Name:

Subject Area/Grade Level* of Lesson Plan:
*all lessons must target 4th grade or higher

**Decoding The Matrix: Exploring Dystopian Characteristics through Film**

*Three 50 minute class periods*

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**Lesson Rationale/Overview:** (brief description of the lesson topic, activity, assessment)

*The Matrix* is a fast-paced action movie with plenty of dazzling special effects. At its core, however, it is a dystopian work with many of the same characteristics found in dystopian novels such as *Fahrenheit 451*, *1984*, and *Brave New World*. In this lesson, students are introduced to the definition and characteristics of a dystopian work by watching video clips from *The Matrix* and other dystopian films. They first explore the definition and characteristics of utopian and dystopian societies, and then compare and contrast the two using a Venn diagram online tool. Next, they identify the protagonist in clips from *The Matrix* and then discuss how the clips extend and confirm their understanding of a dystopia. Students then view additional film clips and identify which characteristics of a dystopian society the clip is intended to portray. Finally, they explore how they can apply their knowledge about dystopias to future readings.

**FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE**

NCTE's Topical Resource Kit, *Professional Communities at Work: Engaging Media-Savvy Students* explains that exploring texts from popular culture in the classroom can open doors for students:

Because of their ties to students' world, these texts often result in a higher level of engagement and underscore the literacy skills that students bring to the classroom. Teachers can identify print, visual, and sound texts that students already read and compose; then, they can analyze and compose examples of such texts in class. Once students understand these reading, composing, and critical thinking concepts in familiar texts, teachers extend students' reading or composing practices to more traditional texts and additional examples and genres from popular culture. In this way, multimodal teaching practices provide a connection to more traditional literature and enable students to enhance and build sophisticated literacy skills that help them explore the cultural texts in the world around them. (*"Framing Text"* 6)

This lesson models precisely this move from familiar text to less familiar text-students begin with an exploration of a popular film that many will already be familiar with and then are ready to extend the analytical skills and new ideas to less familiar novels or other texts.

**Further Reading**


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**Objectives (students will...):**

1. Define the literary terms utopia and dystopia.
2. Identify dystopian characteristics in a film.
3. Explain how dystopias criticize:
   A. Contemporary trends
   B. Societal norms
   C. Political systems.
4. Identify vocabulary words and know definitions as well as explore word origins.
5. Know the connotative and denotative meanings and derivations and its influence on English.
6. Know the terms irony, mood, and style and identify them in the film and related literature. What is the sound of the language?
7. Know the terms archetype, motif, and symbol and identify them in the film and related literature.
8. Know how a film maker and author create suspense, and discuss the similarities and differences.
TEKS (Student expected to…):

§110.51. Literary Genres (One-Half to One Credit).

(a) Introduction.
(1) Students enrolled in Literary Genres will spend time analyzing the fictional elements of dystopian literary texts and read to appreciate the writer's craft. High school students will discover how well written literary text can serve as models for their own writing. High school students respond to oral, written, and electronic text to connect their knowledge of the world.

(2) For high school students whose first language is not English, the students' native language serves as a foundation for English language acquisition and language learning.

(3) Statements that contain the word "including" reference content that must be mastered, while those containing the phrase "such as" are intended as possible illustrative examples.

(4) The essential knowledge and skills as well as the student expectations for Literary Genres, an elective course, are described in subsection (b) of this section.

(b) Knowledge and skills.
(1) The student builds an extensive vocabulary through reading and systematic word study. The student is expected to:
(A) expand vocabulary through wide reading, listening, and discussion;
(B) investigate word origins as an aid to understanding meanings, derivations, and spellings as well as influences on the English language; and
(C) Discriminate between connotative and denotative meanings and interpret the connotative power of words.

(2) The student analyzes fictional and poetic elements focusing on how they combine to contribute meaning in literary texts. The student is expected to:
(A) compare and contrast varying aspects of texts such as themes, conflicts, and allusions;
(B) propose and provide examples of themes that cross texts;
(C) connect literature to historical context, current events, and his/her own experiences;
(D) analyze relevance of setting and time frame to text's meaning;
(E) identify basic conflicts;
(F) describe the development of plot and how conflicts are addressed and resolved;
(G) analyze characters' traits, motivations, changes, and stereotypical features;
(H) describe how irony, tone, mood, style, and sound of language contribute to the effect of the text;
(I) determine and explain purposes and effects of figurative language, particularly symbolic and metaphoric;
(J) identify and analyze text structures;
(K) recognize archetypes, motifs, and symbols across texts;
(L) analyze distinctive features of text genre such as biography, historical fiction, science fiction, political writing, fantasy fiction, short story, dramatic literature, or poetry;
(M) identify how authors create suspense; and
(N) Tell how points of view affect tone, characterization, and credibility.

