

**College Guild**  
PO Box 6448, Brunswick ME 04011

# **INVENTIONS**

## **Unit 5 of 5**

### **Imagining the Future**

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In the final Unit of Inventions, we'll be talking about the future. For years, people have imagined what the future might look like in films, books and television shows. We'll talk about some of this literature and envision our own future.

#### **1984, as Envisioned in 1949**

1984 is a novel by George Orwell published in the year 1949. The novel was written just after World War Two. Orwell was undoubtedly inspired to write this novel because of the interaction in the war with the totalitarian governments of Russia and Nazi Germany. Though the year 1984 has come and gone, some say that the book becomes more and more relevant as time passes.

The book takes place in the year 1984 in London, Oceania. There are now three nations in the world and they are constantly at war. Oceania's government controls every aspect of its citizens' lives. Homes contain "telescreens" which function like televisions but can also see and hear everything in a certain range and constantly stream propaganda. Microphones are hidden in trees. Citizens are constantly reminded by posters that Big Brother, the country's leader, is watching them. The population is divided into the Party and the Proles (Proletariat). The Proles are viewed as less than human, though they make up 85% of the population.



The main character, Winston Smith, is a 39-year-old Party member who becomes curious about the history of his country. He can't find out anything because the Party has edited or destroyed any books or evidence from the past. Winston starts writing in a diary, something he could be killed for doing. "Thoughtcrime" is punishable by death. You could attract suspicion by not being passionate during the "Two Minutes' Hate", a daily propaganda pep rally. The country's motto is: "Peace is war, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength".

1. Some say that Orwell predicted the future. What are three similarities between Orwell's world and today's world?
2. This book saw a surge in sales in the beginning of 2017 shortly after Donald Trump became President and his adviser used the phrase "alternative fact" to defend a claim that had been proven false. What do you think people were hoping to get out of the book, and why was the book relevant to the situation?

### The Future is Now

Other less frightening 20<sup>th</sup> Century imaginings of the future include the children's television shows, The Jetsons and Sealab 2020. The Jetsons, which aired in the 1960s and again in the 80s, is the story of a futuristic family of four. The family has lots of cool inventions that make their life easier including robots to clean their house, a machine to make them whatever they want for dinner at the push of a button, a flying car, jetpacks and watches that let them videochat with each other. However, since the 80s when this show ended, some of the inventions in this show have become more than just fantasy. We talked about smartwatches in Unit 3. The Jetsons' vacuuming robot is also reality now, in the form of the "Roomba", a small, circular robot that has sensors allowing it to navigate and clean an entire floor of a home.



**3. Even though they enjoy the conveniences of the future, the Jetson kids still have to go to school. Describe at least 3 inventions that one might find in their schools.**

- 4. Describe an idea for an episode of The Jetsons, imagining that you are a writer for the show.**

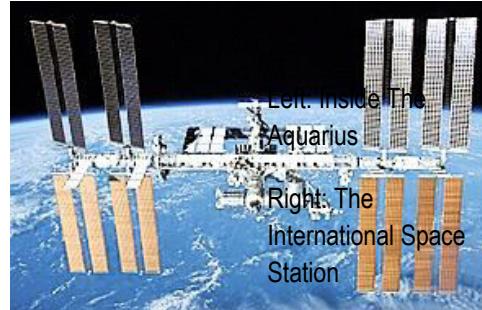


Sealab 2020 is another children's television show. It aired in 1972 and is set about 50 years later in the year 2020. The show is about a group of 250 people who live underwater at an ocean research base. Though, at the time of writing, it is almost 2020 and nothing quite this big exists underwater, we do have the technology now to live underwater. There is a lab off the coast of Florida, 62 feet below the ocean's surface and next to a coral reef.

The lab is called The Aquarius. "Aquanauts" can live there for days or weeks at a time doing marine biology research. It can only fit about seven people at a time, being the size of a school bus. NASA uses it to practice techniques for exploring outer space and living in inhospitable environments.



