

Your Very Own Utopia: Alternative Tasks

The lesson "Your Very Own Utopia" can be completed with **other utopian or dystopian works** of your choice. As an example, we have created alternative tasks based on the dystopian novels ***The Giver*** and ***Uglies***. These alternative tasks replace part 2 (tasks 2A, 2B.1 and 2B.2) of the main lesson plan. As the two books have been turned into movies, we have added tasks based on the movie trailers.



Image: geralt on Pixabay

② Dystopian ideas in films and literature

As you learned in part 1, the dark side of utopianism is dystopianism – a utopia gone wrong. To prepare for designing your own utopia, you are going to explore two dystopian works of fiction. First, you will watch the trailer for a dystopian movie, and later (Task 2B), you will read the book that inspired it.

A.1

Pick **one** of the two trailers described below.

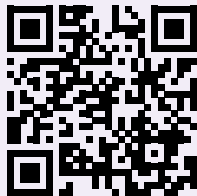
Watch the trailer once and answer the follow-up questions individually.



Image: ChatGPT

The Giver

The Giver tells the story of teenage boy Jonas who lives in a society that values “sameness” over everything else. Life is peaceful and painless, but emotions and individuality are suppressed and collective memories are eradicated.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fH6B4S9ENY4>

Uglies

Uglies is about a dystopian society that considers people “ugly” until they become “pretty” by undergoing extensive cosmetic surgery at the age of sixteen. This procedure is done to keep the peace in an otherwise chaotic world that has exhausted all natural resources.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hcOHkgTrQQ>

How did the trailer generally make you feel? (positive/negative/unclear)

Which parts of the trailer triggered those feelings?

Useful vocabulary:

uneasy disturbed intrigued overwhelmed apprehensive startled anxious fascinated tense disoriented
oppressive bleak chaotic foreboding menacing unsettling dystopian suspenseful haunting

A.2

Find a partner who has watched the **other trailer**. Discuss your reactions. Are your feelings similar or different? Why?

A.3

Watch your trailer a second time and take notes.

What I saw	What I think this means
What I think will happen	

Example:

- *I saw people with no colour → Maybe people have no emotions.*
- *Someone screams → Something is wrong beneath the surface.*

A.4

Now compare your notes and interpretations with a partner who watched the **same trailer**.

Discuss

- what you both noticed
- how you interpreted it
- what you think will happen next in the story.

Talk about any similarities or differences in your ideas and predictions.

B.1

You are now going to read the book *The Giver* (chapters 1 to 13) or *Uglies* (part I). Compare the utopian societies described in the two books. Work individually first and then with a partner.



Image: ChatGPT

Individual work:

Fill in the table with information and your own reactions to the society described in your book.

Partner work: Find a partner who has read the other book.

- Ask questions to understand your partner's society
- Take notes while your partner explains and interprets their text
- Then complete the table with information about the other society

Questions	Person A: <i>The Giver</i> (chapters 1–13)	Person B: <i>Uglies</i> (part I)
How was the society established and how would you describe its people?		
What are their most important values?		
How are rules and rights for individuals established? Is there a government, a police force?		
What is mentioned about: • family/marriage • education • religion • nature and science • individual property?		
Do the members of this society mention any problems?		
Which aspect(s) of this society do you find positive?		
Which aspect(s) of this society do you find negative?		
In your opinion, how has the utopian idea turned into a dystopia?		

B.2

Based on the table you have filled in with your partner, discuss the two societies further and reflect on the following questions:

- Are there aspects of the two societies that you find positive or convincing? Why?
- Are there ideas from either society that you would include in your own utopia? How would you make sure it doesn't become a dystopia? Explain your choice.

Support your ideas with examples from the books and explain your reasoning.



Image: ChatGPT

Once you have finished this task, **continue with part 3 (utopian ideas around the world)** in the main lesson plan.



Answer Key



Model answers

The Giver

What I saw	What I think this means
I saw people at war and then people being happy playing with each other.	I think pain and suffering were stopped in that society.
The state of disorder is being replaced by harmony.	I think everyone in this society is happy, safe and calm.
I saw an old man talking to a teenager and we learn that there is a dark secret.	I think the old man understands and knows what the society is all about.
I saw the old man taking the young man's hands and then he sees lots of images of things that have happened in the world.	I think the young man is allowed to see what the man wants him to see about the world.
I heard that there is a morning injection everyone gets every day.	I think the injection keeps the people calm and compliant.
I heard "When people have the freedom to choose, they choose wrong."	I think someone is taking over to make peoples' decisions for them in order for the society to stay happy.
In the end I saw the young man with a baby being zoomed up into a utopian-looking aeroplane.	I think it means that the young man found something out that they don't want him to know.

Uglies

What I saw	What I think this means
A grey utopian town and a girl waking up and looking at herself in the mirror.	In the future teenagers will live alone.
I saw an assembly in which sixteen-year-olds are told that they are preparing for the procedure to make them pretty.	Every sixteen-year-old gets surgery to look pretty. Nobody is left behind. Everyone has the right to be pretty.
I saw a girl talking to her male best friend and making him promise to stay the way he is even after the procedure. He promises her he will.	I think they are very good friends and the girl is worried that her best friend will change after the operation.
I saw advanced technology, flying vehicles and a highly controlled city.	I think technology is used to control people's lives instead of improving their freedom.
I saw the girl joining a group of rebels that refuse the operation and she follows them into the Smoke.	There is more to the procedure than just the plastic surgery to make everyone pretty.
The rebels are being burned and chased by the authorities who want to eradicate them.	The society is controlling and violent. It is a dystopia that looks like a utopia.

B.1

Model answers

Questions	<i>The Giver</i>	<i>Uglies</i>
How was the society established and how would you describe its people?	The society was created to avoid pain and conflict. The people are calm, obedient and controlled.	The society was built around beauty and order. Most people accept the rules without questioning them.
What are their most important values?	Safety, equality, peace and obedience are the most important values.	Beauty, conformity, technology and social harmony are valued most.
How are rules and rights for individuals established? Is there a government, a police force?	Strict rules are made by the community leaders. The government controls people's lives and everyone must obey.	The government makes the rules and watches the citizens closely. People have very few personal rights.
What is mentioned about: • family/marriage	Families are created by the community, not by personal choice.	Relationships seem to be less important than becoming "pretty".
• education	Children are educated for their future roles in society.	Teenagers are prepared for the operation and their future life as "pretties".
• religion	No religion as such is mentioned. It is replaced by a strong belief in the system and its rules.	No religion is mentioned but one could argue that being equally beautiful propels everyone into a kind of paradise. Nobody has to suffer from being different or not enough.
• nature and science	Science controls life, while nature is not very important.	Advanced science is used to change people's bodies and control society.
• individual property?	People do not seem to own many personal things. Everything is organised by the community.	Individual freedom is limited, but people enjoy luxury after the operation and belong to society.

Questions	<i>The Giver</i>	<i>Uglies</i>
Do the members of this society mention any problems?	Most people think their society is perfect. They are unburdened by past events. Only Jonas begins to see the problems.	Most people are happy with the system, because they get pleasure out of it. Only a few rebels question it and are prepared to live differently.
Which aspect(s) of this society do you find positive?	There is no war, hunger or crime. People feel safe.	Everyone is treated equally and technology has improved people's lives.
Which aspect(s) of this society do you find negative?	People have no freedom, real emotions or personal choices.	People lose their individuality and are judged mainly by their appearance.
In your opinion, how has the utopian idea turned into a dystopia?	The wish for a perfect society destroyed freedom, emotions and individuality.	The dream of perfect beauty became a system that controls people and punishes anyone who is different.