

BRAVE NEW WORLD

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: To provide teachers with instructional materials that will enhance their students' understanding of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* through development of skills in the areas of vocabulary, literary analysis, writing, reading comprehension, and appreciation of the novel via a multi-level instructional approach.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THIS PACKET: To help students

1. build vocabulary based on the language used in the novel.
2. develop the reading comprehension skills of determining cause-effect relationships and recognizing sequence of events and chapter groupings.
3. develop the literary analysis skills of interpreting character, theme, symbolism, and figurative language.
4. practice descriptive, narrative, and critical writing skills.

APPROACHES TO BRAVE NEW WORLD

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is a remarkable fusion of diverse elements, with something of value for every reader. A thought-provoking novel of ideas that does not hesitate to devote many pages to exposition of its themes, it is also a novel rich in action, characterization, and irony. It can therefore appeal to students on both a narrative and a reflective level. Further, its blending of the "two cultures" makes it equally accessible to both the enthusiast of literature and the student who prefers science, or social studies, to English. Finally, its prose style, with vivid and often humorous detail, which will appeal to any reader, is mixed with challenges of syntax, diction, and allusion that will test the wits of the most sophisticated reader.

Considered as a story, *Brave New World* is filled with dramatic or amusing incidents — the rituals on the Reservation, Lenina's attempted seduction of John, the hospital riot — alternating with episodes of psychological insight and social criticism. Its narrative offers the teacher many opportunities to discuss foreshadowing, contrast, and irony. Students may consider, for example, how the Director's recollection of his Reservation visit proves prophetic, or how Huxley interweaves two different conversations for dramatic effect.

But it is Huxley's skill at characterization that prevents *Brave New World* from being merely a sermon or a polemic. Against a background of stock characters — Lenina Crowne, Henry Foster, the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning — who are defined by their blind commitment to the society's mores, Huxley sets two rounded and complex figures, Bernard Marx and John Savage, as well as two lesser but also intriguing characters, Helmholtz Watson and Mustapha Mond. Both John and Bernard have valid criticisms to make, and both display virtues of character. But some weakness — John's puritanical

drives, Bernard's insecurity and egotism — prevents each from being a plastic, cartoon hero. By studying these characters, students can learn to appreciate the complexities and contradictions of good literary characterization, and of real human nature.

In its themes, *Brave New World* offers much pertinent material for classroom discussion. Although it is a half-century old, most of the novel's predictions of technological and social change are either already fulfilled, or now seem quite plausible. Students can examine the book to determine what phenomena Huxley foresaw (for example — television, drug use, artificial insemination) as well as to find what outcomes he failed to anticipate (overpopulation, the energy crisis, et cetera). The conflict of values in the novel, between the old and the new, freedom and happiness, or immediate gratification and higher goals, can lead to stimulating classroom debates or argumentative writing assignments. These can be geared to the abilities of all students; weaker pupils may take as their starting point some of the hypnopædic slogans, while stronger readers and writers can choose sides in the debate between John and Mustapha Mond.

Technically, *Brave New World* offers students extensive practice in grasping subtleties of tone, and in assimilating details and ideas from an unfamiliar perspective. Huxley's use of inversion (the reversed connotations of motherhood and promiscuity, for example), or his invention of new clichés for sleep-teaching and popular songs, and his contrast of these with John's Shakespearean quotations, can make students more aware of the uses of language. These can lead to discussion, or to imitative writing assignments, in the areas of satire, or of advertising and propaganda. Huxley's many allusions, particularly in his use of names or his description of the Fordian "religion," can lead to a number of brief library research assignments. The novel can therefore be of value in linguistic and writing units as well as in literary ones.

The uses of *Brave New World* in relation to other literary texts, or in thematic units, are almost inexhaustible. The teacher may wish to assign *1984* for a study in contrasting, but equally frightening, future visions. Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* is similar to *Brave New World* in its vision of a society based on consumption, sloganeering, and lack of solitude, and even in its debate between the protagonist and a skilled but cynical defender of the society. (In an individualized reading program, *Fahrenheit 451* may be assigned to weaker readers, while more able students are studying *Brave New World*, and the two groups may report on their readings and discuss the novels' related themes.) Huxley's novel may also be read in a science fiction unit together with such lesser-known works as Eugene Zamiatin's *We*, a 1924 dystopia by a Soviet writer, or Frank Herbert's *The Eyes of Heisenberg*, another novel concerned with the possibilities of genetic engineering. But units on advertising, satire, propaganda, values, or technology and society, can

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SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CHART

Key Level 1—Relatively easy exercises
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SKILL AREA	ACTIVITY SHEET	TIME OF USE	LEVEL	SKILL
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