Standards Focus: Genre

**Fantasy, Science Fiction, and Dystopia**

Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* occurs in an other-worldly society which exists only in the author’s imagination. The novel contains elements of traditional fantasy and science fiction to create the author’s fictional community.

**Fantasy** novels take place in a world that does not and cannot exist on earth. They frequently incorporate magic or supernatural forces into the plot, theme, and setting. Fairy tales and myths often draw on magical themes, but modern fantasy literature really began with George MacDonald’s *The Princess and the Goblin* and *Phantastes*. In the 20th century, authors created “lost” worlds, an aspect that Lowry incorporates in *The Giver*, in classic children’s fantasies such as Baum’s *Wizard of Oz* and Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. Most fantasy novels were classified as children’s literature until Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* and Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* series gained attention by all ages. This trend continues today with J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series.

**Science fiction**, a subgenre of fantasy, has grown in popularity through the years. While science fiction also occurs in an imaginary world, its plot and characters deal with the impact of science and technology on humans and their daily existence. The genre of science fiction began in 1818 with Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and grew in popularity through Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth* in 1870 and H.G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* in 1898. While science fiction novels frequently involve aliens and outer space themes, they can also take place in a futuristic society on earth, as evidenced in Lowry’s *The Giver* and Orwell’s *1984*.

In addition to occurring in a futuristic, fantastical society, Lowry’s *The Giver* invokes a dystopian world view. The term **dystopia** was first used in 1868 to mean the opposite of More’s *Utopia* where everything was perfect and everyone was personally fulfilled. Dystopian societies in literature are often created as ideal societies, but evolve into a dangerous place when the community’s structure and rules are taken too far. As in many dystopian novels, the community in *The Giver* places strict restrictions on the characters’ lives and does not tolerate individual thoughts or actions. The novel’s conflict, as in many dystopian novels, revolves around the main character’s feelings that something is wrong in his community, and how he reconciles his feelings living within such a structured society. By incorporating a dystopian society into *The Giver*, Lowry draws on the literary traditions of Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*.

By the use of technology in a fantasy world gone wrong, Lois Lowry firmly places *The Giver* in the dystopian tradition of classic science fiction and fantasy novels.
Standards Focus: Exploring Expository Writing—Genre

Directions: After reading the article about genres on page 11, answer the following questions. Write the letter of the correct answer on the line.

1. _______ What aspect of traditional fantasy novels does Lowry utilize in The Giver?
   a. a recognizable setting
   b. a plot centered on science and technology
   c. setting the novel in a “lost world”
   d. basing the plot on historical events

2. _______ Which of the following novels is not an example of science fiction?
   a. Journey to the Center of the Earth
   b. Wizard of Oz
   c. Frankenstein
   d. War of the Worlds

3. _______ Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of a dystopian novel?
   a. It occurs in a supposedly perfect society which has gone too far.
   b. The main character must try to reconcile his/her individuality to the structure of the society in which he/she lives.
   c. The novel occurs in a realistic setting.
   d. The characters’ lives and individuality are restricted.

4. _______ Which of the following most closely describes the opinion of the author of the article on page 11 regarding science fiction?
   a. The author does not enjoy reading science fiction.
   b. Science fiction is the author’s favorite genre to read.
   c. The author believes that science fiction helps assess the role that technology plays in our lives.
   d. The author does not state his/her opinion of science fiction.

5. Explain the difference between a utopian and a dystopian society. ______________

6. How are the genres of fantasy and science fiction related? Explain the differences and similarities between them. __________________________________________