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Resistance in Dystopian Literature: 1984 and Beyond

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Throughout history, people have faced questions about power, freedom, truth, and what individuals should do when living under unfair systems. While dystopian literature creates imagined worlds, its real value lies in helping us see historical truths and reflect on the choices people make when facing tyranny, conformity, and the loss of civil liberties. This nine-week twelfth-grade English curriculum uses George Orwell's *1984* as the main text and pairs it with nonfiction, philosophy, memoir, poetry, and other dystopian stories. This approach helps students examine resistance from different perspectives. The unit starts by exploring the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens. Students then learn about the Bill of Rights, Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*, Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny*, and Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* After building this background, they apply these ideas to *1984*, "The Pedestrian", "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas", "First They Came", and Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. Students use annotation, weekly Literary Response Journals, and a final braided essay to connect ideas from different genres. They explore themes like tyranny, surveillance, propaganda, conformity, moral responsibility, and human agency. In the end, this unit shows students that resistance is not always about rebellion. Often, it begins with the courage to question injustice, protect the truth, stand up for human dignity, and think independently. By doing this, students learn that dystopian literature is more than just stories about the future. It helps them understand the past, think about the present, and take part in a democratic society.

(Developed for English IV, grade 12; recommended for English IV, AP Literature and Composition, and IB English, grade 12; and English II, grade 10)

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