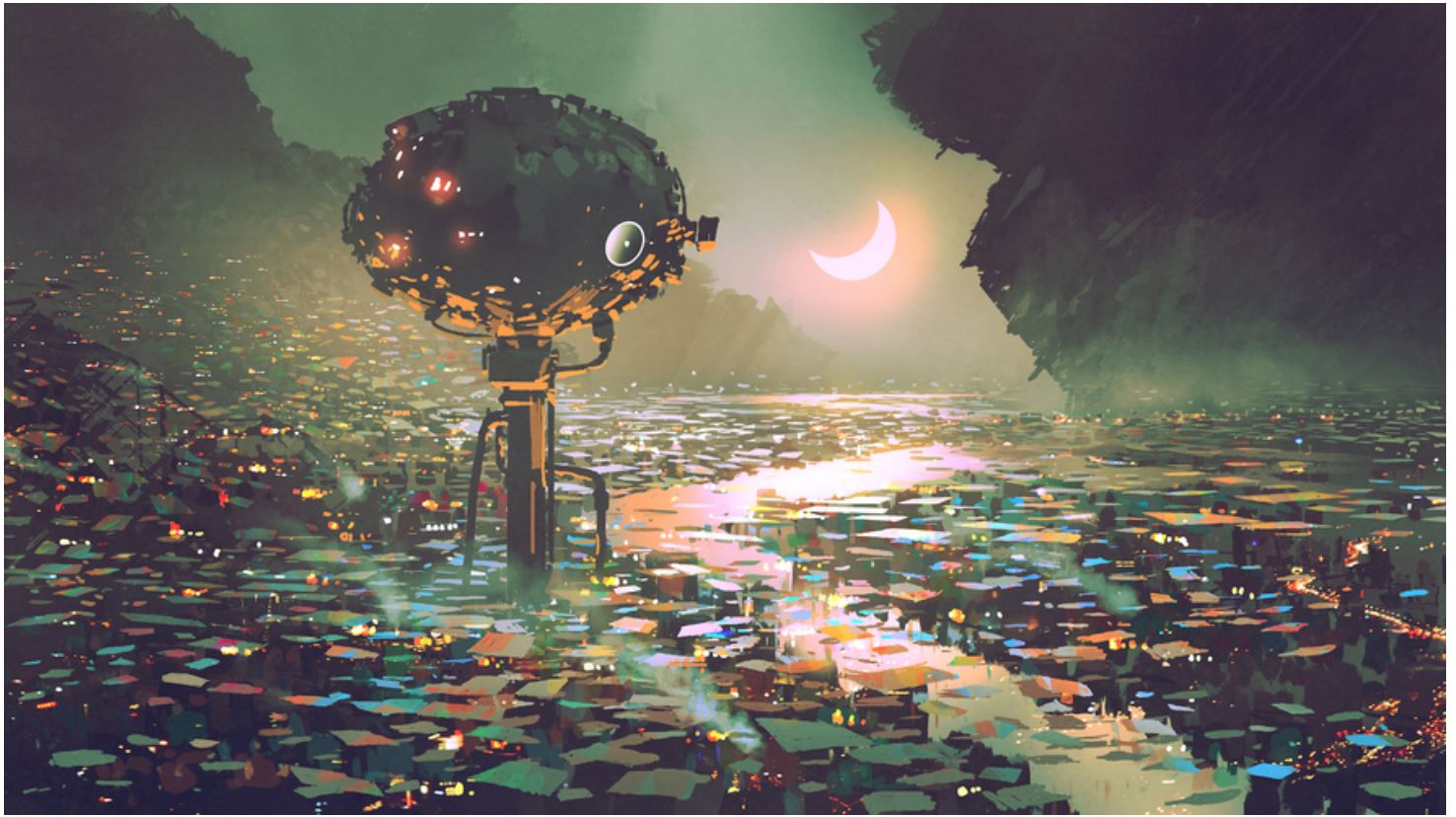


The appeal of dystopian novels for teens

By Thought Co., adapted by Newsela staff on 08.29.19

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Many dystopian novels have dark, dismal settings like the one above of a futuristic water tower looming over a cityscape. Image by: Grandfailure/iStock/Getty Image by: Grandfailure/iStock/Getty

Teens are devouring the current popular literature of the dark, grim and dismal: the dystopian novel. The storylines are typically bleak. They include leaders who terrorize citizens every year by making them watch teens fight to the death or governments who support mandatory operations to remove emotion. Those are just two plots from popular dystopian novels that teens are reading. But just what is a dystopian novel and how long has it been around? And there's the bigger question: Why is this type of novel so appealing to teens?

Definition

A dystopia is a society that is broken down, unpleasant or in an oppressed or terrorized state. Unlike a utopia, which is a perfect world, dystopias are grim, dark and hopeless. When used in stories, they reveal society's greatest fears. Totalitarian governments rule with complete power, disregarding the needs and wants of individuals. In most dystopian novels, a tyrannical government is trying to control and suppress its citizens by taking away their individuality, as in the classics "1984" by George Orwell and "Brave New World" by Aldous Huxley. Dystopian

governments also ban activities that encourage individual thinking. The government's response to individual thinking in Ray Bradbury's classic, "Fahrenheit 451," was to burn the books!

