

TEACHING DYSTOPIA IN DYSTOPIAN REALITIES: TRAUMA-INFORMED
PEDAGOGY AND THE DYSTOPIAN NOVEL AFTER COVID-19

By

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING DYSTOPIA IN DYSTOPIAN REALITIES: TRAUMA-INFORMED PEDAGOGY AND THE DYSTOPIAN NOVEL AFTER COVID-19

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This project advocates for a trauma-informed approach when teaching dystopian literature, particularly those with plague or pandemic plots. To have a truly student-centered approach in the classroom, trauma-informed pedagogy is necessary for students not only to learn comfortably, but to actively be creative or retain information.

Dystopian literature is assigned and consumed at pervasive rates; this popularity calls for additional attention to its teaching. The survey data presented in this project shows that 68 of 100 students had been assigned one or more dystopian texts through school years 2020 onwards, and 72 additionally were seeking out the dystopian genre on their own. This genre provides a unique platform for reflection and connection, often having directly related plot-points to current events; it therefore calls for special attention regarding pedagogical decisions.

Exemplifying trauma-informed strategies in the form of usable lesson plans, this project provides trauma-informed lesson plans for the following texts: adrienne maree brown's *Grievers*, Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, and the album *Land Animal* by Bent Knee. These lesson plans explore dystopia using teaching practices such as content warnings, collaboration, and providing multiple

access points for material. Using these strategies can work towards inclusivity and help students learn and participate during uncertain times. Envisioning oneself into the future can be a radical and healing act for young people, emphasizing those with marginalized identities. All classrooms can benefit from trauma-informed teaching as all students bring different lived experiences and perspectives to the learning space.

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INTRODUCTION

Foreword

I'd come home, shaking hands, and put my mask back on to walk up the stairs wondering how to best stop face shields from fogging up. I'd take off my shoes and leave them in the garage, shower immediately, and put my clothes in the washer. We weren't sure about how contagious it was, and with my father's chemo we couldn't take any risks.

I would work with children with three masks on and follow hand washing protocols, and my bosses would video call in to see how it was going. It was more important to keep the bulky face shield in place than to dodge frustrated pencils, crayons, and stuffed Elmos; I too found the kindergarten Zooms frustrating and frankly dystopian. *Stay muted, keep your eyes on the screen, hands off the keyboard.* With none of my clients could I play outside: the fires raging California had my town at dangerous air quality.

Breathing for the first time of the day, home at last, I would dive in: *Parable of the Sower. Riddley Walker. The Road.* What I was reading was darker than my own days. What had started as a persistent interest throughout my reading life became an insatiable desire for world-breaking. Zooming with my partner, we would screen-share and watch *Westworld. The Handmaid's Tale. Black Mirror.* I was sick to my stomach. I wasn't sleeping. I was holding my breath. I was Lauren Olamina, feeling the pain of others (or

were my dear characters feeling more pain because of me?). My partner lived at Earthseed— a closed outdoor school, equipped with a garden, empty rooms, and acres and acres between them and the neighbors. I was Riddley Walker, traveling through a gray world. I was Rick from *The Walking Dead*, seeing all the cars going the opposite direction, leaving the city...am I going the wrong way? Did something happen? Something happened to me, as something happened to all of us these years.

Unlike Olamina, I did not write down my musings. I could not muster a word about COVID without rejecting it immediately. I reach back now, eyes covered with one hand and the other hand reaching deep into the dark that was March 2020 to June 2021(and onwards). Within and through this project, I ask others to reach back with me, to collaboratively explore world-ending material during our own dystopia.

Through these pandemic readings, I was inspired to pursue this project of investigating student support and dystopian readings, given our current lived experiences, considering the many connections between dystopian situations and dystopian literature. Through the eyes of a poet and researcher, I am viewing this situation through the limited scope of Cal Poly Humboldt learning objectives and students—though there are of course many important stories across the American education system that are applicable to this project.

To speak further of positionality, individuals were impacted differently throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As I graduated with my undergraduate degree in March of 2020, one week prior to lockdown, I did not participate in the education community during these times of high transition and stress. My industry (at the time),

outdoor education, had closed due to transmission possibilities, and I was not actively teaching during the majority of 2020-2022, outside of working as a behavioral therapist for six months. I made my return (on the Zoom platform, not in the classroom) in Fall 2021—still times of stress, but less of confusion or worry of the unknown; many of us were masked, vaxxed, and out and about.

Newly, I am taking on the role of teacher-of-record for first-year composition classes. As I transition from the role of student to that of teacher, I am inspired to consider pedagogy and the effects of COVID-19 as thoroughly intertwined, and further: inseparable. Currently in the classroom, I have been creating a social environment of collaboration, a labor-based grading policy with flexible due dates and many check-ins throughout the semester. To extend this, in this project I root lesson plans in trauma-informed pedagogical strategies and practices that acknowledge student experiences, pandemic and otherwise.

I would like to draw attention to differentiations in plight: the pandemic affected us all uniquely, with marginalized groups substantially affected. Not only as residents of the United States but also as educators, we must remember these lockdown years were also years of protest, the bringing of the Black Lives Matter movement to the forefront of the news, and Donald Trump's presidency. Marginalized identities were not only more largely impacted by COVID-19, but also by the plethora of current political situations plaguing the U.S. We must take into consideration additional traumas specifically towards Black Americans and the rising of BLM to the public eye, the treatment of Asian Americans throughout COVID-19, the effect of Donald Trump's presidency on those

immigrating to the U.S., and the many other political affairs and stressors that affect the daily lives of individuals. This is also to say that students are coming to classrooms with trauma outside of that from COVID-19—bringing different traumas, lived experiences, and understandings to dystopian fiction. I acknowledge the space I take up with my voice and hope my work moves readers to consider language, writing, the experiences of others, and education more deeply when approaching dystopian materials.

Dystopian literature as a genre, and namely science fiction, has prioritized the experiences and writings of white men throughout its existence. The purpose of this project is not to perpetuate this, but to acknowledge and decenter this, examining the effect of reading about dystopian environments during high-stress times through other perspectives.

To start, a poem

In August,
 The light through the smoke was orange
 Then yellow
 Like a bruise.¹
 It smelled of plastic bones.

There are some patterns I didn't see
 I see them now
 Like Lauren Olamina takes on the physical sensations of others²
 I took on others' fear
 Fear
 Shallow breaths in a plastic mask
 So that children would be "less afraid" of
 Me, the strange astronaut in their
 Homes and places of world building.³
 And so it turns out in one fell swoop
 You can snatch someone's face shield
 Sending them floating, floating
 Still, in zero gravity
 Thinking of their father's death at their hands
 Because they couldn't get unemployment benefits.
 As Lauren's dad disappeared,⁴ mine got diagnosed
 And after Zoom after aching Zoom
 I'd search videos of bombs bombs bombs
 And Riddleyspeak⁵ when my language was too heavy to carry
 Out of fears of describing what was before me
 Argawarga argawarga⁶
 Lauren Olamina trekked the 101⁷ while I scoured websites,
 7 months of worry as I concurrently made way to
 Humboldt county.

¹ A series of fires were raging through California at the time: [2020 Fire Season Incident Archive | CAL FIRE](#)

² *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler

³ I was working with children one-on-one in their homes from August 2020-February 2021.

⁴ *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler

⁵ *Riddley Walker* by Russel Hoban

⁶ *Riddley Walker* by Russel Hoban

⁷ *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler

Introduction to “Teaching Dystopia”

As dystopian media grows in popularity, this project collects trauma-informed pedagogical strategies and applies them to the teaching of dystopian novels, working to acknowledge the trauma and experiences students bring to the classroom and to assigned readings. As students underwent varying degrees of lockdown, illness, and media consumption over the past three years, it is important to consider new teaching strategies for pandemic-centered works, as there is now a greater level of relatability to this creative genre. While this relatability provides space for reflection, deeper connections between fiction and reality also make possible re-traumatization, emotional distress, and feeling unsafe in the classroom while studying these texts. This project intervenes by centering the student perspective, analyzing dystopian-focused discourse in online communities, and presenting multiple college and high school-level lesson plans for pandemic and other dystopian-genre works; these lesson plans specifically intertwine trauma-centered pedagogy for the intention of being a functional resource for teachers. Research regarding the teaching of dystopian literature before the onset of COVID-19 exists, in addition to new teaching strategies in response to COVID-19; however, this project responds to prior research by bringing together pandemic-plot and dystopian works specifically with trauma-aware teaching strategies.

My research emphasizes novels that describe pandemics, plague events, or their respective fallouts. The novels this project will be focusing on include *Grievors* by adrienne maree brown, *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel, and *Riddley Walker* by

Russel Hoban. To provide multiple dystopian genres for analysis, I will also speak to a musical album titled *Land Animal* by Bent Knee.

For other aspects of this project, I will be bringing together multiple teaching strategies and informational sources on trauma. Researchers at the Buffalo Center for Social Research describe Trauma-Informed Care as having six guiding values similar to those of the CDC: safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment (2015). They write: “Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is an approach in the human service field that assumes that an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma” (University at Buffalo). This project acknowledges not only that an individual is *more likely* to have a history of trauma, but also that they are likely to have some form of trauma (collective or individual) from the events of COVID-19, extending this conversation from the year 2015 into a 2023 context.

There have been many resources speaking to trauma-informed teaching. UC Irvine’s DTEI (Division of Teaching Excellence and Innovation) provides a definition that privileges “pedagogical practice that keeps trauma, its prevalence, and how it affects an individual, in mind” (DTEI) when crafting lesson plans and operating within a learning space. Referring to past research on the teaching of dystopian novels in the classroom as well, this project combines these two modes of thought with the aftermath of the recent COVID-19 pandemic in mind. These teaching strategies add to the included lesson plans, as well as provide strategies to apply in any reading classroom so as to center the student experience and minimize risk of emotional distress, re-traumatization, and discomfort when approaching dystopian-themed material. In an article titled “What is

Trauma-Informed Care?” through *Trauma Informed Oregon*, it is stated that “the service system can re-traumatize individuals affecting their willingness to participate and engage” (*TIO* 1); this can be extended to the classroom, as it is important to note that school spaces can already be areas of stress for students, and the emotional state of the student affects the learning process (whether positively or negatively). Application of trauma-informed strategies assists in both learning retention and comfortability in the classroom.

There are three main parts of this project I would like to highlight, the first of these being a survey. Through a survey, the collection of student experiences consuming dystopian media forefronts the student voice in this project. Participants were limited to Cal Poly Humboldt students enrolled in an English class Fall 2022 or Spring 2023. This pool was chosen as hypothetically these students would consider taking the English 105 Literature, Media, and Culture course; the learning objectives of ENGL 105 served as a model for the lesson plans within this project. Survey responses document that students are aware of the connections between fiction and lived experiences, as well as the genre providing a platform to explore these feelings.

Survey responses emphasize the need for additional pedagogical considerations with possible novel assignments and lesson plans due to the frequency they have been assigned to survey participants. For example, answers displayed that roughly each participant had consumed a mean of three dystopian titles (books, movies, shows, and an “other” option) since March of 2020. Fifty-seven of the total eighty-five responses noted that at least one of these titles had been assigned through school, while sixty had read or

viewed a dystopian work for leisure (many of which were novels). In longer answer questions, students were able to make connections between their own lived experiences and the content they were consuming, many reporting that dystopian fiction works provided a platform to reflect upon their own experiences.

I included analysis on the dystopian genre and the Reddit forum [r/ABoringDystopia](#) as a discourse community to examine the crossovers between lived experience, writing, and the lenses through which we view texts and the larger world. This online community exemplifies internet-located discourse about dystopia and brings many themes of this project into chiasmus. This community defines itself on the main page as “a subreddit for chronicling how Advanced Capitalist Society is not only dystopic, but also incredibly boring.” [r/ABoringDystopia](#) draws attention to events we may have become numb to due to frequency or normalcy and frames them as dystopian. Considering the ways in which communication is becoming increasingly embedded within internet platforms, this project provides a timely analysis that honors the way we communicate online as just as necessary, intricate, and communicative as those off the web. Including an internet-based analysis also provides deeper context for the spaces in which students are currently engaging within. This external point of reference allows me to address central questions of dystopian framing with multiple perspectives in mind.

Lesson plans make this project a usable reference-text as it acknowledges that additional steps must be taken when approaching sensitive content in the classroom and imagines ways to move forward as students are adjusting themselves to the current state of schooling and new standards for health practices. To create the lesson plans, I have

compiled teaching methods and applied these found methods to dystopian texts. The lesson plans created for each novel follow a template provided by the Cal Poly Humboldt English department, and the learning objectives model those of the English 105 course: “Literature, Media, and Culture” to maintain a synthesized focus. The course description reads as follows: “Study written, visual, and musical genres, with an emphasis on understanding their role as texts in culture. Develop skills and understanding as a thoughtful reader, viewer, and listener” (Course Descriptions, Cal Poly Humboldt).

The individual lesson plans move through four stages: accessing prior knowledge, extending prior knowledge, application, and reflection. This simple template follows research for learning and retention, similar to learning cycles for elementary education that have been successful since the 1960’s: engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration, and evaluation (Hanuscin, Lee, 52). The dystopian lesson plan activities include group work, large and small group discussions, writing prompts, and multimodal activities, each paired with trauma-informed pedagogical strategies and tailored to the denoted dystopian work. The lesson plans are the culminating aspect of this project, as they bring together research findings, student voices, and analysis of the dystopian genre into a user-reference document.

Primarily, the purpose of this project is to provide a resource for teachers to inform their teaching. As an educator still in the student role, I see how dystopian literature as a premise would be a highly interesting class for this generation of students. An article titled “The Changing Face of the Novel,” speaks to the popularity of dystopian fiction as authors examine newer trends in literature as of 2012: the use of images and

multimodality; the use of polyvocality and multiple perspectives; and the increase in consumption of dystopian novels for the young-adult audience. Serafini, Frank, and Blasingame also note the popularity of this genre of fiction when they highlight, “Dystopian literature resonates with young readers for a reason, and teachers need to help students explore how and why these books strike such a familiar note with them” (148), and they speak directly to my overarching project when they elaborate that “teachers should be more concerned with what a book dredges up from the young readers’ conscious or subconscious minds about their present or potential life situations rather than uniform agreement on the dominant themes or symbols” (148). As this article was published in 2012, the popularity has only increased since then, thus increasing the urgency at which we modify teaching practices for this genre.

Considering what can be “dredge[d] up from the young readers’ conscious” (148), with heavy themes and plotline of negative futures, one might ask why we should continue to teach this genre. A *New Yorker* article draws attention to the concept of a trauma-plot, noting how “As audiences grow inured, one trauma may not suffice” (Sehgal); this is to say authors of newer works may reach to make their plots more shocking, dark, or traumatized—deeming the plot a “trauma plot.” While Parul Sehgal goes on to imply the true case against the trauma-plot relies on how well the trauma is incorporated into the story. (“But the rangy, sorrowing themes that Mott wants to explore are subsumed by an array of cheap effects, coy hints of buried trauma in the narrator’s own past: amnesiac episodes, hammy Freudian slips, a therapist’s sage but unappreciated insights” (Sehgal) being a critique of one such trauma-plot story by Jason Mott), it does

raise important questions of the dystopian novel; as characters of this genre are often experiencing post-apocalyptic, worst-of-the-worst narratives, how much darkness is necessary for a literary device?

“Stories are full of our fingerprints and our old coats; we co-create them” (Sehgal)—*The New Yorker* writer recounts the experience of envisioning a Virginia Woolf scene, realizing a coat she had imagined the old woman in was of her own imagination. This is to say through these dark novel depictions, we hope for better. We imagine the old woman has the warmth of the coat. Sehgal continues discussion of the trauma-plot, referencing Cristina Garza’s discussion of pain in her work “Grieving”: “Where suffering lies, so, too, does the political imperative to say, *You pain me, I suffer with you.*” This promotes the idea that reading such works creates further empathy, in addition to being a creative jumping-off point for our own reflection, envisioning the future, and hoping for change.

Serafini, Frank, and Blasingame write, “Dystopian literature resonates with young readers for a reason” (148). The intervention this project provides is an example of thoughtful additions to any lesson plan designed for the new generation of students, especially considering dark projections of the future; throughout studies, students are bombarded with materials surrounding fascism, late capitalism, environmental crisis, economic despair, illnesses, and otherwise.

In the first-year composition I am currently teaching, there is a daily freewrite activity, the prompt being brought in by a different student each week. Under the prompt “How do you envision your retirement?” (ironically before many of them have begun

their careers), a student made a casual remark before class: “I won’t make it past 23.” Other students nodded. When asked to expand, she spoke of car accidents and brutal deaths, and “just a feeling” that she wouldn’t make it. Envisioning ourselves into the near future has never been more necessary; students need avenues to explore the future and utopian thought, as this can provide mentalities and methods for creating this future that contradicts much of the media that students consume.

Methods

This project takes on a multimethod approach to bring together trauma-conscious pedagogy, student voice, and the dystopian novel. These approaches include genre analysis, rhetorical analysis, discursal analysis of an online forum, a student-survey, a review of current trauma-informed pedagogy practices, and ultimately the creation of proposed lesson plans for a selection of novels.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN REALITY AND FICTIONAL DYSTOPIAS: SHOWING
NEED FOR A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

r/ABoringDystopia Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Cherríe Moraga encourages accepting the cultural *as* rhetoric and lived experiences as part of the scholarly conversation in “Theory in the Flesh.” I encourage readers to extend this to online platforms as well—to say lived experiences and personal accounts in online discursal spaces are also adding to the scholarly conversation.

By inserting an analysis of an online community, this project has elements of the digital humanities⁸ discipline. Clement puts words to the purpose of digital humanities research when she writes of “our penchant for uncertain knowledge” furthering the creation of “scholarship that will impact how we think about and develop new scholarly information infrastructures” (Clement). Through Moraga’s acknowledgement of lived experiences as scholarly, this section looks at “new scholarly Information infrastructures” that are already in existence and naming them as scholarly discourse, specifically looking at the popular subreddit r/ABoringDystopia to see the ways in which online users are framing (and therefore ‘genre-ing’) their experiences as dystopian. This confronts the

⁸ Matthew Kirshenbaum defines digital humanities as “a field of study, research, teaching, and invention concerned with the intersection of computing and the disciplines of the humanities.”

gatekeeping that Kim Dorothy mentions in her work “Disrupting the Digital Humanities,” which “seeks to rethink how we map disciplinary terrain by directly confronting the gatekeeping impulse of many other so-called field-defining collections.” This remapping not only occurs through interdisciplinary and multimethod ways, but also in ways that question what is “academic.”

