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Professor Warner

**Dystopian Fiction in Young Adult Literature**

The impression given by dystopian literature has changed with time. *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury and *1984* by George Orwell are both well-respected novels considered to be part of the literary canon and, like many important novels, have found themselves on the receiving end of censorship—as such, they have both obtained the praiseworthy title of “banned book” numerous times in various locations. At the time the books were written (around the mid-twentieth century) the dystopian genre of today was not well-established, but both novels seem to be obvious works to point to as part of the foundation of the dystopian fiction of today. Both novels depict worlds in which authoritarian governmental control is used to create order by way of suppressing the general populace; in *Fahrenheit 451* this is done by controlling the information that the average person has access to and in *1984* this is done by via fear and constant surveillance. Much of what these two novels do is replicated and/or iterated upon by more recent dystopian novels, and yet, the way that most contemporary dystopian fiction is viewed is quite a different light—especially dystopian novels that fall under the umbrella of young adult literature.

All of the books in this annotated bibliography are young adult dystopian fiction novels. Some, such as *The Giver*, are more highly regarded than others; many of them, however, deserve more recognition as good works of literature than they are currently afforded.

Annotated Bibliography

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

***The Giver***

*—I’ve read this book—*

*The Giver* follows a boy named Jonas who lives in a peaceful community free of conflict wherein everyone is given a “life assignment” which they perform as their sole occupation until they are no longer physically able to do so. While devoid of conflict, the community is, however, also devoid of color and emotion—those who live in the community are completely ignorant to the very concept of such things. Jonas, too, was ignorant, up until he receives a unique, secretive life assignment as the Receiver of Memory. His job is to serve as a vessel for all of the things that have been exorcised from the people of his community. He is made to experience for the first time everything from color, to pain, to sexual desire, and all of human history. As he bears this burden he begins to question the nature of the blissfully ignorant community that surrounds him.

*The Giver*, despite being a young adult novel, is quite highly regarded. This may be due, in part, to the fact that it was written in 1993 when what we now know as the young adult target demographic was not the lucrative market that it is today. While I cannot be certain of Lowry’s intentions, *The Giver* does not feel to me like a book that was targeted at a prepubescent audience (despite Jonas, the protagonist, being twelve). High school students are, of course, more than capable of reading and comprehending *The Giver*, but most of the older novels in the literary cannon that students read in high school weren’t written with a young adult audience in mind, so that’s not unusual. *The Giver*, like *Fahrenheit 451*, features of society of people who are kept ignorant in order to prevent conflict. *The Giver* most strongly exemplifies Exeter Qualities four, six, and seven with six being a particular standout.

Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2011.

***Divergent***

*—I’ve not read this book—*

In Beatrice Prior's dystopian Chicago world, society is divided into five factions, each dedicated to the cultivation of a particular virtue—Candor (the honest), Abnegation (the selfless), Dauntless (the brave), Amity (the peaceful), and Erudite (the intelligent). On an appointed day of every year, all sixteen-year-olds must select the faction to which they will devote the rest of their lives. For Beatrice, the decision is between staying with her family and being who she really is—she can't have both. So she makes a choice that surprises everyone, including herself.

**Summary Source:**

“Divergent (Divergent, #1) by Veronica Roth.” Goodreads, Goodreads, 28 Feb. 2012, [www.goodreads.com/book/show/13335037-divergent?from\_search=true&amp;from\_srp=true&amp;qid=Tqr5horHgF&amp;rank=1](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13335037-divergent?from_search=true&amp;from_srp=true&amp;qid=Tqr5horHgF&amp;rank=1).

*Divergent* is another case where society has been set up in a particular way with the intention of creating a form of unity. Everyone is divided into these factions which, from that point on, serve as their one and only allegiance. The goal was to remove the vast mirage of factors that cause groups of humans to come into conflict with each other: family, race, religion, ideology, etc. In place of all of that is the allegiance to the faction. “Faction before blood” is a common mantra from the series that I am aware of. The perfect unity that is meant to exist within each faction is imperfect, though, as some individuals (such as Beatrice, the protagonist) don’t buy into the whole faction fanaticism thing and thusly form cracks in the system. Exeter Qualities two and six seem most fitting for this novel.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. Scholastic Press, 2008.

