Blogtopia: Blogging about Your Own Utopia
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Overview: After studying the utopian literature, students design their own utopian society, publishing the explanation of their ideal world on a blog. As they blog about their utopia, students establish the habits, practices, and organizing social structures that citizens will follow in their utopian societies.

The lesson plan includes alternative handouts for classrooms where computer or blog access is limited. In this alternative, students complete the same basic activities, but publish their work using a Flip Book.

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<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>9-12</th>
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<td>Lesson Time</td>
<td>6-50-minute sessions</td>
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Objectives

- Students will
  - work collaboratively to design their utopian societies.
  - adjust their use of written and visual language to communicate effectively for different purposes.
  - write a series of texts that communicate effectively with their audience.
  - consider elements of visual rhetoric as they design their blogs.
  - find pictures and resources on the Internet to support the content in their utopias.

NCTE/IRA Standards

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5 - Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
8 - Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Preparation

- Prior to this lesson, students should have covered a work of utopian literature. Students might have studied the transcendentalist writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, in particular discussing the utopian societies at Walden and Brook Farm. The ReadWriteThink lesson [Examining Transcendentalism through Popular Culture](https://www.readwritethink.org/lesson/examining-transcendentalism-through-popular-culture) can provide an introduction to the topic. Alternately, students may have studied Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*.
- Look through WordPress to learn the program before the assignment. As with any open online site, remember that anyone can post to these sites.
Some material on them will be inappropriate for your classes. Be sure that the resources that you choose are in line with your district’s acceptable use policy. Some schools filter blogging sites, so you may need to speak with your technology coordinator ahead of time to get approval.

- If your school limits computer or blog access consider the alternative included below, which uses the Utopian Assignment, Utopian Rubric, and Flip Book.
- Make sure that all students have e-mail accounts, which are needed to set up accounts with blogging and photo host sites.
- Make copies of the handouts for all students: Blogtopia Assignment, Examples for the United States, Blogtopia Rubric, and The Bare Bones Guide to HTML.
- Test the Persuasion Map, Letter Generator, and ReadWriteThink Notetaker on your computers to familiarize yourself with the tools and ensure that you have the Flash plug-in installed. You can download the plug-in from the technical support page.

### Procedure

**Session One: Planning/Strategy Session**

1. Introduce the project by connecting to your class study of utopian societies. Explain that like the author(s) the class has been reading, students will create their own utopian societies.

2. Using information on Utopian Communities from the Beinecke Library at Yale and the Amana Colonies from National Park Service, provide an overview or review of utopian communities.

3. Challenge students to answer the following questions to help brainstorm ideas for their individual perfect societies:
   - If you could live anywhere in the world, where would you live?
   - Why? What about this place appeals to you?
   - Describe your perfect life.
     - Who would you want with you?
     - What would you do every day?
     - How would you make money?
     - What kind of rules would you follow (or not)?

4. Discuss similarities and differences between students’ brainstorming ideas and contemporary life in the United States.

5. Pass out the Blogtopia Assignment, and explain that students will develop their utopian communities in small groups.

6. Using the Pre-AP strategy called SOAPS strategy, go over the basic rhetorical situation for the project:
   - **Subject:** The perfect society
   - **Occasion:** Dissatisfied with the current situation, many people are leaving their current societies
   - **Audience:** People who are seeking a new home
   - **Purpose:** To attract new citizens to your utopia in order to help it survive
   - **Speaker:** An authority on this new “perfect world”

7. Pass out the Blogtopia Rubric, and go over the information together,
connecting the information to the SOAPS outline and your coverage of utopian communities and utopian literature. Answer any questions that students have about the project.

8. To help students envision the kinds of text required for the project, work through the list, asking students to identify the Examples for the United States. Alternately you can pass out the example sheet and simply review the information.

9. Arrange students in small groups, and allow the rest of the session for students to begin their projects. During their time together, ask students to accomplish the following tasks:
   - Begin brainstorming ideas for their society.
   - Schedule how they will spend the next five days to develop their utopias.
   - Divide the tasks to be completed.
   - Name the society.

10. Ask students to turn in these preliminary plans at the end of the session. Review their plans and provide support and feedback. You will return the plans at the beginning of the next session.

Session Two: Orienting Students to Blogging

1. Return the plans from the previous sessions to the groups. Answer any questions students have and provide any general comments and support.

2. Explain that this session will be a mini-Lesson on blogging. Students will likely know of the term and may have blogs of their own already. Ask students to share what they know about blogs and blogging, noting their responses on the board or on chart paper.

