**Dystopian Literature**

**Definition and Characteristics**

**Utopia**: a place, state or condition that is ideally PERFECT

in respect to politics, laws, customs, and

conditions.

**Dystopia**: a futuristic, imagined universe in which

oppressive societal control and the illusion of a

perfect society are maintained through corporate,

bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian

control. Dystopias, through an exaggerated worst-

case scenario, make a criticism about a current

trend, societal norm, or political system.

**Characteristics of a Dystopian Society**

1) Propaganda is used to control the citizens of a society.

2) Information, independent thought, and freedom are restricted.

3) A figurehead or concept is worshipped by the citizens.

4) Citizens are perceived to be under constant

surveillance. (“Big Brother”)

5) Citizens have a fear of the outside world.

6) Citizens live in a dehumanized state.

7) The natural world is banished and distrusted.

8) Citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality

and dissent are bad.

9) The society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world.

**Types of Dystopian Controls**

Most dystopian works present a world in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through one or more of the following types of controls:

1) Corporate control: One or more large corporations

control society through products, advertising, and/or the

media. Examples includes *Minority Report* and *Running*

*Man*.

2) Bureaucratic control: Society is controlled by a

mindless bureaucracy through a tangle of red tape,

relentless regulations, and incompetent government

officials. Examples in film include *Brazil*.

3) Technological control: Society is controlled by

technology – through computers, robots, and/or scientific

means. Examples include *The Matrix*, *The Terminator*, and

*I, Robot.*

4) Philosophical/religious control: Society is controlled by

philosophical or religious ideology (beliefs), often enforced

through a dictatorship or theocratic government.

**The Dystopian Protagonist**

* often feels trapped and is struggling to escape.
* questions the existing social and political system.
* believes or feels that something is terribly wrong with the society in which he or she lives.
* helps the audience recognize the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective.