

SCIENCE FICTION / FANTASY ELECTIVE

MRS. MCCLOSKEY

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on science fiction and fantasy as genres melding literary art, scientific speculation, and storytelling in texts, films, and other media.

CONTEXT:

Speculative fiction, a term first used by Robert A. Heinlein in 1947, encompasses various genres that “speculate” about imagined worlds, such as fantasy, science fiction, magic realism, horror fiction, and supernatural fiction. The branches of speculative fiction that we will focus on are science fiction and fantasy. Though not formally identified as a genre until the 1940s, sci-fi / fantasy has its roots in The Brothers Grimm fairytales and the work of pioneers like Mary Shelley and Jules Verne. It may include one or more of the following elements:

- Future setting, alternative time line, or an historical past that contradicts the facts
- Location in another world or outer space
- Political systems/ social structures that are often frightening extensions of current ones
- Situations in which technology is running amuck and/ or taking over
- Visions of apocalypse or of post-apocalyptic worlds, with either society’s collapse or its new organization, whether better or worse than what was replaced
- Use of new scientific technology or futuristic pseudo-technology
- Scientific principles that are new or that contradict known laws of nature, such as time travel, wormholes, or faster-than-light travel
- Characters who cross boundaries, such as aliens, mutants, androids, animal-human hybrids, or humanoid robots
- Characters with paranormal abilities, such as mind control, telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation
- Characters who are mad scientists and/ or evil geniuses
- A magic system: things that occur or exist in your story that do not or cannot exist in the real world, elements of sorcery, witchcraft and enchantment, fantastical creatures and the supernatural, advanced abilities or powers
- Wide-range group of complex, yet archetypal characters

Both genres have one common requirement: suspension of disbelief.

As well, sci-fi itself can be divided into sub-genres, such as time travel, alternative history, apocalyptic, space opera, space western, and military sci-fi, just to name a few. And sci-fi in general, can also be labeled as **“HARD”** or **“soft.”**

Hard sci-fi, which is/ was often written by working scientists such as Asimov, Clark, and Sagan, can be very thorough and detailed in its treatment of scientific principles, such as astronomy, chemistry, and physics.

Soft sci-fi, often far more playful in its use of science, is also more concerned with biology and the social sciences, such as economics, political science, sociology, and anthropology.

Fantasy is set in an imaginary universe, often, but not always, without any locations, events, or people from the real world. Its roots are in oral traditions like fairytales, which then developed into literature and drama. From the twentieth century it has expanded further into various media, including film, television, graphic novels, and video games.

Most fantasy uses magic or other supernatural elements as a main plot element, theme, or setting. Magic and magical creatures are common in many of these imaginary worlds. Fantasy is a subgenre of speculative fiction and is distinguished from the genres of science fiction and horror by the absence of scientific or macabre themes respectively, though these genres overlap.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES OVERVIEW

This course will be organized *thematically* rather than, say, historically. Classes will usually revolve around one or two important themes of the genre explored in depth via readings, films, or other mediums.

By the end of the course, a student will be able to:

- Describe and analyze common science fiction and fantasy themes, tropes, and modes of expression.
- Place representative works of science fiction and fantasy in a larger cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic context.

Required Textbooks and Materials

You will need a blue ink pen and a composition book.

* Texts, films, and assignments subject to changes and additions as best fits the needs of the class

What is Fantasy? What is Science Fiction?

How did these genres begin? What has been their influence?

- ⊃ Films: Princess Bride, League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, War of the Worlds

"STRANGE NEW WORLDS"

What is the nature of life in other parts of the universe/multiverse?

What will be the nature of the relationships between humans and extraterrestrial life forms?

Will contact with extraterrestrial life forms change the way human beings see humanity and its place in the universe/multiverse, and/or the ways we act, and if so, in what ways?

- ⊃ Novel: Ender's Game
- ⊃ Films: Independence Day, Ender's Game

What if there was another world accessible via portals in our world?

What might life be like there? What would happen back here while you're gone?

How would your experience in the other world change you?

- ⊃ Novel: Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban
- ⊃ Films: Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

"THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE: MIND AND MATTER, REALITY AND PERCEPTIONS"

What is the nature of consciousness, a mind, and/or a soul?

What is the nature of reality—if it does exist—and can it ever be fully and/or truly known?

What is the relationship between the perception of reality and actual reality itself?

- ⊃ Novel: I, Robot
- ⊃ Films: I, Robot, Star Trek: First Contact
- ⊃ Short Story: "Robot Dreams" by Isaac Asimov

What is a true hero? How does he become such a hero? What lessons do we learn from said heroes? What does the face of evil look like? What do we learn from great villains?

- ⊃ Novel: Once and Future King, Percy Jackson: The Lightning Thief, The Lord of the Rings trilogy, Hobbit
- ⊃ Films: King Arthur: Legend of the Sword, Lord of the Rings: Return of the King, Star Wars: Return of the Jedi, Star Trek: Into Darkness

“THE BEST (AND WORST) OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS: UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN SOCIETIES”

How is power and right determined?

What if things go wrong, but we had good intentions?

How might the future look based on current population numbers?

What constitutes a ‘perfect’ society or its opposite?

What is the role of free will in shaping a society for better or worse?

What is the relationship between the individual and society and between rights and responsibilities?

⇒ Films: King Arthur: Avatar, Serenity, Star Gate

“MUTATIONS”

How do we define what is ‘human’ and how is that definition changing and/or being challenged?

What is the relationship between Nature and science/technology in shaping life?

What are the risks and rewards of using science/technology to alter Nature?

⇒ Films: X-men, the Avengers

Students will select a sci-fi/fantasy novel to read over the course of the semester.

Thirteen days have been set aside for students to read/discuss their books in a book club.

During the last three days of the semester, students will give a presentation of their book, providing summaries, genre characteristics, differences from the film version (if applicable), etc..

Presentation counts as the final for the course, weighted equally with each quarter.

Students will study sub-genres and analyze films and short stories in their composition books, which will be routinely collected and graded.

Student-led class discussions will take place after each sub-genre study. These will be graded on preparation, participation, and the quality of student contribution (evidence of critical thinking.)

Small analysis writing assignments will be interspersed throughout the semester.

MRS. MCCLOSKEY'S CLASS POLICIES

DISCIPLINE PHILOSOPHY

My ultimate goal is to lead a respectful and disciplined classroom that nurtures a learning-focused environment. To achieve this, I have established a few simple policies. As a student, it is your responsibility to comply or accept, and learn from, the consequences. By enforcing these policies, I promise fairness and order in our classroom.

Rules

• Focus on Learning! •



MATERIALS

Show up daily, on time, ready: pens, binder, smashbook, Chromebook.



INTEGRITY

Academic Integrity means if you say you read it or wrote it, you did. Manage your reputation carefully.



ELECTRONICS

We need to learn to **MANAGE OUR ATTENTION**. Use only as directed.



ATTENDANCE

MUST BE PRESENT TO WIN!
Present means in your seat, with all your materials, when the bell rings.

Words Matter! Students will exhibit courtesy and respect toward all other persons at all times. Leave the drama in the cafeteria. Hateful comments of any type—i.e. race, religion, gender, sexuality, political views, appearance—will not be tolerated. This applied to serious as well as “joking” comments. Be aware that I am a mandated reporter.

Save it for Gym! Physical contact of any kind is not permitted. Violation of this simple rule will garner you an immediate trip to the assistant principal's office.

Stay in Your Seat. Do not walk around during class unless directed to do so. Have everything you need ready before class begins. Materials needed for the day's class are listed on the daily agenda.

Leave the Food at Home. Students may not eat or drink in the classroom. This includes gum and mints. (Check under your desk or on your neighbors' knees for further clarification.)

Eyes on Me! Assume the “learning position”: **Eyes** looking at the speaker (no sleeping), **Ears** turned on and tuned in, **Lips** closed, **Brain** paying attention, **Body** sitting tall and still without tapping, wiggling—hands on desk/lap, feet, still, under the desk.

Nothing Goes Airborne. Nothing will go airborne in class at any time. This includes pens, paper, and other students.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Plagiarism is when one borrows material from another source without giving that source credit. Plagiarism is the equivalent of cheating. It is the same thing as sitting in class and copying someone's answers on a test.

Cheating is another form of academic dishonesty. It includes, but is not limited to:

- More than one student turning in the exact same root responses to an individual project, paper, or homework.
- Allowing another student to copy your work
- Sharing answers with another student, or looking at another student's paper during assignment

It speaks poorly of a student who chooses to engage in any of the aforementioned behaviors and constitutes academic misconduct. Such behaviors will result in a grade of zero on the assignment, school detention, and a phone call home. The student **will not receive the opportunity to make up the assignment.**

SYLLABUS CONTRACT

Please complete and detach this contract agreement and return to Mrs. McCloskey in Room 113 no later than Friday, _____ . The syllabus itself should **remain in the front of your binder**.

I, (**print** student name) _____, have completely read and understood the contents of this syllabus, the classroom procedures, and class policies. I agree to abide by the guidelines outlined within.

Student signature: _____

I, (parent(s)/guardian(s) **printed** name(s)) _____, have complete read and understood the contents of this syllabus, the classroom procedures, and class policies. I agree to support their implementation. I further understand that my child will need to access to a Chromebook in order to read his/her textbook and complete course assignments.

Parent(s) / guardian(s) signature: _____

****The rules and policies outlined in this syllabus are intended to ensure the success of each student and therefore are subject to adjustment. If changes become necessary, I will clearly communicate said changes.**