



UTOPIA / DYSTOPIA

“Is it better for a man to have chosen evil than to have good imposed upon him?”

Anthony Burgess (1917 – 1993), from *A Clockwork Orange*

1. Utopia/Dystopia Discussion

1. How would you describe your perfect world? How does this society function? What values do people have? What do the people have available to them? Who is in charge?
2. What would it take to achieve this world?
3. How would you get people to cooperate to create this world and ensure its success?
4. How could this perfect world be protected from those who intend to destroy it?
5. Which books, TV shows or films depict utopias? How are the societies in these stories?
6. Would it be a utopia if everyone went back to living in harmony with nature? Why or why not?
7. Which countries today could be described as utopias? What makes them so successful?
8. Do you think living in a utopia could be a bit boring? Why or why not?

2. Utopia/Dystopia Vocabulary

- **utopia** (noun) – *an imaginary perfect world.*
- **dystopia** (noun) – *a real or imagined society usually characterised by a lack of freedom, oppression and fear.*
- **dictator** (person), **dictatorship** (regime) (nouns) – *a ruler that holds absolute power, often obtained by force and maintained by oppression; a regime ruled by a dictator.*
- **totalitarianism** (noun), **totalitarian** (adjective) – *a form of government or government policies that controls all aspects of its citizen's lives, often by force.*
- **to rule with an iron fist** (idiom) – *to rule in an extremely strict, cruel, tyrannical or oppressive way or with absolute control.*
- **to be away with the fairies, to live in cloud cuckoo land, to have one's head in the clouds** (idioms) – *describes someone who is easily distracted, lives in a dreamworld, or is excessively idealistic.*

Using the vocabulary words above, complete the following sentences (remember to use the correct form of the word, e.g. verb conjugation or plural noun)

1. After seizing power in a military coup, the Army General ruled as a **dictator** for over 20 years before being toppled by the popular revolution.
2. Augusto Pinochet **ruled with an iron fist**; when he came to power, he banned all parties on the left, assassinated 3,000 political opponents and sent another 30,000 political opponents to prison to be tortured.
3. He still thinks that people will forget about their differences and come together for the benefit of society. He **is away with the fairies/is living in cloud cuckoo land/has his head in the clouds**.
4. Human nature means that a **utopia** will be nothing more than a fantasy or dream.
5. West-European socialists criticised the USSR for creating a **totalitarian** form of government.
6. With all the pain and suffering in the world, we might already be living in a **dystopia**.

Utopia/Dystopia vocabulary comprehension questions

1. Are utopias inherently unrealistic? Why or why not?
2. In what ways are we already living in a dystopia?
3. Which dictatorships (past or present) can you think of?
4. What rules or restrictions do you consider totalitarian in your country?
5. Which leaders have ruled with an iron fist?
6. Do you know anybody who is living in cloud cuckoo land? What makes you think that?

3. Video: How to Recognise a Dystopia

You are going to watch a TED Ed video called "How to Recognise a Dystopia".

Watch the video here: <https://yourenglishpal.com/blog/esl-conversation-lesson-plan-utopia-dystopia/>

Watch the video and answer the following questions:

Multiple choice

1. Who ruled in Plato's utopia?
a) kings and queens **b) philosopher kings** c) utopian kings
2. Where do religions promise utopia can be found?
a) on Earth b) in Yorkshire **c) in the afterlife**
3. When did Thomas More write *Utopia*?
a) 1516 b) 1560 c) 1566
4. What does 'Utopia' mean in Greek?
a) impossible place b) perfect place **c) no place**

Sentence completion

5. Modern progress raised hopes of realising utopian dreams, but instead, they all too often turned into **nightmares** of war, famine and oppression.
6. *Gulliver's Travels* provides a **blueprint** for describing dystopian societies.
7. Instead of freeing workers, industrial technology trapped them in slums and **factories**.
8. Mass media allowed instant **communication** between leaders and the public.

Short answer

9. What had been eliminated in Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *We*? **Freewill and individualism**
10. Which ideologies did George Orwell fight on the front lines against? **Fascism and communism**
11. What threat did *Dr Strangelove* and *Watchmen* warn against? **Nuclear war**
12. What did *V for Vendetta* and *The Handmaid's Tale* warn could disappear in a crisis? **Our rights**

4. Utopia/Dystopia Conversation Questions

1. How would you describe your nightmare world? How would society be? What values would people have? Who would be in charge?
2. How could we prevent this world from happening?
3. Which books, TV shows or films depict dystopias? What happened in those stories?
4. Do you think it could be exciting to live in a dystopia? Why or why not?
5. Which real life dystopias from the past or present can you think of? What made/makes them dystopias?
6. Which ideologies are responsible for creating dystopias? Why are people attracted to these ideologies?
7. Does human nature naturally lead towards utopias or dystopias? Why?
8. Is the future heading towards utopia or dystopia? Why?

5. Utopia/Dystopia Writing Task

Write about your opinion of utopias and dystopias. Try to use some of the vocabulary you learned earlier in this lesson. In your answer, you could include some of the following topics:

- A description of your perfect world.
- Which societies from the past or present you consider to be real-life dystopias.
- Whether you think we will live in a utopia or dystopia in the future.

Alternative exam question

All ideologies claim that their ideas will create the perfect society. So far, however, all of these ideologies have failed. Indeed, many of them, from both the left and the right, have instead created dystopian societies. For that reason, many people claim that a utopia is nothing more than an unrealistic dream. Do you agree or disagree with this?