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Blade Runner Redux: Teaching a Sci-Fi Meta-Art Classic

Introduction

At my small, alternative high school I teach a semester-long course entitled "The Future is Now." This course is designed to help students see the connections between today's world and imagined worlds by reading classic Science Fiction or Speculative Fiction—my preferred term (both abbreviated as SF for convenience). This is one of the most popular classes I teach, allowing students to consider who they are and who they might become as human beings. Students are inspired to examine contemporary issues—technological, biological, psychological, sociological, and environmental—portrayed in future settings. Regardless of background, students appreciate the opportunity to discuss the complex issues they are facing in the 21st century. Saturated by manipulative media and overloaded with information, these same students need guidance to read their multifaceted, high-tech world. Today's teachers have a responsibility to prepare students to use critical inquiry and their imagination, to solve problems in a future that may look very different from today, and Speculative Fiction can help in this preparation.

This unit examines Philip K. Dick's novel *Do AndroidsDream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and *Blade Runner* (1982), Ridley's Scott's classic sci-fi film adaptation. Prior to this unit, students will have read Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984.* Both dystopian novels function as relevant warnings about social control and totalitarian rule, but through very different means. To complete the semester, I have used short fiction, film, and other novels including *Anthem*, *Cat's Cradle*, *Ender's Game*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Giver*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*. A number of these texts can be challenging for my students, who range from enthusiastic to reluctant and from skilled to inexperienced. My classes are generally small, approximately 15 students. This allows me to dedicate extra instruction to the development of reading skills at all levels with the belief that similar strategies (especially critical inquiry at each stage of reading) can help all readers improve comprehension and interpretation of what they read. The engaging subject matter compels students to make sense of these disorienting narratives. The same is true when readers approach *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, my latest addition to the course.

While I had seen *Blade Runner*, it was not until I read the novel that I began to appreciate the film. I now see the value of both texts in much the same way that Philip K. Dick did. After initially criticizing an early draft of the screenplay, he said the novel and the film "reinforce each other...it's like they're two halves to one meta-artwork, one meta-artifact. It's just exciting."[1] After spending more time with these two works, I found myself

examining them in a similar way—as one larger work with textual, visual, and auditory components.

This unit is timely. The year 2007 marks the 25th anniversary of *Blade Runner* to be celebrated with a long-awaited, limited theatrical run plus the DVD release of a remastered Director's Cut—the supposedly definitive "Final Cut." Even so, this extraordinarily influential film may be unfamiliar to today's teenagers who were born in the 1990s. The film, originally a box-office failure, was later recognized as a seminal science fiction film, featuring the postmodern explorations of proto-cyberpunk writer, Philip K. Dick. Teenagers may be more familiar with recent cinematic adaptations of other fiction by Dick. A spate of films, including *Total Recall* (1990), *Minority Report* (2002), *Paycheck* (2003), *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), and *Next* (2007) have been produced, and a biopic of Dick is in the works. While of varying quality, these futuristic films explore technological innovations, simulated realities, altered states, and identity politics—all prescient issues that motivate enthusiastic adolescent exploration.

Additionally, this year the authoritative Library of America is also reissuing a collection of four Philip K. Dick novels, including *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* The editor of the collection describes Dick as the "Shakespeare of science fiction"—a bold claim that demands further investigation. But where does science fiction (or even the more radical sub-genre of cyberpunk) fit into the English curriculum?

My unit attempts to answer this question, articulating a rationale for teaching *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (*DADES*) and *Blade Runner* by enhancing critical thinking, close reading, oral language, and writing skills. Because there are significant changes and interesting choices made by the director and screenwriters of *Blade Runner*, the unit will approach the film as an artistic achievement in its own right, rather than as a mere supplement to the novel. Students will thus explore issues surrounding the idea of adaptation itself, empowering them to consider how and why stories change, and the impact of the various media through which they are conveyed.

This five-week unit is designed for a mixed-level class of students in grades 9-12, targeting a wide range of reading skills. The school population is approximately 80% African American and 20% Caucasian. This past year, 48% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Over 90% of the students are accepted to college. Located in Richmond, Virginia, Open High School is a fully accredited, community-based public high school, which supports a student body of no more than 200. This unit supports the larger mission of Open High School to create students who are self-directed, independent learners.

Blade Runner is rated R for violence, but violence in 1982 looks much tamer than the gratuitous violence of 2007. Still, teachers will want to send home permission forms that explain the purpose of this selection. Students will be taught and assessed based on selected standards from grades 9-11 of the Virginia Standards of Learning. This unit also supports the basic principles of the Richmond Public Schools Instructional Model. (See Appendix A.)

Rationale

Having no sci-fi background myself, my unit may be more accessible to those new to the genre. My interest in SF has come through novels generally not classified as typical science fiction, but I have come to appreciate the genre and see its great relevance to today's students.

Until recently SF has had a credibility problem in literary circles. As a genre it is often relegated to pulp—popular, pleasurable yarns rather than serious literature, worthy of academic study. This problem may be exacerbated by the fact that an easy definition of the genre seems impossible and may even be counterproductive.

When I introduce the course to students, I discuss the ongoing influence of what many consider the first science fiction novel, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). This mythic novel provides an essential framework to discuss scientific advancements and their unintended consequences. But as others have suggested, Shakespeare's *Tempest* could also be considered SF depending on how we choose to define it. So in order to structure the course, I begin with an inclusive definition:

> SF is a form of fantastic literature that attempts to portray, in rational and realistic terms, future times and environments that are different from our own. It will nevertheless show an awareness of the concerns of the times in which it is written and provide implicit commentary on contemporary society, exploring the effects, material and psychological, that any new technologies may have upon it.[2]

As a genre, SF has long addressed visual modes of communication as part of futuristic technology. Orwell gives us "telescreens," Huxley gives us the "feelies," and Dick gives us the "empathy box." In each example we can see the power of the machine-generated image—to control, to entertain, and to transcend. Most educators are all too aware of this power, in the form of television, the Internet, and other media that captivate students. When students use such technologies, the image is often privileged at the expense of the text, and this predilection can be troubling as fewer students come to high school as competent readers. Still, as our traditional understanding of literacy expands to include visual and audio information in analog and digital modalities, it is essential for students to become active, critical viewers rather than passive recipients. My goal is to show students how to critically approach a multitude of texts, including film.

Perhaps because of its emphasis on technology, SF is ideally suited for film. Even before CGI (computer generated imagery), imagined worlds came into being on the screen, capturing the popular imagination. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977) remain highly influential films, perhaps best known for the director's visual interpretation of future worlds. They seem to demonstrate the capabilities of cinema that literature may lack.

