



LANGUAGE ARTS

# Wrong Place, Wrong Time

by Elizabeth Anders

Overview

Students will:

- Learn about dystopias and dystopian literature.
- Create their own dystopias, including a centralized premise.

Terrain Article: "Rhetoric Overload," Summer 2005, page 11.

## Introduction

We have all seen movies or read books about the end of the world as we know it. In each instance, a different method for world domination is portrayed. In some cases, ray gun-toting aliens with big heads invade the planet and put their enormous insect-like queen on a throne in the White House. In others, the citizens of the world are slowly brainwashed by prime time television into becoming dull-witted slaves to evil multinational conglomerates. These books and movies have one thing in common: they are all dystopias.

Simply, a dystopia is defined as a bad place, a place where no one would want to live, a place in which one's rights and freedoms would be gone, a place where the environment would be devastated. In fiction, like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, or in movies like *The Matrix*, the bad place is more than a setting. The dystopia acts as a vehicle for an author's dramatic opinion about the way we live today. In this way, dystopian literature is usually crafted so that it acts as a warning to us – to stop what we're doing or face the consequences.

You may wonder how dystopian literature is different from fairy tales or horror stories. The difference is this: a dystopia is more than a yarn about a person who acts badly in an otherwise sane world. In a dystopia, everything (from subordinate characters to setting and beyond) focuses on one evil premise. The protagonist is an outcast of this world and usually the only one able to see the problems inherent in it.



The term dystopia is derived from Greek and is the opposite of a utopia. Utopian literature details a good place, a perfect place – a place that does not and will not exist. Unlike a dystopia, a utopia is difficult to describe. Writers of utopian literature are often caught in a pickle: the perfect place for one is never the perfect place for all. Because of this, the term "utopian" can be used outside the literary world to negatively describe a concept or belief as wildly naive and idealistic. A dystopia, on the other hand, generally has wide-spread appeal to audiences because it plays upon our deepest fears – a loss of life, liberty, and happiness.

*Resistance is futile!*

CA LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS, GRADES 11-12: READING: Expository Critique 2.6: Critique the power, validity, and truthfulness of arguments set forth in public documents; their appeal to both friendly and hostile audiences; and the extent to which the arguments anticipate and address reader concerns and counterclaims (e.g., appeal to reason, to authority, to pathos and emotion). Literary Criticism 3.8 Analyze the clarity and consistency of political assumptions in a selection of literary works or essays on a topic (e.g., suffrage, women's role in organized labor). (Political approach) WRITING: 1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of discourse (e.g., purpose, speaker, audience, form) when completing narrative, expository, persuasive, or descriptive writing assignments. 1.2 Use point of view, characterization, style (e.g., use of irony), and related elements for specific rhetorical and aesthetic purposes. 2.1 Write fictional, autobiographical, or biographical narratives: a. Narrate a sequence of events and communicate their significance to the audience. b. Locate scenes and incidents in specific places.



## Wrapping our Heads Around It

## Warm-up Activity

Students will encounter the idea of dystopia through writing from a quick-write prompt.

## Teacher Directions

Give students 10 minutes to write their thoughts upon the prompt questions at right. After they are finished writing, ask them to share their views and write these views on a chalkboard, over-head projector, or piece of butcher paper.

*When is it OK to scare or intimidate people?  
Why do people scare others?  
Does it work?  
When do you use fear or intimidation? Why?*

## Talking to the Text

Students will read the *Terrain* article, using notation. They will discuss the uses of dystopia in literature.

## Active Reading Teacher Directions

Pass out a *Terrain* magazine to each of your students and go over the term dystopia. After they engage in active reading, place the chart below on an overhead projector or board and have the class call out their responses.

## Active Reading Student Directions

1. The Glance: Open the magazine to page 11. Look over the article, but don't read anything. Look at the pictures and the layout.



Source: Reading for Understanding

Criticisms	
Unknown word meanings	
Questions	
Scariest Thing	
Grade	

2. Talking to the Text: This magazine is yours for notation. You can write on it, doodle on it, and use it as your personal notepad while you read. Before you begin to draw a skull and crossbones, you must understand some of the other note-taking rules. In the course of reading this article, you must write at least 15 notes. These notes should include:

- One criticism. That means you may criticize the author, the cartoon, the people the author is criticizing, anything.
- Any unknown words you encounter AND what you think the words mean.
- One question.
- One note about what for you was the scariest thing mentioned in the article.
- One note in which you grade the article: A for excellent – F for terrible. You must give a reason for this grade.

## It's Greek to Me

Dys – a prefix from Greek meaning bad, harsh, wrong; ill; hard to, difficult at; slow of; disordered.

Eu – a prefix from Greek meaning good.