The Reddit Page

Created in 2015, the Reddit page “r/boringdystopia” is 71.2K members strong.⁹ In the “About Community” section, you find one concise, straightforward sentiment of the group’s work: “Showcasing the idea that we live in a dystopia that is boring.” Only one year later, a new subreddit was born: r/ABoringDystopia. This community quickly grew and far surpassed its predecessor by nearly 700,000 users, currently maintaining 775k members. In a ranking system, r/ABoringDystopia was listed at #692 in terms of subscribers. This may not seem like a feat, however, there are 2.8 million subreddits and 430 million monthly users (Redditlist). With a more specific “About Community” section than its predecessor subreddit¹⁰ and easily accessible rules (which 10 moderators enforce), the surpassing of r/ABoringDystopia to r/boringdystopia may provide a glance into the subreddits core values—a precision with language and presentation.

Focusing solely on the more popular r/ABoringDystopia, this chapter will underscore a few different contentions:

⁹ The webpage Reddit is organized into interest-based “subreddits” to which users can subscribe to be alerted of content. Unsubscribed users (and even users without an account) can still view subreddit pages. r/boringdystopia and r/ABoringDystopia are both subreddit pages that provoke similar posts among users.

¹⁰ “A subreddit for chronicling how Advanced Capitalist Society is not only dystopic, but also incredibly boring” (r/ABoringDystopia).

1. That the subreddit is, in fact, a discourse community;
2. What is at stake with including subreddits as discourse communities in the realm of academia;
3. A discourse and genre analysis of the ‘top’ three posts;
4. How the sentiments within this discourse community connect to a selection of survey answers, speaking to another portion of this project, and
5. Showing that teenagers and adults alike are frequently connecting dystopian literature to lived experiences, as well as framing their own experiences as ‘dystopian’.

Including r/ABoringDystopia as a discourse community in the scholarly conversation allows students to realize the many ways they participate in discourse and are members of respective communities. It decenters what is expected in academia, creating a shift that acknowledges students and the many intricate ways we communicate that are typically external to the academic world. This analysis provides insight as to headspaces some students might be in upon hearing “dystopia” —that it is “boring”, as well as providing a side societal commentary that sheds light on one current mood towards ‘dystopia’ as a terminology. In terms of the whole project, this section points to connections within answers of the student survey.

Under the logic of linguist John Swales and his aspects of a discourse community, we see the first aspect of discourse communities is to maintain “common public goals.” For this discourse community, common goals are found immediately in the “about” section. Below this, one finds the rules for the community members, implying

values: structure, order, and respect. Upon an initial scroll of the subreddit webpage, one finds that sharing content, validation, and collective commiseration seem to be the goals of maintaining, acting within, and publicizing this discourse community.

A second determinant of discourse communities is having “mechanisms of intercommunication.” For this DC, they include (but are not limited to) posting, commenting on posts, and direct messaging among members. The online community has “participatory mechanisms” through upvote and downvote features (similar to liking/unliking mechanisms) as well as user-given awards to provide feedback for both posts and comments. Upon a scroll, you can find different genres—images, text posts, images from other social media sites to show the ways in which reality is dystopian and share the connections people are making. The inclusion of these genres onto this specific page is framing lived experiences and observations as dystopian, creating the space for this project. Lexis, or specialized language needed to participate successfully in this discourse community, includes terms specific to the Reddit community (upvotes, downvotes, karma, etcetera). This community includes members that are moderated, have an awareness of internet communities and current events and maintain a Reddit account, that often pertain to having an awareness of the “silential relations” (Swales 8) or unsaid expectations of this community. “Horizons of expectations” (Swales 8) are maintained through the downvote and upvote functions (users input on what constitutes good or bad work within the discourse community) and the discourse community persists “a sense of its history, and value systems” (Swales 8) through the post history itself, immediate through scrolling.

A Genre Analysis of R/ABoringDystopia

There are a few predominant genres within this discourse community that act as modes of communication: image posts, text posts, reposts from other social media sites, commenting, and a messaging apparatus. One aspect of Reddit's organizational structure for posts and comments is the option to select your viewing organization by "Hot" (trending) "New" (recent) and "Top." This project will be looking at the "Top" ten posts in this subreddit with the temporal selection "of all time," signifying the ten posts that have garnered the most upvotes, per data gathered on February 19th, 2023.

The first trend is that the posts have largely originated from other websites; seven posts are tweets from Twitter, one is a TikTok, one is from a comic website, and one originated on the Reddit platform (see Fig 1). This shows that the community is built from an amalgamation of sources and ideas and highlights the online platforms on which users are posting their connections between life and the term 'dystopia.'

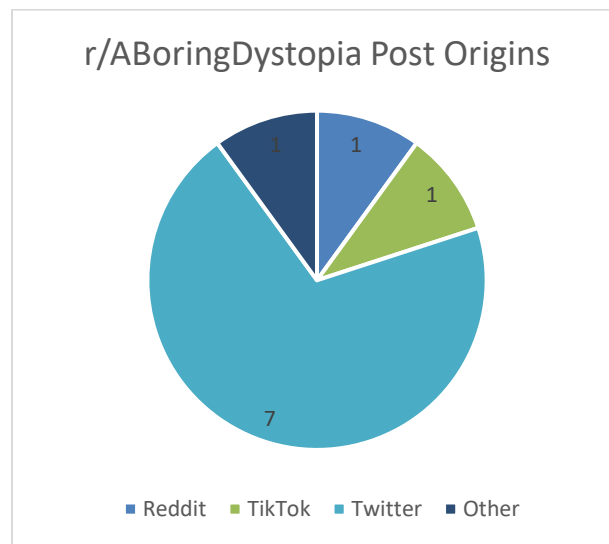


Figure 1: Origins of the most popular posts on the subreddit r/ABoringDystopia. Note: only one of the ten top posts was from Reddit.

In terms of content, it becomes immediately apparent that the posts are from the onset of COVID-19; of the top ten posts, five were posted in the year 2020, and five in 2021. This fact in itself shows a possible skew or limitation of the data: were situations appearing more dystopian during these years, or were people simply more online due to varying degrees of country lockdown? While these questions unfortunately cannot be truly answered through an analysis of this online community, it is worth noting the ways in which data is limited or skewed due to national and world events.

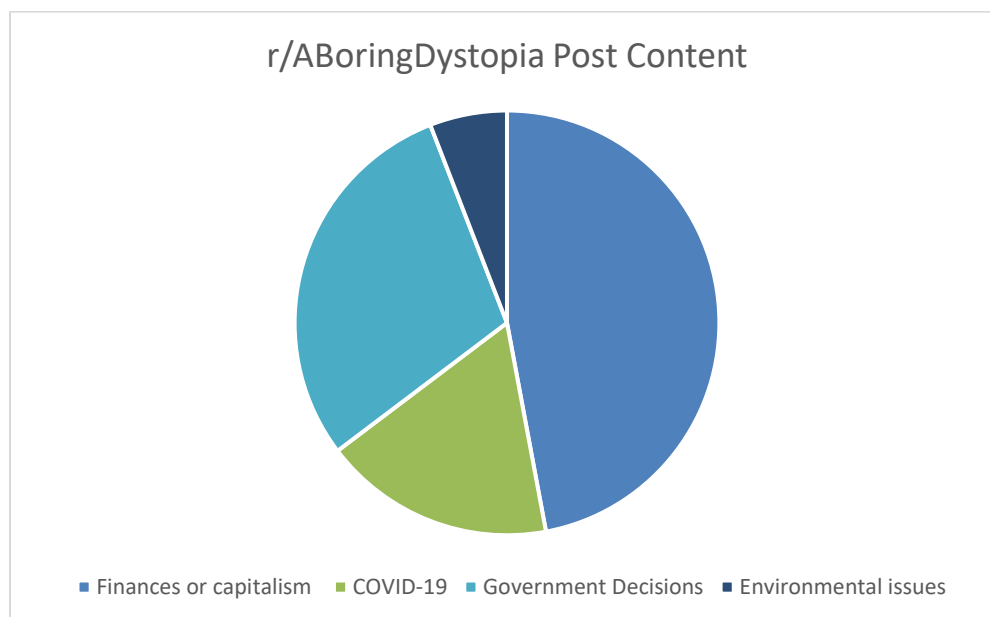


Figure 2: Topics of highlight mentioned in the top ten posts on r/ABoringDystopia. Note: These are aspects viewers are framing as dystopian from lived experience.

Nine of ten posts mention issues that affect the U.S. or reference American currency, and six name America/U.S.A. in the post. Three did not specifically name a country, and one post named the U.K. The most interesting aspect of the data was in terms of what justified the post being evidence of us living in a boring dystopian world: eight posts mentioned finances or capitalism, three posts referenced COVID-19 or its aftermath, five referred to general government decisions, and only one post mentioned the environment.

Reviewing the data, we see that according to this specific online discourse community, many Americans across different platforms are labeling and framing their own lived experiences as “dystopian,” which shows the need for this project (See Fig 2); This serves my project as I note the connections students are making between their lives

and dystopian-genred medias, displaying a need for further pedagogical decisions when teaching dystopian texts in the classroom (and more specifically, plague/pandemic-plot novels after COVID-19). Overall, the data from analysis of the posts shows that many of the largest ‘dystopian’ worries are centered around issues aroused by late-stage capitalism.

Limitations

The top ten posts were posted in 2020 and 2021; while this could lead to some interesting ideas about those years being more dystopian than most, other factors are simultaneously affecting this data, such as more people generally being online during various degrees of pandemic lockdown. Also seeing the posts trending towards American issues, one could interpret Americans as interpreting events more frequently dystopian, or the country itself having more dystopian issues. However, this subreddit is in English which limits its participants, effectively skewing the data towards English-speaking countries and English-speaking users.

Claims Represented in the Data

From the analysis of the posts, we see that internet users are framing and labeling their lived experiences (often daily experiences) as ‘dystopian,’ specifically in the U.S.A and to events connected to capitalism and neoliberal ideologies. Considering our recent pandemic, this conceptualizes a need for additional considerations in the classroom when teaching dystopian material, and more specifically, plague or pandemic-plot fictions as students are largely connecting this genre with their own lived experiences. The use of trauma-informed teaching strategies when using dystopian fiction could ease this

experience for students who feel anxiety or adverse emotions towards the ‘dystopian’ aspects of their own lives, and even provide a platform for healing. The purpose of this online discourse analysis is to underscore that people are making these connections.

SURVEY

Dystopian Medias Survey

Introduction

As dystopian novels are frequently assigned in schools due to the avenues of political, social, and emotional reflection, students are seeing the ways their realities are “dystopic.” This ultimately shows a need for greater care in instruction, specifically trauma-informed teaching strategies as students can be greatly affected by these forms of media. To speak to this need, I was inspired to complete a survey which documents the ways in which students are connecting their lived experiences to the term “dystopia.” This anonymous survey was distributed to Cal Poly Humboldt students currently enrolled in an English course, as these would be the students in consideration for assigning these novels.

Methods

The aims of the survey process are to assess if college-enrolled students are consuming dystopian content (2020 onward), and to record their personal connections to this content. A Qualtrics instrument was used to complete this collection of experiences. The survey itself is twelve questions, comprised of two acknowledgment questions (consent form and reading definitions), four select-answer questions, one listing question (optional, if participant were to select “other”), one Likert scale, and four long-answer questions. The duration of participation was estimated at around ten minutes. In terms of selecting types of questions and responses, I implemented suggestions from the Office of

Institutional Research and Planning of University of Washington, including “grouping questions” (3) for understanding, “focusing on *respondent experience*” (5), and implementing different forms of short-answer questions, such as a yes/no, select all that apply, and a Likert scale.

Participants

In terms of recruitment methods, I notified students of the opportunity to participate in the survey by reaching out to Cal Poly Humboldt English professors as an invitation to share the survey with their students, as well as advertising them to my own classes—both the classes I am currently taking and teaching (thus showing this survey is not limited to undergraduate students).

As other aspects of my project model the learning objectives of a Cal Poly Humboldt class (English 105), I limited my survey sample to Cal Poly Humboldt students currently enrolled in an English class to complete this qualitative research. This is not limited to certain majors, general education, or graduate classes, widening the pool of those who are eligible for the survey. Many consume dystopian media as it grows in popularity, but due to time and sample restraints, this project is limited to the experiences of Humboldt English students.

Confidentiality

The survey was completed anonymously, as anonymity ensures privacy as well as confidentiality for the students, further decreasing the already minimal harm and risk in participation in this research. Anonymity for completing the survey will ensure that undue influence is neutralized. No identifiable information will be written within this

research project; however, there are always limits to confidentiality—witnesses viewing participation in the survey, IP addresses connected to the survey (though these won't be looked into), and other unforeseeable risks that are always possible with an internet-distribution.

While a positive outcome of confidentiality can be honesty in short and paragraph answer survey questions, by preserving confidentiality, representation and diversity cannot be ensured within the written answers or representations of answers on bar graphs, which is a shortcoming of this decision. Data is not associated with identifying information, therefore any trends based upon identity will not be represented in this research. A primary reason for this decision is to guard against conflict of interest (as some survey participants were concurrently taking a class I was teaching—they may feel pressured to participate) and make cognizant power dynamics in the classroom; I removed possible pressure to take the survey by maintaining anonymity and optionality.

Typically, it is expected in research that faculty cannot conduct research on students as it may cause undue influence. My title, however, is shifting as I am both a student and a graduate teaching associate—something my students are fully aware of. As this research takes form as a survey and collection of experiences with minimal risks of harm, it has been accepted by Cal Poly Humboldt's Institutional Review Board.

Institutional Review Board

Students were fully informed about the research and chose to participate or not. Each survey participant had selected a box on the survey itself that indicated their acknowledgement of their participation, their role in the research process, and possible

harms, thus maintaining autonomy and taking on the role of informed research participants. The screen displayed after the Qualtrics survey provided documentation that the survey took place, and the checked box provided a record of agreement. In addition to voluntary participation, refusal to participate did not involve penalty. The student could discontinue participation at any time. This is reflected as there were 100 participants, but each question ranged in number of responses.

Harm possible for completing this survey included psychological distress surrounding research tied to personal experiences, negative emotions, and disclosure of information. Harm for this survey can be defined as minimal risk: "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in the daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests" (Protection of Human Subjects 2018).

As alluded, this project does not ensure that students will not experience adverse emotions by dystopian works in the classroom. However, it instead works to minimize the effects in its approach to pedagogy, keeping trauma in mind when teaching these works.

Data Presentation

Longer answers are analyzed in the "discussion" section before presenting information on trauma-centered teaching, while yes/no and number-answer questions are visually presented as a bar graph (see Fig. 3).

The intent of the survey process is to display relevance for the goals of the overall project and reveal a student perspective, considering the rise in consumption of dystopia-presenting materials. As this project focuses on pedagogical practices and student-centered teaching, the use of student responses within the project prioritizes the student voice in the academic conversation.

Results¹¹

In a “select boxes that apply” question, I included seventeen example titles for students to choose if they had read or watched the dystopian media since the year 2020. Another option was to select ‘other’. Of 100 responses, boxes were selected 336 times. In the written follow-up to the ‘other’ option, thirty-two students elected to include additional titles they had read or watched since the onset of COVID-19, which led to an additional fifty-six titles. This is to say of 100 survey respondents, roughly seventy-three different dystopian titles were consumed between March of 2020 and April of 2023.

Of the titles students selected or listed, the next question asked them to designate how many had been assigned through school. As this survey was distributed to a wide range of students at different years in their college pathway (first-year students to graduate-level students were surveyed, as long as they were currently enrolled in an English class at Cal Poly Humboldt), these answers reflect both high school and college assigned readings. Of 100 students surveyed, sixty-eight had been assigned one or more

¹¹ One hundred percent of students acknowledged the informed consent and the definitions of terms, so all the survey answers were usable for the purpose of this project.

dystopian works 2020-2023. Of the respondents, seventy-two had engaged with one or more dystopian works for leisure (see Fig. 3).

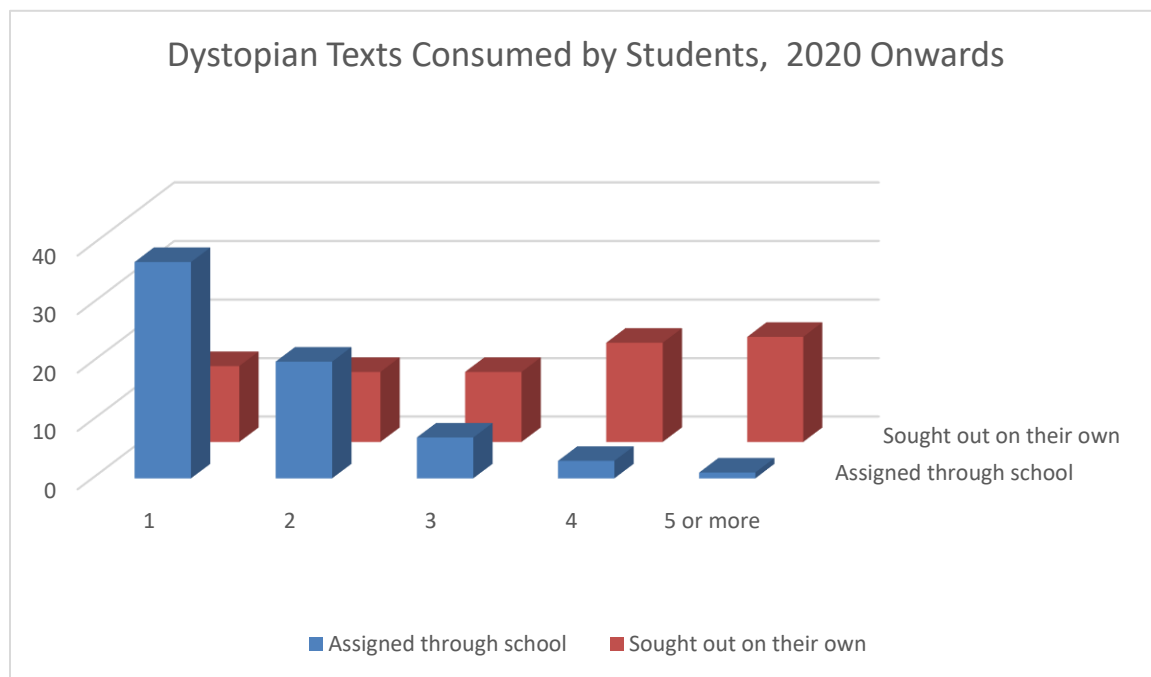


Figure 3: Number of dystopian titles (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more) students sought out on their own, compared with the number of dystopian works assigned in school.

