: love. The infringement of an individual's right to act upon their human desires is a commonality among most dystopian literature. Overall, the novel is an essential mentor text to comprehend that all utopian and dystopian novels' totalitarian governments prevent most of its citizens to naturally behave as human beings.

Introduction to the Unit

Journal Prompt for the Entire Unit

To start the unit, I will introduce the ongoing quick reflection activity the students will have to complete in their journals at the beginning of each class session during the unit. I will have the students write what they are thankful for at the moment. It is a simple activity and the only condition is that they cannot repeat something they have written before. The students have an option to share what they wrote, and I will be giving an extra credit point if they do share.

Through this quick activity, I want to emphasize the importance of the blessings they have and to not take it for granted. No matter how horrible the world may be or how they feel, I want them to hold onto the hope that they are still good things. I want to also help them cope with the depressing environment presented in these dystopian novels, so they are aware that their freedoms and individual liberties can be taken away.

Defining the Unit's Terms

It is important to start the unit with being on the same page with the students. I want them to understand what the terms utopia, dystopia, types of dystopian control, and dystopian protagonist mean by the end of the unit. By knowing these terms early, students are able to be aware how these terms are represented in the text. I will have a worksheet provided that goes over these terms, and I will go more in depth about the contemporary examples shown in Appendix A.

Song Activity

To help students comprehend the unit's terms further, I will play two songs with their lyrics on screen. The songs will either resemble a utopia and dystopia. The first song will be Cat Stevens' "Peace Train." The song exemplifies the desire to leave their homes to search for that perfect place of their envisioned "peace." On the other hand, Coldplay's "Spies" resembles the extreme censorship of the "Spies" where no one is safe from their homes and in their thoughts. After each song is played, students will have time to write in their journals. They will answer to the following questions:

1. What are your first impressions of the song? What tone does the song display?
How?
2. How does the song set up its utopia (Cat Stevens' "Peace Train") or dystopia (Coldplay's "Spies") through the use of imagery, words, and sound?
3. Does the song appeal to you? Is there a line that stands out in the song? Explain.

The Main Text: *1984*

Readings

Since there are three main sections of the novel, each week will be focused on one section.

Because there are at least eight chapters in a section, I will be assigning a chapter or two for homework. Most of class time will be spent on class discussion or group work based on the reading.

Class Discussions

Before each class discussion, I'll have the students answer to these questions:

1. Were there any areas of confusion?
2. What is one thing you have learned while you were doing the assigned reading?
3. What is one thing you want to accomplish in today's class? Or what is one thing you want to learn about in today's class? (example: "I want to share what I've learned in last night's reading" or "I would like to learn how the author uses imagery to display the horror effects of having an all-controlling government")

Answering these questions can help students visually see where they stand on the readings. It will also help class discussion, and I hope it will encourage them to let me know what they want to know about the story or what they want to talk about in the class sessions with my guidance and experience with the text, of course.

Weekly Group Project Activity

Since each week will be focused on a section of the book, I want them to focus on how the dystopian government in the book prevents its people from being full functioning human beings. With that said, I will be introducing them to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in the beginning of the unit. I will be giving each student a copy photo of Appendix B and have them

take class notes on what each level means. There are five levels where each level consists of the needs that humans must have in order to be a healthy well-being: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Therefore, the students will be divided into five groups, each group will be collaboratively working on a specific level from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Here are the directions of the Group Assignment:

1. On the given blank butcher paper, first write "There is NO [put level the group will be focusing on]". NOTE: if you are doing the physiological level, your group can put "There are NO physiological needs being met" instead.
2. Under the title, write at least five quotes that resemble the story's government taking away the needs of your assigned level. Remember, you must cite in MLA format.
3. Next to the quotes, draw a scene or a symbol that captures the meaning of your quotes.
4. Be creative! There is no format where everything needs to be, except for the images!

I will have the students do this group assignment on Fridays since they will have read the whole section. There will be no class discussion on Fridays, but I will help facilitate the group activity to make sure the students are relating the book correctly to their assigned level or assist them in any way. The groups will present their posters to the class on Monday before I introduce them to class discussion on the new section. I will have their posters up on the wall next to a life-size poster of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The activity highlights the corporate control of these dystopian societies. All in all, the activity will aid the students' awareness of how these governments control the people through restricting the exposure of these levels' full potential.