Ou - a prefix from Greek meaning not.

Topia – a root from Greek meaning place – originally a field.

Dystopia – literally, a bad place, often used as a literary device in which authors warn readers of the dangers of society's present course if continued in the future.

Eutopia/Utopia – an ideal place that does not exist in reality. (From Greek outopia meaning no place and eutopia meaning good place.)



## Dystopian Drill

Students will create their own dystopian literature.

### Teacher Directions for Modeling Dystopian Drill

1. Before students pair off to create their own dystopian literature, you will model the first few steps.
2. Place the handout below on an overhead projector and pick four students to help you fill it in. These students can be coached by the class.
3. Come up a premise for the dystopia. Some examples:

everyone is equal so no one can be different, crime no longer occurs because the government stops the crime while it is being thought about, all drugs are illegal, etc.

4. Determine how the premise will affect the world of the tale. Example: In *Brave New World*, the characters are emotionally and physically controlled by government-mandated drug use. Due to this premise, this world is filled with anger therapy houses, birth control belts, and pills which supply emotion. It also means that the feelings anyone experiences are suspect.

Name:  
 Name:  
 Date:  
 Period:

### *Dystopian Drill Handout*

What is your dystopian premise?

How does this premise affect the people living in this dystopia?  
(Explain four ways.)

What is the setting of this dystopia? (Place and time period)

Describe your protagonist/main character. (name, gender, age, race, etc.)

How is your protagonist an outsider?

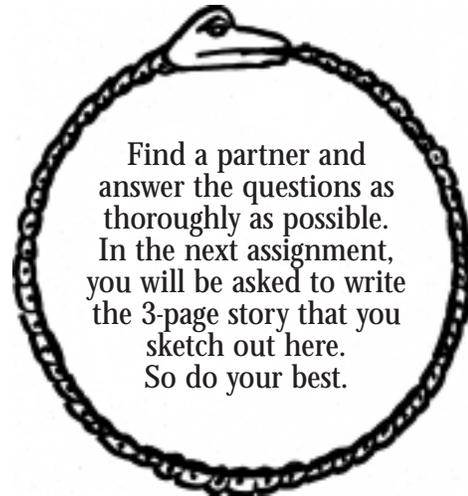
What trait does your protagonist have that will make your readers empathize with him/her?

What are some of the antagonistic agencies the protagonist has to struggle against?

What is the main conflict or issue with which the protagonist is dealing?

What will be the climax or the most exciting part of your story?

How will your protagonist resolve her conflict?





## Story Time

## Writing Assessment

Students will write a three-page dystopian tale in pairs.

Student Directions: You and your partner will write a dystopian story together. Refer to the Dystopian Drill hand-out and answer the following questions with your partner.

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Story Formatting

1. BEGINNING (Introduce premise, protagonist, conflict)
  - Who will write the beginning?
  - How long will this section be?
  - Are you going to hint at the climax? How? Why not?
  - Write the first line of your short story here:
  
2. MIDDLE (Action builds, conflict comes to a head)
  - Who will write the middle?
  - How long will this section be?
  - How will you get the story ready for the resolution?
  - Write one sentence of the climax here:
  
3. END (The resolution)
  - Who will write the end?
  - How long will this section be?
  - You will leave the readers with what emotion?
  - Write the last sentence of the story here:

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Tone/Voice

1. What tone will you use? (Sarcastic, weary, hopeful, etc.)
2. Give 2 examples of vocabulary words you will use. (Technical terms, made-up words, etc.)
3. How will you make sure that this story doesn't sound like two people wrote it?
4. Will your story be told in first person (I was walking) or third person (He was walking)?
5. Will you use omniscient perspective (narrator knows all the characters' thoughts) or limited perspective (narrator knows only the thoughts of one person)?
6. Will your story be action-packed? Why? Explain the action-adventure moments.
7. Will your story have much dialogue? Between whom?

Write one line of dialogue here:

8. Will your story have an interior monologue? Why/why not?

Write one line of interior monologue here:

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Character

1. Who is your protagonist?
2. What is he/she up against?
3. Does this character have any friends? Why?
4. Would you befriend this person? Why?
5. Is this character young or old?
6. Are his/her parents alive? Are they in this tale?
7. Why does your character have a problem with his/her world? How does this affect his/her behavior?
8. Who would be the opposite of your character?

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Setting

1. What is the physical landscape like in this story?
2. What is the government like in his story?
3. What is religion like in this society?
4. What are the laws like in this society?
5. Who has the money/power in this story?
6. When thinking of the setting, what colors do you imagine?
7. How does the environment affect the characters/conflict of the story?
8. How are families or communities run in this place?

What is the message you want to get to your readers through this story?