In question six of the survey, participants were asked: “Why have you chosen to read or watch dystopian works opposed to a different genre?”

Answers of highlight include:

- “They show a world we hope to never become.”
- “The subject matters were on my mind more than usual at the times I read the books.”
- “I really love science fiction, and I feel like the two go hand-in-hand. I also enjoy Dystopian novels because they are interesting but they are a good way to engage with our own world.”

- “The subject matter is intriguing and relevant”
- “They grab my attention easier than other genres.”

Of the seventy responses, there were twenty-six answers that mentioned them being ‘interesting,’ drawing them in, ‘cool,’ or otherwise entertaining. There were twenty-three responses that mentioned a connection between reality and what they were reading or watching. Seventeen responses mentioned choosing those works due to their genre (dystopian or science fiction).

Discussion

The survey results display a need for additional consideration for teaching strategies, given the rate at which dystopian media is both assigned and sought out outside of the classroom and the connections and reflection students are making between these materials and their lived experiences. Dystopian media appears to be assigned at high rates and provides a platform for students to reflect on their own experiences, therefore framing them as dystopian, which occurs in the long-answer portion of this survey. Being aware of these framings and experiences, applying a trauma-informed teaching approach will acknowledge students as whole individuals, taking account of these experiences and providing room to validate and interrogate these framings in a conscious and affirming way.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DYSTOPIAN GENRE

The Fraught History of Dystopian Literature

While dystopian literature is a more recent genre in the history of the novel, it is often associated with the more expansive genre of science fiction. Like many, this is a genre that has privileged the works of white men over that of other authors. Keeping its past in mind, the genre and its readership have become more inclusive in more recent years due to burgeoning interest—authors such as Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson and adrienne maree brown have created more space for authors of color within the genre, as well as proliferated alternative genres, such as Afrofuturism and speculative fiction.

Past writers have often used the platform of the science fiction genre to create intentional realms of othering: a practice derived from racism. Loved authors and fan favorites have produced capital from the basis of spectacle and othering—this can look as innocent as *Star Trek*'s ventures into the unknown, gawking at the alien cultures, languages, and appearances as they are so different from our own (Kwan), and even Mary Shelley, the known mother of science fiction othering the creature in *Frankenstein* for social commentary (Matthew 174).

There is a great need for this type of study: as we reimagine our own future, we can manifest it. Writing narratives of the future as a methodology (brown and Imarisha) are the first steps towards a tangible way to change our current course, whether it be towards the ideal (utopia), the possible (critical dystopia), or the worst case (anti-utopia),

speaking to a central premise of this project. This chapter will provide definitions and modes of thought towards the term “dystopia” as well as speak to answer the following question: “In what ways does ideology and binary opposition operate within dystopian fiction?” As ideology often serves as a driving aspect of world-building and plot in dystopian novels, it is also important to see how these ideologies operate inside *and* outside of the text—how culture and reality play into the deeming of an ideology as dystopian.

This genre analysis will focus on the dystopian genre, and more largely, its place in both language and culture, thinking of ideology and beginning at the linguistic level. This provides context for the dystopian genre and highlights the importance of surrounding conversation before diving in on a novel-by-novel basis. The cultural analysis of the genre portrays a larger picture of the science fiction and dystopian genre, as well as narrowing and defining the dystopian genre itself. Accounting for both communicative and creative genres, I will analyze how genre presents the topic of dystopia. Considering genre at its Latin roots, as “generating” a particular response (Devitt 550), I will look at what the dystopian genre generates: deeper reflection on our own cultures, values, and social action.

Defining Dystopia

The survey participants referenced in the previous chapter were given two definitions to understand “dystopia,” which read as follows:

1. an imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice, typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic. Compare with utopia” (OED).
2. of, relating to, or being an imagined world or society in which people lead dehumanized, fearful lives; relating to or characteristic of a dystopia” (Merriam-Webster).

Specifically defining dystopian literature, William Harmon and Hugh Holman provide a definition for dystopia: “Literally, ‘bad place.’ The term is applied to accounts of imaginary worlds, usually in the future, in which present tendencies are carried out to their intensely unpleasant culminations. Literature of *dystopia* has flourished in many forms since the early twentieth century, in fiction (E. Zamyatin’s *We*, George Orwell’s *1984*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*...) See UTOPIA.” They continue their list to include numerous more titles.

In these definitions, we see that dystopia is deeply intertwined with projections of the future. Andrew Milner explains the etymology of dystopia by foregrounding the phrases “dyschronos,” implying bad times, “topos” meaning place, and how they come together to form “dystopia” in “Changing the Climate: The Politics of Dystopia.” This article focuses on Australian literary history, but also nods to Baudrillard, noting that Sci-Fi falls under the “second productive order in simulacra and simulation” (829). Milner speaks of author Raymond Williams and his position, which includes a “more modest insistence on the close kinship, but conceptual separateness, of eutopia, dystopia and

science fiction. They are each centrally concerned with the ‘presentation of otherness’, he argues, and thus depend on an element of discontinuity from ‘realism’” (829). This otherness and separation are places for interrogation with the context of Stuart Hall’s chapter, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’” discussed below.

This separation yet closeness that Milner emphasizes of Raymond Williams is further validated by chapters of Marleen Barr’s work, *Genre Fission*. In her introduction, Barr lays the groundwork for what genre fission is: “an idiosyncratic juxtaposition of the categorically disparate which yields new critical or cultural insights. It is an eccentric close encounter undertaken to reveal a thought-provoking third kind” (ix). While it may be helpful to consider similar arguments for multimodality,¹² the work of genre fission also denies confining boundaries when it comes to defining works; in these fused spaces and different generic considerations, new insights are born. To provide an example, she writes: “Literary critics engaged with genre fission resemble painters who combine different (sometimes clashing) colors to create images which confound categorical expectations” (x). Immediately, one is reminded of Foucault’s heterotopia—this is to say colloquially, aspects accepted in a space in which they do not belong. I am interested in what “cultural insights” (ix) are to be found in generic considerations for the dystopian genre. One thinks of “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” categorized as a utopian work, however, the utopian society in the plot operates solely upon an incredibly dystopian principle. The term “genre fission” becomes increasingly useful as it draws

¹² Multimodality is discussed in a later section, titled “Genre and Multimodality: a brief discussion.”

light to these areas of tension that provide new insights when examining the contradictions between utopia, dystopia, and speculative fiction. So where do these works lie?

Sypnowich separates utopia from dystopia and largely promotes utopian readings as tools for learners. Categories helpful for defining dystopian works include “anti-utopian” (the novel ends and there is no hope for utopia), critical dystopia (the piece ends with potential for possibilities, escape, or an end to the dystopia), and utopia (the novel speculates a utopian future). Focusing on *We* and *1984*, she sheds light on the importance of “hope” in the novel; while the two novels' plotline is incredibly similar, the nuances of the endings¹³ imply drastically different takeaways for readers. This reading implies that the way in which a future-imagining work's genre is determined can be largely influenced by the plot ending and what it implies. Critical dystopias, which provide a semblance of hope upon the ending of the work, contrast greatly with “anti-utopia” pieces such as *1984*. Using these distinctions helps us understand the dystopian genre and what can be included.

Thinking of these terms does not solely apply to the fictional realm. In Chapter 5 of Marleen Barr's *Genre Fission*, titled “Los Angeles/ New York: ‘New York, New York, a Helluva Town’ Sings ‘I Wish They All Could Be California Girls,’” discusses the escapism that comes with the notion of utopia (eutopia's etymology being derived from “no place”) and how it showcases a desire to be elsewhere (89). She looks to American

¹³ *We* ends with the concluding notion of infinite revolutions, and *1984* with the total victory of Big Brother.

geography and city building choices, describing the supposed utopia of suburbia that is frankly dystopian. There is a lack of connectivity due to road placement, cars, and phones; “American modernism’s worship of technology and suburban individual isolation is a failed effort to achieve utopia” (87). This failure of the goals of suburbia becomes “homodystopian” while “heterotopic architecture” (89) brings together differences—making it the true utopian ideal. Barr’s chapter offers helpful insights in examining the ways in which fictional ideologies are perpetuated, replicated, or abandoned in a U.S. reality. Referring to past chapters of this project, namely the analysis of r/ABoringDystopia and the student survey, it is important to note the ways in which Barr frames American realities as dystopian as this project tracks the ways nonfictional aspects are categorized as dystopian.

Culture and Binary Oppositions within Dystopia

Specific Cultural Studies lenses for an analysis of ideology and dystopian fiction include Barbara Foley’s chapter on ideology and two chapters from Stuart Hall’s *Representation* (Introduction and Chapter 4 “Spectacle of the ‘Other’”). Foley’s work in “Ideology” provides a framework for understanding ideology and how it operates. Referencing Chapter 4 of *Representation*, which addresses otherness, can explain the ‘dystopian’ versus ‘utopian’ binary and even ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ (thinking of presentations of the world and what is deemed good or bad, which could vary across cultures and lived experiences). Viewing dystopian media through these lenses encourages the reader to interrogate power structures in genre and the novel in addition to

external to the fictional realm. This will help us understand dystopian fiction's engagement with questions of dominant and counter-hegemonic cultures, the politics of representation operating in these novels, and their critiques of hegemonic power.

Stuart Hall's "Introduction" begins by explaining that representation is thoroughly intertwined with culture (Hall xvii). The author divulges the dynamism of language; not only is it necessary for culture as the vessel for shared meaning, but it also acts as a "media" (xvii). Hall's main approach can be summarized as such: "Representation through language is therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced" (xvii). Beginning at this language level, we can see what is represented in dystopian medias as meaning-making, but also that language is framing; representing a text as "dystopian" influences the way in which it is consumed and meaning is interpreted from the novel, opposed to being framed as "utopian," "speculative," or something else. The terminology of "dystopia" sparks something particular within a viewer or reader—anticipating a dark depiction of the future. This act of framing alters or limits the scope through which a text is viewed, as acts of categorization do.

Hall's chapter then moves into a section that describes different definitions for cultural studies. These include analyzing systems that rely upon shared meanings, shared values, "ways of life" (xviii), or in this instance, language and representation. The "true" definition of cultural studies depends on the lens or field through which you are viewing culture. Bringing together cultural studies and dystopian fiction accentuates the need to question: what "ways of life" (xviii) are being challenged, questioned, or framed as dystopian in a work? What do these texts reveal about the cultures in which you are

situated? Later in Hall's textbook, we learn to shift away from a fixation on 'truth', and instead towards "effective exchange" (xxvi). As all aspects of culture are mediated by language, this introduction is focusing on a logical idea of an origin, providing a general overview of cultural studies, and only towards the end of the chapter does it outline the power in representation (in the terminology sense we think of in 2023—representation in the media) and how it shapes culture. Representation, as it's characterized in Hall's textbook, is relevant to the dystopian novel, as much of dystopian literature investigates race, gender and sexuality, class, politics and power, and technological change—to name some of Hall's sections. In dystopian novels, the lack of mention of these subjects (namely race, gender, and sexuality) plays an equally important role in culture. The lack of a signifier, in this instance, still signifies.

In "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," Hall focuses on images to exemplify and complicate Saussure's notion of signifier/signified. An image, or in the depicted examples, a journalistic photo, acts as a signifier, and then there's the "more connotative or thematic meaning" (217), which is the signified. He notes that this is "how 'myth' works" (217); an image is presented, but the way it is presented can influence the viewer's attempts at making meaning and creating a "signified" mental response. Meaning is thus placed on an unspoken communication between photographer and viewer, and due to this alienation cannot be certain or absolute. Instead, as Hall puts it, meaning "floats" (218). Individuals cannot make identical meanings, but those from the same culture will likely have similar meanings. When the photographer or presenter presents a caption, they are guiding the viewer and ensuring further that the two

meanings are similar, which “*anchors it with words*” (218).¹⁴ Through Saussure and this metaphor, one can see that meaning is never created by signifier, or image, alone.

People’s cultures, schemas, and any captions or angles provided influence the meaning/image relationship heavily. Dependent on the cultures and locations of readers, what is deemed “dystopian” could be vastly different—the meaning of the term is shifting. In the Reddit forum r/ABoringDystopia, we see that many everyday events can be considered dystopian when framed as such, while hikes in prices and a changing job market might seem neutral to a viewer not familiar with the page or genre of fiction.

According to both Hall and Saussure, this is also to say meaning is entirely “relational” (224). Looking to Bakhtin, we see that meaning is “fundamentally dialogic” (225)—that it relies upon dialogue, a back-and-forth, and therefore opposition, to construct meaning. (The lack of something means as much as something present). Through this understanding of absence, it becomes clear that what is ‘socially peripheral’ is also ‘symbolically centered’ (226). This relationality may ask readers to investigate what hegemonies and dominant narratives are being ‘symbolically centered’ (226) in a given dystopian work, and if its premise is an act of counter-hegemony or perpetuation. Thinking of this relational dialogue, noticing a lack of marginalized identities in a movie says just as much (although different messages) as a movie that has diverse casting. We see here that the presentation of “dystopia” is just as powerful as an imagined “utopia,” though the acts of imagination may have different effects on a person’s emotions.

¹⁴ This could lead to interesting conversations around book cover analysis.

Derrida is quoted in Hall's "Spectacle of the 'Other'" as stating: "There is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition" (Hall 225). With this absence/presence binary and other opposites, there is a power relation. Analyzing good/bad and utopia/dystopia as constructed binaries, the dominant narrative comes to light—either in an analytical framework, or as a reproduction of ideology. This is when both inter-textuality (222) and the notion of the spectacle come into play—in the novel. Another binary for consideration is Culture vs. Nature (223) in cultural studies: how culture vs. nature plays into racism, what is considered 'cultured' vs. human 'nature', with an obvious privileging of culture. Seeing how this otherness plays into racism, the problematic nature of this powered binary (225) comes further to light.

Ideology

We learn early in Barbara Foley's chapter "Ideology" that something must be "at stake" (57) for an idea to be considered an 'ideology.' Ideology "disseminat[es] and reinforc[es] the standpoints of those processing in property and power" (58). This is to say that not only is ideology a tool, wielding whatever is at stake, but that it is in favor of the ruling class, making ideology and class thoroughly intertwined. In the example of Lenin, it is a "weapon that can be deployed by contesting sides in social struggles" (Foley 60), reflecting the views of differing classes. Marx provides three different definitions of ideology: "an illusory consciousness; as the standpoint of a class; and a socially necessary misunderstanding" (61).

Through this social construction (reliant on group communication, and always evolving), under ideologies we become socially subjected; one must then interrogate agency, as we operate under many weaponized and non-weaponized ideologies. When Foley states “truth does not exist” (60), she is speaking to the lack of objectivity in the many ideologies each individual operates under: both ideological state apparatuses, which includes family, church, education, media, etc. and oppressive state apparatuses, such as the police, the state, and the prison system. Turning back to Foley’s essay, it is a “weapon” in how its dispersal channels how people think, how they view the world, and further, we demonstrate ideology through actions. Dominant narratives, or “ruling ideas” (63) wield solely the desires of those of capital and power.

It is on us to learn ideology and specifically dominant narratives so that we can work to undo them. Dominant narratives are frequently weapons within dystopian works, which attempt to bring our dominant narratives to light. Complicatedly, these dystopian works also reflect dominant narratives and ideologies.

In imagining new realms, societies, and even governing systems, science fiction works also play and operate within our own realms. To provide an example, the popular book and movie *The Hunger Games* projects a possible future of the United States,¹⁵ including a commodity-fetishist Capitol. While Suzanne Collins forms fictional ideologies, we can also see how ideologies are replicated, perpetuated, or altered as the novel itself operates within reality; while Collins may have been proposing a commentary

¹⁵ The United States of America are specifically referenced in the newest prequel, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, while the location was somewhat ambiguous in the original trilogy.

on the buying practices and values of the Capitol citizens, stores in our own world were plagued with Peeta notebooks, Katniss backpacks, and merch galore for years after the release date of each film. The ways in which ideology operates within and without the texts is an area of tension this project aims to explore.

Applying Sypnowich's critical dystopia to Sean Connors's "Engaging High School Students in Interrogating Neoliberalism in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction," the idea of critical dystopia gives context for a climactic quote from *The Hunger Games* antagonist, President Snow: "Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear."¹⁶ As critical dystopian works typically show hope, opposed to an anti-utopian closing, these novels draw attention to critical junctures for social action in reality. However, parts of these novels that seem to work against the ideologies of neoliberalism, fascism, as Connors calls attention to, actually reinscribe these forces. Sean Connors writes: "By uncritically reproducing assumptions associated with neoliberalism, these books risk legitimizing the very forces that are responsible for producing systemic oppression in the first place" (99). Those of us who have read *The Hunger Games* remember how Peeta and Katniss's relationship was sensationalized by Panem's media as a commentary, yet this subsequently was replicated in the U.S. Shelves were lined with Team Peeta or Team Gale merchandise. The advanced capitalism and self-as-commodity the text seems to work against is also perpetuated in the way the text is used, but also within its own content—Connors emphasizes how *The Hunger Games* focuses on the individual: Katniss

¹⁶ This quote appears in *The Hunger Games* film but is absent in the book.

pulling herself up by her bootstraps to get out of this terrible situation, rather than focusing on the collective, embodying the neoliberal idea of individual exceptionalism. Dystopian novels provide an especially interesting jumping off point for examining ideology not just in how they present ideologies in-text, but how the works themselves operate out-of-text.

Synthesis

Critical dystopia, utopia, and anti-utopian framings can cause biases in readers, considering Hall and Saussure (signifier, signified). In framing texts as dystopian, signifying certain ideologies, and the way these texts present and represent ideologies, we see that genres themselves carry ideological weight.

To extend and synthesize this conversation, below is a list of questions consumers of dystopian media can contemplate, as well as include in classroom discussions.

- What function does this text play in our dominant discourse (compared to how the fictional 'dominant discourse' operates)? (Foley, Devitt)
- Is this media constructing and/or perpetuating an 'other', as described by Stuart Hall? (Hall)
- How does this play into the dominant narratives of the U.S.? (Foley)
- What identity is this genre offering me as a consumer? (Devitt)
- What action is this genre generating? (Devitt, Foley)

TEACHING DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

This section references past researchers addressing dystopian novels in the classroom, noting aspects of lesson plans, student reactions, and suggestions. These articles were each published prior to the onset of COVID-19 in the year 2020 and highlight how students were already connecting material framed as dystopian to their lived experiences.