Obviously SF literature can be shaped by powerful imagery and literary techniques that may not translate well on the screen. Yet traditionally, SF literature has been distinguished from canonical literature because of its primary emphasis on *ideas* rather than the *aesthetic* form the ideas take. With canonical literature, both the ideas and the aesthetics are important. So while Huxley, Orwell, and Dick all have masterful moments where the stylistic qualities of the language are apparent, the *ideas* presented in their famous fiction are the most interesting and significant.

While Dick's original ideas enhance the value of *Blade Runner*, the film is most celebrated for its aesthetics, that is, its effective visual realization of a future cityscape. In this way, the film is a fuller sensory experience than the novel. And while the novel provides some imaginary inspiration, it is the film that creates the highly textured and believable future world of Los Angeles in 2019 (versus Dick's San Francisco of 2021). Here the old, decrepit buildings coexist with new technologies like gigantic video billboards and flying cars. The streets are overcrowded with the marginalized masses—Asians, Hispanics, punks, dwarfs, and Hare Krishna devotees who have not yet emigrated off-world—swarm below in the city streets. Yet empty buildings are common, and

the corporate elite, represented by Eldon Tyrell, are isolated in towering, high-tech (and ironically ancient) ziggurats. A perpetual wet darkness blankets the traditionally sunny L.A, and the police are a constant, if ineffectual, presence.

Visually *Blade Runner* is stunning, and the sensory richness of the film is heightened by the Vangelis soundtrack. It is a film that will allow students to explore the elements of cinema, while simultaneously helping them explore and elaborate upon ideas in the novel. Overall, this unit aims to show students how these two texts work together as one "meta-art" classic and how the *mode* of storytelling affects the experience.

Objectives

Students will be able to

- Apply critical reading strategies at various stages of the reading process
- Make inferences, connections, and predictions related to a text
- use an online writing environment to engage in discourse with peers
- identify and apply vocabulary related to novel and the SF genre
- understand the elements of literature (characterization, theme, allusion)
- understand the novel's structure and the *doppelgänger* effect
- understand the elements of film (*mise-en scène*, camera angle/movement, light, color, sound, editing, special effects)
- identify characteristics of *film noir*
- understand the film's relationship to the myth of Frankenstein and the Fall of Man
- identify, analyze, and articulate the intellectual and creative choices involved with film adaptation
- gain experience with oral language through classroom discussion
- use interpretive skills to explain significance of quotations and film stills
- write a critical essay, commentary, or adaptation related to the book and/or film

Strategies

Anticipation

I will begin with a short online survey (see Appendix B) as a pre-reading strategy, engaging students in a critical examination of their beliefs about technology. This will prepare them to make personal connections to, and larger generalizations about, ideas in the novel and film, particularly the man-made replication of humans. Because there are no right or wrong answers, this is a potent place to begin an open-ended discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of technology. Students will be required to defend and question their beliefs. The survey and the conversation it promotes will also allow us to consider some essential vocabulary like *android, artificial intelligence*, *cyborg*, *cyberspace*, *robot*, and *virtual reality*.

From here we will move to a brief background discussion on the work of Philip K. Dick and his influence on SF and popular culture. While Dick's sensational life story as an agoraphobic, paranoid, amphetamine addict is interesting, I will focus not on his biography but on some of the basic "Dickian" concepts developed in his fiction. I will show two short clips from the films *Total Recall* and *Minority Report*, asking students what issues are being raised and the possibility of experiencing something similar in their lifetimes. In *Total Recall,* adapted from the short story "We Can Remember it For You Wholesale," Dick focuses on implanted memories and the question of reality. In *Minority Report*, adapted from the short story of the same name, Dick focuses on pre-cognition and free will. A brief discussion about these issues will allow students to become more familiar with Dick's sci-fi oeuvre.

Reading the Novel

One of the challenges English teachers face is finding texts that students will actually read. Given the appropriate introduction, students *will* read *DADES*, attracted by the strange, action-packed adventure and socially relevant issue of humanity's relationship with technology. *DADES* asks readers to imagine a dystopian future where nuclear war and its deadly effects have lead to mass emigration to "off-world" colonies like Mars. Those who are left on Earth are insignificant, genetically inferior, or poisoned by nuclear fallout. The protagonist, Rick Deckard, is a bounty hunter assigned to "retire" rebel androids, who have escaped their servitude off-world and illegally returned to Earth. These androids are created for the convenience of humans and corporate profit. They are organic machines—the latest generation Nexus 6 model—essentially identical to humans, differentiated only by their supposed lack of *empathy*—a term that will be discussed in detail, beginning with a basic dictionary definition.

While as readers we are trained to sympathize with the point of view of our protagonist, can we not empathize and celebrate the androids' quest for freedom? The analogous quest of African Americans and other marginalized groups who have been dehumanized is clear. Ironically, the few remaining animals—and even artificial ones—have a higher status than the life-like androids, since to own and care for an animal is a means of demonstrating empathy. The confused social hierarchies lead Dick and students to larger questions like, *What does it mean to be human*? *What is real*? and *How do we know*? These are ancient philosophical questions that deserve our students' attention. Certainly in this digital age, students must consider not just how we are shaping technology but how technology is shaping us.

Students tend to read *DADES* and focus on the humanity of the androids rather than the lack of humanity of the protagonist, but the latter focus is crucial to a satirical reading of the novel. In a 1972 essay entitled "The Android and the Human," Dick argues that humans "become instruments, means, rather than ends, and analogous of machines in the bad sense. . .." He describes this reduction to "mere use" as "the greatest evil imaginable,"[3] and I agree, imagining our world of cubicles and corporate drones, devoid of creativity or purpose. In this way, *DADES* addresses current issues with regard to economics and education. Huxley explores a similar idea in *Brave New World* where genetically engineered clones are created in conditioned castes for the purpose of maintaining economic and social stability, retaining the biology but not the "spirit" of humanity. In this world, homogenization and creative sterility abound and intellectual curiosity is absent. Huxley and Dick forecast the concerns of many educators who fear that standards-driven, one-size-fits-all curricula may result in compliant workers who do not think for themselves and do not know the joys of learning.

Similarly, Dick's novel encourages readers to question the mechanized life. *DADES* asks students to imagine what happens when we begin to resemble our technology? Can we separate ourselves from our technological

creations? Has our quest for scientific rationality killed our appreciation for emotional intelligence, creativity, and the arts—elements that give us our humanity? With the proliferation of iPods, cell phones, gaming, and virtual environments like MySpace and Second Life, it is critical to include students in a discussion about the technology they use, how they use it, and how it mediates and shapes their reality.

