

Lesson Objective

Read the short story *The City of Silence* by Ma Boyong and identify plot elements within the story which fit the definition of Speculative Fiction, author's purpose and connections to the essential question "How do you define "personhood? What makes someone or something, a person?" .

Summary:

Ma Boyong, winner of the 2010 People's Literature Prize, one of the highest honors in the area of the arts in China, writes *The City of Silence* as a echo of Orwell's *1984*, which attempts to show how the technology that's been developed since Orwell's day might change (and exacerbate) the repressive techniques of an oppressive state. "Technology is neutral. But the process of technology will cause a free world to become ever freer, and a totalitarian world to become ever more repressive." It has some interesting thoughts on how individuals, while despising the system, can simultaneously be agents of that system.

Class Activity #1 Initial Read:

Assigned homework reading pages 151-6, classroom reading 157-162 (conclusion)

Two Column Notes: Two-column notes can provide an excellent outline for use as a writing tool. The student can use the notes as an outline for a summary by turning main ideas into topic sentences and adding key details as supports. (It is important to note at this point the necessity of paraphrasing.) Also, the notes can later be used as a study sheet. For example, the students can fold their paper, turn the main ideas into questions, and then use the main ideas to recall the details as well as use the details to generate the main ideas.

(individually answer discussion questions outlined below)

1. Below, list five relevant facts about Ma Boyong life as outlined i the biographical information given on pages 151-152
2. Given the summary above, and your reading for homework, what life experiences may have given Boyong insight on the themes of communication, technology and censorship.
3. Explain what entropy is in your own words.

4. Identify the central theme of the story, what, in your opinion, is the author's intent behind the message?
5. Describe the character of Arvardan, how do you think these traits compliment the central theme of the story,

With discussion questions, Think Pair Share: A collaborative learning strategy in which students work together to solve a problem or answer a question about an assigned reading. This technique requires students to think individually about a topic or answer to a question; and share ideas with classmates. Discussing an answer with a partner serves to maximize participation, focus attention and engage students in comprehending the reading material.

Class Activity #2 Synthesis:

Save the Last Word: Pass out index cards or slips of paper to each student, one card for each quote they have found. On one side of the card, ask students to write down the statements from the text. On the other side, instruct them to write any comments or feelings about their statements. Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students. All students in the group are allowed to share one of their quote cards. The first student reads one of their quotes to the group and shows where to locate it in the text. However, the student isn't allowed to make any comments about his or her quote until the other members of the group give their reactions. Therefore, the student gets the last word in the discussion of the statement.

Framed Paragraph: Framed paragraphs are pre-writing tools that help students write well-developed paragraphs. They are skeleton formats containing information about the main ideas and transition words that guide the organization and the development of supportive details. Framed paragraphs offer a structure for students to use as they begin to write paragraphs and essays.

Class Activity #3 Pre Writing:

Use your framed paragraph from the previous activity: WRITE an essay in which you CITE the story and a nonfiction article to SOLVE the question

“What happens to our freedom as individuals when the line between humanity and technology is no longer visible or under our control?”

Class Activity #4 Comparing to outside sources:

Brainstorm with a partner what you recall from reading George Orwell last year. Once you have some plot details that you can jot down, read the following article on Orwell's work 1984 entitled

“George Orwell’s Letter On Why He Wrote ‘1984’”

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/george-orwells-letter-on-why-he-wrote-1984>

Then, to juxtapose this theme to The City of Silence and Ma Boyong, read the article below entitled:

Science fiction and the People's Republic: the fantastic truth about China

<https://www.afr.com/lifestyle/arts-and-entertainment/books/science-fiction-and-the-peoples-republic-the-fantastic-truth-about-china-20180521-h10c1l>

WRAP UP ESSAY:

Using the Framed Paragraph you composed in activity #3, The City of Silence by Ma Boyong, and the two articles provided above, write a 1,200 word essay answering the following prompt:

How does Orwell’s vision of the future compare with Boyong’s? What is the role of Government, the individual and technology in both works? How has the evolution of the Chinese political landscape influenced the point of view of the author?