As mentioned in the introduction, “The Changing Face of the Novel” examines three newer trends in young adult and children’s literature: the use of images and multimodality; the use of polyvocality and multiple perspectives; and the rise of dystopian novels in young adult literature. This increase in popularity of this genre of fiction is noted when Serafini, Frank, and Blasingame highlight, “Dystopian literature resonates with young readers for a reason, and teachers need to help students explore how and why these books strike such a familiar note with them” (148). The third section, “Changing Boundaries,” provides context and suggestions for teaching dystopian literature to children, which can surely be applied to an older audience. The authors first provide a clear definition for what constitutes dystopian literature: “In dystopian fiction, the world has gone radically astray at some point in the future, as authors extrapolate on current social, political, or economic trends. These novels provide teens with a look at a future they may suspect is nearly upon them, perhaps validating their worst fears” (147). Notably, they are centering the student perspective and response in this definition. This article too proposes additional considerations when assigning dystopian novels to

students, as they write a call to action for teachers. Educators “need to facilitate students in their personal engagement with dystopian fiction rather than attempt to employ what has been called the IRE (Initiate, Respond, Evaluate) method of classroom literature study so commonly applied to books read by a whole class” (148)—rewriting the future and other personal creative writing projects can be a way to achieve this goal. They elaborate that “teachers should be more concerned with what a book dredges up from the young readers’ conscious or subconscious minds about their present or potential life situations rather than uniform agreement on the dominant themes or symbols” (148). This is to say that dystopian literature has a distinct psychological effect on its readers, given the potential of what it may “[dredge] up” for readers. As plague and pandemics are fresh on readers’ minds even in 2023, “The Changing Face of the Novel” shows that an awareness of dystopian content is necessary.

While Sean P. Connors has many dystopian-relevant works that would appeal to this project, “Engaging High School Students in Interrogating Neoliberalism in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction,” specifically looks to neoliberalism and its presentation within three dystopian novels—whether it reinforces or deconstructs neoliberal thinking. Connors considers what ideologies YA dystopian fiction is asking students to adopt, specifically interrogating neoliberalism and how these novels either resist or sustain neoliberal discourses. Within this article, he narrows dystopia into “critical dystopia,” which emerged in the 1980s—this is a specific genre of dystopia where the characters become aware of the oppressive forces and fight against them, showing hope, opposed to ending on a bleak note. *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Orleans* are used as examples of this

sub-genre. Connors argues that critical dystopian works exemplify what is needed to transform this bleak world: “...critical dystopias like *Orleans* (Smith, 2013) and, to a lesser extent, *The Hunger Games* (Collins 2008) are pedagogically valuable because they invite teen readers to imagine more socially just and compassionate ways of living together” (99).

Interrogating ideologies can cause areas of tension in the classroom. In response to students being uncomfortable interrogating their own competition or exceptionalism, or white students uncomfortable with interrogating their positionality and racism, he responds: “as most educators understand, students benefit when they are positioned to think critically, as this requires them to problematize previously held beliefs and assumptions and view them in a new light” (100). Leaning into this discomfort, it is important to allow dystopian literature to provide a mirror for critiquing reality (as well as one’s positionality), but it is also important for students to be “positioned to think critically” (100) of the texts themselves. Quoting a collaborative work with Trites, he lists questions that work to achieve this, and more specifically for students to interrogate neoliberalism in *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *Orleans*:

- What institutions appear in the novel, and do characters experience them as empowering or oppressive?
- Does the novel acknowledge gender, race, age, ability, etc. as privileging or oppressing characters, or does it depict characters succeeding as a result of their own talents?
- Does the novel emphasize individual success or strength through community and supportive relationships? (100)

He proposes these further questions to extend this conversation, as well as to extend these listed questions to arenas outside of the classroom:

- What should be the role of government in a democratic society?
- What are potential drawbacks to emphasizing self-reliance and individual exceptionalism, and who, if anyone, benefits from these concepts?
- What are the drawbacks of living in a society that only ever emphasizes competition?
- Are there domains of life in which competition is not necessarily desirable, and why?
 - What are the limits of self-reliance?
 - Do all people have the same opportunities for economic success, and why?
 - When have students experienced pressure to compete with other people, and how did this make them feel? (100)

These questions are useful for educators and provide an example of how to encourage students to connect lived experiences, opinions, and deeper concepts with dystopian texts.

Giulia Ricco directly accounts her experiences teaching dystopian materials to students that deals with current political topics in “Teaching *It Can’t Happen Here* in the Trump Era,” noting events and experiences that students are bringing with them to the classroom; she suggests pedagogical change in content presentation that reflects (and respects) this. The professor creates a platform in the classroom for all students of different ideologies and comfortability in the classroom to participate in the form of an assignment which can be altered depending on the learning goals. Ricco writes: “And while *It Can’t Happen Here* is a richly productive text for anybody interested in teaching fascism, the work requires pedagogical caution, as students tend to find it overwhelming, especially in the post-2016-election era” (172). In terms of suggestions for amendments to lesson plans that use the dystopian novel *It Can’t Happen Here*, the work states that students need context (172), among “both primary and secondary sources on fascism” (172).

She speaks to her positionality:

For me, a woman and an immigrant who obviously has both a personal stake and a political stance in this conversation (denying it would be quite absurd), managing to navigate students' different stances—a phenomenon that undeniably exists, especially at public institutions—is always difficult. In order to better contain these dynamics, I designed a writing exercise that has proven effective in keeping students focused on the novel while enabling them to comment on the current political situation. (173)

In this writing activity, she asks students to choose a passage or character and rewrite it, with information that reflects the current situation of their lives. She includes different options in terms of genre: “I also offer them several ways in which they can create such a narrative: develop the perspective of a single character in the story, invent a new character, or talk about a particular moment in history” (173). This is a platform for both teaching and healing—students can process current politics (specifically ‘Make America Great Again’ Trumpism) “while putting it productively in conversation with the novel and the class discussion of interwar fascism” (177).

Wilkinson writes of teaching *Brave New World* and *Feed* to students in 2010 and how dystopian novels provide context for current experiences and environments. She concisely states the exigence of this work as she writes “Dystopian visions can help students deconstruct their contexts, which is crucial now more than ever” (25). While she focuses on consumerism and how rampant it is today and the contexts of the two novels, she ends with a few student assignments. Wilkinson includes her classroom discussion starters:

1. Is life easy for us today? Is it too easy?
2. Give examples of how people escape from everyday life. Is it necessary to do so? Why or why not?

3. Is our nation too focused on consumerism? Explain.
4. What have you bought this week? Why? Do you need these things?
5. Do you own any clothes, electronics, etc. that you rarely or never use? Why?
6. Read and respond to Hillary Mayell's "As Consumerism Spreads, Earth Suffers, Study Says." What, if anything, surprised you? How might we solve some of these issues? Are you concerned? Why or why not? (25)

Building upon and reframing these questions in terms of dystopian plague novels

(opposed to novels focused on hyper-consumerism) could be a fruitful activity early in the semester to generate metacognition, and to note the ideologies at work in reality that exist within the text. Similar to the suggestions of other articles, Wilkinson also includes personal creative writing activities below:

Walk outside at night to watch the stars for an hour; write about it. Walk around the mall and people-watch; don't buy anything. Learn about propaganda techniques and analyze commercials; what are they really selling? (26)

As she describes a call to action for students within lesson plans, she also calls upon educators as she states, "Students are eager to make an impact; we should call on them to act" (26).

Presenting multiple views of the future, Christine Sypnowich separates utopia from dystopia in "Lessons from Dystopia: Critique, Hope and Political Education" and largely promotes utopian readings as tools for learners. This piece is advocating for *utopian* novels in political education through contrast to dystopian novels, however, the insight into dystopian education is still pertinent for this project. Focusing on *We* and *1984*, she sheds light on the importance of "hope" in teaching students, considering the question: is *1984* still helpful for the classroom? While the *We* and *1984* plot lines are incredibly similar, the nuances of the endings (*We* ends with the concluding notion of infinite revolutions, and *1984* with the total victory of Big Brother) imply drastically

different takeaways for readers—she privileges the use of *We* for the classroom, contrasted with the anti-utopian *1984*. Applying utopian thought and assignments, given *1984*'s “anti-utopian” nature, shows that this dystopian novel can still be important, and even healing, in the classroom, bringing together Riccio and Wilkinson's classroom activities and Sypnowich's ideas of hope and utopia in political education. To apply these ideas to dystopian novels would be a form of re-writing and practice for the exact notions she wants students to grasp.

Considering a shift to student-centered teaching (opposed to lesson plans that privilege the educator's perspective), content-specific awareness builds onto an existing conversation around teaching practices. The above authors speak to managing both the negative and positive capabilities of dystopian literature in the classroom, posing timely questions applicable to all materials and all literature-engaging classrooms; bringing lived experiences, realities, and interests into the classroom promotes a student-centered model, which reveals attention to the whole student when crafting lesson plans for dystopian literature. What newly needs to be added to this conversation are pedagogical changes that reflect specific reactions students may have to dystopian novels (especially plague or pandemic-plot fictional works), how this may affect the learning experience and the classroom environment, and how educators can respond to these new hurdles.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PEDAGOGY

Introduction and Methodology: Using Trauma-Informed Pedagogy to Inform Teaching Practices

This chapter collects sources that compile teaching strategies and explains how they can be used in the classroom, as well as why trauma-informed teaching should be considered when approaching lesson plans with dystopian themes, seen in section “Trauma.”

These sources add to my lesson plans, as well as provide strategies to apply in any reading classroom so as to center the student experience and minimize risk of emotional distress, re-traumatization, and discomfort when approaching dystopian-themed material. According to Trauma Informed Oregon, “the service system can re-traumatize individuals affecting their willingness to participate and engage” (*TIO* 1); this can be extended to the classroom, as it is important to note that school spaces can already be areas of stress for students, and the emotional state of the student affects the learning process (whether positively or negatively). Application of these trauma-informed strategies assist in both learning retention and comfortability in the classroom. This intervention provides an example of thoughtful additions to any lesson plan designed for the new generation of students, especially considering dark projections of the future; throughout their studies, students are bombarded with materials surrounding fascism, late capitalism, environmental crisis, economic despair, illnesses, and otherwise. Taking these

extra steps when teaching heavy topics can increase engagement and learning potential in the classroom.

Trauma

The Substances Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) organization defines trauma as “an event or circumstance resulting in: physical harm, emotional harm and/or life-threatening harm” that results in “lasting adverse effects” (Trauma and Violence). An NPR podcast published in 2022 defines reactions to trauma as an “emotional response to a terrible event” and feelings of “fear and helplessness” (Experts Call the Pandemic a Collective Trauma. Why Don't We Talk About It That Way).

Roxanne Cohen Silver, a professor of psychological science at UC Irvine, studies collective trauma and defines Covid-19 as traumatic: “The event happens, there is great tragedy, and people pick up the pieces of their lives” (Experts Call the Pandemic a Collective Trauma). As COVID-19 was a “slow moving disaster” and not a “singular event,” it becomes harder to categorize or note as traumatic (Experts Call the Pandemic a Collective Trauma). Bessel van der Kolk, a leading researcher on trauma as well as founder and medical director of the Trauma Research Foundation in Massachusetts, emphasizes a key aspect of trauma in this podcast: “another important definition of trauma is that even after the threat is over, you continue to feel that threat” (Experts Call the Pandemic a Collective Trauma).

Despite a current lack of clarity as to how the pandemic can be psychologically categorized in our lives, the feelings of fear and helplessness felt during these significant years cannot be denied, as well as the amount of loss that occurred from the illness itself. In the same podcast, Dr. Arthur Evans, CEO of the American Psychological Association, remarks that the APA saw a large increase in need for mental health services both in 2020 and in 2021. This increased need for additional care only extends the myriad of issues, traumas, and extenuating circumstances that students are consistently facing in post-pandemic realities.

Dr. Bruce Perry, in a video titled “Patterns of Stress & Resilience: Neurosequential Network Stress & Trauma Series” crafted during the U.S. COVID-19 lockdown, notes that in some situations, such as COVID-19, it is likely that we’d be sensitized or experience long-term effects. In response to these situations, predictability and controllability are large factors in building resilience. It is necessary to stress that individuals “at the bottom of the power differential are the ones that end up suffering the most” during these situations of sensitization, and he makes a call to action: those with more predictability and controllability (privilege, thinking of those with “meaningful work”, “secure housing”, and more) need to help those with “vulnerability” (Patterns of Stress & Resilience). Perry also makes predictions for COVID-19 at the time of this video, 2020: “The most marginalized, vulnerable people in our society are going to be devastated by this and this will have transgenerational consequences,” affecting physical, social, and mental health. “The real crisis is not necessarily the next six months, it really is what are we gonna do with the social and emotional toll that this is having on

individuals and families who will remain the most marginalized for the next six decades” (Patterns of Stress & Resilience); this is to say that while the imminent threat may be over for some of us, there is still a need for action and awareness. Given the prevalence of trauma and what may be to come in the aftereffects of COVID-19, educators must consider how recent events impact students in the classroom.

Tamar Rodney specializes in post-traumatic stress disorder at John Hopkins School of Nursing and notes that “especially as the pandemic drags on, we need to be paying attention to the warning signs - irritability, trouble sleeping, drinking more than usual, fatigue, loss of joy” (Experts Call the Pandemic a Collective Trauma). While educators are not healthcare professionals, having a greater awareness of what students are experiencing can create greater insights as to student performance and participation in the classroom, especially given the sheer number of students that may have experienced traumatic events, including those brought on by COVID-19, but also outside of this collective experience.

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs defines PTSD as “a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening or traumatic event.” This definition is narrowed to include only “symptoms [lasting] more than a few months” (PTSD: National Center for PTSD Home). In terms of how many Americans are dealing with PTSD, they admit a great limitation to accurate data as there is no study that asks *everyone*. From data they have accumulated, “About 5 out of every 100 adults (or 5%) in the U.S. has PTSD in any given year. In 2020, about 13 million Americans had PTSD,” acknowledging that women and veterans are at higher risk (How

Common is PTSD in Adults?). In terms of children with trauma, studies show that “about 15% to 43% of girls and 14% to 43% of boys go through at least one trauma. Of those children and teens who have had a trauma, 3% to 15% of girls and 1% to 6% of boys develop PTSD. Rates of PTSD are higher for certain types of trauma survivors” (How Common is PTSD in Children and Teens?). Noting how varying these percentages are, to create a truly inclusive classroom would include incorporating some form of a trauma-informed approach. TIP is one of these possible steps that educators can take.

How Trauma-Informed Pedagogy Can Transform the Classroom

Remembering that educators are not health care professionals but are often offered identities and positions that go far beyond their job expectations, the realms of health and education were further intertwined by the COVID-19 pandemic and classrooms were transformed with new considerations for teaching practices, whether it be incorporating ways to be more deeply interactive on online platforms, or ways to make students more comfortable in the classroom (thinking of masks, open windows, and spacing). These ideations also apply to pedagogical practices at the content and curriculum levels. Understanding that students are living with potential traumas, preparation is necessary to account for the impact trauma has on student learning. This becomes truer in literature courses that focus on dystopian and plague-related themes, which could cause emotional distress. However previous chapters highlight the persisting popularity of the genre and even healing potential of dystopian works, and

methodological additions in the classroom can allow for students to engage with the connections between fiction and reality with a greater sense of security.

A concern that may arise with conversations around trauma-informed teaching is maintaining rigor in the classroom and challenges for students despite their possible trauma. Carello notes that trauma-informed teaching does not imply the lowering of standards, the avoidance of materials, that educators act as therapists, or even the promise that students will not be retraumatized (Carello). It rather looks at specific teaching practices that can offer a feeling of “safety” (Carello) and promote engagement in the classroom or with materials.

To provide context as to how trauma affects student learning in the classroom, Dr. Bruce Perry explains that “Brain functioning will shift as your internal state shifts” in a video titled “State-dependent Brain Functioning: Neurosequential Network Stress & Trauma Series.” To explain state-dependence, he says, “All functioning of the brain is state dependent. The dynamic activity of all networks in the brain shifts with the various diurnal (and other) patterns, and in response to internal and external stimuli” (State-dependent Brain Functioning). This notes that external stimuli, such as an assigned reading in the classroom, can alter students' thinking capabilities given their neurological response. He expands upon this: “Therefore the ‘capability’ of a person in any given time is fluid; your cognitive, emotional, social, motor, and regulatory capabilities shift—with your internal state.” Students must be in an ideal mental space in order to fully engage cognitively in the classroom. These varying states greatly affect a person’s ability to learn, be creative, and reflect. The learning and thinking location of the brain goes

“offline” as well as other brain responses changing or shutting down when faced with trauma, re-traumatization, or “trigger” (Carello) greatly affecting the ability to learn, remember, and participate. Adverse states, such as fear, “[mobilize] some networks and capabilities, while shutting down others” such as abstract thought (State-dependent Brain Functioning). Employing teaching practices that are aware of this and reflect this can help students remain regulated, which is the ideal state for learning.

Among Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Cognitive Processing Therapy, and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, Prolonged Exposure is one of the leading evidence-based treatments for trauma (Watkins et al). Prolonged exposure “teaches individuals to gradually approach their trauma-related memories, feelings, and situations” (APA Prolonged Exposure). While restating that teachers are not therapists, the notion of prolonged exposure advocates for dystopian novels that present plague or pandemic plotlines in the classroom as a gradual approach for COVID-19 based trauma, considering healing moving forward as well as bringing student interest and student experiences into the classroom for a student-centered approach. While posing the risk of re-traumatization if not done with care, prolonged exposure to current events through reading and analyzing dystopian novels can desensitize and heal.

Healing-Centered, Opposed to Trauma-Informed

Dr. Shawn Ginwright of *Kinship Carers Victoria* wants to draw further attention to language in terms of “trauma-informed care” (1) in institutions: “Without careful consideration of the terms we use, we can create blind spots in our efforts to support young people” (2). He instead suggests a “healing centered approach,” which would

“[involve] culture, spirituality, civic action and collective healing” (3). Shifting the language to an action of the provider, opposed to labeling the receiver, highlights a deeper understanding of the entire person—not just their trauma. This research complements the intentions of this work: a student-centered approach.