Reality itself is an idea that is continually questioned in Dick's fiction, foreshadowing the ideas of cyberpunk writers exploring virtual environments in cyberspace. In *DADES,* Dick creates a future world with programmed moods, artificial memories, powerful celebrities, and a religious cult requiring a machine to access. It is not difficult to see the similarities in contemporary society with our liberal use of pharmacology, our fascination with "reality" TV, our commercial "programming", and the rise of the media-driven mega-church. Recently, scientists studying post-traumatic stress disorder announced work on a new pill to "erase" painful memories by disassociating the memory from the emotional response reminiscent of *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). And new fMRI technology—which can peer inside and quantify our minds—may force us to consider cognitive freedom and issues of privacy that would surely have Orwell burrowing deeper into his grave.[4]

Dick's world is also a world where consumerism is king. As Eldon Rosen, the manufacturer of the Nexus 6 androids proudly declares, "We produced what the colonists wanted. . .. We followed the time-honored principle underlying every commercial venture."[5] Like Victor Frankenstein, he does not anticipate the ethical consequences of his android creation. For Rosen, profit trumps ethics, and this same scenario clearly presents a serious problem for America in the 21st century.

All these contemporary social issues provide fertile ground for substantive student discourse.

Reading Strategies

Because a number of my students struggle with reading, I generally begin a novel by reading aloud. I model my reading as a thinking process, encouraging students to pause, ask questions, visualize, and clarify possible meanings. My larger goal is to help students see every reading assignment as an opportunity to apply reading strategies. I am especially interested in having students annotate their texts as a regular practice. This becomes difficult when I provide the class texts. So in this case, I keep post-it notes readily available and encourage students to take notes as they read. They may ask questions, make connections, define unknown vocabulary words, identify patterns, or comment on characters or plot.

Along with reading aloud and annotation, I have students read together in pairs or in groups. Here they are instructed to read whole pages, sections, or paragraphs. The key to this strategy is that the students determine how much they want to read and when they want to stop. Regular interruption of the reading is critical, allowing listeners to clarify and ponder what they have heard. This interactive practice also helps alleviate the pressure that so many students feel when asked to read aloud in front of a large class. At the same time, it demands that they develop their oral language skills, with a special focus on pacing, articulation, and using punctuation as a guide.

To further strengthen students' fluency, they will be asked to read independently and maintain a Journal. (See Appendix C.) This will be useful for the classroom Blog (see Appendix D), which will be used multiple times during our reading of the novel. Students will be able to identify and question characterization, overarching themes, and the use of allusions in an open-ended discussion with their peers.

Characterization in the Novel

The primary conflict in the novel centers on Deckard's feelings of empathy for the androids he is assigned to kill. His machine-like response to "retiring" the androids begins to trouble him to the point where he begins to question his own humanity. Perhaps he is himself an android. His identity struggle is at the heart of the novel, and as Patricia Warrick argues, the novel is "best read as the inner journey of a divided, restless mind seeking wholeness."[6] I want students to explore Dick's use of the character John R. Isidore as a foil or second self for Deckard. Isidore, the simple "chickenhead" and victim of nuclear fallout, demonstrates the compassion that Deckard—the rational killing machine—lacks. Deckard hopes to kill an android so he can afford to replace his electric sheep with the real thing, assuring himself of his humanity. This desire could be a sign of his empathetic nature or merely his programmed awareness of the social status associated with owning a real animal. Isidore, working for an electric animal veterinarian, seems to care little about the distinctions between real and artificial, falling in love with the android Pris—identical in appearance to the android Rachael. Deckard finds himself in love with Rachael, but it is his unemotional wife, Iran, who may reveal the final, confused truth about what it means to be human.

These contradictions, oppositions, and tensions run throughout Dick's fiction. In terms of characterization, the doppelgänger or "doubling" effect of the machine-human metaphor can best be explored with students in a graphic format as in Figure 1.[7]

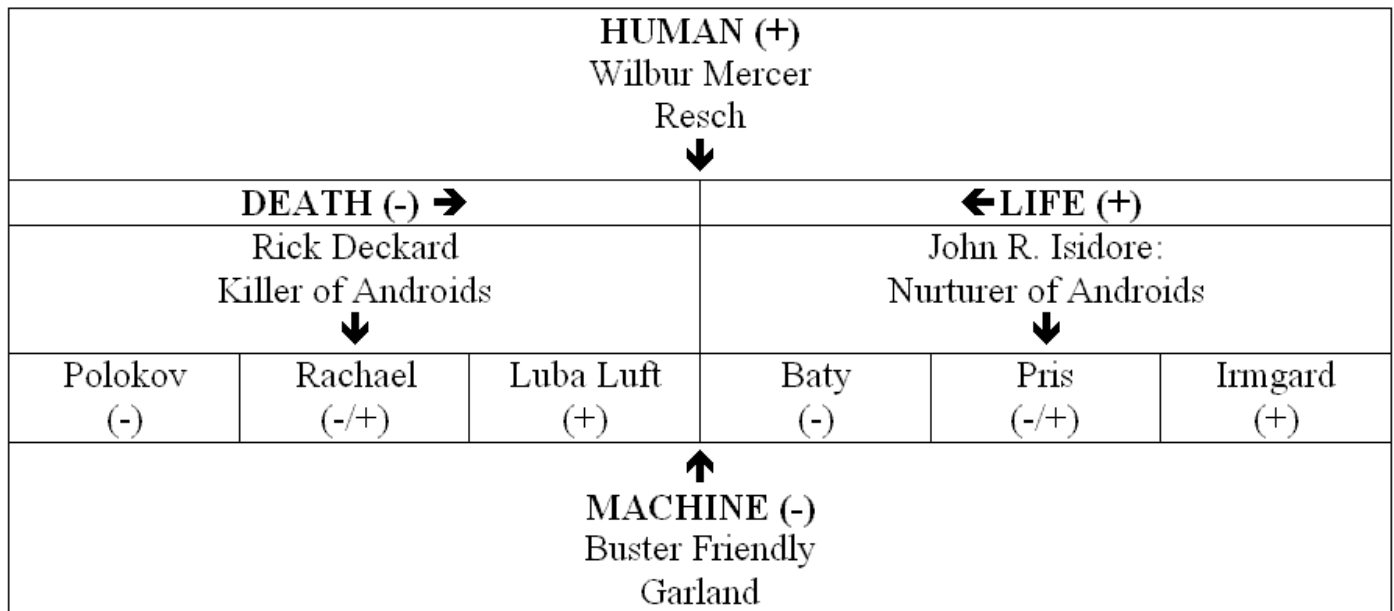| HUMAN (+) Wilbur Mercer Resch ⬇					
DEATH (-) ➔ Rick Deckard Killer of Androids ⬇			⬅LIFE (+) John R. Isidore: Nurturer of Androids ⬇		
Polokov (-)	Rachael (-/+)	Luba Luft (+)	Baty (-)	Pris (-/+)	Irmgard (+)
MACHINE (-) ⬆ Buster Friendly Garland					

Figure 1

This format helps me makes sense of the narrative and will likely help students appreciate the precision with which writers compose their work.

