**Understanding Dystopia**



**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, government, 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/Business control:** One or more large corporations control society through products, advertising, and the media. ***Examples include Minority Report***

• **Government control:** Society is controlled by a government that has strict or impossible rules and regulations, and incompetent government officials. ***Example: The Hunger Games, Divergent***

• **Technological control:** Society is controlled by technology—through computers, robots, and/or scientific means. ***Examples: 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 recognizes the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective.