Elements of Science Fiction

#1: Science Fiction Reflects Cold War Realities

You can't be a student of American **literature** and American **history** and NOT study science fiction!! History is the **ENGINE** that drives literature! Many writers of science fiction draw on the scientific and social trends of the **present** to describe future societies that might arise if those trends continued. **Nuclear proliferation, the space race, early computer technology, and the pervasive fear of the unknown** dangers during the Cold War were the realities that prompted a boom in science fiction during the 1950s. Cold War politics contributed to the suspicion and paranoia of anything "un-American." Many Cold War short stories, novels and films had extraterrestrial invaders and aliens that were a scantily-veiled substitute for the Communist threat.

#2: Elements of Science Fiction

- Realistic and fantastic details

- Grounded in real **SCIENCE**!

- Usually set in the **future**

- Unknown **inventions**/advanced & amazing **technology**

- Makes a serious **comment** about the world

- Often contains a **warning** for humankind—sometimes causing mass hysteria

#3: Elements of Science Fiction

- Can be set in **alternate location**—another planet, another dimension, new worlds!

- May contain **ALIENS** or strange **INVADERS** and unexplained events

- Must have a **protagonist**(hero) and an **antagonist** (villain) who do battle. The villain was always symbolic of Communism in the 1950s.

- Will have a **problem** that must be **overcome** by the hero

#4: Ray Bradbury on Science Fiction

- There still are people who will come up to you and say: "Science Fiction? Ha! Why read that?!" The most direct, off-putting reply is: Science fiction is the most important fiction ever invented by writers. It saw a whole mob of troubles pouring toward us across the shoals of time in the late 1940s and early 1950s and cried, "Head for the hills, the dam is broke!" But no one listened. Now, people have pricked up their ears, and opened their eyes. *(From "Science Fiction")*

#5: Science Fiction Settings

- Another planet

- Under the oceans

- Another dimension of existence

- May be a utopia or dystopia

- May be in the future

- May time travel to the past (or future)

- May take place in present, but alternate reality

#6: Science Fiction Characters

- Protagonist (Hero)

- Antagonist (Villian)

- These characters may be a being (human or other) or may be a force

- Protagonist or Antagonist may be a society's laws, a disease or other problem, technology, etc.

- Creatures, robots, aliens, etc.—Man vs. Machine

#7: Science is Important to the Story

- Advanced technology

- Genetics

- Disease

- Exploration

- Special powers or senses as a result of science

- Science can be the savior or the root of the problem

#8: Sci Fi contains a wide range of contexts. Some of the most common include…

1. **Utopian:** in utopian science fiction, the WISE use of advanced technology and science creates a perfect world free from the injustices and flaws of the present society. (Disney's Tomorrowland)

2. **Dystopian**: Why is it that dystopian young adult novels are so extremely popular today? The harder the times, the more people yearn for dystopia, so it seems. Dystopian science fiction shows the dangerous outcomes of the unrestrained use of technology and science. They often take place in post-apocalyptic settings. (Logan, Divergent, Mad Max, Brave New World, Hunger Games, The Giver, 1984, The Hundred, We)

3. **Alien worlds or encounters**: In these works, other life forms or artificially intelligent machines are often in control of a competing society, which leads to conflict with humans or the humans' surrender to the superior force. (Arrival, Area 51, Avatar, Guardians of the Galaxy)

4. **Time travel:** this form of science fiction may explore future worlds that help the protagonist gain enlightenment or may show how traveling back in time can change the present. (Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice, Back to the Future. The Flash)

Message or Warning for Humans

- Science Fiction stories often contain a message or warning.

- Why study science fiction?

- Perhaps the MOST important reason for students to study science fiction is to discuss the subject of the **future** and the concept of **change.** Technology is changing faster than our society can adjust to it. Reading and developing an **awareness** of possible issues like those raised in science fiction and encouraging us to think through as many possibilities as we can for a future issue will **better prepare us for the future**. Topics like cloning and surrogacy were first introduced in science fiction in the 1950s! Here are more!

Sci Fi Predictions that Came True

- Ipad Predicted in 1968 by Arthur C. Clarke in   *2001: A Space Odyssey*

- *"When he tired of official reports and memoranda and minutes, he would plug in his foolscap-size newspad into the ship's information circuit and scan the latest reports from Earth. One by one he would conjure up the world's major electronic papers…Switching to the display unit's short-term memory, he would hold the front page while he quickly searched the headlines and noted the items that interested him. Each had its own two-digit reference; when he punched that, the postage-stamp-size rectangle would expand until it neatly filled the screen and he could read it with comfort. When he had finished, he would flash back to the complete page and select a new subject for detailed examination…"*

Sci Fi Predictions That Came True

- In just a paragraph, Clarke was able to perfectly sum up on the online news experience we're familiar with today. "In a few milliseconds he could see the headlines of any newspaper he pleased…The text was updated automatically on every hour; even if one read only the English versions, one could spend an entire lifetime doing nothing but absorbing the ever-changing flow of information from the news satellites."

Sci Fi Predications that Came True

- **Virtual Reality Games in 1956 by Arthur C. Clarke in** *The City and the Stars*

- *Of all the thousands of forms of recreation in the city, these were the most popular. When you entered a saga, you were not merely a passive observer…You were an active participant and possessed—or seemed to possess—free will. The events and scenes which were the raw material of your adventures might have been prepared beforehand by forgotten artists, but there was enough flexibility to allow for wide variation. You could go into these phantom worlds with your friends, seeking the excitement that did not exist in Diaspar—and as long as the dream lasted there was no way in which it could be distinguished from reality.*

Sci Fi Predictions That Came True

- Scuba Diving in 1875 by Jules Verne in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*

- Although diving suits existed when Jules Verne's novel was published, they were the stiff, clumsy ones that limited the user's movement and connected them via a long tube to an air supply above. But in*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, characters use a backpack-sized breathing apparatus that presaged modern divers' tanks decades before they were used.

Sci Fi Predictions That Came True

- Credit Cards in 1888 by Edward Bellamy in *Looking Backward*

- Edward Bellamy's novel envisioned a 21st century in which money was eliminated and people carried cards that held a certain amount of money that could be spent. The idea's a little closer to debit cards than credit cards, though the principle is the same.

Sci Fi Predictions That Came True

- Earbud Headphones in 1950 by Ray Bradbury in *Fahrenheit 451*

- *And in her ears the little seashells, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming in on the shore of her unsleeping mind*

Sci Fi Predictions That Came True

- The Escalator in 1940 by Robert Heinlin in *The Roads Must Roll*

They glided down an electric staircase, and debouched on the walkway which bordered the north-bound five-mile-an-hour strip. "Have you ever ridden a conveyor strip before?" Gaines inquired. "It's quite simple. Just remember to face against the motion of the strip as you get on."

They threaded their way through homeward-bound throngs, passing from strip to strip…
After passing through three more wind screens located at the forty, sixty and eighty-mile-an-hour strips, respectively, they finally reached the maximum speed strip, the hundred mile and hour strip, which made the round trip, San Diego to Reno and back, in twelve hours.

Sci Fi Predictions That Came True

- Video Chat in 1911 by Hugo Gernsback in *Ralph124C 41*

- *Stepping to the Telephot on the side of the wall, he pressed a group of buttons and in a few minutes the faceplate of the Telephot became luminous, revealing the face of a clean-shaven man about thirty, a pleasant but serious face.*

- *As soon as he recognized the face of Ralph in his own Telephot, he smiled and said, "Hello, Ralph." "Hello, Edward. I wanted to ask you if you could come over to the laboratory tomorrow morning. I have something unusually interesting to show you. Look!"*

- *He stepped to one side of his instrument so that his friend could see the apparatus on the table about ten feet from the Telephot faceplate.*

Sci Fi Predictions That Came True

- The Internet in 1904 in *London Times* by Mark Twain

Twain's 'telectroscope' was a <u>phone</u> system that connected people the world over. "The improved 'limitless-distance' telephone was introduced, and the daily doings of the globe made visible to everybody, and audibly discussable too, by witnesses separated by any number of leagues."

The main character of Twain's story, a condemned murderer is even saved through the use of the telectroscope. Moments before he is to be executed, his friend catches a glimpse of his supposed victim during an event being live streamed from China.

Sci Fi Predictions That Came True

- Moon Landing in 1865 by Jules Verne in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*

He predicted they would be weightless!

"The three adventurous companions were surprised and stupefied, despite their scientific reasonings. They felt themselves being carried into the domain of wonders! They felt that weight was really wanting to their bodies. If they stretched out their arms, they did not attempt to fall. Their heads shook on their shoulders. Their feet no longer clung to the floor of the projectile. They were like drunken men having no stability in themselves."

Sci Fi Predeictions That Came True

- Screensaver in 1961 by Robert Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land*

- "They went to the living room; Jill sat at his feet and they applied themselves to martinis. Opposite his chair was a stereovision tank disguised as an aquarium; he switched it on, guppies and tetras gave way to the face of the well-known Winchell Augustus Greaves."

Sci Fi Predictions That Came True

- Flip Phones, Blue Tooth, and More predicted by *Star Trek* (debut 1966)