While guiding students through Dick's characterization during classroom discussion and through facilitation of the Blog, I will gradually recreate this diagram on large chart paper so we can trace how Dick uses characters to transmit particular ideas. What I want students to explore is Dick's suggestion that there is a continuum between Human and Machine. Deckard and Isidore, while both human, represent two different aspects of humanity, with Deckard closer to a Machine and Isidore closer to a Human. The androids they encounter also exhibit different qualities along this same spectrum. The characters marked with a "+" have more life-

affirming qualities, like Isidore. The characters marked with a "-" have more destructive qualities, like Deckard. Some characters, like Rachael and Pris, have both.

What becomes apparent is that over the course of a single day, Deckard and Isidore gradually change. Both characters are forced to confront the limits of human and artificial life. Through an encounter with his mirror image—the cold, machine-like, human bounty hunter Phil Resch—a confused Deckard questions his own identity and his ability to actually distinguish humans from androids. Eventually, Deckard rejects the violence of his profession for the compassion represented by Isidore, his alienated self.

In the end, both characters fuse with Mercer, the fraudulent religious figure that requires faith to "exist"—another way Dick is playing with our perception of reality. The martyr Mercer tells Deckard that, "It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity. At some time, every creature which lives must do so. It is the ultimate shadow, the defeat of creation; this is the curse at work, the curse that feeds on all life. Everywhere in the universe." [8] According to Warrick, this is classic Dickian philosophy—a recognition that life is difficult, even incomprehensible, yet we humans, like Sisyphus, keep on going.

Because most of my students are female, I will also encourage them to consider how gender functions in the novel. SF has long been dominated by male writers who have often presented women in the stereotypical role of angel or temptress. Beginning with Deckard's selection of 594 on the mood organ: "pleased acknowledgement of husband's superior wisdom in all matters,"[9] students should be alert to narrative and/or authorial gender biases. After all, it is artificial females—the identical pleasure models Rachael and Pris—who lead Deckard and Isidore through a destructive, yet transformative experience. Revisiting "doubling" and a little feminist criticism, one might argue that Isidore actually represents connected "female" emotion, which must find balance with Deckard's detached "male" logic.

To promote critical thinking, I introduce various critical approaches to show students there can be multiple interpretations of the same text. Without delving deeply into psychoanalytic criticism, I will share one intriguing fact about Dick's biography: the death of a twin in infancy. Dick himself has said that, "If there can be said to be a tragic theme running through my life, it's the death of my twin sister." [10] Students might consider whether Dick's interest in doubling and reintegration originated from this event. With the advent of fertility drugs, twins are commonplace and involve a different kind of human replication that might be worth exploring further.

Themes in the Novel

Students will be prompted to consider at least four main ideas during class discussion, as they develop their Journal, and as they respond to each other on the classroom Blog. These ideas are 1) human identity; 2) dehumanization; 3) celebrity and religion; and 4) death and renewal. Clearly Dick wants his readers to contemplate these ideas, but it is not altogether clear what he wants us to think about them.

In order to develop critical thinking skills, students should be given the opportunity to determine how these ideas promote specific themes. It becomes their task to identify and defend a theme. Students should be reminded that a theme is an insight into human nature, rather than a single word, a moral, or a conflict. Themes should be declarative sentences such as "Empathy distinguishes humans from androids."

The following questions can be used to promote thinking about themes before, during and after reading of the novel:

1. What qualities distinguish human beings from animals and/or machines? What aspects of humanity have artificial substitutes and why? How did the ideas of Copernicus and Darwin shape and revise our understanding of humanity's place in the world? Will technology force a reassessment of how we see ourselves?
2. How and why are hierarchical systems of power used? Why might the rebellion of the androids be justified? When in history have people been dehumanized and why? How has this dehumanization been justified? Who has benefited and who has suffered?
3. What is the role of Buster Friendly and his Friendly Friends? Does it matter that Buster is an android? What is being said about celebrity culture? What is the role of Mercerism? Does it matter that Mercer is a fraud? What is being said about religion? What is being said about belief, "programming," and reality itself?
4. What is entropy? How does this relate to "kipple" and the tomb world? What is Dick saying about the state of the universe? Do you agree or disagree with these ideas and why? How can you apply your knowledge of science? How is reality a *relative* human construction rather than a *fixed* concept?

When students finish the book they will brainstorm thematic statements on the board. They will then utilize the same method as the Technology Survey, answering each statement with "I agree" or "I disagree" and defending their answers with textual evidence.

Allusions in the Novel

Students need to develop their cultural literacy by identifying allusions and analyzing their relationship to larger themes in a novel. I remind students that writers use these cultural references to tap into the knowledge of the reader, giving emotional weight to an idea. The most frequent allusions come from classical mythology, Shakespeare, and the Bible, and while students often do not recognize such allusions, this reminder keeps them alert to the possibilities.

I will focus on two allusions in *DADES*. The first is an allusion to the mythical Sisyphus, a trickster condemned by Hades to suffer eternal punishment in the underworld. Sisyphus was forced to continually push a heavy bolder up a hill, but on reaching the summit, it would roll back down. This same toil is experienced by Mercer and those who fuse with him. Students will be asked to consider why Dick uses this allusion. The Greeks believed humanity was condemned to a life of hard labor, unlike the idle gods of Mount Olympus. What might Dick be suggesting about human nature? Is Deckard's job of retiring androids a "Sisyphean task"—one involving endless but ultimately futile labor? Is his larger quest—to attain an understanding of the human condition—a curse that keeps him (and all mankind) toiling for non-existent answers? How is Mercer a Christ-like figure, whose suffering encourages empathy (from the Greek *pathos* or "pain")? Does it matter that Mercer is revealed to be a fraud or is this revelation ultimately irrelevant to the experience of empathy? What if religions are just stories created by man? Would this matter?

The next allusion we will examine is the art of Edvard Munch. Known for delving into the psychological realm, Munch's appearance in the novel highlights the state of anxiety, alienation, and disillusionment felt by both Deckard and the androids. Before reading this section of the novel, I will show students "The Scream" and ask them how it might relate to the androids in the book. I will do the same with Munch's "Puberty," which represents a phase of life androids would never experience. Students will also be asked to brainstorm descriptive adjectives that the paintings bring to mind.

Dick associates Munch with the android Luba Luft, who is not only a museum patron but also an opera singer. She might be said to represent man's artistic impulse replicated in machine form. Deckard and Phil Resch

follow her to the museum and are confronted with "The Scream." Resch says that an android must feel like the tormented creature on the bridge. His recognition may reveal his humanity but he still kills Luba without remorse. Deckard, on the other hand, is able to recognize the value of the artist, regardless of origin.

