

LESSON PLAN

Decoding the Dystopian Characteristics of Macintosh's "1984" Commercial



Grades 9 - 12

Lesson Plan Type Minilesson

Estimated Time 50 minutes

Lesson Author



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INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

Students will

- define the literary terms utopia and dystopia.
- identify dystopian characteristics in a television commercial.
- explain how dystopias criticize contemporary trends, societal norms, or political systems.

INSTRUCTION & ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to share anything that they know about the year 1984. What have they seen on television or read in books? What were the major events of the year? If desired, use the Wikipedia list of events for **1983** and **1984** to set the context for the Macintosh commercial, or use a similar list from a reference book.
2. Display and read the **Voiceover Text from the "1984" Macintosh Commercial** using an overhead projector, or pass out copies of the text and read the passage to the class.
3. Ask students to share their immediate reactions to the passage with the class. Note their observations on the board or on chart paper.
4. Distribute the **Background Information on the "1984" Macintosh Commercial**. Read and discuss the information and ask students how the details influence their understanding of the commercial. If desired, you may show **Steve Jobs' Introduction of the Macintosh Computer** to the class. The video clip includes screen images from the 1984 machine.
5. Show the "1984" Macintosh commercial to the class, or have students view the commercial in a computer lab. The clip is available on the following Websites (free **Quicktime** plug-in required):

- Some Cool (Mostly Apple-Related) Movies

- The 1984 Apple Commercial: The Making of a Legend

- Apple's 1984 Commercial

6. Ask students to review their original reactions to the **Voiceover Text** and consider whether their feelings have changed now that they have examined the text in its original context.
7. Briefly review the **Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics** handout, or the characteristics that you have presented in previous sessions. Wikipedia has **additional information about dystopia** that you can share with students. Consult the definition and examples of dystopia in literature and film from the Wikipedia site to supplement the lesson further. As always, remember that anyone can edit Wikipedia pages; so be sure to confirm and review resources from this site.
8. Lead a discussion on the interplay between the commercial's voiceover and images. If desired, pass out copies of the **"1984" Macintosh Commercial Analysis Worksheet**, and use the sheet to record observations during the discussion.
9. Use the following questions to lead the exploration of the commercial:
 - How would you describe the workers depicted in the commercial?
 - How does the runner compare to the workers?
 - How do these characters display dystopian characteristics?
 - What type of dystopian controls are used in the society depicted in the commercial?
 - What characteristics of a dystopian society are present in the commercial?
 - How are setting and characterization used to show that the protagonist in this commercial is trapped by this society and is trying to escape?
 - What is the protagonist in conflict with in the commercial?
 - What is the symbolic meaning of the protagonist's action of throwing the hammer and destroying the screen?
 - What negative aspects of the dystopian world in the video are highlighted through the actions of the protagonist?
 - What comment or criticism is being made about our society through this dystopia?
10. If desired, show the commercial again at this point, as students may notice different features now that they have discussed it.
11. Pass out **Scene-by-Scene Summary of the "1984" Macintosh Commercial**, for students to use as reference while they work on a more specific analysis of words and images from the commercial.

12. Demonstrate the "1984" Macintosh Commercial Analysis Tool, and have students complete its questions individually or in small groups. Alternately, you can display the tool using an LCD projector and work through the questions as a whole class.

13. Circulate through the room as students work, offering feedback and support.

14. Ask students to use the handout to identify the figurative meaning and dystopian nature of the following symbols:

- circular tunnels
- riot gear
- gray uniforms
- shaved heads of workers
- black and white versus color images
- athletic clothing versus workers' uniforms
- large computer screen
- disembodied head of a man
- rows of workers in the hall
- hammer
- hammer being thrown
- woman's red shoes versus the workers' shoes
- white light from exploding screen
- Apple Computers logo

15. As the session draws to a close, ask students to make summarizing comments and observations about the commercial and its dystopian characteristics.

16. For homework, ask students to respond in their journals to the following prompt:

Choose one specific example from the commercial and explain what you believe to be the overall comment or criticism about society that the "1984" Macintosh commercial makes using that example.

EXTENSIONS

- The "1984" Macintosh commercial is one of the most popular SuperBowl commercials of all time. Ask students to discuss why this commercial has remained popular even though its actual advertising message is no longer pertinent in the way another commercial might be (e.g., a commercial for Pepsi). Compare [more recent Apple Computer commercials](#) or commercials and advertisements for other computer companies to the "1984" Macintosh commercial. Ask students to consider how the images and approach of the commercials have

changed and to consider how Apple's corporate image today compares to its image in 1984.

- Follow this unit with a novel or another piece of literature that explores a dystopian society. Appropriate novels include *Brave New World*, *Fahrenheit 411*, and *1984*. Obviously, the activity pairs best with George Orwell's *1984* because of the direct allusions to the novel in the commercial. Begin your exploration of the novel by pointing out some of the obvious connections (e.g., the televised image of a Big Brother-like speaker). As they read, ask students to watch for descriptive passages and specific symbols in the novel that connect directly to the commercial. After students have completed the novel, play the commercial for the class again, and ask them to rethink its use of dystopian characteristics. Students may notice images and symbols that were less obvious before they read the book. Ask students to return to the journal entry that they wrote at the conclusion of this activity and reconsider it in light of the novel, focusing on how their original assessment of the message about society in the commercial compares to the messages about society that Orwell explores in his novel. Additional pieces of literature that may be considered for this activity include:

- *Feed* (M.T. Anderson)
- *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* (Mary E. Pearson)
- *The House of Scorpion* (Nancy Farmer)
- *Uglies* series (Scott Westerfield)
- *Bar Code Tattoo* (Suzanne Weyn)
- *Unwind* (Neal Schusterman)
- *Delirium* (Lauren Oliver)
- *Matched* (Ally Condie)
- *Human.4* (Mike Lancaster)
- *Divergent* (Veronica Roth)
- *Chaos Walking* series (Patrick Ness)
- *The Search for WondLa* (Tony Diterlizzi)
- *Ship Breaker* (Paolo Bacigalupi)

STUDENT ASSESSMENT/REFLECTIONS

Informal assessment works best for this activity. As students work, circulate through the classroom, observing students' analytical process and their understanding of dystopian characteristics. Provide support and feedback as you speak with individual students and small groups.

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