Trauma-Informed Strategies

Aspects of a Trauma-informed approach

The CDC defines a trauma-informed approach as incorporating six aspects:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness & transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration & mutuality
5. Empowerment & choice
6. Cultural, historical, & gender issues (Infographic: 6 Guiding Principles).

We see trends in trauma-informed principles across multiple sources. At the Buffalo Center for Social Research, they describe Trauma-Informed Care as having five guiding values: safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment (2015). They write: “Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is an approach in the human service field that assumes that an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma” (University at Buffalo). This project acknowledges not only that an individual is more likely to have a history of trauma, but also that they are likely to have some form of trauma (collective or individual) from the events of COVID-19, extending University at Buffalo’s conversation of TIC from the year 2015 into a 2023 context.

The “Key Components of TIC” that apply to a teaching realm include a “genuine culture change,” “recognizing the pervasiveness of trauma,” and “involves vigilance in anticipating and avoiding institutional processes and practices that are likely to retraumatize individuals who already have a trauma history” (University at Buffalo). Acknowledging the “pervasiveness,” including statements above that the trauma-responses inhibit the learning process, becomes imperative for educators, knowing that a “genuine culture change” could promote learning and engagement. The culture change itself would be brought on by trauma-conscious pedagogical choices, where aspects incorporate “anticipating and avoiding... practices that are likely to retraumatize” (Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care). In a chart by *The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care* (2015), the Buffalo Center includes two lists that denote ways re-traumatization can occur both within the system and within relationships. While the system refers to healthcare and is not directly applicable to the intentions of this project, relationship dynamics in terms of power, control, and subversiveness applies to teacher-student dynamics in the classroom. Situations the Institute believes could retraumatize individuals include:

- Not being seen/heard
- Violating trust
- Failure to ensure emotional safety
- Noncollaboration
- Doing things for rather than with
- Use of punitive treatment, coercive practices, and oppressive language

These are some of the practices to avoid when employing a trauma-informed approach, noting that much of the list focuses on a greater attention to language use.

From here, having spoken of general approaches, I turn our attention to specific strategies that embrace trauma-informed teaching practices.

Trauma-Informed Teaching Strategies

In a video titled “Educator Strategies for the Classroom” Dr. Bruce Perry explains traditional ideas of rewards and consequences will not build skills for “dysregulated” students (who are often more marginalized); Perry instead proposes “collaborative problem solving” between student and teacher to work towards a more regulating space for learning. As “heterogeneous clustering” happens naturally in the college classroom, with grouping of students in different stages of life, knowledge of subjects, and backgrounds, educators need to be prepared to enact differential instruction in order to respond to a diverse student population who will experience varying levels of dysregulation. To move towards a space with a sense of control, which aids in regulation, Perry suggests promoting an environment in which the students teach as well as learn, to incorporate “movement” into the space, and to use “less traditional testing” models that often increase stress (Perry).

University of California Irvine provides an encapsulating definition of trauma-informed pedagogy through the Division of Teaching Excellence and Innovation. Their definition of trauma privileges not the “event” of a singular person, but the unique reaction individuals may have to a stimulus. They define trauma-informed pedagogy as “pedagogical practice that keeps trauma, its prevalence, and how it affects an individual, in mind...” (DTEI). The website goes further to provide a list of examples of this pedagogical practice in a bullet-formatted list:

- Providing content information in advance
- Using content descriptions, especially for potentially triggering media
- Creating a safe and inclusive framework for discussions
- Checking in on students
- Encouraging community building and sense of belonging
- Allowing for multiple ways to engage with course content
- Building flexibility into assessment and absence policies
- Valuing student input and feedback (DTEI).

Key to teaching dystopian novels in the classroom is facilitating class discussions on “potentially traumatic topics” (DTEI). Touching on sensitive topics, you can never be sure as an educator what parts of a student’s past will be sparked, what topics could trigger a stress response, or what content could cause a student harm. Keeping in mind both the student as well as the community space, there are no methods to ensure a student will be comfortable— however, there are steps to take towards comfortability, and at least, respect. The UC Irvine practices for facilitating discussion I will be engaging with include (but are not limited to): “content warning,” “provide strategies for grounding,” “allow students to opt out of potentially triggering topics,” and “affirm responses by reflecting back using students’ words throughout the discussion” (DTEI). There are other suggestions I will not be speaking to, as in my opinion, they should be “givens” in a classroom (an example being: “be open minded” (DTEI)).

An online community regularly posts resources for trauma-informed teaching practices in the form of a blog titled “Trauma-Informed Teaching & Learning: Bringing a Trauma-Informed Approach to Higher Education.” On the “About” page of the site, Janice Carello, PhD, LMSW writes:

Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning (TITL) is an umbrella term I coined to refer to a trauma-informed approach to college curriculum delivery. For those

who are unfamiliar, to be trauma-informed in any context means to understand the role that violence and victimization have played in the lives of many individuals and to use that understanding to improve policies and practices in order to accommodate the needs of trauma survivors.

On the blog, you can find resources in the form of books and videos, calls for submissions, and questions from other higher-education teachers. One video titled “Trauma-Informed Teaching & Learning in Times of Crisis” was posted by Carello in 2020 in response to questions about teaching with COVID-19. Outside of expected class material, Carello suggests educators help students in seeking out resources, have regular check-ins, and while providing weekly summaries and announcements, keeping this communication brief to respect the onslaught of electronic information students experience daily. In terms of class structure, Carello states to limit changes in the flow or structure of the class, maintain a growth mindset that provides opportunities for revision and self-evaluation, and offer constructive feedback on students’ work (Carello). Limiting changes allows students to have awareness of what to expect each week, and therefore a greater sense of control, while revision and self-evaluation allows for the student to learn independently, be able to improve on areas of need with lower stakes and feel greater ownership of their work (and therefore connection to the class).

Trauma-informed pedagogy is especially necessary for the consideration of dystopian novels moving forward to create more comfortable spaces for students to read, create, and interact with texts that can be deemed sensitive material. Two texts representative of this include *Grievors* by adrienne maree brown, and *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel, each depicting a fallout of a national health event. Bent Knee’s

Land Animal and Russel Hoban's *Riddley Walker* also highlight this in a significant way: devastation to the environment, haunting themes, interrupted communication, and subject matter of loss. While these texts include material that may be deemed disconcerting, too close to home, or otherwise triggering, conversations around these texts create the perfect platform to analyze post-apocalyptic narrative and how it should be presented to young adults who too may be feeling their world is ending.

Extending Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

Acknowledging Eco-Grief

In addition to pandemic-induced grief or trauma, students have other dystopian, looming worries as they move through their studies. In a 2021 survey of ten thousand participants across ten countries, it was found that seventy-five percent of children and young adults “think the future is frightening.” The same survey concluded that “[c]limate anxiety and dissatisfaction with government responses are widespread in children and young people in countries across the world and impact their daily functioning” (Hickman et. al.). Scholars such as Jennifer Atkinson and Sarah J. Ray are researching these effects of eco-grief and student learning. In their work, “The Emotional Curriculum of Climate Justice Education: An Existential Toolkit,” they acknowledge the “significant emotional toll” of the climate crisis (45). The weight of the climate crisis and “anxiety, hopelessness, and guilt” students are experiencing both “impact[s] student learning” and “immobilizes young people from getting engaged in climate solutions” (45). Atkinson and Ray acknowledge that the material itself has an impact on student learning in the

fields of environmental sciences, where educators and learners alike are facing “heartbreaking material at every turn” (45). The intervention of “The Existential Toolkit” is to “make visible the often invisible and unacknowledged emotional dimensions of learning about climate breakdown and injustice” (46), providing a toolkit for educators to work with and through this existential anxiety, such as providing “opportunities for authentic conversation and deep listening,” and “explicitly acknowledging learners’ emotional responses to course material” (46). These activities have been affirmed by students during the trial and research process. Community building is acknowledged as trauma-informed practice by numerous entities (CDC, Buffalo Center for Social Research, The Division of Teaching Excellence and Innovation, etc.), and experience as “legitimate subject of classroom discussion” (46) has become incorporated in English classrooms through Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s mode of thought: “Theory of the Flesh.”

Environmental devastation is frequently presented in dystopian and speculative works and is something students are facing every day in their studies, the news, social media, and conversations. Bringing these conversations into the classroom in a constructive way and acknowledging student experiences as academic can work to build a sense of community, heal, and transfer knowledge from the classroom setting to other realms.

Imaging Methodologies

With co-editor adrienne maree brown, Walidah Imarisha introduces a new term that separates futuristic and justice focused works from other science fictions in the

introduction of *Octavia's Brood*: “‘Visionary fiction’ is a term we developed to distinguish science fiction that has relevance toward building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power” (Imarisha 4). Breaking away from dominant narratives adds to the conversation of genre, but also to what we should be doing with these platforms. She adds, “Because all organizing is science fiction, we are dreaming new worlds every time we think about the changes we want to make in the world” (4)—this is to say that all critiquing eyes on power structures and organization is essentially doing the work of the science fiction genre, as the imagination reflects changes we’d like to see in reality. As dystopian fiction is often categorized under the umbrella of science fiction, and frequently focuses on organization and social change (positive and negative), this critical eye can be applied to this genre, focusing on “dreaming new worlds every time we think about the changes we want to make” (4); as dystopian fiction imagines and projects negative futures, applying this mode of thought and imagination could be healing for students who are seeing dystopias in their daily lives. In this work, we see explicitly how genre “generates” social action (Devitt 550).

Applying this utopian thought to both reality and dystopian fiction becomes a methodology for creating these futures, as the written narratives become artifacts and examples of change, and further can be a methodology for the trauma-informed teaching of dystopian novels. A sense of control is a factor when dealing with trauma (Perry). Challenging writers to envision the future can create change for our futures, but at the

more local level, can cause change and healing for the reader themselves as they see “ways out” and a greater sense of control in what is to come.

In an essay included in the *Octavia’s Brood* collection titled “The Only Lasting Truth” by Tananarive Due, Robert Heinlen’s three lines that drive science fiction writers are highlighted: “What if,” “If only,” and “If this goes on” (264).¹⁷ Due recounts reading *Parable of the Sower* for the first time, encapsulating both the need for care with post-apocalyptic, speculative, and dystopian novels, but also the novel’s influence in the ways she was “sobbing, struck” (266). Thinking of “dreaming new worlds” (Imarisha 4), Due builds on the *Parable of the Sower* as “quite literally [setting] out to change the world by forcing readers to consider what a powerful force change actually is” (267). In Butler’s work, we see two uses of “If this goes on” (264): environmental devastation, the “Make America Great Again” phrase and an evangelical dictatorship in America, but also Lauren Olamina persisting, manifesting change, and leading people on a path of positive change; “...the change Butler calls for is in attitude and the attitude and the interpretation of events around us. Attitudes are in need of change to prevent the dystopia in our book...” (Due 268). We see the two sides of this in Tananarive Due’s experience, as well, as she reflects, “while I cringed through some of the frankness and violence of the rape and murder running rampant in the society she depicts, I felt uplifted by the sliver of hope offered in the parable itself and by the transformative aspects of the story that touched me in such a personal way” (267). This shows the great impact this book has on readers and

¹⁷ Thinking of utopias in this chapter, one can easily see how these questions can promote positive thinking as well as dystopian projections of the future.

writers. Questions for students could include: What would Earthseed look like twenty years past the end of *Parable of the Sower*? What poem or piece of writing could you see enacting great change, if people shaped their lives and built community around it?

In the outro to the anthology *Octavia's Brood*, adrienne maree brown proposes a call to action for this methodology of imagining identities and positive change into our future: “It is our radical responsibility to share these worlds, to plant them in the soil of our society as seeds for the type of justice we want and need” (brown 279). While dystopian novels often present instances of world-breaking, these can be shifted into world-making opportunities as students explore positive futures and alternative outcomes for fictional and current realities—just as brown describes science fiction as the “perfect ‘exploring ground’” with “the opportunity to play with different outcomes and strategies before we have to deal with the real-world costs” (279). She lists three specific strategies for moving these imagined futures off the page and into our lives: “Visionary fiction” which encapsulates that “the stories we tell can either reflect the society we are a part of or transform it. If we want to bring new worlds into existence, then we need to challenge the narratives that uphold current power dynamics and patterns” (279), “emergent strategy” (280) which is a framework for resistance, and lastly “collective science-fiction/visionary fiction writing workshops” which is to say “if we want worlds that work for more of us, we have to have more of us involved in the visioning process” (281).

Considering what gets written into the future, José Esteban Muñoz, in *Cruising Utopias: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, works against “Antiutopianism in queer studies” (12), instead promoting a “forward-dawning futurity” (7). He also describes

notions of *Cruising Utopia* as a “critical affect and a methodology” (4) seeing how imagining inclusive futures for marginalized identities is an action that works towards the goal of a true utopia. This methodology asks readers “to reconsider ideas such as hope and utopia but also challenges them to feel hope and utopia, which is to say challenges them to approach their queer critique from a renewed and newly animated sense of the social, carefully cruising for the varied potentialities that may abound within that field” (18). We see him speak specifically to the methodological intentions of utopian thought when he writes of queer icons Andy Warhol and Frank O’Hara’s poetry: “What if we think of these modes of being in the world—Warhol’s liking of things, his ‘wows’ and ‘gees,’ and O’Hara’s poetry being saturated with feelings of fun and appreciation—as a mode of utopian feeling but also as hope’s methodology?” (5). This is to promote an awareness of current utopia—with the same intensity this project has been noting the ways we genre current situations as dystopian—but also to generate a feeling of hope as methodology for the future. We are more likely to act in a way that promotes change if we first believe positive change is a possibility. The following quote was excerpted from a speech of Muñoz:

In part we must take on an abstract hope [that] is not much more than merely wishing and instead we need to participate in a more concrete hope, what Ernst Bloch would call an educated hope, the kind that is grounded and consequential, a mode of hoping that is cognizant of exactly what obstacles present themselves in the face of obstacles that so often feel insurmountable” (207).

Making these hopes “cognizant” (206) can be facilitated through writing activities with students across disciplines, allowing them a greater sense of control when facing the “insurmountable” (207) such as environmental crisis, neoliberalism, advanced capitalism,

also noting the ways in which trauma-informed teaching strategies call for social justice¹⁸. In envisioning the future, students may not be able to see themselves or their identities in the future. Writing marginalized identities into futures, and essentially utopias, becomes a radical and hopeful act.

An example of reimagining the future as methodology for the future manifests in the Queerutopias website. Queerutopias is an online project that works to collect creative writing projects with a theme of utopia. They describe: “These queer renditions of utopia propose alternative forms of establishing intimacy, fostering belonging and creating inclusive spaces for citizenship to those dictated by normative heterosexual logics of imagining the future” (What We Do). Through this process, imagination can become hopeful methodology; “Drawing on theories of queer temporality and affect, my main objectives are to a) tease out the relation between time and queerness, b) examine the depiction of time in queer Cuban and Mexican contemporary cultural texts, such as digital storytelling, and c) trace how these depictions tantalize a queer poetics of hope from which to articulate a critical vision of the future” (What We Do). Through the practice of writing, these imagined stories become tangible, and create a “critical vision of the future” (What We Do), crowd-sourcing ideas for a better future for us all.

¹⁸ See The CDC’s criteria for a trauma-informed approach, pg 58: “Cultural, historical, & gender issues”

LESSON PLANS

Introduction

The genre of the lesson plan generates new actions for the reader of this project—not simply to read, but also to teach and create, deeply considering the application of these concepts.

Methodology

The materials, plans, and activities generated for the purpose of this project will speak to the English 105: “Literature, Media, and Culture” learning outcomes and course description to maintain a synthesized focus and truer demonstration of trauma-informed teaching practices within a usable lesson plan¹⁹. The purpose of utilizing the genre of the ‘lesson plan’ in this project is to demonstrate abstract concepts in a concrete and functional way for educators. Lesson plans activate a text’s potential in the classroom setting and generate the action of either pedagogical use or applying trauma-informed methods to other lesson plans.

To create lesson plans, I used materials from the “English 581: Teaching in Practicum” course of the Cal Poly Humboldt Applied English MA program, namely a fifty-minute class template (see Appendix D). In terms of what is being taught in the

¹⁹ English 105: Literature, Media, and Culture is a general education English course that meets a humanities requirement for undergraduate students.

proposed lesson plans, they follow the Humboldt English 105 learning objectives and course description.

The English 105 course description goes as follows: “Study written, visual, and musical genres, with an emphasis on understanding their role as texts in culture. Develop skills and understanding as a thoughtful reader, viewer, and listener” (Course Descriptions, Cal Poly Humboldt). The departmental learning outcomes are for students to:

1. Analyze the relationship between texts and contexts (i.e., political, historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts of race, class, gender, and sexuality)
2. Integrate information from public and scholarly sources in your writing
3. Apply disciplinary and theoretical terminology to critically analyze cultural practices and/or products (English B.A., Cal Poly Humboldt)

As students would be locating dystopian literature as it pertains to their own realities and be creating written pieces that utilize sources as critical aspects of the lesson, the activities described in the lesson plans meet both the course description and learning outcomes.

As my own addition to these lesson plan templates, I reference sources on trauma and trauma-informed teaching and implement these practices into a hypothetical lesson plan, collected in the lesson template below, which follows a learning cycle for optimum retention.²⁰ Trauma-informed pedagogical strategies can be found in the chapter titled

²⁰ The lesson plans follow a format of: Access Prior Knowledge, Extend Prior Knowledge, Application, and Reflection, and some small administrative amendments that I made to accommodate each lesson. This

“Trauma-Informed Pedagogy.” This will achieve the result of approaching pandemic, plague, and otherwise dystopian media in the classroom in a trauma-informed way. Currently, the lesson plans are only for circulation of this project—they have yet to be used within a classroom setting.

Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis will be provided individually for selected novels. The rhetorical analysis of a given novel will be located prior to each lesson plan, bringing the scholarly conversations around a novel to the forefront when preparing to teach and looking into the rhetorical ecology, as these practices would also be taught to hypothetical students.

The novels for rhetorical analysis and lesson planning were selected due to epidemic, plague, and world-ended (as we know it) material. These include adrienne maree brown’s *Grievers*, Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*, and Russel Hoban’s *Riddley Walker*. Despite its lack of a pandemic (though radiation sickness and mutation add an ominous, plague-like element to the novel), I was inspired to choose *Riddley Walker* due to possibilities with language and translanguaging. For context, this book was written in Riddleyspeak, an imagined post-nuclear version of English. Analyzing language use, code-switching, and translation in the classroom provides new angles to approaching trauma.

lesson plan follows suggestions of current research for learning retention and a student-centered approach, often referred to as the “learning cycle,” (“Learning Cycles”) and the 5E method (“Empowering Students”).

To provide exploration into different written genres, I will also provide a lesson plan for Bent Knee's 2017 album *Land Animal*. These choices provide opportunities to showcase other genres for dystopian literature outside of the expected novel format. Looking to content within these lesson plans, students should have a working knowledge of genre prior to participating successfully with these activities. By including different communicative genres within these lesson plans, students explore these different genres that engage with similar ideas and fears.

Grievors

Trauma-informed pedagogical considerations become especially pertinent with the content of *Grievors*—a dystopian novel by adrienne maree brown, as it is centered around multiple topics and social issues brought up in the monumental year 2020 and onwards. Encompassing a pandemic experience, *Grievors* brings together a number of pressing issues in the Detroit-based novel, including a number of genres: “speculative fiction,” “fiction,” and “LGBT” (brown, back cover). While these categories naturally overlap, I found this genre tension interesting under the lens offered in the article “Black (w)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality” by Evelyn Hammonds; while *Grievors* itself features an LBGT character, the LBGT storyline is not central to the plot of *Grievors*—other genres more wholly define the work. Early into “Black (w)holes”, Hammonds discusses the “adjectives” (301) of identity, considering the ways in which identity and body of work intersect, also analyzing the ways in which race and sexuality inform each other and create tension in the realm of theory. The lesson plan I crafted does

not pursue the politics of genre and categorization (though this would be interesting for future endeavors), instead focusing on the human experience for which adrienne maree brown sets the stage.

In future teachings, I intend to employ “significant passages”— excerpts of longer readings for the class to explore. This allows me to increase the quantity of titles on a reading list without over burdening the learners. Within this lesson plan, I will be using a significant passage from Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s *M. Archive: After the End of the World*. *M. Archive*, the second text in a planned series, which follows a future researcher as they unearth evidence that document “the persistence of Black life following a worldwide cataclysm” (back cover). Within *Grievors*, Dune herself begins a form of archival work in a post-illness (H-8) Detroit, making these works complementary.

Lesson Plan: *Grievors* (50 minutes)

Trauma-informed strategies used:

- Content descriptions/trigger warnings
- Flexible absence practices, allowing students to exit mentally/physically
- Validating students’ lived experiences
- Community building
- Peer support
- Choice
- Allowing different ways to participate with course concepts
- Interweaving cultural, historical, and gender issues
- Checking in on students
- Valuing student input and feedback

Prior to the Lesson: Students will have read *Grievors*, and significant passages of Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s *M. Archive*. Class begins by previewing topics for discussion as well as a brief overview of *Grievors* and *M. Archive*.

[Content descriptions]

Content description/trigger warning: “Within this lesson, we will be investigating topics such as grief, pandemic, racism, and sense of place within *Grievors*. Throughout this session you may quietly excuse yourself if you need a break. To preview other content we will discuss, the following is a look into *M. Archive*, which we will be analyzing today:

Told from the perspective of a future researcher, *M. Archive* examines evidence of capitalism and environmental crisis, providing a new look on ways of being. Reminding us of works by Nalo Hopkinson and Octavia Butler, it is revealed that Black feminist theory exists after the end of the world— through this lens we see what is possible in writing and research, as well as within the blending of limiting categories, such as science, writing, politics, poetry, art, and more.”

Explore Concepts (5 min): As a class, read out loud a portion of *Grievors*. Out loud reading will be decided on a volunteer basis. If uncomfortable, students are permitted to leave the room, doodle (or other forms of grounding), or choose not to share/participate (stated at the beginning of this class).

For read aloud, a section on page 98, stopping with “Horror and immense longing” (brown 98) for students to consider: What are you afraid of? What are you longing for? How could these fears be kept out of the future, and what you are longing for written into the future?

[allowing students to exit physically or mentally, flexible absence practices]

On the Jamboard application, whiteboard, or by using sticky notes, students will each add a word to the space as to how this section made them feel, a theme, or an answer to one of the questions above—a small time capsule of the moment.

Access Prior Knowledge (10 min): Free write prompt: Thinking of *M. Archive*, what would future explorers and researchers think of the city in Dune's basement? What might the green mold look like, or the city of Detroit?

Think about your own living space or town, and select one object, text, or item that is in sight. What would people make of this in the future? What does it aesthetically or ontologically reveal about our values, societal expectations from a futuristic perspective? **[validating life experiences and privileging them on par with course concepts, readings]**

Break (5 min): Students are encouraged to leave questions and comments on a piece of paper and put it in the box provided in the room. If they don't have questions, they are encouraged to leave a blank piece of paper in the box (to normalize it, and to provide further anonymity).

[during the break, students can debrief, socialize, and other forms of community building]

Extend Prior Knowledge (15 min):

For five minutes, students will read and annotate a printed significant passage of Gumbs's *M. Archive*. They will then share annotations and discuss with a partner how *Grievors* and *M. Archive* connect (or how one informs the other) and create a casual mini presentation on their findings. During this activity. The instructor will walk around the room and check in on students.

[checking in on students, community building, peer support, allowing for different ways to engage with course content]

Application (15 min): Following a brief statement of lifting each other up and honoring each other's ideas, students will collectively brainstorm on the following prompts:

- How could these texts affect how we move about the world?

- What the implications are of writing oneself into the future?

Forming groups of 4, they will create an infographic to be displayed in the classroom. Next class session, the “Explore Concepts” portion will be to browse the displayed infographics.

[community building, peer support, safe spaces]

Reflection (5 min): The instructor will read aloud any questions in the box and answer. After this portion, class ends.

[valuing student input and feedback]

Additional Assignment: Read the “Song for Vivian” (brown 95) and look up what a dirge is—what conventions make a dirge, in fact, a dirge? How does it differ from other types of songs? Write a dirge for your own COVID-19 experience. How did the writing within the genre of the dirge change the writing process? Is there a type of song specific to your own culture, family, or communities of practice? How do these songs communicate differently?

Riddley Walker

Russel Hoban’s 1980 novel *Riddley Walker* follows a young boy moving throughout a changing world after nuclear catastrophe; the text chronicles the times after “1 Big 1” (World War III) labeled as the “Bad Time” as protagonist Riddley Walker’s hunter-gatherer society begins to move into a new “teckernogical” (technological) age twenty-five hundred years post-nuclear devastation. As this novel investigates culture, environmental devastation, and language, even being written in its own post-nuclear

English, Riddleyspeak, it provides multiple ways for students to perceive and engage with the content.

Jerry Porter connects language and the atomic bomb in “Three Quarks for the Muster Mark: Quantum Wordplay and Nuclear Discourse in Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker*” and concisely describes the novel:

A book about life after the bomb, Hoban’s *Riddley Walker* calls attention to itself principally as a novel exploring the relation between science and language. Hoban’s polyglot novel offers a radical example of antilanguage that is noteworthy largely because it derives from the primary story of new physics-radioactive decay. (450)

Porter speaks to Riddley’s environment describing it as “chronic disorder and loss in a radioactive world...matched in language by the mutation of speech” (450), connecting Riddley’s life experiences with the way he communicates through written word. Porter writes, “For post-atomic humanity, life after the bomb is agony, but for language, ironically, contamination is a remarkably inventive process” (450), furthering this by claiming “language knows things that people do not” (451).

R.D. Mullen discusses literacy in *Riddley Walker* in his work “Dialect, Grapholect, and Story: Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker* as Science Fiction,” noting that “[the father] and Riddley are the only literate members of the group. They have paper, ink, and pens, but nothing is said about their having any books or manuscripts other than (evidently) a copy of the Eusa Story, which, as a holy work, exists only in the old spel,” (393), “old spel” referring to a version of English more recognizable to the reader.

Riddley Walker becomes inspiration for the interdisciplinary as it is referenced in archaeological work. Sarah E. Newman describes “Stoan Branches Unner a Stoan Sky,” a

scene in *Riddley Walker* in which the reader can take a present location and reach forward, imagining the impression of someone far into the future (thinking to *Station Eleven*, *M. Archive*, and *Octavia's Brood*). She writes, "At one point, the novel's eponymous protagonist finds himself awestruck by the ruins of the Canterbury Cathedral: 'stoan branches unner a stoan sky'." Here, Riddley captures the "wonder and distance we feel when confronted with the traces of former times" (142). This novel provides a unique vantage point for reflecting on current realities as past artifacts and investigating what "language knows" (Porter 451) that we do not.

Translation and Translingualism in the Classroom: A Discussion on the First and Nineteenth Chapters of *Literacy as Translingual Practice*

As language and plot are deeply intertwined in *Riddley Walker*, this section focuses on the introductory chapter of *Literacy as Translingual Practice: Between Communities and Classrooms*, as well as Chapter 19, titled "Moving out of the monolingual comfort zone and into the multilingual world: an exercise for the writing classroom" by Joleen Hanson. These texts explore antiracist language and literacy practices in the classroom. Hanson discusses that a multilingual reality not only better reflects the diversity of the classroom, but also the state of the current world with increasing use of the internet. English monolingualism not only further minoritizes marginalized groups but limits the classroom and possibilities for educators and students alike. The exercise Hanson proposes is to complete a website analysis and practice research in a non-English language, using internet translation services. This brief

discussion will reference Suresh Canagarajah's introductory chapter to speak to the ways this exercise meets the expectations of translanguaging, while presenting an extending language activity within this project.

In the introduction, Canagarajah breaks 'translanguaging' into its roots: trans and lingual. When thinking of the root 'trans' we consider a movement between languages: "the term moves us beyond a consideration of the individual or monolithic languages to life between and across languages" (1). Featured in Chapter 19 of *Literacy as Translingual Practice*, Hanson describes a translation activity in her classroom where students analyzed websites they had found that were in non-English languages. Hanson states that most students were able to gather "some meaning" (213) from analyzing a website in another language. As translanguaging focuses on new, blended, and expanded forms of meaning-making, comprehensiveness still holds emphasis. For students to accurately move "between and across" (1) languages, Hanson's lesson could be extended for students to also make further attempts to understand what the language is saying.

I propose expanding this project to include multiple forms of meaning-making: a translation activity. The students would first attempt to make meaning from a text using Google Translate, as many in Hanson's class did. This is then furthered by the use of multiple translators, cross-referencing the results, and re-writing the text they were trying to interpret with the use of translation theory. This could be framed as a group project, involving lots of communication. Readings as prerequisite to this extended activity could include Friedrich Schleiermacher and Lawrence Venuti, speaking to readerly versus writerly translation methods, and considering both speaker and audience in translation.

Students would interrogate their positionality to a text before examining the ways they ‘translate’ in other areas of their life. While Hanson’s classroom project rejects monolingualism, going deeper into this project and providing multiple meaning-making moments can create a more accurate grasp of multiple languages; this would speak to multiliteracies and represent translanguaging. Adding these activities could create an accumulation of sources and deeper understanding, opposed to relying on the students’ initial impressions of text in different languages.

As we consider and reconsider what is academic language in the classroom, students may already be entering the space with linguistic discomforts, experiences with microaggressions in the classroom, or even macroaggressions as educators deem what makes good writing (Inoue 330). Embracing translanguaging and multiliteracies in the classroom then becomes a trauma-informed practice.

Lesson Plan: Making Meaning of *Riddley Walker* and What That Implies of all Literacy (50 minutes)

Trauma-informed strategies used:

- Content descriptions
- Allowing students to exit mentally/physically
- Flexible absence practices
- Validating students’ life experiences
- Community building
- Checking in on students individually
- Allowing multiple entry points for engagement with material
- Valuing student input and feedback
- Peer support
- Choice

- Interweaving cultural, historical, and gender issues
- Checking in on students
- Valuing student input and feedback
- Growth mindset that provides opportunities for revision and self-evaluation

Prior to the Lesson: Students will have read Chapter 1 of *Riddley Walker*.

Students will have read and annotated the following Significant Passages. Creating a Significant Passages list allows for expanding the reading list without adding undue burden upon the reading load of the students.

Significant Passages

1. The term “Translingualism,” making inferences as to what it means, as well as the following elaboration: “the term moves us beyond a consideration of the individual or monolithic languages to life between and across languages” (Canagarajah 1).
2. Friedrich Schleiermacher addresses the dichotomy an individual is faced with upon translating a project in his work “On the Different Methods of Translating”; one must decide between a “reader” (Schleiermacher 49) privileging work, in which the translator creates the “image” while also preserving “such enjoyment” (51) one might have reading a work in its original language, or that of a “writer” (49) privileging work—a more direct translation that maintains “a foreign tone” (54). That is to say the ability for a reader to understand and enjoy a translated work contradicts that of faithfulness to the author of the original piece. Schleiermacher elaborates on this as he notes the conservation of “rhythm and melody caught in irreconcilable conflict with dialectical and grammatical fidelity” (52), believing a translator must choose between the artistry or truth of a written piece, inevitably asking: “what is to be sacrificed here?” (52). Schleiermacher outlines the contradiction of high-stakes choices when translating a work—staying truer to the text or re-crafting a text for greater understanding that has a familiar read.

3. Lawrence Venuti examines translation through a socio-political lens in the first chapter of his work *The Translator's Invisibility*. He notes that “fluency” (Venuti 1) is often regarded in direct relation with quality, assuming “[t]he more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text” (1).

Explore Concepts (5 min): Class begins by previewing topics for discussion as well as a brief overview of *Riddley Walker*.

“*Riddley Walker* creates a narrative around topics such as nuclear fallout, language, disability phobia, colonization, and sense of place. Within this lesson, we will be investigating the ways in which language operates within this novel.

Throughout this session you may quietly excuse yourself if you need a break.

To preview other content we will discuss, the following is a look into translanguaging as a term, which we will be connecting with *Riddley Walker* today” (Significant Passage 1).

[Content descriptions]

As a class, read out loud a portion of *Riddley Walker*. Out loud reading will be decided on a volunteer basis. If uncomfortable, students are permitted to leave the room, doodle (or other forms of grounding), or choose not to share/ participate.

[allowing students to exit physically or mentally, flexible absence practices]

Access Prior Knowledge (10 minutes)

Free write prompts, which students can choose between:

- In *Riddley Walker*, these post-nuclear communities built their values off of a few scarce artifacts that remained (painting, puppet/genre of theater). What would it be like to build a community off of an item, text, or artifact of your choosing?

- How much of *Riddley Walker* were you able to understand or not understand? Within the language differences, were you able to make meaning? What could this imply about language or literacy in general?

[validating life experiences, choice]

Break (5 min): Students are encouraged to leave questions and comments on a piece of paper and put it in the box provided in the room. If they don't have questions, they are encouraged to leave a blank piece of paper in the box (to normalize it, and to provide further anonymity).

During this time, students can also share their free-writes with each other or they can change the genre of their free-write into a concept map, poem, or looping activity (take the most significant sentence from your free-write, and then do a deeper free-write on just that topic).

[during the break, students can debrief, socialize, and other forms of community building]

Extend Prior Knowledge (20 min): Students can work on their own or in pairs to decipher different paragraphs of *Riddley Walker* into casual English. From here, they will translate it into another language, either using a translation generator online or prior knowledge. Using a generator to translate it back into English, they can examine the ways in which the text has changed. Now is the time for language decisions: they will refer to the above Significant Passages, choose a translation approach, and clean up their work on the *Riddley Walker* paragraph, taking all sources of information into account.

They will decide what they would like their final translation to be: Standard Academic English, a different form of English, or an entirely different language (but this decision is a conscious act of languaging).

During this time, the instructor will walk around the room and check in on students.

[checking in on students, community building, peer support, choice, allowing for different ways to engage with course content]

Application (10 min): Following a brief statement of lifting each other up and honoring each other’s ideas, students will first share their translations, and then collectively brainstorm on how this practice could affect how we move about the world. They will answer metacognitive questions such as: How much did this text need to change each time?; How did you feel about the translation process, and how successful do you believe your translations were at conveying meaning?; How much did the meaning change across languaging attempts?; and What does this activity say about languaging and literacy as a whole?

This will occur in a group discussion.

[community building, peer support, safe spaces, growth mindset that provides opportunities for revision and self-evaluation]

Reflection (a few minutes, if time): The instructor will read aloud any questions in the box and answer to the best of my ability. After this portion, class has come to a close.

[valuing student input and feedback]

Station Eleven

Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* depicts a post-pandemic world in which the reader follows multiple characters, one of whom takes part in a traveling theater. Charles Conaway highlights the use of Shakespeare in “‘All the World’s a [Post Apocalyptic] Stage’: The Future of Shakespeare in Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*”; “allusions, quotations, performances and other references to Shakespeare invite us to consider the nature of his continued cultural importance in a world where civilisation as we know it has been devastated” (4). Conaway expands on Mandel’s

considerations of past culture in a post-technological world by reminding readers of a past NPR interview in which Mandel “indicates that she is also interested in the role that other cultural artifacts might play in a post-apocalyptic world...and her interests, here, further complicate our understanding of the therapeutic value of culture” (7). Referring to the “Station Eleven” privately published comic book that has significantly influenced certain players in Mandel’s post-apocalypse, this quote invited readers to consider other artifacts surviving into the future. Pertinent to this project, Mandel’s work seems to signify a healing aspect to the cultural works we bring into the future.

Not every reader agrees, however, that one of these persisting culturally significant works should be by William Shakespeare. In “Postapocalyptic Curating: Cultural Crises and the Permanence of Art in Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*,” Carmen Méndez-García notes that bringing forth Shakespeare into the apocalypse versus other works perpetuates “the universal Shakespeare,” which is “tied to a problematic conception of an intrinsically Anglophone ‘survival’ of culture” (116). The choice of Shakespearean plays over that of other playwrights then seems a Eurocentric view of culture and persistence; the narrator justifies the choice, asserting that “audiences seemed to prefer Shakespeare to [the traveling theater group’s] other theatrical offerings” (Mandel 38), given the reason for *The Traveling Symphony*’s choices. Méndez-García advocates to work against the “‘universality’ of any given text” (117) and rather than assuming a universality with experience and the Shakespearean play, to focus on the ability of texts to act as a “response to specific circumstances” (117). This is to say instead of imagining that Shakespeare lasts above all playwrights, far into a

postapocalyptic world, to configure how Shakespeare was chosen as a response to the events, also calling for further works to be created and possible futures for works to be imagined as response.