***The Hunger Games***

*—I have read this book—*

*The Hunger Games* follows the story of Katniss Everdeen, a girl from District 12, who volunteers herself as tribute in place of her younger sister Prim and, as such, is made to compete in the titular Hunger Games. The Hunger Games are a form of entertainment for those living in the capital wherein those who live in the districts are placed into arenas and forced to fight to the death.

*The Hunger Games*, unlike many of the other dystopian novels on this list, is not so much a utopia gone wrong, as it is a utopia functioning at the expense of those who reside outside of that paradise-like zone. Though, that said, whether or not life in the capital is truly utopic in the first place is debatable—considering that, if nothing else, they find enjoyment in watching children kill each other in some sort of reality-tv sport. *The* *Hunger Games* trilogy is not a perfect series by any means, and I don’t necessarily believe that it is on-par quality-wise with the more classical dystopian texts like *Fahrenheit 451* or *1984*, but I do think that—apart from being an entertaining/thrilling read—it is a well-realized concept that allows for very poignant social commentary. The vast majority on dystopian novels feature some sort of authoritarian government that is in some way limiting or controlling the general populace and that, in and of itself, is where the brunt of the social commentary is directed. *The Hunger Games* does have that familiar scary all-powerful government trope, but it also has a far more unique angle of commentary: reality television, or television in general, and our desensitization to violence and our disdain for the deaths and struggles of strangers in faraway places. It shouldn’t be written off just because of its target demographic. I’d connect *The Hunger Games* most strongly to Exeter Qualities two, three, six, and seven.

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Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Game*. Tor, 1991.

***Ender’s Game***

*—I’ve read this book—*

*Ender’s Game* is a science fiction novel set in the future when humanity has become a space-faring race and has encountered a species of highly advanced aliens who threaten humanity. In order to combat this advanced alien species, humanity needs not only technology that can match theirs, but genius military strategy that can outmaneuver an enemy that vastly outnumbers them. To this end, they engage in child conscription. The brightest and most gifted children are taken from their families before they reach double-digit ages and are flown to training facility in space where they are pit against each other in war games. One such child is Andrew “Ender” Wiggin, the protagonist.

*Ender’s Game* is not a traditional dystopian novel, but it certainly has dystopian elements. The who child soldiers thing that was explained in the summary is certainly a major aspect of that. Another, though, is the concept of a “third.” Basically, in order to prevent overpopulation, each married couple is limited to only two children (and non-married couples having children is highly illegal). If a couple does have a third child, then they are given the on-the-nose moniker of “third” and are widely treated like dirt. While, again, the general structure of human society doesn’t scream “dystopia,” the way they abuse their power in manipulating Ender in particular, all for the sake of the “greater good” is very reminiscent of the manipulative/controlling governments one will find in more obviously-dystopian novels. This book, in my view, hits every single Exeter Quality, but number five really sticks out to me as I am quite fond of the approachable-yet-sufficiently-advanced reading level; a fair amount of higher-level vocabulary is used, but not an uncomfortable amount. Number one really sticks out too, though. I absolutely adore the shifts between multiple perspectives, seldom as they may be.

Dashner, James. *The Maze Runner.* Delacorte Press, 2009.

***The Maze Runner***

*—I’ve not read this book—*

When the doors of the lift crank open the only thing Thomas remembers is his first name. But he's not alone. He's surrounded by boys who welcome him to the Glade — a walled encampment at the centre of a bizarre and terrible stone maze. Like Thomas, the Gladers don't know how or why they came to be there — or what's happened to the world outside. All they know is that every morning when the walls slide back they will risk everything — even the Grievers; half-machine, half-animal horrors that patrol its corridors — to try to find the way out.

**Summary Source:**

“The Maze Runner.” *Amazon*, "Books by Mail" Pub. Co., [www.amazon.com/dp/B00N2EFKV0/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?\_encoding=UTF8](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00N2EFKV0/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8).

*The Maze Runner* does not start off seeming like a dystopia novel. It begins as a story about a group of amnesiac teenagers who find themselves stuck in a giant maze inhabited by horrible cyborg monsters. However, at the end of the novel (which I did read because I had seen the film but wanted to know how the ending was handled in the book) it is revealed that the cast of part of an experiment administered by a group who controls the maze. It is also revealed that prior to the events of the book a cataclysmic event rendered much of the earth uninhabitable, making this both a dystopian story and a post-apocalyptic story, neither of which is obvious for most of the book. The premise is somewhat similar to *The Hunger Games* in that adults are forcing kids/teenagers to fight for their lives in a large arena of sorts that the adults are able to manipulate. The major difference in terms of the dystopian aspect is definitely that *The Hunger Games* delves in deeply to the dystopian society first and then works its way to the actual Hunger Games whereas *The Maze Runner* starts off with the maze and delves into the dystopian aspect later on. As for Exeter Qualities, I would definitely cite number two as the main one and number four as well.