Working Beyond the Text

To make the unit more suitable for the YA audience, I would pair books with the dystopian classic that can also display a horrifying depiction of a totalitarian government. These books will aid the students in understanding the detrimental and unnatural effects of these corrupted systems that are relevant to the more modern ages. These books include:

1. *Scythe* by Neale Shusterman: The novel takes place in the year of 2042 where humans attain immortality and there is no such thing as crime, war, poverty, and especially death. The novel is about Citra and Rowan who are attempting to be a part of the Scythe or a group of killers to control the population. Though, the problem arises with questioning of the Scythes' moral code to find the joy in killing humans for the greater good.
2. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins: The novel is about Katnis Everdeen who lives in District 12, one of the impoverished districts of the nation of Panem or what used to be North America. She volunteers in place of her sister, Prim, to fight for her life in the yearly Hunger Games, an anticipated event in remembrance of the districts' past riots against the Capitol.
3. *Divergent* by Veronica Roth: The novel's setting is based in a futuristic Chicago where the people are divided into factions. With that, Beatrice, the protagonist, finds out that she is a Divergent during her Choosing Ceremony, which is a ceremony that determines an individual's place in society. Being a Divergent poses a threat to society because they do not fit into one of the five factions but can have the combined characteristics of these factions possess: selflessness like the Abnegation, peaceful like those who are Amity, honest like the Candor, bravery like the Dauntless, and intelligence who are Erudite.

4. *Uglies* by Scott Westerfield: The book takes place a couple years into the future where the government offers free cosmetic operations. People who have not gotten the surgery are called Uglies whereas those who have are called Pretties. The novel is about Tally Youngblood who wants to escape the forced operation of being one of the Pretties.
5. *Wilder Girls* by Rory Power: The novel is about Hetty who goes to a boarding school in Raxter Island, off of the New England Coast. Unfortunately, an increasing number of girls deaths in the island. The cause of these deaths is a virus called the Tox, which intrigues to find the truth in who is behind the virus and what she can do to prevent its spread.

Concluding the Unit

Essay Assignment

To assess their understanding of the unit and the readings, I would like to have the students write an essay based on the prompt below:

Now that you have learned about and applied Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to George Orwell's *1984*, which level is the most deprived in the novel? How does it affect the people in the novel's environment? Why is it important to have this level met all across humanity?

Construct an argumentative essay answering all the questions with supporting evidence from the novel.

Appendix A:

Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics

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:

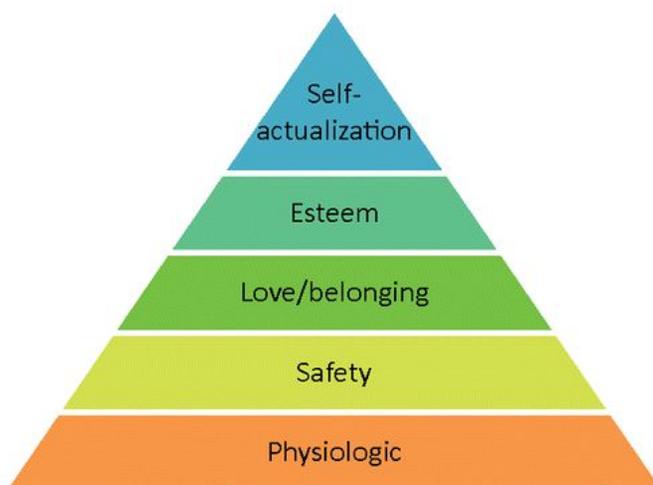
- Corporate control: One or more large corporations control society through products, advertising, and/or the media. Examples include *Minority Report* and *Running Man*.
- Bureaucratic control: Society is controlled by a mindless bureaucracy through a tangle of red tape, relentless regulations, and 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 recognize the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective.

http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson926/DefinitionCharacteristics.pdf

Appendix B:



This image shows the pyramid of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Hale et al. fig. 1).

Works Cited

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