To extend this conversation, one could have students take their creative texts to the future—what would you write as a response to the events in *Station Eleven*? What do you see as maintaining popularity in the post-technological world, given what characters in *Station Eleven* have had to go through? Méndez-García does give St. John Mandel accolades, stating in “comparison to other postapocalyptic texts, *Station Eleven* is not quite as concerned with the violence immediately following the apocalypse but with a process of re-construction and rebirth” (112). Considering what students may have experiencing years 2020-2023 and beyond in terms of instabilities, this positive shift towards “re-construction and rebirth” (112) emphasizes the types of forward-looking found in *Octavia’s Brood* and provides many opportunities for reflection and imagination in activities for students²¹.

Lesson Plan: <i>Station Eleven</i> (50 minutes)
Trauma-informed strategies used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content descriptions • Allowing students to exit mentally/physically • Validating students’ life experiences • Community building • Allowing multiple entry points for engagement with material • Valuing student input and feedback

²¹ See section titled “Extending Trauma-Informed Pedagogy”

- Peer support
- Choice
- Interweaving cultural, historical, and gender issues
- Valuing student input and feedback
- Incorporating movement
- Growth mindset that provides opportunities for revision and self-evaluation

Access Prior Knowledge (10 to 15 minutes):

“*Station Eleven* depicts a post-apocalyptic world after a pandemic. We will also be discussing how specific choices in this novel relate to culture. Feel free to leave the room at any point during this discussion, doodle, or take breaks in a way that helps you if you need throughout the class.”

[Content Description, allowing students to exit mentally/physically]

Having read *Station Eleven*, students will read an excerpt of Carmen M. Méndez-García’s “Postapocalyptic Curating: Cultural Crises and the Permanence of Art in Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*” to begin considering projecting artifacts, items, and textual genres into the future. Students will then freewrite answers to the following prompt:

In *Station Eleven*, we read that despite other creative efforts, “audiences seemed to prefer Shakespeare to their other theatrical offerings” (38). What are the implications of Shakespeare persisting across an ‘apocalypse’? Thinking across genres, what ‘text’ do you see persisting to a distant future after devastation? A song? A play? A book? What would that imply about our culture?

[validating students’ life experiences, valuing student input, Interweaving cultural, historical, and gender issues]

Extend Prior Knowledge (5 to 15 minutes):

“In *Station Eleven*, Clark builds a museum in the airport of various items that reflect a past, technological, connected world.”

1. The instructor will revisit the concept of “genre,” and introduce them to the genre of museum placards.
2. Students will reflect: what conventions are necessary for one to recognize a text as a museum placard, opposed to something else? What type of information is typically included?

Application: (20 to 25 minutes minimum)

In small groups, students will choose a selection of items and create descriptions that could accompany it in a museum for future generations, following conventions of the museum placard genre. Students will collaborate with each other to build said museum with images and text using a digital format of their choice.

[community building, peer support, choice, allowing multiple entry points for engagement with material]

Reflection (if time):

Students will have time to move throughout the room and see each of the curations. In addition to the curations, they will also put a note in the box as to what they’d hope to do next with their curations, or what they wish they had been able to do.

[incorporating movement, valuing student input and feedback, growth mindset that provides opportunities for revision and self-evaluation]

Additional Assignment:

Select one item from your group’s curation. Describe this item in as much detail as you can. Why did you or your group select this item? What role does it play in our culture? If looking at this item from the perspective of a future archivist, what do you think this item would reveal about cultural practices, values, and beliefs?

*Land Animal*Genre and Multimodality: a brief discussion

This section will look at the ways Amy Devitt's "Generalizing about Genre" and the Hybrid Pedagogy online work "Multimodality as a Frame for Individual and Institutional Change" work together to challenge notions of genre, and the ways in which multimodality informs genre.

"Multimodality as a Frame for Individual and Institutional Change" highlights a shift towards first-year composition teaching that focuses on "written, oral and visual communication" (Hybrid Pedagogy) rather than following the tradition of English classes; this shift provides room for students to explore genres outside of novels and essays. The authors hint at genre being a 'rhetorical decision' and note their past work that provides opportunities that allow students to "consider which modes were most appropriate in a given circumstance" (Hybrid Pedagogy). Genre as a rhetorical choice intertwines with Devitt's "Generalizing about Genre," as this notion works to "unify form and content" (Devitt 573).

Devitt explains that "those formal traces" we use to identify genre "do not define or constitute the genre" (575); this is due to the fact that genre comes to be from pattern of use, and if their use changes, so does the pattern, and therefore the genre. For students, the concise poster of the Conference on College Composition for Genre may make this clearer. The CCC writes: "[Genres] are available for use, but they have both a history and a future; when we write within them, we participate in the genre's future, regardless of

the shape that genre may take” (1). Multimodality and multimodal ways of communicating can play a hand in this, as shifting traditional works to include multiple modes can over time change the genre itself. Explaining this to students may inspire them to play around with genre and modality, knowing that it is not a rigid form.

Something important to contemplate in a 2023 context is that multimodality is not always associated with digital media. The Hybrid Pedagogy piece acknowledges that design, readability, and creativity can be just as powerful as the writing itself when it comes to a work and a writer’s development, yet these notions are not restricted to technological use—although this can be challenging to consider in a reality steeped in technology. Embracing multimodal approaches can apply even more so in the digital age, as we increasingly read on a screen. Past genres are dramatically changing to be readable on multiple platforms outside of the printed text. The practicality of a multimodal text increases as digital screens create a scroll, skim effect when reading texts that in the past may have been traditional to a printed form. As students read and write course texts using digital platforms, multimodality and other forms of textual breaks become imperative to current writing education.

The CCC also has a poster for multimodality as a first-year composition concept, and a section that speaks specifically to the significance of multimodality in composition:

Multimodality reminds us of the richness of all texts and of the many ways we create meaning. Interestingly, small children – mixing drawing, colors, letters, and layout– seem to compose multimodally almost “naturally”. It may be that engaging in the same kind of “multimodal play” would benefit many composers:

it's often through such "play" that we see alternative ways of seeing and of meaning making. (1)

Breaking away from forms of writing students may be expecting from their high school experiences (five-paragraph essays, revision as simply editing, a topic followed by three pieces of evidence, etc.) could even be a healing activity for their relationships with writing, as the CCC touches on "multimodal play" and the more 'childlike' or fun aspects of writing. In their final reflections for ENGL 104: Accelerated Composition and Rhetoric, many of my 25 in-person students reflected on the freedom in a Public Genres Portfolio in which they chose and crafted works in different genres that were intended to be shared in some form. Adding elements of multimodality can only expand upon this feeling with writing.

Broadening the understanding of genre as not only a type of text but as "dynamic patterning of human experience" (Devitt 573) opens the gates for interpretation in multimodality. Within this larger project, it is important to include different communicative genres outside of what would be assigned novels. To provide more platforms for genre exploration and analysis within the classroom, I am including a music album to this work.

Daniel Rubin recounts using a Queensryche album *Operation: Mindcrime* in the classroom to increase engagement, demonstrating the use of multimodality as a tool to capture students' interest. Thinking of Amy Devitt and incorporating genre in the creative *and* communicative senses, he writes: "Therefore, it is essential that language arts teachers attempt to incorporate non-print materials in their classrooms, such as music,

film, and art, to involve, engage, and motivate a new generation of students” (74). He explains multimodality further as a “tool” that “supports and facilitates the growing dialogue of high school students” (74). Rubin also provides the prompt for his own lesson plan, not only displaying the use of an album and student considerations being equally rigorous to that of literature, but also investigating parallel themes: “You will be required to analyze the parallel concepts and themes of these two works with the intent of further developing a critical eye towards injustice, personal empowerment, and the creation of a political consciousness” (76). The learning goal provided reads as to “help students engage with the literature presented and encourage a higher level of literary and socio-cultural analysis than just covering the text alone” (78), showing that multimodal analysis is not only on par with that of exclusively literature, but also that it can surpass it in analysis and student understanding.

Land Animal as Dystopia

For this section, I analyze the ways in which Bent Knee’s 2017 album *Land Animal* can be a dystopian work and provides a platform for analysis in the classroom while providing Carly Rae Jepsen’s 2022 hit “Loneliest Time” as a utopian alternative. This will serve to locate these two musical works within this project, while also providing an example for future students considering multi-genre approaches or aspects of multimodality into their work.

Bent Knee takes today’s current political, economic, and environmental issues lyrically and extends them into the unknown future. To first label the album as dystopian, I am using the definitions from *Oxford Language* to define “dystopia” and “dystopian,”

found in the section “Defining Dystopia.” Through lyricism and tone, Bent Knee proposes an altered, “imagined state” of current issues that plague the U.S., such as climate change, racism, and mass extinction— these events that are described in the songs are sung in exacerbated, extreme, and futurized ways. For lyrical examples and brief analyses, refer to the chart below. For reference, there are ten songs on the album, but for time restraints and ease of reading I will include a few for special mention in addition to a deeper reflection on “Land Animal,” the album-titled song, below.

Song Title	Lyric	Interpretation
1. Terror Bird	Crises come with machetes Harvesting the reactions, the moldy flavor of apathy Trying to find the words to say To take the visceral pain away	Depicts a moment of crisis and violence while commenting on the current state of apathy (this connects to my discourse community analysis of r/ABoringDystopia). The state of the world cannot be fixed through language alone.
7. Time Deer	Every tree bursting No phoenix, no net No Green Peace, no regret Just gravity // Oh, nasty dog You are choking on a cog in my time machine Drag you along to the times from which you run So you can see what I see	These lyrics explicitly refer to climate disaster and longing for different times, while depicting a sense of escapism through time travel. As this song employs the fictional device of a time machine, it most closely fits what readers and listeners alike may consider “dystopian.”
8. Belly Side Up	Ah, don't turn your belly side up Show me your teeth, girl Show me what you're made of // Glistening gems to follow	When reading these lyrics, one can ask: what types of movies have come to life? What sharp promises are we swallowing? There is the hopeful act of continuing to fight and protect oneself and the

Song Title	Lyric	Interpretation
	Like the movies come to life Sharp promises to swallow Everything is alright	necessary mantra that “everything is alright.”
9. The Well	The well is empty Let's dig ten more feet You'll see there's plenty You'll see it's empty The well is empty Let's dig ten more feet I'm gonna lay back down Hey, where's your boy Hey, where's your girl Hey, where is everyone Left this place behind, one- way stride to the ozone Hey, let's remember when we slipped into the ocean	This song doesn't appear to project the future—it is situated in the imminence of the present, serving as a call-to-action. This refrain is repeated throughout the song, striking further urgency as Swain curtly sings: “You see, there's plenty / To last 'till our kid's twenty.”

To dive deeper into analysis, I would like to draw further attention to the eponymous song, “Land Animal” and the messages the outro is sending to the listener. Here is a link to a live version of the song:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFwtaweXX8s&ab_channel=InsideOutMusicTV.

“Land Animal” begins at 25:24, while this section begins at 28:00.

I'ma
I'ma send a
I'ma send out a message to my love
Sending out a message to my love
Sending out a message when I worry too much
Only thing that matters is not giving up
I'm sending out a message to my love
I'm always at it every night

Dye cast memories strewn aside
 Truth be told I'll soon be old
 Top of the middle I'm in the huddle
 I drag my body through tiniest tunnels
 It turns me on to soon be gone

Singer Courtney Swain captures a certain hopelessness when alluding to sending out this message: it is unsure if it is being received, it is repeated every night, and the “only thing that matters” is the continuity in “sending out a message”—privileging the act, and not the outcome. The repetition (“I’m a / I’m a send a/ I’m a send out a message to my love”) emphasizes this insecurity. It is at the forefront of the mind that time is passing (“I’ll soon be old”), however this is met with relief and even fetishization that the speaker (and possibly all humans) will come to their demise—after fighting in the thick of it (“Top of the middle, I’m in the huddle”). Haunting moans and tones end the song, purposely offsetting the listener out of the moment of comfort provided by the violin heavy, lyrical outro above.

To frame this song as not only discourse, which James Paul Gee considers strings of text and meaning-making, but as Discourse, which expands to include “*saying (writing)-doing-valuing-believing* combinations” (Gee 6), we can consider the “identity kit” (7) that this song as an act of Discourse projects onto the listener “so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (7). Considerations for this ‘identity kit’ include its creative genre, progressive rock, an amount of musical knowledge that leads one to discovering the Bent Knee band, and an awareness and even disdain for the current state of economic and environmental situations.

Another aspect of this discourse worth looking into is its textual genre: an album. Thinking of the identity this album may be providing for the listener as an act of Discourse, Amy Devitt writes that “genres represent their communities, they effect and make consequential the communities' interests” (543) in “Materiality and Genre in the Study of Discourse Communities,” displaying a more complex relationship; while listeners may gain a form of ‘identity kit’ from consuming the media and partaking within the community created through the album, listeners and their interests are also represented within this particular genre. Breaking down the notion of genre into its Latin roots, Devitt reminds us that “gener” comes from “to generate” (551). Particular topics are written about in dystopian works, and as a literary genre, it *does* something (as do communicative genres, like what Devitt discusses in her work), such as imagining, and thus materializing the future, and perpetuating forms of cultural work. As this album generates a conscious awareness of our current dystopian state, it can spark action, narrowing its label into a critical dystopia, opposed to an anti-utopian mode of thought.

“Loneliest Time” as Utopian

To contrast the Bent Knee album, I shift our gaze to Carly Rae Jepsen’s single “Loneliest Time” released in October of 2022. Popularity wise, the bridge of this song has been used by TikTok content creators in 189.9K videos (TikTok) as of December 13th, 2022—only two months later. This number does not include other social media platforms such as Instagram or listening platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music; this is to say this song has a high level of interaction with listeners, beyond listening to the audio.

Content-wise, we will be looking specifically at the bridge and outro of this song, in which there is a large tonal shift. Throughout the chorus and verses, it is a poppy, upbeat song about returning to a love from the past and finding companionship in lonely times. This is a song of nostalgia: nostalgia for past loves, longing for a less lonely time, nostalgia for disco, and later within the music video and bridge, nostalgia for the hope of space exploration of the 1960's; this directly opposes America's current bleak view of the future represented in movies, shows, and other areas of popular culture and dominant discourse. In the bridge, we shift to the content regarding space travel.

What happened was we reached the moon
 But lost in space, I think we got there all too soon
 But you know what? I'm comin' back for you, baby
 I'm comin' back for you (2:50).

These lyrics imply space travel, very similarly to Bent Knee's recurring themes of escape, however, there is a specific twist that instills hope within the listener. While Bent Knee's messages focus on being too late (see "The Well" in the table above), Jepsen's lyrics propose that instead, we arrived "too soon": there is more time, we are early. There is even time in which to return to their place of origin and travel back to the moon, as Jepsen is capable of doing when she promises "I'm comin' back for you"; Contrarily, Bent Knee is "sending out a message to my love", but it is unsure whether this message is received or in vain. Bent Knee describes a temporal anxiety when they remind us in the outro "Truth be told, I'll soon be old"—we are running out of time. Jepsen's vocals are that of a tentative optimism— Courtney Swain's haunting vocals appear foreboding. The

final lyric of Land Animal is “It turns me on to soon be gone.” This directly juxtaposes the ending Jepsen presents for listeners, a lyric repeated three times:

And in the mornin'
Sun hits the water
Is this Nirvana?

Things could not be better; nature is working as it should (the sun is hitting the water, and it is supposedly beautiful). Climate disaster is not making itself known in Jepsen’s outro. Instead, Jepsen is offering a utopian escape from the woes of our world, while Bent Knee propels us deeper into them. However, we know through etymology that utopia means “no place”—this is a realm that does not exist.

Returning to Gee, this act of discourse offers the listener a different perspective, and therefore different “identity kit” (7): someone fun, dancing, relaxed, and in the comfort of a past love. Identifying and analyzing the messages songs are sending and analyzing genre in new ways can provide new revelations for the reader. Choosing the communicative genre of the song presents an interesting opportunity as well, as they themselves recreate a “recurrent situation” (Bickmore); this is to say that songs are made to be replayed and reheard over time. I would be interested in asking students what each artist is doing through the genre of song, and what call-to-action they are imposing upon their listener with their choice of genre.

This discussion focuses on the lyricism of the work as my musical fluency has depleted due to lack of use. Integrating different modalities (in this instance, analyzing musical and notational choices of songs), however, provides a platform for students to explore the auditory, visual, and sensory elements of a work external to textual analysis,

and embraces multiliteracies by allowing students to access a text in ways outside of reading and writing.

Lesson Plan: Finding Critical Dystopias and Utopias in Music and Art (50 minutes)

Trauma-informed strategies used:

- Content descriptions
- Allowing students to exit mentally/physically
- Validating students' life experiences
- Community building
- Allowing multiple entry points for engagement with material
- Peer support
- Choice
- Growth mindset that provides opportunities for revision and self-evaluation

Prior to class: Students will have read the short [CCC poster on Multimodality](#) the night before.

Review (0 to 5 minutes):

Students are provided with a refresher worksheet that has 3 definitions and empty spaces: critical dystopia, anti-utopia, and utopia. They are encouraged to work collaboratively to fill out their definitions.

[peer support, choice]

Access Prior Knowledge (5 minutes):

Students have 5 minutes to make annotations on the printed reading from the night before: 5 written annotations, and 5 drawn (circling, underlining, arrows, etc.). When finished, they will share their annotations with a peer to build up definitions and emphasis on certain parts further.

[community building, peer support]

Extend Prior Knowledge (15 minutes)

We will have a fishbowl discussion (3 groups, about 5 minutes per group) that speaks to the ways multimodality can affect a work, both from the readerly and writerly perspective, and what being multimodal can look like.

[validating student experiences, community building]

Break (5 min): Students are encouraged to leave questions and comments on a piece of paper and put it in the box provided in the room. If they don't have questions, they are encouraged to leave a blank piece of paper in the box (to normalize it, and to provide further anonymity). These questions are entirely anonymous, to remove any embarrassment from students "not knowing" something.

[during the break, students can debrief, socialize, and other forms of community building]

Application: (25 minutes)

1. Students are provided with a brief content description of the song chosen.

[Content descriptions]

2. A song from the *Land Animal* album is played and students are encouraged to free-write during its duration. They can focus on the content of the song and their reactions, or they can connect it explicitly to the definition worksheet mentioned above.

[validating life experiences and privileging them on par with course concepts, readings]

3. If uncomfortable, students are permitted to leave the room, doodle (or other forms of grounding), or choose not to share/ participate.