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Lackey, Mercedes. *Hunter*. Hyperion, 2015.

***Hunter***

*—I’ve not read this book—*

… Joy soon realizes that the city's powerful leaders care more about luring Cits into a false sense of security than protecting them. More and more monsters are getting through the barriers, and the close calls are becoming too frequent to ignore. Yet the Cits have no sense of how much danger they're in-to them, Joy and her corp of fellow Hunters are just action stars they watch on TV. When an act of sabotage against Joy takes an unbearable toll, Joy uncovers a terrifying conspiracy in the city. There is something much worse than the usual monsters infiltrating Apex. And it may be too late to stop them?

**Summary Source:**

“Hunter.” *Amazon*, "Books by Mail" Pub. Co., [www.amazon.com/dp/B0851ZHFWD/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?\_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0851ZHFWD/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1).

*Hunter*, like *The Maze Runner*, is a post-apocalyptic story with monsters that is also a dystopia. However, unlike *The Maze Runner*—in which the dystopian elements don’t emerge until the final act, so to speak—the dystopian elements start showing themselves fairly early on. The people who live in the city watch on their screens as the hunters risk their lives fighting monsters (much like in *The Hunger Games*) but the twist is that the people in the city aren’t as safe as they think they are. The Hunger Games are organized and fully controlled by the government, so the people living lavishly in the capital have nothing to fear from the dangerous situations the tributes are forced into. In *Hunter*, on the other hand, the hunters are fighting against nature, effectively, and nature is completely out of the control of the people running the city. As such, the utopia that the people in the city believe that they are living in is actually not as far away from the danger as they are led to believe. This novel really intrigues me because it feels like a sort of mixture of *The Hunger Games* and *Dune*. Exeter Qualities two, four, and seven all seem relevant, but more importantly, number three! Strong female protagonists!

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Davidson, Ellen Dee. *Stolen Voices*. Lobster Press, 2005.

***Stolen Voices***

*—I’ve read this book—*

*Stolen Voices* follows Miri, a fifteen-year-old girl who lives in Noveskina, a wonderful place where everything is lovely and peaceful and perfect. It’s basically flawless utopia apart from a few small issues such as music being outlawed, and the fact that there is a social caste system, among other things. Residents of Noveskina, upon turning fifteen take part in the masking ceremony during which they receive a mask. These masks essentially become a part of their body and they are told that the masks will help them to control their talents (which are basically like super powers) but in reality they restrain and limit their talents. However, none of this matters to Miri because she doesn’t even have a talent. Because of this, even though both of her parents are important officials, she is going to be relegated to the rank of house servant which is the lowest rung of the social class hierarchy in Noveskina. So basically, she’s going to be made into a slave. However, with the help of a rebel servant she is able to escape and then proceeds to discover music and the darker truths behind Noveskina.

*Stolen Voices* is similar to *The Giver* in that just as *The Giver*’s world is without color, Noveskina is without music, and just as Jonas rediscovers color (along with everything else), Miki rediscovers music. So, *Stolen Voices* has a similar feel to *The Giver* except *The Giver* doesn’t have the authoritarian government trope that so many other dystopias have, instead it just has pandora’s box in the shape of an old man. While *Stolen Voices* has the whole music thing that is reminiscent of *The Giver* plus it has the scary all-powerful government that forces people to wear masks and maintains this horrible social caste system. I think that this novel serves as a nice middle ground between a somewhat hard to process book like *The Giver* and a more approachable, action-packed book like *The Hunger Games*. The Exeter Qualities that I think are well-demonstrated in this novel are numbers two, three, four, and six.

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Westerfeld, Scott. *Uglies.* Simon Pulse, 2005.

***Uglies***

*—I’ve not read this book—*

Tally lives in a world where your sixteenth birthday brings aesthetic perfection: an operation which erases all your flaws, transforming you from an 'Ugly' into a 'Pretty'. She is on the eve of this important event, and cannot wait for her life to change. As well as guaranteeing supermodel looks, life as a Pretty seems to revolve around having a good time. But then she meets Shay, who is also fifteen - but with a very different outlook on life. Shay isn't sure she wants to be Pretty and plans to escape to a community in the forest - the Rusty Ruins - where Uglies go to escape ' turning'. Tally won't be persuaded to join her, as this would involve sacrificing everything she's ever wanted for a lot of uncertainty.

