



The Maze Cutter Unit Overview KS3

An eight lesson sequence of learning investigating the conventions of dystopian fiction through an analysis of James Dashner's The Maze Runner series — with emphasis on his newest entry, The Maze Cutter. The use of literature will develop students' creative writing skills.

Core

- Lesson 1: Dystopian vs Utopian
- Lesson 2: Conventions of Dystopian Literature

Supplementary

- Lesson 3: Character Creation
- Lesson 4: Setting Creation
- Lesson 5: Conflict Creation
- Lesson 6: Point of View — Analysis
- Lesson 7: Application — Writing & Story Creation
- Lesson 8: Application — Review & Assess

Lesson 1: Dystopian vs Utopian — Speaking / Discussion		
Learning Objectives: To compare and contrast features of utopias and dystopias; to define and identify conventions of dystopias, using the Maze Cutter as an example.	Activities:	
	<i>Starter / Do Now</i>	Students write down 5 ideals or aspects of a perfect society and think about why.
Resources: • The Maze Runner, Ch. 1 — 'Minho'	<i>Introduction</i>	Students analyze images of dystopia vs utopia, noting down descriptors.
Key Vocabulary / Topics: • Dystopia • Utopia	<i>Model & Practice</i>	Teacher defines dystopian vs utopian. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students read The Maze Runner extract, focusing on how the extract makes them feel, then — as a class — they decide if the story would be fit as dystopian or utopian, giving reasons why. • Students reread text and answer the questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eerie, grime, and twisted are three adjectives used to describe the setting. Why do you think the author used these adjectives? What impression does it give you of the setting? Why does the author use 'cold' or 'icy' multiple times? 2. Why do you think the monsters are called 'Grievers?' 3. Think about being in a maze. How would you describe that situation? Students try and imagine a world that is a utopia. What would that be like?
	<i>Review of Learning</i>	Students write an answer to the question: 'Is a utopia possible? Why or why not?'

Lesson 2: Conventions of Dystopian Literature – Reading

Learning Objectives: To analyze the Maze Runner by using the conventions of dystopian fiction.	Activities:	
	<i>Starter / Do Now</i>	Students consider statements and decide if they agree or disagree with each statement.
Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity: Agree or Disagree • The Maze Cutter, Ch. 1 – ‘Minho’ 	<i>Introduction</i>	Students watch 2 or 3 trailers of dystopian films for them to review the feature of dystopian stories. Possible options could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Maze Runner, The Hunger Games, Divergent, The Giver, The Darkest Minds, or Mortal Engines. <p>Students then think-pair-share to recall and/or mindmap the features.</p>
	Key Vocabulary / Topics:	<i>Model & Practice</i>
<i>Review of Learning</i>		Students reconsider the statements from the Do Now to see if their opinions have changed.

Lesson 3: Setting Creation – Text Analysis

Learning Objectives: To evaluate the importance setting to dystopian fiction and create a setting for their dystopian story.	Activities:	
	<i>Starter / Do Now</i>	Students match famous settings with their stories.
Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity: Setting Discussion • The Maze Cutter, Ch. 6 – ‘Issac’ 	<i>Introduction</i>	In pairs, students analyze pictures and discuss questions.
Key Vocabulary / Topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Destruction • Nuclear Disaster • Government Control • Religious Control • Technological Control • Survival • Loss of Individualism 	<i>Model & Practice</i>	Class reads Excerpt and suggests words that describe the setting. Teacher explains that there are different types of dystopian fiction. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students try to write a summary for each of the types below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental Destruction - Nuclear Disaster - Government Control - Religious Control - Technological Control - Survival - Loss of Individualism Students reread Excerpt to decide which kind of dystopian fiction applies to the Maze Cutter and why.
	<i>Review of Learning</i>	Students draw a setting from their dystopian world, using vivid descriptive vocabulary to annotate and explain it.