The International Space Station is similar to this lab. Astronauts typically stay there for 6 or more months at a time, doing research while orbiting the earth.



5. Would you rather live and work underwater or in outer space? Give three reasons to support your choice.
6. Give three reasons why someone might make the opposite choice from the one you made in Question 5.

Nowadays, not everyone who goes into outer space does so for work. Space tourism is a new industry that allows the very wealthy to purchase a trip into space for about 20 million dollars.

7. If you had a \$20 million travel budget, would you use it go to outer space? Why or why not? If not, explain what you would do with the money instead.

### The Future in Modern Movies and TV



The Martian, released in 2015, is a science fiction movie set in 2035. It tells the story of an astronaut who gets left behind on Mars by his fellow crewmembers when they presume that he died in a dust storm. He has to find a way to communicate with NASA and survive until he can get back home. He becomes an inventor, using what he has to grow food and get shelter.

8. What do you think of the title of this movie? If you had to give it another title, what would you call it?

9. Write a short story about someone who is the only human left on Earth in modern times.

Black Mirror is a TV show that began airing in 2011. It's called Black Mirror because when a television or computer is turned off, its black screen is reflective like a mirror. Each episode has different characters and is set in a different version of the future. The show is a cautionary tale about technology taken too far and the consequences of the use of such technology. The show is creepy and sometimes horrifying. One episode, entitled "Arkangel", released at the end of 2017, tells the story of a nervous but loving mother who has a chip implanted in her young daughter's head. The chip connects with a tablet which the mother can use to monitor her daughter's location and medical status. She can even view live what her daughter is seeing and shield her from obscenity or stressful stimuli by distorting what she sees and hears. As the girl grows older, the tablet drives a wedge into her relationship with her mother.



10. Technology has already made it possible to track the locations of others based on the location of their phone or watch. Explain under what circumstances you think it is appropriate for adults to track the location of their children.
11. Under what circumstances do you think it would be appropriate to monitor an adult's location?

## Robots

The Star Wars franchise is worth \$42 billion dollars. That's enough money for 2100 people to go on vacation to outer space! These movies have captivated adults and children alike since 1977. The Star Wars movies are said to take place "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away", but they have a futuristic feel. They feature spaceships, light saber battles and strange planets and tell the story of good people trying to triumph over "the dark side". Some of the most beloved Star Wars characters are the humans' robot companions, including C-3PO, R2-D2 and, in the newer movies, BB-8.



C-3PO is a humanoid robot that is fluent in more than 7 million forms of communication. He is programmed for etiquette and protocol. Though he is always there to help his friends get out of trouble, he constantly complains and fusses, focusing on statistics, odds, and the way things are supposed to go.

R2-D2 is on the left in the picture above. He is an astromech, which means that he is a mechanic, fixing starships and assisting pilots. He is a constant companion to C-3PO, speaking in beeps that C-3PO can understand. The two are a funny pair and provide comic relief to viewers during battle scenes.

BB-8 is another astromech who looks kind of like a snowman. His bottom half rolls around so that he can travel on all different kinds of terrain. He is skittish but loyal, and was entrusted to carry a clue to the location of the lost Jedi Master Luke Skywalker.

- 12. If you could have any of the 3 robots described above as a companion, who would you choose and why?**
- 13. Draw another robot that looks different from the robots already described. Give it a name and describe what it can do.**



Robots are not science fiction anymore. They exist in real life and are getting smarter and smarter. RoboCup is a sport in which teams of robots compete against each other to play soccer. Every RoboCup team uses the same robots that can hear, see, speak and move. The team programs them to know what to do in certain situations. The robots are not controlled by humans at all during the game, except for being placed on the field and being pulled out if they get a penalty. They listen for a whistle that tells them to begin play. It's fun to watch the 2-foot-tall robots run around a field, often walking out of bounds,

falling over and having trouble finding the ball. The goal of RoboCup is to promote research in the field of Artificial Intelligence. The RoboCup organization has said that their ultimate goal is that in 2050, a team of humanoid robots will play a soccer game against that year's Fifa World Cup champions, complying with the official rules, and win.

