**A Level English Language and Literature:**

*Over the next 2 weeks, you will research the dystopian genre, where ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ fits within this genre, how current society could be viewed as ‘dystopian’, finishing in your extended task.*

**Week 1 - What is dystopian literature and speculative fiction?**

Create a power point/mind map/short video/handout of your findings which are shaped by the bullet pointed questions below:

* What is dystopian fiction? Define ‘dystopia’.
* What are the characteristics of the genre and examples of these?
* What is the history of the dystopian genre? What has influenced the genre’s development?

This should be in your own words and you should summarise the ideas presented in the articles and videos below:

Read and make notes on the links below to help you answer the above questions in detail.

<https://jeremiahdickey.com/How-to-Recognize-a-Dystopia>

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-dystopian-fiction-learn-about-the-5-characteristics-of-dystopian-fiction-with-examples#what-is-the-significance-of-dystopian-fiction>

<https://electricliterature.com/the-rise-of-dystopian-fiction-from-soviet-dissidents-to-70s-paranoia-to-murakami/>

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/05/a-golden-age-for-dystopian-fiction>

<https://www.thegreatcoursesdaily.com/utopian-and-dystopian-works-of-literature/>

Why do we need dystopian literature?

<https://the-artifice.com/dystopian-literature-purpose/>

Atwood herself describes ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ as not simply dystopian. She describes it as ‘Speculative fiction’. What is Speculative fiction? What are the conventions of this genre?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hRO6Ls8q54>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJFBHnFRdHE>

[http://thelovelybones.wikifoundry.com/page/Speculative+Fiction](http://thelovelybones.wikifoundry.com/page/Speculative%2BFiction)

What is the ‘what if’ question which Margaret Atwood poses in The Handmaid’s Tale?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7a8LnKCzsBw>

Speculative fiction could be defined as ‘a place beyond reality, a place which could have been, or might have been’. What type of reality does Atwood present and why?

**Theocracy**, government by divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided. In many theocracies, government leaders are members of the clergy, and the state’s legal system is based on religious law. Theocratic rule was typical of early civilizations.

**Totalitarianism**, form of [government](https://www.britannica.com/topic/government) that theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of individual life to the [authority](https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-power) of the [state](https://www.britannica.com/topic/state-sovereign-political-entity).

**Week 2: Atwood’s Inspiration and context**

Margaret Atwood calls her book *The Handmaid’s Tale* “speculative fiction”, instead of “science fiction”. She made sure to only include technology that already exists, and write about things that had already happened at some point in history. The terrifying events of the novel all have their precedents in some of the darkest chapters in world history.

Please answer the following questions this week:

**What moments in history inspired Margaret Atwood?**

**Give examples from the novel which are connected to these historical influences.**

**Why does she use these moments in history? What point is she trying to make?**

You could add slides to your existing ppt, or create a mind map, or illustrated infographic.

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2019/sep/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-testaments-real-life-inspiration/>

<https://historycollection.co/17-moments-in-history-that-inspired-the-handmaids-tale/5/>

**Why is The Handmaid’s Tale so relevant today?**

How did Trump’s election make The Handmaid’s Tale even more relevant?

<https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/the-handmaids-tale-is-parallel-to-real-life>

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180425-why-the-handmaids-tale-is-so-relevant-today>

**Final Task:**

* Using your research, and knowledge of how to analyse an extract from both GCSE Language and Literature as well as your research in the context relating to The Handmaid’s Tale, you should now complete the essay linked to the extract from ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’.



**Help box:**

Consider Gilead as a dystopian, prison like storyworld. How is this conveyed and what does it symbolise?

Consider how the setting reflects the society of Gilead.

Consider how Atwood conveys that the way that oppression has become routine.

Link to the relevant context (from your research) which inspired this setting and Atwood’s intentions.

Use your knowledge of writing GCSE Literature responses, but apply the more specific language terminology below, looking for patterns of language.

**Terminology which may be of relevance in this extract:** noun-phrases, plural pronouns, semantic field, metaphor, simile, adverbs, verbs, thought verbs, lists, repetition, simple sentence, and symbolism.

**Summer reading:**

Throughout this course, you will be studying *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, but to name a few. It is recommended that you pre-read these texts so you have time to explore the plot and characters at your own pace before the course begins.