Paintings will also be examined during our study of *Blade Runner*, reinforcing the idea that a painting (like a novel or a film) functions as a text that can be "read" by viewers with a critical eye. This examination will also help students recognize the variety of forms creative expression can take. For adventurous teachers, a sample of *The Magic Flute* (performed by Luba) and a brief biography of Mozart's short life may also have resonance with some students.

Adapting the Novel into Film

Dudley Andrew, our seminar leader, suggests that where literature elaborates a world out of story, cinema carves a story out of a world.[11] This distinction is fascinating to consider (and the kind of conundrum that Dick might have appreciated). It is also a way to help students appreciate the distinct ways literature and film approach storytelling. With this in mind, students will be introduced to the concept of adaptation and asked to contemplate the artistic, ideological, and even economic issues that arise when works are adapted.

According to Andrew, there are three primary methods of film adaptation: borrowing, intersecting, and transforming. If we apply these terms to science fiction film, *Star Wars* can be a viewed as a film that "borrows" its basic narrative from the legend of King Arthur, relying on the mythic power of an original source. A sci-fi film like *Solaris* (1972) "intersects" with an original text, that is "the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is intentionally left unassimilated in adaptation." [12] The adaptation of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* on the other hand, "transforms" an original source into the medium of film, attempting to remain faithful to the literary experience.

Where does *Blade Runner* fit into this schema? The film is a *loose* adaptation of Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, and Ridley Scott was clearly not interested in fidelity to the original text. The screenplay—which had two screenwriters and went through multiple drafts—leaves out many of the important concepts found in the novel, like Mercerism and the status of animals. The bounty hunter Phil Resch is also absent, and Rachael's character is darker and less sympathetic.

The screenplay might be said to "borrow" from the cultural power of the Frankenstein myth and the biblical Fall of Man. At the same time, *Blade Runner* offers the viewer more than archetypal themes. This is especially true with regard to how *Blade Runner* exploits the medium of film. Robert Silverberg has argued that at its best, science fiction film offers rich texture and detail such that "the vision of tomorrow. . .will remain embedded forever in the imagination." He goes on to say that "The Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* is a unique invention, actually owing relatively little to the Dick novel. . .the city itself remains the essential imaginative achievement. . .."[13]

What this suggests is that while *Blade Runner* is indeed an adaptation of Dick's novel, it is worth studying not as a supplement to the novel but as a work of equal, yet radically different, power. Brooks Landon suggests thinking about the film as an adaptation that "frames" its antecedent, serving as "a lens for better understanding its source and as a mirror for better studying ourselves." [14]

As a mirror, *Blade Runner* has inspired critics from a wide-range of disciplines to examine this imagined world *because* it looks so real. Using in-camera special effects, Ridley Scott creates verisimilitude—a realistic,

detailed depiction of Los Angeles in 2019. Androids and flying cars exists alongside a decaying, overcrowded urban environment, lit by neon lights and video billboards the size of buildings. The mood is dark, reflecting the *film noir* tradition of the 1940s. Costumes and hairstyles are especially representative of the era. Even though produced in 1982, there is something timeless about the look, which modifies rather than replaces. The "layering"[15] technique reveals a setting full of ambiguities. The culture of the past is recycled and coexists with the technologies of the future. Traditional boundaries between the past and the present seem to blur. This incongruous setting may leave some students disorientated, but this reaction may actually reflect the city of the near future, with endless urban sprawl, abject poverty, and mega-wealth. Because my students come from all over the city to a downtown campus, this is an ideal opportunity to compare our city and the cityscape depicted in the film.

The setting also shows that *Blade Runner* can be studied as a "quintessential example of postmodern cinema." [16] It is a hybridization of genres, stylistically incorporating the technological advancements of science fiction and the urban decay associated with detective fiction. The architecture is both ancient and modern. Power and technological advancement, in the form of the Tyrell Corporation, is invested in gigantic ziggurats, which evoke the ancient Aztec civilization and human sacrifice. The "little people," like J.R. Sebastian, live in empty, isolated, apartments that provide only sporadic shelter from the constant rain. Globalization—an aspect of postmodern society much more evident in 2007 than 1982—is also present in the multiethnic society that collides at the street level. The different mingling of races, languages, and styles on the street seems like a sign of things to come. And the film's vertical stratification of the classes [17] shows students a possible outcome of unrestrained capitalism. As a postmodern text, students can uncover the transformation of hierarchies. When once the Great Chain of Being described a world where a benevolent God looked down to man and man to animals, in *Blade Runner*, the corporation looks down to cops, who look down to "little people," and at the bottom are the replicants. Students should be prompted to consider what other warnings might be embedded in the film's visual design.

Film and Visual Representation

The paradoxes of postmodern society are also seen with the film's self-referential emphasis on vision, representation, and the nature of reality. From the earliest scene, the eye becomes a central visual motif. The fact that this is clearly the blue eye of the replicant Roy Batty should make students question just whose story this is—Rick Deckard's or Roy Batty's? Are we, the viewer, to watch this through the lens of an enslaved individual fighting for human dignity and a desire to know who he is?

The motif is woven throughout the film. Deckard is a "private eye," in the tradition of American detective fiction. The character represents the outsider who exposes the evils of the social order. [18] He "sees" in a way others do not. This is true of the Blade Runner Deckard, who eventually "sees" that replicants deserve the same dignity reserved for humans.

The motif continues with Chew's Eye Works laboratory, the ubiquitous surveillance of the police, the androids glowing eyes, Rachael and Pris' eye makeup, and the blinding of Tyrell, whose thick glasses already indicate impaired "vision." Roy Batty tells Chew, "If only you could see what I've seen with your eyes." This begs the question, does it matter that the eyes are not "real"? Do they not still see? Can they not see better? Perhaps

the machine sees more than the human eye. After all, the Esper device unlocks the mysteries of a photograph, "seeing" behind corners not visible to Deckard's human eye. The Voigt-Kampff machine measures the eye's response to emotion, becoming the proverbial "window to the soul" of a human subject or exposing a replicant's artificial eye. That a machine determines one's humanity is an irony that can encourage students to question their own relationship with, reliance on, and fears regarding technology.

The photograph plays a critical role in the film. As a visual representation of reality, it is similar to the replicant who is a replication, or copy, of a human being. What interested Dick and writers like Jean Baudrillard is captured visually and thematically in *Blade Runner*—simulation has become more real than reality. In the words of Tyrell, the corporate motto is "more human than human." This idea of "hyper-reality" [19] gains support when we see Rachael and Leon's attachment to photographs, which provide evidence of existence, of memories. While they may be programmed memories, they are memories nonetheless and in many ways, no less real. Deckard's own attachment to old family photographs provides the first clue that he may himself be a replicant. How would he know? And how do students know they really exist? (A question I love to ask!) Because so many of them have seen the *Matrix* trilogy, they are often primed for this kind of existential exploration.

