**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 recognizes the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective.