

A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

Student Worksheet

Dystopian Literature

Discuss these questions in pairs or small groups, for five to ten minutes per question. Make a few notes as memory aides at the end of your discussion, but don't let note taking get in the way of the discussion! At the end of each question, your teacher will ask you to feed your pair's or group's ideas back to the whole class.

1. What are the problems facing society today? List them:

2. Is it society's aim to eliminate these evils? Is it possible to eliminate them?

3. Is a utopia ever achievable in reality? If not, why not?



A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

4. Where can we find images of utopia in popular culture?

5. Is a dystopian society possible in reality? Where can we find historical or contemporary examples? Where can we find examples in literature and popular culture like television and cinema?



A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

6. Read the quotation from “1984” (see below): then, individually and without consulting anyone else, write down your immediate response to the quotation. What does it make you think or feel?

“If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – for ever.”

(“1984”, part III, chapter iii)

Orwell, 2013, "1984" - The Annotated Edition p.307

7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of these three ways of thinking about human nature?

- human beings are essentially good

- human beings are essentially evil (original sin)

- human beings are neither essentially good nor evil, but are formed by their environment (tabula rasa)



A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

8. How does the idea of tabula rasa fit with utopian or dystopian literature?

9. Why should writers wish to write dystopian literature in the first place?

10. Is dystopian literature mainly the preserve of male writers? What might this tell us about the difference between the male and female psyche?



A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

11. What do you think of dystopian ideas? Are they alarming, depressing, interesting, exciting...? Would you like to read such literature? Why? Why not?

12. Which other literary genres is dystopia related or similar to?



A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

Optional final question: (and how appropriate that there should be 13 questions about dystopia...)

13. Is dystopian writing primarily British, born of the British psyche? Is there such a thing as “the British psyche”? Is American writing more optimistic than British writing (perhaps because of the influence of Hollywood)?

