Utopias and Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics
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Utopia: A place, state, or condition that is ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions.

Characteristics of a Utopian Society
- Information, independent thought, and freedom are promoted.
- A figurehead or concept brings the citizens of the society together, but not treated as singular.
- Citizens are truly free to think independently.
- Citizens have no fear of the outside world.
- Citizens live in a harmonious state.
- The natural world is embraced and revered.
- Citizens embrace social and moral ideals. Individuality and innovation are welcomed.
- The society evolves with change to make a perfect utopian world.

Types of Utopian Ideas
Most utopian works present a world in which societal ideals and the common good of society are maintained through one or more of the following types of beliefs:
- Economic ideas: Money is abolished. Citizens only do work that they enjoy.
- Governing ideas: Society is controlled by citizenry in a largely individualist, communal, social and sometimes libertarian "government". The term government is used loosely, as power is seen to corrupt, so constructed government systems are warned against.
- Technological ideas: In some cases, technology may be embraced to enhance the human living experience and make human life easier and more convenient. Other ideas propose that technology drives a wedge between humanity and nature, therefore becoming an evil to society.
- Ecological ideas: Back to the nature, humans live harmoniously with nature and reverse the effects of industrialization.
- Philosophical/religious ideas: Society believes in a common religious philosophy, some fashion their surroundings around the biblical Garden of Eden. In inter-religious utopias, all ideas of God are welcomed. In intra-religious utopias, a singular idea of God is accepted and practiced by all citizens.

The Utopian Protagonist
- works to promote the ideals of society.
- questions the existing social and political systems with the aim to bring positive change.
- believes or feels that the society in which he or she lives is always getting better.
- helps the audience recognize the positive aspects of the utopian world through his or her perspective.
**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.
Your Perfect World
On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions:

● If you could live anywhere in the world, where would you live?
● Why? What about this place appeals to you?
● Describe your perfect life.
   Who would you want with you?
   What would you do every day?
   How would you make money?
   What kind of rules would you follow (or not)?
Create Your Utopia

On a separate sheet of paper, outline your utopia:

1. Name of Your Utopian Society
Choose a creative and appropriate name to represent your new society. Explain your choice in a way that makes the reasons for the name clear.

2. Declaration of Independence
Write a brief statement (1-2 paragraphs) describing the reasons for your formation of a utopian society. In other words, what specifically don’t you like about current society? How has the current society broken trust with you? Why do you feel the need to form a “more perfect” society? You might refer to the U.S. Declaration of Independence for ideas.

3. Utopian Motto and Seal with Animal
Create a slogan or motto that inhabitants of your utopia will follow, and develop a utopian seal. Explain the meaning and significance of the motto and seal you choose. What animal would symbolize your utopia? Explain your choice.

4. List of Rules
Develop a list of at least ten rules that all community members will follow. Provide a rationale for each rule.

5. Governing Body
How will the government of this utopia be structured? Will you have a democracy, an anarchy, a monarchy, or a dictatorship? How will your utopia make decisions?