



THE GIVER: PRE-READING DISCUSSION GUIDE

To prepare students for reading the dystopian novel *The Giver*, get students thinking about the meaning of utopia and dystopia and about the dystopian genre in general.

Share and display the definitions of **utopia** and **dystopia** with the class. Have students brainstorm their idea of utopia using the *Novel Study: The Giver: Pre-Reading Activity* worksheet or a separate piece of paper. Have them share with 1–2 classmates. Then pose the questions below. Students can discuss in small groups or share out with the whole class. Use the key points listed below to help guide the discussion as needed.

Utopia: an imaginary place in which the government, laws, and social conditions are perfect

Dystopia: an imagined world or society in which people lead wretched, dehumanized, fearful lives

Fun fact to share: The word utopia comes from Sir Thomas More's 1516 book of the same name. He created the name by combining the Greek words *ou* (no, not) and *topos* (place) to imply that the perfect conditions described in his book could never truly exist.

1. What were some common elements and themes in the different utopias you designed?

Key points:

- Answers will vary but should mention any similarities in government, laws, and social conditions.

2. Describe the similarities and differences between the terms *dystopia* and *utopia*.

Key points:

- Both are words for imaginary places, but “utopia” is good and perfect, while “dystopia” is bad and broken.

3. How and why might a “utopian” future become the setting for a “dystopian” story?

Key points:

- Perfect for one person isn't necessarily perfect for everyone.
- Often, in order to have a “perfect world,” there must be strict rules and expectations.
- Certain elements of our current society might have to be sacrificed for a utopia to exist.

4. *The Giver* is a dystopian novel, which is a specific type of science fiction. What do you already know about this genre? What other books or movies are dystopian?

Key points:

- Dystopian stories are usually set in the future.
- They sometimes have a “post-apocalyptic” setting.
- They may include elements of environmental destruction.
- They often feature significant government control.
- They usually present themes of individualism and survival.
- Some popular dystopian stories include *The Hunger Games* series, the *Divergent* series, *The Maze Runner*, *Wall-E*, *City of Ember*, and others.

5. Why do you think authors write dystopian fiction? What can readers learn from these types of stories?

Key points:

- Writers use dystopian stories to present a vision of the future that challenges readers to reflect on the current social and political environments in which they live.
- Dystopian stories can help readers see aspects of our society in new ways.
- Dystopian stories can encourage us to make changes and improve the world to avoid these types of dystopian futures.

To engage students further, have them write a brief reflection about any new perspectives or ideas they have about utopia versus dystopia.