(3) The student reads critically to evaluate texts and the authority of sources. The student is expected to:
(A) analyze the characteristics of well-constructed texts;
(B) describe how a writer's point of view may affect text credibility, structure, or tone;
(C) analyze aspects of texts such as patterns of organization and choice of language for their effect on audiences; and
(D) Examine strategies that writers in different fields use to compose.

(4) The student reads to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to:
(A) compare text events with personal and other readers' experiences;
(B) recognize and discuss themes and connections that cross cultures; and
(C) Recognize how writers represent and reveal their cultures and traditions in texts.

(5) The student uses writing as a tool for learning and researching literary genres. The student is expected to:
(A) use writing to discover, record, review, and learn; and
(B) Link related information and ideas from a variety of sources.

Source: The provisions of this §110.51 adopted to be effective September 1, 1998, 22 TexReg 7549; amended to be effective August 22, 2011, 35 TexReg 3261.
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Prior Knowledge (What would you expect the students to know PRIOR to this lesson?):

They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound–letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

Materials / resources / equipment needed:

Teacher:

Interactive Venn Diagram
http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/venn-diagram-circles-30006.html
This interactive tool allows students to create Venn Diagrams that contain two overlapping circles, enabling them to organize their information logically.

Printouts (see attached hard copies)
1. Dystopias definitions and characteristics

2. Identifying dystopian characteristics
http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson926/DystopianCharacterFilm.pdf

3. Identifying the characteristics of a dystopian protagonist

4. Dystopian film clip guide
http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson926/FilmClipGuide.pdf

5. Teachers film clip guide The Matrix
http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson926/MatrixTeacherNotes.pdf

PREPARATION

1. Prior to Session One, use the Dystopian Film Clip Guide and Teacher’s Film Clip Guide: The Matrix to select and preview the film clips you will use for this lesson. All of the film clips selected are free of profanity and contain only mild violence.

2. Make copies or overhead transparencies of the handouts: Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics, Identifying Dystopian Characteristics, and Identifying Characteristics of a Dystopian Protagonist. Test the Interactive Venn Diagram on your computers to familiarize yourself with the tools and ensure that you have the Flash plug-in installed. You can download the plug-in from the technical support page.

Student:

1. Will be read handouts with definitions to familiarize themselves with literary terms.
2. Students will be prepared for discussion and input.
3. Students will be prepared for group work for brainstorming and writing projects.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Agenda: YOU WILL WRITE THIS ON THE TEACHERS BOARD (or have it as the first pot slide)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(What I will write on the board so that the students’ know what is going to happen during this lesson plan).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Objective and standard met:</td>
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<td>2. What they should be able to do to show their understanding by the end of the lesson:</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Major activities for lesson</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Homework or next time…</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Includes descriptions of warm-up/hook, details about what the teacher and student are doing, and a break down of the estimated time interval for each activity).</td>
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**Session One**

1. Ask students to brainstorm lists of characteristics that describe a perfect society silently in their notebooks.
2. Once everyone has had a chance to jot down some answers, ask students to share the characteristics with the class. Record their responses on the board or on chart paper.
3. Introduce the following definition of utopia from the Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics: A place, state, or condition that is ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions. Consult the definition and examples of dystopia in literature and film from the Wikipedia entry on Dystopia to supplement the lesson further. As always, remember that anyone can edit Wikipedia pages; so be sure to confirm and review resources from this site.
4. Have students identify connections between the class list of characteristics for a perfect society and the definition of a utopian society. Encourage students to fit the items from the brainstormed list into the definition. Ask students whether the items on their lists are aspects of politics, laws, customs, conditions, or something else.
5. Show “The Real World” (Chapter 12, counter 0:38:39 to 0:44:22) from The Matrix, and ask students to think about their list of the perfect society and the definition of utopia as they view the clip.
6. Ask students to compare the society depicted in the film clip to the utopias that they have described. Students should readily point out that the world of the film is quite opposite from their ideas of a perfect society.
7. Introduce the definition of a dystopia from Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics: 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.
9. Go over the information on the Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics sheet, answering any questions.
10. Ask students to use the Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics sheet to fill out the Identifying Dystopian Characteristics chart. If desired, students can complete the sheet in small groups rather than working individually.
11. Once students have completed the chart, gather the class and have students share their findings.
12. Have students save their charts for use during later sessions.