[allowing students to exit physically or mentally, flexible absence practices]

4. Students are put into groups and tasked with finding a song on their own, and label it as critical dystopia, anti-utopia, or utopian with evidence as to why. If

uninterested in finding a song, they can also analyze album art. During this activity, the instructor will walk around the room and check in on students.

[checking in on students, community building, allowing for different ways to engage with course content]

5. Following a brief statement of lifting each other up and honoring each other's ideas, we come back together as a class and each group shares, playing snippets of the song or showing the art as they discuss their findings.

[community building, safe spaces]

Reflection (if time):

a. Exit ticket: How did employing other forms (opposed to analyzing text) change the way you went about this? How was it as an audience member for other presenters, opposed to past presentations?

b. I read any questions from the question box and answer for the class.

[valuing student input and feedback, growth mindset that provides opportunities self-evaluation]

CONCLUSION

To have a truly student-centered approach, educators must take into account the whole student; this includes their distant and not-so-distant pasts. As the dystopian genre often depicts especially dark, world-ending, reflective material, educators can make additions to classroom practices to work towards a space where students are comfortable enough both to learn and to approach sensitive material. We see in online forums and in campus conversations that students are not only anxious about their own futures, but anxious about the future for their country and planet—being conscious of this in the classroom in general and when presenting material that has potential to ‘trigger’ students (especially considering the recent COVID-19 pandemic and pandemic-plot literature) can help students remain in a regulated mental space to where they can be creative, retain information, and feel seen in the classroom, while also consuming media with a heightened sense of control. The lesson plans for *Grievors*, *Riddley Walker*, *Station Eleven*, and *Bent Knee* work to acknowledge the whole student and provide areas for them to explore dystopia in a low-risk manner with content warnings, collaboration, and choice. Employing these modes of thought to all classrooms could help students learn and participate during uncertain times, and work towards a more inclusive classroom—all classrooms can benefit from trauma-informed teaching practices (acknowledging the high rates of trauma²²) as all students are bringing different academic comfortabilities, lived experiences, and perspectives to the learning space.

²² Rates found in the section titled “Trauma”

Suggestions for future research

In a future iteration of this project, I would include lesson plans for the following titles: *Parable of the Sower*, *Tender is the Flesh*, *The Plague*, *The Road*, *Oryx and Crake*, *Orleans*, “Those Who Walk Away from Omelas”, and “Explaining Seafood to my Grandchildren.” Lesson plans and conversations around these interesting and timely dystopian works did not make it into this project due to time restraints. Applying trauma-informed teaching practices to more novels could work towards a trauma-informed dystopian literature course, which could be highly interesting for students given the popularity of the dystopian genre (ex: current *The Hunger Games* resurgence, *The Last of Us*, and more.).

A better view into student experience and dystopian literature as a course could be highlighted with a more limited survey: limiting responses not to those currently enrolled in an English class, but to those in currently partaking in the English major or various English minors, as that would be a better view of the audience to which these lesson plans would be taught. It would be interesting to make the survey not anonymous or take into account demographic information—as I was currently teaching and many of my students took this survey, I instead chose to omit all identifying questions in order to make it truly anonymous, in which students could answer questions more freely. The information on demographics would be interesting to cross-analyze with questions that consider “what is dystopian” or connections between lived experiences and the fictional

realm as marginalized communities experience frankly dystopian connections at higher rates.

Within the research itself, I would also include Janice Carrello's written works, in addition to her insightful videos. This would be a way to thoughtfully expand on trauma-informed teaching strategies.

An Applied English Podcast

To bring together student thought and visionary fiction, I am including a digital humanities project that collaboratively imagines utopia, via the Audacity podcasting platform. First, I recorded my own part of this story, and then I presented the question to other cohort members for collaborative science fiction: looking ahead to the future.

Walidah Imarisha defines science fiction in the collaborative work *Octavia's Brood*: "Because all organizing is science fiction, we are dreaming new worlds every time we think about the changes we want to make in the world" (4). *Octavia's Brood* examines creative projections of the future as a methodology for creating the future. Considering the term organization, we see any reorganization of dominant narratives, governing practices, or social configurations as science fiction itself. Through this digital humanities-inspired project, those featured on the podcast move from the realm of observer of science fiction to becoming a participant.

Participants were limited to the current cohort of the Applied English program and chosen on an opt-in basis. By asking questions about utopia, this cohort gets the gears moving for creating a better future. Participants signed an informed consent form

(See Appendix E), and were given some time to think before answering the following question and being recorded: What needs to be present in your version of ‘utopia’ that you’d like to see in our future?

Through this collaboration, this project works to tell a past story (my positionality for a dystopian project) as well as a story of the future. I included stories that looked towards the future until reaching the five-minute mark. Featured storytellers include Jasmine Fortunato, Natalie Acuna, Sara Spradley, Anthony Lowe, Elizabeth Hershey, Noemi Maldonado, and Cinnamon McIntosh. Hopefully, the effect is the future “from below”, modeling the “Notes on Women Who Rock” by Michelle Habell-Pallán, Sonnet Retman, and Angelica Macklin: “community-based knowledge production.” With additional time, I would have liked to include the podcast itself in this project. Instead, see the transcription below.

Transcription²³

Thank you for listening to this creative project as we hear ‘what it takes for utopia’, according to the Applied English MA cohort. But first, a bit of a positionality statement:

I’d come home, shaking hands, and put my mask back on to walk up the stairs. Breathing for the first time of the day, home at last, I would dive in: *Parable of the Sower*. *Ridley Walker*. *The Road*. What I was reading was darker than my own days. What had started as a persistent interest throughout my reading life became an insatiable desire for world-breaking. *Westworld*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Black Mirror*. I was sick to

²³ The transcription has been edited for conciseness and clarity.

my stomach. I wasn't sleeping. I was holding my breath. I was Lauren Olamina, feeling the pain of others. I was Riddley Walker, traveling through a gray world. I was Rick from *The Walking Dead*, seeing all the cars going the opposite direction, leaving the city.

Unlike Olamina, I did not write down my musings. I could not muster a word about COVID without rejecting it immediately. I reach back now, eyes covered with one hand and the other hand reaching deep into the dark that was March 2020 onwards. Within and through this podcast, I ask others to reach forward, to collaboratively explore building utopias as a methodology of manifestation in the midst of our own boring dystopia.

What needs to be present in your version of 'utopia' that you'd like to see in our future?

“When I consider utopia, I often think about access to universal health care, access to housing. For healthcare, I think of our pandemic, how so many of us are scared to visit our doctor, in fear of deportation, not being taken seriously, and countless other reasons. I think if I were going to have a utopia, these are just a few of the things I would consider. And I want clean air, damnit! I want clean air.”

“What my utopia would be like... I would probably say free access in response to homelessness. A lot of the things that aren't considered as mental health awareness and as more studies that go into mental health, how we can approach that. Also, I

think free access to education and skill shops should be provided. Just more accessibility when it comes to job searching and not being kind of held back because of a lack of degree. One of the big things would be access to translators within health centers. I know that one of the things I struggled with growing up was being a translator for my grandparents, so I think just better accessibility when it comes to language. That's what my utopia would be like—an accepting world.”

“Given the political background of Humboldt at the moment, I feel like housing security is a huge thing—at least one that's in my mind constantly. To think about a utopia would lead me to believe that homelessness isn't a problem. That alongside safety as a general concept is something that is implemented consistently...like, oh my gosh, gun control that works. That would be crazy! Could you imagine that? I feel like the two go hand in hand with when you have a home, you feel safer, alongside just general safety for all kinds of people—especially the LGBTQIA community.”

“If I were to change something, or create a utopia, or bring something from utopia over to our world, I think it would be a decentralized education system where people don't need to rely on any one particular institution for their degree—where they can choose from multiple universities, multiple colleges, and take classes all over the U.S. if they want to remotely. That barrier between university boundaries kind of fell

apart during COVID and that made me think that hey, we could pull classes, get our education from wherever we want.”

“I think my version of utopia would have to make sure to account for healthcare for all and an absence of systems that continually work to oppress people.”

“I would say for something to be my ideal utopia it would need to have access to healthcare, not just sick care. I want to be able to live without taking a million prescription pills. And I would also say access to organic foods and not anything that has pesticides or GMOs of any sort. That would be my ideal utopia.”

“For me it’s a question of what needs to be absent, and I think that oppression needs to be absent. And all of us, no matter where we’re from or where we’re headed, we’ve all experienced oppression in various ways. So just saying ‘equity needs to be present,’ I don’t think that’s enough, because oppression hides behind so many shadows.”

Thank you so much Fortunato, Natalie, Sprad, Noemi, Elizabeth, Anthony, and Cinnamon for sharing your thoughts on what needs to be there for a utopia. I hope to see some of these changes in the future. Thank you so much for listening.

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APPENDICES

Appendix AInformed Consent

You are invited to participate in this voluntary survey regarding the consumption of dystopian materials during the COVID-19 pandemic. You are being asked to participate in this survey as you are currently enrolled in an English course at Cal Poly Humboldt, and this research project focuses on the experiences and learning objectives pertinent to Cal Poly Humboldt English classes. If this information does not apply to you, please disregard this survey.

Purpose of the study: This study is taking place to include the student voice and student experiences in teaching-focused research, as well as display a correlation between reading materials and lived experiences. This survey will be included in a larger project that brings together trauma-informed teaching practices and dystopian novel lesson plans for Humboldt's ENGL 105 learning objectives. The current working title is Teaching Dystopia in a Dystopian Reality: Trauma-Informed Pedagogy and Dystopian Fiction after COVID-19. Results of this survey will be shared within the project, which will be published on Digital Scholar.

Requirements of Participation: Participation requires the completion of the following survey. Duration of participation can be expected to be approximately 10-15 minutes. You may choose to not answer any questions for any reason, and you can withdraw at any time during the survey process.

Risks and Confidentiality: There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this research outside of emotional distress. If you are experiencing negative emotions and would like support, please reach out to Counseling and Psychological Services here: [Counseling & Psychological Services \(humboldt.edu\)](https://www.humboldt.edu/counseling-psychological-services). Your survey completion is entirely voluntary and anonymous.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact the facilitator of this survey, Emily Lavrador by email at erl271@humboldt.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a survey participant or if you wish to report concerns about the study, you can find information to contact the Institutional Review Board for Cal Poly

Humboldt through this link: [Contact IRB | Institutional Review Board \(humboldt.edu\)](#).

Thank you for your time in completing this survey!

Emily Lavrador
Graduate Teaching Associate
English Department
Cal Poly Humboldt

Appendix B

This email was used for contacting current English instructors:

Dear Professor _____,

I am reaching out to you to request the dispersal of this survey. I am researching the consumption of dystopian media among students currently enrolled in an English class, as well as any reactions they had or connections they made. Your dispersal and their participation would be greatly appreciated, as this research will help inform my MA Project with the working title: Teaching Dystopia in a Dystopian World: trauma-informed pedagogy and dystopian fiction after COVID-19.

[Qualtrics Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management](#)

Thank you for your time!

Best,
Emily Lavrador
Graduate Student Applied
English MA

This email was used to distribute the survey to students:

Hi fellow English MA students!

I am reaching out to you to request participation in my 15-minute survey for the MA project. I am researching the consumption of dystopian media among students currently enrolled in an English class, as well as any reactions they had or connections they made. Your participation would be greatly appreciated, as this research will help inform my MA Project with the working title: Teaching Dystopia in a Dystopian World: trauma-informed pedagogy and dystopian fiction after COVID-19. Best of luck with your own projects and the closing of the semester—I thank you for your time!

[Qualtrics Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management](#)

Best,
Emily Lavrador

Appendix C

Dystopian Medias Survey

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in this voluntary survey regarding the consumption of dystopian materials during the COVID-19 pandemic. You are being asked to participate in this survey as you are currently enrolled in an English course at Cal Poly Humboldt, and this research project focuses on the experiences and learning objectives pertinent to Cal Poly Humboldt English classes. If this information does not apply to you, please disregard this survey.

Purpose of the study: This study is taking place to include the student voice and student experiences in teaching-focused research, as well as display a correlation between reading materials and lived experiences. This survey will be included in a larger project that brings together trauma-informed teaching practices and dystopian novel lesson plans for Humboldt's ENGL 105 learning objectives. The current working title is Teaching Dystopia in a Dystopian Reality: Trauma-Informed Pedagogy and Dystopian Fiction after COVID-19. Results of this survey will be shared within the project, which will be published on Digital Scholar.

Requirements of Participation: Participation requires the completion of the following survey. Duration of participation can be expected to be approximately 10-15 minutes. You may choose to not answer any questions for any reason, and you can withdraw at any time during the survey process.

Risks and Confidentiality: There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this research outside of emotional distress. If you are experiencing negative emotions and would like support, please reach out to Counseling and Psychological Services here: <https://counseling.humboldt.edu/>. Your survey completion is entirely voluntary and anonymous.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact the facilitator of this survey, Emily Lavrador, by email at erl271@humboldt.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a survey participant or if you wish to report concerns about the study, you can find information to contact the Institutional Review Board for Cal Poly Humboldt through by emailing irb@humboldt.edu.

Thank you for your time in completing this survey!

Emily Lavrador
Graduate Teaching Associate
English Department, Cal Poly Humboldt

- I acknowledge the above statement, descriptions of my participation in this research, and limitations.
- I do not consent to participating in this survey.

Definitions

The following are definitions for terms used within the survey:

Dystopia or Dystopian:

1. an imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice, typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic. Compare with utopia.
2. of, relating to, or being an imagined world or society in which people lead dehumanized, fearful lives; relating to or characteristic of a dystopia.

Genre:

1. a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content.

- I have read the above definitions.

1. Select any dystopian books, short stories, TV shows, or movies you've read/watched since March 2020.

- Westworld
- The Handmaid's Tale
- 1984
- The Hunger Games
- Divergent
- Black Mirror
- The Walking Dead
- The Road
- Total Recall
- Station Eleven
- Parable of the Sower / Parable of the Talents
- The Giver
- Fahrenheit 451
- Riddley Walker
- Grievors
- Tender is the Flesh

The Plague

Other

2. If you selected "other" in the previous question, what title(s) are you referring to?
Please list all relevant titles.

3. Of the titles you've selected or listed, how many of these were assigned to you through school (K-12 or college)?

1

2

3

4

5 or more

4. Of the titles you've selected or listed, how many of these did you engage with for leisure?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more
-

5. Of the titles you've selected or listed, were any of these novels?

- Yes
- No
-

6. Why have you chosen to read or watch dystopian works opposed to a different genre?

7. Did you relate to any of the characters in the dystopian media you consumed? Please indicate on the scale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
I did not relate to any of the characters.						I completely related to one or more of the characters.

8. Describe any thoughts or feelings you had when encountering the content of one or more of the dystopian works.

9. In literature, there are often similarities with our lived reality. What connections did you make between any dystopian media (like those answered above) and the real world?

10. How have your perceptions of 'dystopia' changed after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Appendix D

Individual Lesson Plan Template (50 minutes)
0. Administration/ Course Housekeeping (0 to 5 minutes)
<p>1. Access Prior Knowledge (10 to 15 minutes)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What this can mean: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tap students’ course-based knowledge from the previous unit, class meeting or week, or: 2. Tap students’ knowledge about a new concept by asking them to draw on their existing knowledge or lived experience. 2. What it can look like: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students write independently in response to a question or turn and talk to a table partner. 2. Share out in small or partner groups before whole-group discussion. 3. Write/ make visible students’ prior knowledge on whiteboard or live document. 4. Students complete a quick task (answer a closed question, write a quick response, such as a tweet or a text, develop a question about the topic). 5. If working asynchronously, ask students to make a bulleted list and then compare that list to the “Extend Prior Knowledge” part of the lesson.
<p>3. Extend Prior Knowledge (5 to 15 minutes)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What this can mean: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The instructor adds on to existing knowledge by expanding/extending current concepts by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connecting to assigned readings and/or: 2. Quick and/or interactive lecture (e.g., talk, slides, video, or other media), 3. Defining and unpacking new terms and presenting examples of them, 4. Setting up the application task with directives to connect existing/prior knowledge to the new knowledge that will be developed through the task. 5. Setting up the “flipped” lesson, where the lecture precedes the reading.
3. Application: (aim for 20 to 25 minutes minimum)

1. What this can mean:

1. Students work in small groups around a designed task that connects prior knowledge to new knowledge.
2. Students work to synthesize and/or create questions around assigned texts.
3. Students engage in some other particular design.

4. Reflection (if time):

1. Exit ticket
2. Rating of understanding
3. Take away/ New questions
4. What I learned/ What I want to know more about

Appendix E

Podcast: Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in this voluntary interview regarding what you hope to see in the future. You are being asked to participate in this survey as you are currently enrolled in an English MA-level course at Cal Poly Humboldt. If this information does not apply to you, please disregard this survey.

Purpose of the study: This study is taking place to include the student voice and student experiences in teaching-focused research, as well as display a creative example for a chapter of my project that emphasizes the importance of imagining the future, contrasting dystopian media. This interview will be included in a larger project that brings together trauma-informed teaching practices and dystopian novel lesson plans as well as a smaller project for ENGL 615: Digital Humanities. The title is: “Teaching Dystopia in Dystopian Realities: Trauma-Informed Pedagogy and Dystopian Fiction after COVID-19”. Results of this interview will be shared within the project, which will be published on Digital Scholar.

Requirements of Participation: Duration of participation can be expected to be approximately 5 minutes, and answers will be audio-recorded. Participation requires answering the following question:

What needs to be present in your version of ‘utopia’ that you’d like to see in our future?

Use of audio:

It is anticipated that study results will be shared with the public through presentations and/or publications (Digital Scholar). Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Raw data containing information that can be identified with you will be destroyed after a period of three years after study completion. This consent form will be maintained in the English TA office and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Risks and Confidentiality: There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this research outside of emotional distress. If you are experiencing negative emotions and would like support, please reach out to Counseling and Psychological Services here: [Counseling & Psychological Services \(humboldt.edu\)](https://www.humboldt.edu/counseling). Your interview completion is entirely voluntary.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact the facilitator of this survey, Emily Lavrador by email at erl271@humboldt.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant or if you wish to report concerns about the study, you can find information to contact the Institutional Review Board for Cal Poly Humboldt through this link: [Contact IRB | Institutional Review Board \(humboldt.edu\)](#).

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, and that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for your time participating in my project!

Emily Lavrador
English Department
Cal Poly Humboldt

I, _____, acknowledge the above form and consent to my voice and opinions being included in this project.