**Summary Source:**

“Uglies.” *Amazon*, "Books by Mail" Pub. Co., [www.amazon.com/dp/B007Q0CKAU/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?\_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B007Q0CKAU/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1).

I like the reluctant hero aspect of this story, how Tally doesn’t actually want to leave the community—she refuses the call to action by her friend Shay, but then she ends up being tossed out into the ruins anyways. The formula is somewhat similar to that of *Stolen Voices* as neither of them realize the problems with their community until they are forced out (Tally being literally forced out and Miki being given no good option but to leave) and then, once outside, they gradually learn about the darker side of their former homes. Exeter Qualities 3, 4, and 6 seem to be embodied well in this novel.

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Shusterman, Neal. *Scythe*. Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2016.

***Scythe***

*—I’ve not read this book—*

A world with no hunger, no disease, no war, no misery: humanity has conquered all those things, and has even conquered death. Now Scythes are the only ones who can end life—and they are commanded to do so, in order to keep the size of the population under control. Citra and Rowan are chosen to apprentice to a scythe—a role that neither wants. These teens must master the “art” of taking life, knowing that the consequence of failure could mean losing their own.

**Summary Source:**

“Scythe.” *Amazon*, "Books by Mail" Pub. Co., [www.amazon.com/dp/B01BKR487W/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?\_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B01BKR487W/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1).

Of the books on this list that I’ve yet to read, this is the one I am most interested in reading. The concept of humans having progressed to the point of achieving actual immortality but because of that there are obvious overpopulation problems is just incredibly cool to me. It’s ever-so-slightly reminiscent of *The Giver*, actually. The people in *The Giver* do grow old and die, but they can’t feel pain which is somewhat similar to the people in this story being immortal. Then we have Jonas who takes up the horrific mantle of the Receiver of Memory while Citra and Rowan are similarly forced to take on the role of executioner. Exeter Qualities four, six, seven, and possibly three seem likely to be well-executed in this novel.

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Sloan, Tamar, and Heidi, Catherine. *Burning*. Sequel House, 2019.

***Burning***

*—I’ve not read this book—*

Only the chosen shall breed.

In a new world isolated by a rising, toxic sea, a single bridge connects Askala to the Outlands. Those who remain will need to pass a Proving to determine if they have the intelligence and heart to champion the future of their broken Earth.

Those who succeed will become Bound, the ones chosen to breed.

Those who fail, are Unbound. Free of responsibility, but robbed of their ability to bear children.

Four young lives are born into this world. Magnus and Callix, two brothers determined to uphold this new order. Two brothers in love with the same girl.

Amity, the one who must make the impossible choice.

And Mercy, the girl who no one sees, but sees it all.

As a new threat to Askala emerges, secrets will be revealed and the fight for survival will become their biggest challenge yet.

Life is fragile. Love will refuse to be denied.

Sacrifice will be inevitable.

**Summary Source:**

“Burning (The Thaw Chronicles, #0.5) by Tamar Sloan.” *Goodreads*, Goodreads, 13 Nov. 2019, [www.goodreads.com/book/show/48835535-burning](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/48835535-burning).

This is another post-apocalyptic story. This novel, and the rest of the series (which is about dozen books long) is categorized as dystopian, but I’m not actually entirely sure where the dystopian aspect comes in. A small group of specially selected individuals being allowed to reproduce while everyone else is forbidden to do so does give me *Brave New World* vibes in the sense that some people are seen as genetically superior to others. I think my issue is that based on what I’ve read so far, I don’t have a very clear picture of what this society is like. Who makes the decision regarding who gets to reproduce? Unlike most of these dystopian novels, the summaries I’ve read really don’t describe the government or authority structure at all. Regardless, I am fairly confident that this is, in fact, a dystopian novel. It feels a bit like the reverse of the premise of *Scythe* where instead of humans being immortal and dealing with overpopulation, humans are nearly extinct concerned about thew quality of the now-limited gene pool. I’d like to read both novels and contrast them. As far as Exeter Qualities go, it seems like it will probably include most or all of them, based on what I’ve read in reviews etc.