**Session Two**

1. Review the material covered in the previous session by asking students to share their Venn diagram printouts with the class.
2. Show “Morpheus’ Proposal” and “Down the Rabbit Hole” (Chapters 8 and 9, counter #0:25:10-029:50) from The Matrix.
3. Identify the protagonist in the clips.
4. Discuss the difference between direct and implied information. To provide an example, compare what is directly stated to what is implied by the characters’ comments.
5. Arrange students in small groups.
6. Pass out copies of the Identifying Characteristics of a Dystopian Protagonist chart, and ask students to use the information on the Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics to fill out the sheet. Ask students to focus both on direct and indirect information that is communicated in the clip.
7. Gather the class, and ask groups to share their finding with the class. Encourage discussion and exploration of the ways that the clips extend and confirm their understanding of the characteristics of a dystopia.
8. Review the types of dystopian controls listed on Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Two</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Review the material covered in the previous session by asking students to share their Venn diagram printouts with the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Show “Morpheus’ Proposal” and “Down the Rabbit Hole” (Chapters 8 and 9, counter #0:25:10-029:50) from <em>The Matrix</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6. Pass out copies of the Identifying Characteristics of a Dystopian Protagonist chart, and ask students to use the information on the Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics to fill out the sheet. Ask students to focus both on direct and indirect information that is communicated in the clip.</td>
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<td>7. Gather the class, and ask groups to share their finding with the class. Encourage discussion and exploration of the ways that the clips extend and confirm their understanding of the characteristics of a dystopia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Review the types of dystopian controls listed on Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Session Three</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Have students share their journal observations with the class. Encourage students to connect their thoughts to the types of dystopian controls listed on the Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics sheet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Show students “Slimy Rebirth” (Chapter 10, 0:32:25 to 0:35:23) and “The Gatekeepers” (Chapter 17, 0:56:30 to 0:58:53) from <em>The Matrix</em>. Allow discussion of the dystopian characteristics the clips exhibit between the clips.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Ask students to identify the aspects of dystopian society that these clips focus on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Return to the definition of 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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Ask students to focus on the second sentence of the definition (indicated in bold above).</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Ask students to identify the “worst-case scenarios” that the film clips explore. List their observations on the board or on chart paper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Review the list, and ask students to make some initial suggestions of the trends, norms, and/or systems that the film clip criticizes. Record their responses on the board or on chart paper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Arrange students in small groups and ask each group to consider one or more of the following questions, referring to notes and charts from previous sessions:</td>
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<tr>
<td>o What illusion of a perfect society is depicted in the clips the class has viewed? What is the society like in reality?</td>
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<tr>
<td>o How are the members of this society being oppressed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o What kind of control is used to keep the members of this society oppressed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o What current trend, societal norm, or political system is exaggerated in this world?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o What criticism is made through this exaggeration in the clips? What current trend, societal norm, or political system is addressed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Gather the class, and have students share their observations and discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Have students compare their findings to the lists gathered at the beginning of the session.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Ask students to discuss how to apply what they have learned about dystopias in this exploration to future readings. Begin by asking students to brainstorm suggestions that they would give to someone who was reading (or viewing) a dystopian work for the first time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Work students suggestions into a set of guidelines, and record the ideas for use as the class reads and views additional texts.</td>
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**Homework:**

Session One: Have students use the Interactive Venn Diagram to compare and contrast the definitions for dystopia and utopia.

Session Two: Ask students to complete a journal entry in response to the following question: “What does this film communicate about the world in the film? What controls the world in this film and the people who live in that world?”

Session Three: Informal assessment works best for this activity. As students work, circulate through the classroom, observing students’ analytical process and their understanding of dystopian characteristics. Provide support and feedback as you speak with individual students and small groups.

**Extensions**

Use the handout Dystopian Film Clip Guide to identify one or two additional dystopian film clips. Show the film clips to the students. Ask students to use their knowledge of dystopian characteristics to gather information, and use it to answer the following questions:

- What illusion of a perfect society is depicted in this clip? What is the society like in reality?
- How are the members of this society being oppressed?
- What kind of control is used to keep the members of this society oppressed?
- What current trend, societal norm, or political system is exaggerated?
- What criticism is made through this exaggeration? What current trend, societal norm, or political system is addressed?

Follow this unit with a novel or another piece of literature that explores a dystopian society. Appropriate novels include *Brave New World*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *1984*. The short story “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut is another option. Additional pieces of literature that may be considered for this activity include:

- *Feed* (M.T. Anderson)
- *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* (Mary E. Pearson)
- *The House of Scorpion* (Nancy Farmer)
- Uglies series (Scott Westerfield)
- *Bar Code Tattoo* (Suzanne Weyn)
- *Unwind* (Neal Schusterman)
- *Delirium* (Lauren Oliver)
- *Matched* (Ally Condie)
- *Human.4* (Mike Lancaster)
- *Divergent* (Veronica Roth)
- Chaos Walking series (Patrick Ness)
- *The Search for WondLa* (Tony Diterlizzi)
- *Ship Breaker* (Paolo Bacigalupi)
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Printouts with English and Spanish definitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Film clips with sub-titles or dubbed in Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. ESL student will be paired with another student within the groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Venn Diagram in English and Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teacher will review film for cliché phrases and provide a flash card or written description, for example, “down the rabbit hole.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Engage the ESL student when assessing the students work. Have them discuss their knowledge of oppressed societies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Give examples of oppressed and free societies to the student (real world examples.)</td>
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