Lesson 4: Character Creation – Text Analysis

Learning Objectives: To analyze characters and create a new protagonist for their dystopian setting (story).	Activities:	
	<i>Starter / Do Now</i>	Students write possible dialogue between two characters from the Maze Runner, Thomas and Theresa.
Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Maze Cutter, Ch. 9 – ‘Minho’• The Maze Cutter, Ch. 1 – ‘Alexandra’• Worksheet: Building a Character	<i>Introduction</i>	In plenary, class analyzes the picture of Thomas and Theresa and mindmaps their attitudes towards each other and possible descriptions.
Key Vocabulary / Topics:	<i>Model & Practice</i>	Class reads Excerpt #1. Teacher models how to evaluate Minho and Roxy as characters, based on their dialogue, personality traits, and descriptions. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What impressions do you get of Minho and Roxy? In pairs, students evaluate the character of Alexandra and Flint.
	<i>Review of Learning</i>	Students imagine a character for their dystopian settings and what their character could be like.

Lesson 5: Conflict Creation – Text Analysis

<p>Learning Objectives: To assess the types of conflicts used in dystopian literature and note how these are used in the Maze Cutter.</p>	<p>Activities:</p>	
	<p><i>Starter / Do Now</i></p>	<p>Students imagine they had to leave their home and survive in a desolate landscape.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What five things would you bring? Why?
<p>Resources: • The Maze Cutter, Ch. 3 – ‘Issac’</p>	<p><i>Introduction</i></p>	<p>Class reads Excerpt and discuss what the conflict is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are Isaac and his friends afraid of the boat?
<p>Key Vocabulary / Topics: • Environmental Destruction • Nuclear Disaster • Government Control • Religious Control • Technological Control • Survival • Loss of Individualism</p>	<p><i>Model & Practice</i></p>	<p>Teacher reviews the types of dystopian fiction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student pairs brainstorm what the ‘conflict’ of each type is and what kinds of problems the characters might encounter. <p>Teacher models identifying the conflict of a previous Excerpt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • environment destruction in chapter six (Lesson 2) <p>Pairs identify the conflict in another excerpt, like governmental control in chapter 1 (Lesson 2)</p> <p>Individually, students plan what the conflict in their dystopian world, using the setting they created as an inspiration.</p>
	<p><i>Review of Learning</i></p>	<p>Students decide if the excerpt from chapter three would count as dystopian, explaining why or why not.</p>

Lesson 6: Point of View		
Learning Objectives: To review third-person point of view by analyzing three viewpoint character's narratives.	Activities:	
	<i>Starter / Do Now</i>	Students identify a problem or experience they had, then they mindmap how they reacted to it and one other person reacted — they should consider why the reactions were similar or different.
Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generator: https://www.flippity.net/ra.php?k=1sGWC0_oNj1V6aCpPKcuvZryasqluOiuy0CQfIOcJY4M • The Maze Cutter, Ch. 3 — 'Alexandra' • The Maze Cutter, Prologue — 'Thomas' • The Maze Cutter, Ch. 11 — 'Jackie' 	<i>Introduction</i>	Teacher uses dystopia story generator to emphasize how perspective changes people's actions and reactions to events.
	Key Vocabulary / Topics:	<i>Model & Practice</i>
<i>Review of Learning</i>		Students analyze their protagonist from Lesson 3, identifying the character's attitude and brainstorming words that their character would use to describe the environment.

Lesson 7: Application – Writing		
Learning Objectives: To write a dystopian scene (or short story) and to peer-assess partner's work.	Activities:	
	<i>Starter / Do Now</i>	Students complete diamond ranking grid to show which books or movies are most similar to the dystopia genre.
Resources: • Diamond Ranking Grid • Success Criteria	<i>Introduction</i>	Class watches a clip from The Maze Runner and note observations, along with descriptive words.
Key Vocabulary / Topics:	<i>Model & Practice</i>	Teacher has student imagine they were in the maze and models writing a descriptive scene, using: third-person point of view, descriptive details, dialogue, and dystopian features. Students write a scene set in their dystopian worlds, utilizing aspects of the setting, the characters, and the conflict they have previously imagined.
	<i>Review of Learning</i>	Peer-assess and then feedback their ideas.

Lesson 8: Application – Review & Assess

Learning Objectives: To create a book pitch and cover to summarize and market their dystopian stories.	Activities:	
	<i>Starter / Do Now</i>	Students write a short social media post to interest their friends about a book they read or movie they watched.
Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Story Cubes: https://www.storycubes.com/en/• Story Dice (online): https://davebirss.com/storydice/9dice.html	<i>Introduction</i>	Student pairs tell story using Story Cubes or Story Dice
	Key Vocabulary / Topics:	<i>Model & Practice</i>
<i>Review of Learning</i>		Students take turns pitching their book to each other.