History

Dystopian novels are not new to the reading public. Since the late 1890s, H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury, and George Orwell have entertained audiences with them. Their classics tell stories of Martians, book burnings, and Big Brother, the ever-present Orwellian leader. Over the years, other dystopian books like Nancy Farmer's "The House of the Scorpion" and Lois Lowry's Newbery-winning book "The Giver" have given younger characters a more central role in dystopian settings.

Since 2000, dystopian novels for teens have retained the dismal, dark setting, but the nature of the characters has changed. Characters are no longer passive and powerless citizens. Instead, they are teens who are empowered, fearless, strong and determined to find a way to survive and face their fears. Major characters have influential personalities that harsh governments attempt to control but cannot.

A recent example of this type of teen dystopian novel is the incredibly popular "Hunger Games" series. Katniss, a 16-year-old girl, is the series' main character and hero. She is willing to take her sister's place in the annual event where teens from 12 different districts must fight to the death. Katniss commits a purposeful act of rebellion against the Capital that keeps readers on the edge of their seats.

In the dystopian novel "Delirium" by Lauren Oliver, the government teaches citizens that love is a dangerous disease that must be eradicated. By age 18, everyone must undergo a mandatory operation to remove the ability to feel love. Lena looks forward to the operation and fears love. Then she meets a boy and together they flee the government and find the truth.

"Divergent" by Veronica Roth is yet another favorite dystopian novel. In it, teens must unite themselves with groups based on virtues. However, the main character learns she's divergent; she doesn't fit into a group. This makes her dangerous. She becomes a threat to the government and must keep secrets in order to protect her loved ones from harm.

Teen Appeal

So what do teens find so appealing about dystopian novels? Teens in dystopian novels get to perform ultimate acts of rebellion against authority, and that's appealing. Conquering a dismal future is empowering, especially when the teens have to rely on themselves without having to answer to parents, teachers or other authoritarian figures. Teen readers can certainly relate to those feelings.

Today's teen dystopian novels contain teen characters who exhibit strength, courage, and conviction. Although death, war and violence exist, a more positive and hopeful message about the future is out there. It's being sent by teens who are facing future fears and conquering them.

Quiz

1 Which two of the following sentences from the article include CENTRAL ideas of the article?

1. *Teens are devouring the current popular literature of the dark, grim and dismal: the dystopian novel.*
2. *Since the late 1890s, H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury and George Orwell have entertained audiences with them.*
3. *In the dystopian novel "Delirium" by Lauren Oliver, the government teaches citizens that love is a dangerous disease that must be eradicated.*
4. *Teens in dystopian novels get to perform ultimate acts of rebellion against authority, and that's appealing.*

- (A) 1 and 3
(B) 1 and 4
(C) 2 and 3
(D) 2 and 4

2 Read the following paragraphs from the section "History."

A recent example of this type of teen dystopian novel is the incredibly popular "Hunger Games" series. Katniss, a 16-year-old girl, is the series' main character and hero. She is willing to take her sister's place in the annual event where teens from 12 different districts must fight to the death. Katniss commits a purposeful act of rebellion against the Capital that keeps readers on the edge of their seats.

"Divergent" by Veronica Roth is yet another favorite dystopian novel. In it, teens must unite themselves with groups based on virtues. However, the main character learns she's divergent; she doesn't fit into a group. This makes her dangerous. She becomes a threat to the government and must keep secrets in order to protect her loved ones from harm.

How is the article's CENTRAL idea developed in these two paragraphs?

- (A) They demonstrate how dystopian novels have changed from the 1890s until now.
(B) They show that dystopian novels have a hopeful message at the end of the books.
(C) They highlight some of the criticisms that teens have voiced about dystopian novels.
(D) They provide popular examples of dystopian novels with teens as the main character.

3 Read the paragraph from the introduction [paragraph 1].

The storylines are typically bleak. They include leaders who terrorize citizens every year by making them watch teens fight to the death or governments who support mandatory operations to remove emotion. Those are just two plots from popular dystopian novels that teens are reading. But just what is a dystopian novel and how long has it been around? And there's the bigger question: Why is this type of novel so appealing to teens?

Which word from the selection shows a depressing tone?

- (A) bleak
(B) mandatory
(C) emotion
(D) appealing

Conquering a dismal future is empowering, especially when the teens have to rely on themselves without having to answer to parents, teachers or other authoritarian figures.

How does using the word "empowering" affect the tone of the sentence above?

- (A) It conveys the sense of fear and uncertainty that teens feel when they are reading dystopian novels.
- (B) It conveys a sense of freedom and hope about what teens are able to accomplish in dystopian novels.
- (C) It conveys a sense of strength and power that authoritarian figures have over teens in dystopian novels.
- (D) It conveys the sense of amusement and entertainment that teens feel after reading the ending of a dystopian novel.