Perhaps because Ridley Scott was trained as a painter, paintings—another visual representation of reality—inform the visual design of the film. Scott supplied the production team with Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks," attempting to capture a sense of urban isolation. [20] Two other paintings—Emanuel de Witte's "Interior with a Woman Playing the Virginals" and Jan Van Eyck's "The Arnolfini Wedding"—will also be shown to students. These Dutch interiors are similar in texture and nuance to the photograph taken from Leon's room. The Esper machine reveals a reflected image in a mirror (a simulated eye) that exposes the sleeping replicant Zhora around the corner. The Van Eyck's painting contains a similar mirror that exposes the painter and witness to the actual wedding—a replication of the event. De Witte's painting also contains a mirror as well as a series of doorways that capture and direct the viewer's gaze. What is not immediately seen is the man in the bed, suggesting that the human eye is often fooled. [21]

The emphasis on visual reproduction and simulated realities is worth exploring with students in depth. This generation of students receives the majority of their information through images, so they need more practice reading visual and digital texts. Photographs also seem to consume the world of adolescents, many of whom do not leave home without a digital camera or cellphone/camera combo to document their existence. Pictures appear on MySpace and seem to reaffirm reality, proclaiming friends, memories, likes, and dislikes. And with social networking sites and life-like digital avatars gaining in popularity, it makes sense to discuss how the idea of individual identity might be changing in the digital age.

Viewing Strategies

Just as students must be familiar with the elements of literature, so too must they become comfortable identifying and analyzing the elements of film. While there is some obvious overlap between the two mediums, film requires a new vocabulary that will be discussed prior to viewing *Blade Runner*. Ironically, students often feel confident in their abilities to comprehend film, yet their "reading" rarely goes beyond the level of plot. One way for high school students to approach film is provided by Teasley and Wilder in their book *Reel Conversations*.[22] By having students distinguish between the *literary*, *dramatic*, and *cinematic* aspects of film, they can better appreciate the similarities and differences between the various mediums.

Literary elements include characterization, theme, and symbolism. For example, symbolism in the film not

found in the novel is the aforementioned emphasis on vision. The *dramatic* elements of film are similar to what audiences would see at the theater. These elements, which make up the *mise-en scène* of film language, would include costume, props, and acting. Finally, the specifically *cinematic* elements of film include camera angle and movement, light, color, sound, editing, and special effects.

The three categories will be written on the board so that students can refer to them while viewing. I will also pause the film periodically so that students can take notes, identifying how Scott incorporates the various elements. Students should also ask questions that we will return to when we examine still images.

Characterization and Themes in the Film

After viewing the film, we will return to the doubling structure of the novel and see how the film focuses not on Isidore as Deckard's alter-ego, but Roy Batty. Students will be asked how this reshapes the original conflict of the individual. Roy is still the leader of the rebel replicants, but here his quest is explicit—to extend his four-year lifespan. There is no question that Roy and the other replicants kill humans in their escape from off-world, but students will be asked to consider whether the killing is understandable, even justified given their situation? Roy seems to have some remorse when he confesses, "I've done questionable things." As with *Frankenstein*, the child returns to confront his arrogant creator. Unlike Victor Frankenstein, Eldon Tyrell does not learn from his mistake; instead, he is destroyed by his own creation, and Roy's symbolic destruction of his eyes reminds us that the creator lacked vision.

Students will be asked whether or not future machines might similarly seek vengeance on their human inventors. I will prompt students to consider other popular films that share the same theme, such as *I, Robot* or the *Terminator* series. This focus also affords a good opportunity to discuss the current problem of computer viruses, self-replication, and the fact that the language of biology is already being applied to man-made objects and vice versa.

Roy Batty's symbolic function as a Christ-figure will also be discussed when students examine still images. With a single viewing, students may not immediately recognize Roy's self-inflicted stigmata or his releasing of a dove as biblical, but with further research and discussion they will make these connections on their own. Roy saves Deckard, and students need to consider why he does this. Perhaps he wants a witness for his own "death." In this way, Roy becomes Deckard's spiritual savior as well, rescuing him from his cold detachment from the oppressed "other." Deckard is alienated from humanity just like the replicants, but in the end he is able to feel empathy for their situation.

Lesson 2 will allow students to explore the biblical theme of the Fall of Man, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the work of William Blake. In his article "Science Fiction and Transcendence," David Desser discusses how like science fiction *Paradise Lost* is, creating a strong sense of place in its depictions of heaven, hell, and the Garden of Eden.[23] He provides one description of hell that evokes the Los Angeles of *Blade Runner*:

```
 A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round As on great Furnace flam'd, yet from those
flames No light, but rather darkness visible Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace And rest can never dwell, hope never
comes That comes to all, but torture without end Still urges, and a fiery Deluge,
fed With ever-burning Sulphur unconsumed. . .
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(Paradise Lost, book I: 61-69)

I will ask students if the setting is indeed similar to hell, and based on their general knowledge of the epic, what this might say about mankind in the future. Is Scott's hellish world a result of man's fall from a state of

grace? Does the film offer redemption? Students will provide their own research on Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden and possible associations with the film. They will be asked to consider a number of possibilities: How is the female replicant like Eve? How is the use of the *femme fatale* archetype appropriate in this context? Are Deckard and Rachael a new Adam and Eve?

We will also briefly discuss the Romantic idea that Satan, rather than Adam, is the true hero of *Paradise Lost.* Is *Blade Runner* worth reading in a similar way? Roy may be the fallen angel seeking vengeance against an omnipotent and cruel God, Tyrell. At the same time, Roy may be the redeemer of man, allowing Deckard to transcend his alienated state. Here we see how Deckard and Roy might also be two halves of a broken whole. As with the novel, Deckard seems to be more machine-like, but here it is the machine Roy who is more human, fighting for his freedom with the raw emotions of love, hate, pain, and fear.

That Roy's character can be likened to a fallen angel becomes clear when students examine a line from William Blake's *America: A Prophecy*. Roy revises it to say, "Fiery the Angels fell [cp. the original "rose"] while thunder roared around their shores, burning with the fires of Orc." I will also use Blake's poem "The Tyger," which evokes a similar tension between destruction and creation found in *Blade Runner*.[24]

A mystery that will probably linger with students is the inclusion of the unicorn that Deckard dreams about. This scene is never explained. The only other unicorn reference is at the end of the film when Deckard finds Gaff's origami. Most critics see the origami as a sign that Gaff knows Deckard is himself a replicant and has been given an implanted dream about a unicorn. Regardless of his origin, Deckard realizes Gaff has been at his apartment and has let Rachael live. Gaff's final words, "It's too bad she won't live, but then again, who does?" echo as a reminder to Deckard that the human and nonhuman beings have something in common.

Classroom Activities

Lesson 1: Characteristics of Film Noir

A full appreciation of *Blade Runner* will be lost if its intertextuality is not considered. Not only is the film's narrative connected to *DADES*, but stylistically it is connected to the tradition of *film noir*. Students will explore this tradition prior to viewing *Blade Runner*. The designation of *noir* is applied to certain American films during and after World War II that are "dark" in tone. The often intricate narratives generally involve a gruff private detective investigating a crime. Alienated and living outside the law, he is driven by his own moral code. Voice-over narration (original to the theatrical release of *Blade Runner* but removed from the 1991 Director's Cut) is common, as is an emphasis on a realistic urban setting and the use of flashbacks. A beautiful *femme fatale* is also commonplace. She can be read as a sexist backlash against the societal shift of the 1940s when women joined the workforce, becoming an unconscious threat to male power.

The aesthetic considerations include chiaroscuro lighting with shadows, silhouettes, and high contrast lighting. Light is accentuated by the smoke wafting from the outlaw characters who drink as much as they smoke. Venetian blinds, fans, and the patterns they create are hallmarks of the lighting design. Unbalanced compositions are also evident, with directors using odd camera angles to create interesting frames.

Before viewing *Blade Runner*, students will be shown the opening scene of *Double Indemnity* (1944). Also set in Los Angeles, this work exemplifies *film noir* in all aspects except the hard-boiled detective. Still, the point of

view is a man who narrates his own story of corruption by a *femme fatale*.

Students will be asked to consider how a particular mood is created through the use of cinematic elements. After watching the scene once and asking for students' initial impressions and sensations, we will discuss the elements of *film noir*. We will then watch the same scene without the sound so that students can focus on the visual aspects of the composition. This lesson will prepare them for a more critical approach to visual design when viewing *Blade Runner*.

Lesson 2: Allusions in the Film

Blade Runner is a puzzling film, which many viewers find frustrating. While the original voice-over narration may have helped viewers make sense of the plot, most critics agree that the film is much stronger without the heavy-handed narrative. Like any mystery however, clues abound. In order to focus my students' viewing on some of the ideas discussed earlier, I will ask them to play detective like the character Deckard.

I will provide pictorial and textual clues to help them uncover meaning and appreciate the cinematic and literary allusions. Each student will receive an item, easily printed from the Internet, that in some way relates to the film. (Students could also work in teams, studying one clue collectively.) Prior to viewing *Blade Runner*, students will complete independent online research on their clue. As detectives, they will write short reports on their findings. They will continue their investigation by watching the film with an added focus on their particular clue and its possible relationship to the film. They will then write another short description of observations and possible connections. Finally, students will present their learning to the class and lead a short whole-class discussion on their clue. Scenes can be replayed at this time.

Clues will include.

1. Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks"
2. Humphrey Bogart
3. The monster from Frankenstein
4. Christ on a crucifix
5. An Aztec pyramid
6. Emanuel de Witte's "Interior with a Woman Playing the Virginals"
7. Jan Van Eyck's "The Arnolfini Wedding"
8. Line from William Blake's *America: A Prophecy*
9. William Blake's poem "The Tyger"
10. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden
11. Passage from John Milton's "Paradise Lost"
12. A unicorn

Lesson 3: Examining Film Stills in Small Groups

The next activity will allow students to take their observations even further as they examine still images from the film. Stills can be captured using free software downloaded from the Internet. Looking at stills allows students to spend quality time with many aspects of the film—literary, dramatic, and cinematic—that would otherwise be lost with a single viewing.

Students will be divided into groups, and each member given a task (facilitator, recorder, reporter, evaluators). After findings have been reported to the whole class by the reporter, each group member will

evaluate the group experience with a simple rubric. This rubric, given out and reviewed prior to the discussion, reminds students that group discussion should be purposeful. Students should stay on task, listen, make eye contact, be considerate, ask questions, make connections, and take risks.

Groups will discuss the following still images and accompanying questions:

1. The large blue eye. Whose eye is this? Why do you think the film begins with this image?
2. The Tyrell Corporation ziggurat. What might this architecture tell us about the future?
3. The video billboard of Asian woman taking a pill. How might this image relate to Huxley's *Brave New World*?
4. The neon dragon. How might this image relate to a larger theme in the film?
5. Tyrell with glasses and the interior of the complex. What themes do these images of Tyrell and his headquarters help support?
6. Bryant's office. How does the interior of Bryant's office compare to Tyrell's headquarters? What other features do you notice?
7. Rachael's eye framed by the Voigt-Kampff machine. Why is this image and the Voigt-Kampff machine ironic?
8. The picture found in Leon's apartment. Does this image remind you of anything? What are some of the features of the photograph?
9. Deckard's unicorn dream sequence, the pictures on his piano, and the origami unicorn. What might these images suggest about the character of Rick Deckard?
10. Crowded street scenes. What are some of the significant features of the street scenes?
11. Images of Zhora, Rachael, and Pris. What do the depictions of the three female replicants suggest? Brainstorm similarities and differences.
12. Roy Batty's pierced hand and the dove. What does Roy Batty injure his hand? Why is the dove significant? Why does Roy save Deckard?

Assessment

I will monitor students' reading in class, through their Journals, and through the classroom Blog. Reading quizzes will be given if I determine students need more external motivation. Students will be formally evaluated on their research, analysis, and presentation of a "clue" related to the film.

