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| **Highlighted Text-More Than a Trend: Why Dystopias Matter** | **Reader Annotations** |
| In the world of YA literature, it can sometimes feel like we are constantly bouncing from one trend to the next. One great book captures everyone’s imagination, and the next thing we know, the shelves are crowded with a thousand others like it.At the moment, dystopias are unquestionably on top. In the wake of the phenomenal success of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, it seems like every other YA book that comes out features a love triangle set against a backdrop of ruined cities, advanced technology, and scary totalitarian governments.There are many reasons dystopias appeal to teens. For one thing, they are a lot of fun — filled with action and romance — but they are also inherently relatable. Teens are at a time in their lives when they probably feel oppressed by those in authority. High school itself can feel a lot like a dystopian society where their every move is tracked and controlled. Like the characters in the books, they may long to rebel. Add to that the uncertain times we live in and the concerns teens may have about the future of the world they will soon inherit, and the overwhelming popularity of this particular genre right now is no surprise. However, this is one YA trend that serves a greater purpose.A good dystopia shines a light on things that are wrong with our society and where we could be headed if we continue down a certain path. You can see the future it describes growing naturally and plausibly out of the present we live in. It makes you think. It gets under your skin because you can see it really happening. If a good fantasy builds a world the reader wants to live in, a good dystopia creates a world the reader really, really does *not* want to live in. Bluetooth headsets creep me out because they remind me of the seashell radios in *Fahrenheit 451*. I know this is weird, but I cannot get past it. These books become a part of our psyche.What classic dystopias like *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984* did for their time, books like *The Hunger Games* are doing for ours. Of course, like any trend, some titles are much better than others, and it may be true that a lot of junk has gotten published that never would have seen the light of day if not for the Hunger Games craze. But there is also a crop of very fine books out there that really have something to say.[2011 Printz Award winner](http://http//www.ala.org/yalsa/printz/previous/2011) *Ship Breaker* by Paolo Bacigalupi is set on the Gulf Coast in a future United States ravaged by extreme climate change and fuel shortages, where the global power structure has been completely rearranged. Eerie and insightful, it constructs a world that could easily become reality if we do not take better care of our planet.It is also easy to see how the weaknesses in our current economy and out-of-control consumption of resources could lead to a future like the one described in Gabrielle Zevin’s *All These Things I’ve Done* — a latter-day Prohibition era in which chocolate and coffee are illegal drugs. This book was a [Teens’ Top Ten](http://http//www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/teenreading/teenstopten/2012TeensTopTenNominations.pdf) nominee this year.In *Matched* by Ally Condie ([2011 Best Fiction for Young Adults](http://http//www.ala.org/yalsa/booklistsawards/booklists/bestficya/bfya2011), [2011 Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers](http://http//www.ala.org/yalsa/booklistsawards/booklists/quickpicks/qp2011)), a clever homage to *1984* and *The Giver*, every life decision from what you have for breakfast to whom you marry is made by the Society. This one especially got me thinking about the implications of all written communication becoming digital.Not to leave out the very book that sparked the trend, in *The Hunger Games* itself, Suzanne Collins takes on the frivolity in pop culture and the way it seems to take more and more of a shock factor to satisfy our obsession with reality TV.Sure, all these books are great up-all-night reads, replete with pirates, gangsters, and star-crossed lovers, but they are also much more than that. They provide a lens to look at big-picture issues from bioethics to personal liberty and challenge us to think about these things for ourselves.I for one am glad these books are being written. They need to be read, and perhaps there is no better audience for this genre than teenagers. After all, today’s teens will ultimately be the ones making the decisions that shape the future. We are now living in the time in which those classic dystopias were set. I would like to think that the world Orson Wells and Ray Bradbury envisioned never came about in part because all the young people who read their books heeded the warning and kept it from happening.So what is your favorite YA dystopia? Which one gives you chills?– Wendy Daughdrill, currently reading *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs | Why do you think dystopias are on top? How do they appeal to young readers?What is one young adult trend in dystopian literature? Why do you think this has been added to modern dystopian literature?How can dystopian literature serve as allegories to our society? Highlight examples from the article to support your thought.What other types of novels come to mind besides The Hunger Games when you think of dystopia?What is pop culture? How does pop culture play into The Hunger Games’ storyline? Give examples. |