

Sci Fi Fanatics

HTHCV Fall 2013

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Course Description

This course will provide an overview of classic and contemporary science fiction and fantasy literature and film. Though science fiction genre is often dismissed as being of little literary merit, the best examples of science fiction are richly interdisciplinary and incorporate elements of history, mythology, philosophy, politics, sociology, and, of course, the sciences. Good science fiction, which we will explore in this course, challenges our conception of imagination and reality, opens our minds to seeing the world as it might be as well as how it actually is, and leads us to question what counts as “human” in our increasingly unhuman world.

This course has three main components: delving into scientific concepts through readings and films, debating social implications and discussing those works with classmates, and reflecting on the works both orally and in writing. Readings and films will be comprised of both teacher-selected and student-selected works. Students will experiment with writing techniques to create their own works of science fiction. Students will also develop their academic discourse and presentation skills by taking part in daily discussions and periodically leading discussions and/or presentations.

Course Content and Materials

Content

There are many subgenres within the realm of science fiction, but in the interest of time and the nature of the 6th period elective at HTHCV, this course will focus on the following science fiction themes in three-week increments: **Time travel, Dystopia, Robots/Artificial intelligence, and Space operas.** Both the timing and thematic focus of each unit are subject to change depending on the progression of the course and at the instructor’s discretion. Please see the attached *Readings, Films, and Authors* list for a sample of the type and scope of science fiction we will be exploring in this course.

Materials

The Constitution of the State of California requires that we provide a public education to you free of charge. Subject to certain exceptions, your right to a free public education means that we cannot require you or your family to purchase materials, supplies, equipment or uniforms for any school activity.

Many families have been asking what supplies their child may need during this school year. Below, I have a recommended list of supplies that your child may bring to school. Please note that if your child does not bring the recommended supplies, the school will provide the supplies for him/her. If you have any questions/comments about this, please contact me, or Lillian Hsu, our school director. Thank you.

1” three-ring binder with dividers (can be shared with other classes)
College-ruled paper
Pencils with erasers and blue/black ink pens
Internet access (at home or at a nearby library for online assignments)

In addition to in-class readings, films, and assignments, you will be required to complete four science fiction novels of your choice (one per month). These can be purchased from a bookstore, borrowed from the HTH Digital Library or your local community library, or accessed as a free text from the Internet.

Grading Policy

10%	Timeliness and preparation
25%	Homework and in-class assignments
25%	Presentations and projects
40%	Discussion and reflection

Reading Presentations and Final Project

Reading Presentations

Students will be required to read a minimum of four (4) science fiction novels of their choosing over the course of the semester, which translates to roughly one book per month. Of these four books, students will select one on which to give a 7-9 minute presentation to the class. Presentations will include an overview and historical context, discussion of themes, connections to other works and the larger body of science fiction literature, and personal conclusions regarding how the work demands that its readers be problem solvers, speaks to human nature, challenges what it means to be real or unreal, stretches the mind to new possibilities, and encourages readers to not only think outside the box but to create new realities and new boxes.

Final Project

The last two weeks of the class (Dec 2 – Dec 13) will be reserved for oral or A/V presentations that students will craft as their final project. You will be asked to join a group of 3-4 students to give a 20-minute presentation to the class. Each group can select a topic we're covering or something that is not being covered but is related to the following Essential Question: *How do science, technology, and cultural change affect humankind?*

The form of the presentation is open and may include panel discussions, debates, movies, live games, quiz-shows, radio plays, skits, and other forms. Let your imagination run free! This is a great opportunity to express yourself and your understanding of how our world and humankind is changing and is changed by scientific understanding, societal pressures, and technological advancement.

Every group member should provide an equal level of participation overall, including preparation and presentation. You may divide your 20 minutes of presentation however you see fit, but if you're not dividing your live-presentation time equally, let me know how you divided the work. Be sure to get your topic and form of presentation approved by Aliza at least one week prior to the presentation. Each individual within the group is graded on the clarity and organization of the presentation, the quality of the analysis, the appropriate use of reference material, and their individual contribution.

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to come to class on time and ready to listen and be actively involved in the discussion, project or activity. Because a majority of the final grade is dependent on participation in class and the quality of in-class discussion and reflection on the studied works (which will often be films viewed in class), students with five (5) unexcused tardies or two (2) unexcused absences will be in danger of failing the course.

Behavioral Expectations

Respect me, respect each other, respect yourselves, and respect our classroom! Don't throw things across the room or into the trash can. If you do throw something into the trash can and you make it, we will kindly ignore the infraction. If you do miss, however, you have to pick up 20 pieces of trash at the teacher's discretion.

Readings, Films, and Authors

Readings

Time Travel

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, Mark Twain
The End of Eternity, Isaac Asimov
Golf in the Year 2000, Jay McCullough
Slaughterhouse Five, Kurt Vonnegut
The Time Machine, H.G. Wells
Timeline, Michael Crichton

Dystopia

1984, George Orwell
Battlefield Earth, L. Ron Hubbard
Brave New World, Aldous Huxley
Fahrenheit 451, Ray Bradbury
The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood
Neuromancer, William Gibson
Welcome to the Monkey House, Kurt Vonnegut

Films

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)
Star Wars Episodes IV-VI (1977-1983)
Aliens (1979)
Blade Runner (1982)
Back to the Future (1985)
Jurassic Park (1993)
Contact (1997)

Influential Science Fiction Authors

Douglas Adams
Isaac Asimov
Ray Bradbury
Pat Cadigan
Orson Scott Card
Arthur C. Clarke
Michael Crichton
Philip K. Dick
Harlan Ellison
William Gibson

Space Opera

2001: A Space Odyssey, Arthur C. Clarke
Altered Carbon, Richard Morgan
Dune, Frank Herbert
Ender's Game, Orson Scott Card
Foundation, Isaac Asimov
The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Douglas Adams
"The Sentinel," Arthur C. Clarke

Robots/Artificial Intelligence

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, Philip K. Dick
I, Robot, Isaac Asimov
Prey, Michael Crichton
R.U.R.: Rossum's Universal Robots, Karel Capek
The Windup Girl, Paolo Bacigulpi

Gattaca (1997)
Starship Troopers (1997)
Sphere (1998)
The Matrix (1999)
I, Robot (2004)
War of the Worlds (2005)
Star Trek (2009)

Robert Heinlein
Frank Herbert
L. Ron Hubbard
Ursula K. Le Guin
Stanislaw Lem
Gene Roddenberry
Neal Stephenson
Jules Verne
Kurt Vonnegut
H.G. Wells

The above list of books, films, and authors is by no means exhaustive and is intended only to serve as a starting ground for your foray into the genre of science fiction and fantasy. I encourage you to find other novels that you would like to read for this course, even if they fall outside our projected course themes.