The unit will culminate in a test asking students to identify and discuss the significance of selected still images and quotations (from novel and film). Students will also be required to complete a project from three choices:

1. Write a critical essay comparing the experience of the novel to the experience of the film.
2. Compose and record a critical film commentary to be listened to while watching at least two scenes from the film.
3. Select a scene/chapter from the novel that is not represented in the film. Using the format for a screenplay, write a well-developed adaptation.

Notes

1. Brooks Landon, "'There's Some of Me In You': *Blade Runner* and the Adaptation of Science Fiction Literature into Film," in *Retrofitting* Blade Runner*: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's* Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? Ed. Judith B. Kerman (Bowling Green OH: Bowling Green State UP, 1991), 92.

2. George Mann, ed., *The Mammoth Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2001), 6.

3. Patricia S. Warrick, "Mechanical Mirrors, the Double, and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*?" *Mind in Motion: The Fiction of Philip K. Dick* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987), 118.

4. Margaret Talbot, "Duped," *The New Yorker* (2 July 2007)

5. Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (New York: Ballantine, 1968), 47.

6. Warrick, 121.

7. adapted from Warrick, 124.

8. Dick, 156

9. Dick, 5

10. Warrick, 131.

11. Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford UP, 1984), 101.

12. Andrew, 99.

13. Landon, 99.

14. Landon, 99.

15. Keith M. Booker, *Alternate Americas: Science Fiction and American Culture* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 182.

16. Booker, 178.

17. David Desser, "Race, Space and Class: The Politics of the SF Film from *Metropolis* to *Blade Runner*" in *Retrofitting* Blade Runner*: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's* Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? Ed. Judith B. Kerman (Bowling Green OH: Bowling Green State UP, 1991), 112.

18. Paul Fry, "Crime in Fiction, History, Region, Social Outlook" (talk presented at the Intensive Session of the Yale National Initiative, New Haven, CT, 9 July 2007).

19. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994), 125.

20. Paul M. Sammon, *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner* (New York: HarperPrism, 1996), 74.

21. Marshall Deutelbaum, "Memory/Visual Design: The Remembered Sights of Blade Runner." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 17:1 (1989):

69.

22. Alan B. Teasley and Ann Wilder, *Reel Conversations: Reading Films with Young Adults* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1996)

23. David Desser, "*Blade Runner*: Science Fiction and Transcendence." *Literature/Film Quarterly 13:3* (1985): 173.

24. R. Morrision, "*Casablanca* Meets *Stars Wars:* The Blakean Dialectics of *Blade Runner*." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 1 (1990): 2-10.

Resources

Bibliography

Booker, Will. *The Blade Runner Experience: The Legacy of a Science Fiction Classic.* London: Wallflower P, 2005. Essays (mostly from British academics) focus on adapting Philip K. Dick, identity, and the postmodern city. More current issues like gaming and fandom are also explored.

Kerman, Judith B. ed. *Retrofitting* Blade Runner*: Issues in Ridley Scott's* Blade Runner *and Philip K. Dick's* Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*?* Boling Green, OH: Bowling Green UPP, 1991. An excellent collection of essays. Focus is on themes, genre, adaptation, and aesthetics. Criticism based on theatrical release rather than Director's Cut.

Kolb, William M. "*Blade Runner*: An Annotated Bibliography." *Literature/ Film Quarterly*, 18: 1 (Jan 1990): 19-64. A comprehensive resource for all your *Blade Runner* needs. Summarizes sources and categorizes by source type.

Sammon, Paul. M. *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner*. New York: HarperPrism, 1996. A fun, behind-the-scenes read on the complex production and post-production of the film. More trivia than insightful analysis.

Filmography

Blade Runner: The Director's Cut. DVD. Directed by Ridley Scott. 1991; Burbank; Warner Home Video. There are a few versions of *Blade Runner*, including the original 1982 theatrical release. This cut is now the most common, but a "Final Cut" is planned for DVD release in December 2007.

Student Resources

Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* New York: Ballantine, 1968. The novel can be found in a number of different editions, but this was cheap enough to buy a class set. This edition is actually titled *Blade Runner* with the original title in parenthesis—an indication of how much the film has provoked a reassessment of the novel.

"Philip K. Dick: The Official Site." http://www.philipkdick.com (accessed 26 July 2007).

Materials for Classroom Use

1 Class set of novel

2 DVD of *Blade Runner: The Director's Cut*

3 Computer with media player

4 LCD projector and screen

5 Internet access

6 Large chart paper

Appendices

Appendix A: Virginia Standards of Learning for English and District Instructional Model

Reading

9.3 Explain the relationships between and among elements of literature: characters, plot, setting, tone, point of view, and theme.

10.3 Identify text organization and structure; identify main and supporting ideas; make predictions, draw inferences, connect prior knowledge to support reading comprehension; identify universal themes.

11.3 Discuss American literature as it reflects traditional and contemporary themes, motifs, universal characters, and genres.

Research and Writing

9.6, 10.7, 11.7 Generate, gather, plan, organize, and revise writing.

9.8 Credit the sources of quoted and paraphrased ideas.

10.11 Present information as an oral presentation and written report; use technology to access information, organize ideas, and develop writing.

District Instructional Model

The Richmond Public Schools Instructional Model includes the following components: snapshot; instructional focus; procedure and activities; class review; application; assessment; homework; and maintenance moment.

Appendix B: Technology Survey

Surveymonkey.com is one site where teachers can easily develop their own online survey. Students can submit answers and data can be easily analyzed. The free service only applies to the first ten questions, but often this is enough to generate a fruitful discussion.

I created a simple survey with the following "belief statements" on the uses of technology.

1. Technological advances make life better for everyone.
2. It would be great to have my own personal robot to take care of my needs.
3. It is dangerous to place too much faith in technology.
4. Having the latest technology is important to success.

5. The conveniences of modern technology outweigh the disadvantages.
6. Online networks (like MySpace) help develop and maintain friendships with other people.
7. If people let machines do too much for them, eventually people will no longer be able to do things for themselves.
8. It is possible for a human to love a machine.
9. Eventually, artificial intelligence will surpass human intelligence.
10. Eventually, humans and machines will merge, creating a new species.

Students must answer either "I agree" or I disagree." After collecting the data, I will facilitate an open-ended discussion on what the results might suggest. As a final activity at the end of the unit, this survey will be retaken and the new results compared and analyzed.

Appendix C: Journal

Students will maintain a double-entry journal. This assignment will help students read with the eye of a detective, uncovering possible meanings. Interacting with the text helps students slow down and pay attention to the language. This helps develop reading comprehension and analytical skills. Students can begin to appreciate the critical art (and joy) of close reading.

For each chapter of the novel, students will write one entry composed of at least four short passages. Students should graphically divide their journals so that one side of the page provides a space for interesting lines or passages taken directly from the text. The other side of the page provides space to interpret the text. I provide a guide that gives them a range of interpretive options including:

1. questioning to clarify or probe
2. reflecting on possible meanings
3. making connections to other texts, to self, and to world
4. visualizing with drawings
5. discussing literary techniques and their effects

Appendix D: Classroom Blog

Online Blogs (Web logs) provide an excellent forum for student discussion about literature. Like a traditional journal, Blogs provide an area for students to experiment with ideas and writing. As with strong classroom discourse, the teacher is a facilitator and not the focal point of the discussion. Blogs also utilize students' online literacy so many come to this activity with great enthusiasm.

Prior to initiating a Blog, discuss ground rules and have students agree that such rules are essential for fruitful dialogue. Ask students what kind of responses are not appropriate and might hinder full participation. Remind students that the goal is to have everyone participating in a conversation about the literature. The goal is not witty repartee, but in-depth examination of the text.

Blogging has become easy to implement, and there are a multitude of free sites to begin (blogger.com, wordpress.com, blog.com, etc.). A good introduction to educational use of Blogs (and Wikis) can be found at www.wikiblogedu.org.