- 14. Would you rather watch humans or robots play soccer? Explain.**
- 15. What other game or activity would you like to see robots try? What aspect of this game or activity would be the hardest for robots to understand?**

When it comes to Artificial Intelligence, the possibilities are endless. Robots will one day be capable of doing many of the jobs that humans do now. Companies may not want to lay off their employees, but robots can be cheaper and more efficient at doing certain tasks than humans. A lot of people may one day be displaced from their jobs by robots.

- 16. Write an essay about your thoughts on robots replacing humans in the workplace and what you think the government's role should be when this happens.**

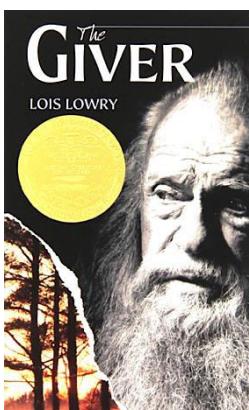
### Fears and Hopes

WALL-E (2008) is an animated movie from Disney Pixar Studios set in the year 2805. The main character in the story is a robot called WALL-E, which stands for "Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class." All the humans that are left in the universe are on a "cruise" that was only supposed to last 5 years while WALL-E robots cleaned up the garbage and made the Earth habitable again. However, this cruise has dragged on for 700 years as no plants have grown on Earth. The humans have become lazy and have forgotten all about Earth. WALL-E, the only robot still doing his job, makes cubes of garbage and stacks them in huge towers day in and day out.



One day, WALL-E finds a small plant growing in the soil and he places it in an old boot. A robot named EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator) comes down from space to look for signs of life. WALL-E falls in love with her and shows her his plant. She then takes it and gets picked up by a spaceship.

- 17. Write your own ending to this story.**
- 18. How might Wall-E act as a warning, and how might it offer hope?**
- 19. Do you think children and adults would have different reactions to this movie? Explain.**



A dystopia is an imagined place where everything is bad. It is the opposite of a utopia, a perfect place. Often, in stories, a dystopia is the result of a failed attempt to create a utopia. The world of 1984 is a great example of a dystopia. The Giver by Lois Lowry (1993) is a dystopian novel that offers a little more hope than 1984. It tells the story of a boy named Jonas, who, on his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, is chosen to be the receiver of memory for his Community. In Jonas's Community, every 12-year-old child is assigned a job that they will do until they retire. Jonas's friends get jobs working at the recreation center and caring for the elderly, but Jonas's job is "Receiver of Memory". He is responsible for meeting with an old man called The Giver to take from him all the memories of the world. Jonas alone must bear the burden of knowing about a time before the Community, where war, death, pain and suffering existed. However, he also learns of snow, animals, music, color and love, things that do not exist in the Community. Jonas starts to question whether it is right to keep all of this from people. Eventually, he runs away with his baby brother, who is about to be "released" from the Community (put to death). He knows that if he leaves the Community, everyone left behind will have to bear the burden of the memories. The story ends with Jonas

and his brother starving and cold with the Community far behind them. They come across a sled and take it down a snowy hill into a village where there are lights and music.

Some interpret the ending of this story as a happy one in which Jonas and his brother have made it to "Elsewhere", leaving the community to heal, while others think the boys have died of cold and starvation and are travelling into an afterlife. Some say it doesn't really matter.

- 20. What do you think about the ending of the story? Do you like the ambiguity (uncertainty) or find it frustrating?**
- 21. The Giver explores memory. How do you think memory and the future relate to each other?**
- 22. Reflect on what you've learned in this course and write a poem about any aspect of inventions you want.**

As this is the last Unit, we welcome any feedback you can give us. Let us know if you have any suggestions on how this course could be improved for future students!

*Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes*

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