3. Shape students’ responses into a class definition of blogging. A general example definition is “a blog is a kind of online journal that is relatively easy way to publish and allows writers (bloggers) to share ideas, social commentaries, and reflections.”

4. Discuss the legal guidelines in the Electronic Freedom Foundation’s Bloggers’ FAQ: Student Blogging and how the guidelines impact this project. In particular, talk about the kinds of language and content that are appropriate.

5. Demonstrate the blog hosting site that you have chosen for the class, and discuss the choices that groups can make for their utopian blogs. If you have chosen the Blogger site, for instance, you would demonstrate how to set up an account and pick a template that they would consider using to publish their materials.

6. As you review the options on the blog hosting site that you have chosen, make connections to the goals of the project and the rhetorical situation that has been established with the SOAPS strategy. For instance, encourage students to consider the tone that they want to establish with their template or layout choices. If their society is casual, their template should reflect that tone through colors, font, and design. If their society is more formal, the design for the site should have a more formal look and feel.

7. Once students have completed the basics for their blogs, turn to the
specific entries that students will compose for the different parts of the project. Demonstrate how to create an entry on the blog hosting site that you have chosen. If the site has special buttons or features to help with the look of the entries, be sure to go over this information as well (e.g., buttons for bold and italics fonts).

8. In most cases, students will want to go beyond the basic capabilities that are built into the blog hosting system. Pass out copies of the The Bare Bones Guide to HTML or visit the site online. Go over the basic information on this HTML sheet, and answer any questions that students have about marking up their blog entries.

9. Remind students to preview their changes before posting their entries.

10. Create an example entry to demonstrate the entire process for the class.

11. Answer any questions that students have about the blog host or their projects.

12. Allow the rest of the session for students to work on their blogs. Circulate among groups, answering questions and providing feedback and support as students work.

Sessions Three to Five: Blogging Work Sessions

1. During these work sessions, students continue to work on their blogs.

2. In mini-lessons, as desired, demonstrate additional tools that students can use as they compose and revise the text for the Blogtopia entries:
   - Persuasion Map can be used to gather ideas for the Invitation to Friends and Advertisement.
   - Letter Generator can be used to create a rough draft of the Invitation to Friends. (Note that this text will need to be retyped.)
   - ReadWriteThink Notetaker can be used to outline any of the texts, but may be especially useful for the Daily Itinerary.

3. Additionally, you might review example texts (e.g., the United States’ Declaration of Independence) and discuss the qualities from the example that should also be seen in students’ blog entries.

4. When not providing additional instruction, among groups, answering questions and providing feedback and support as students work.

5. Remind students to compare their work to the requirements outlined in the Blogtopia Rubric as they design their blogtopias.

6. Allow additional sessions as necessary for students to complete their work. At the end of these sessions, students should turn in the URLs for their blogtopias.

Session Six: Visiting Group Blogtopias

1. Post the URLs for all group blogs—either write the information on the board or on chart paper, or create a Web page with the links for students to refer to.

2. Explain that during this session, students will explore the blogs created by other groups in the class. Ask each student to visit a minimum of five blogs and use the comment tools on the blogs to leave comments for the authors.

3. Post a list of possible comments on the board or on chart paper:
   - Comment on what you liked.
4. Encourage students to provide constructive feedback. The comment session should focus on reflection and support for other writers in the classroom community.

5. After visiting the other blogs, each student should write a reflection about his or her own blog, focusing on one or more of the following questions:
   - What was your group trying to accomplish? Did you succeed? Why or why not?
   - What would you change about the group’s approach to the project? What did the group do well?
   - What did you like about the project? What was difficult? What was easy?
   - What grade does your blog deserve? Why?

Alternative

If computer or blog access is limited in your classroom, customize this project using the Flip Book. Students can still create utopian societies in small groups, but have the groups publish their work in the Flip Book. Discuss how to decide which portion of the project to put on which pages in the Flip Book (e.g., longer portions should go on longer pages). Use the blank flip book to demonstrate the planning process and how to fit the information on the pages. Use the Utopian Assignment and Utopian Rubric in lieu of the handouts from the body of this lesson.

Resources

Bloggers’ FAQ - Student Blogging
http://www.eff.org/bloggers/lg/faq-students.php
This legal guideline from the Electronic Freedom Foundation’s is an essential read for teachers and students.

Blogs in Education
http://courses.uhcl.edu/blog/
This site provides additional resources on blogging that teachers can use to learn more background information, find additional supporting sites for the classroom, and locate more blog hosting sites.

America and the Utopian Dream
http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/utopia/utopcom.html
This resource from Beinecke Library at Yale offers information about specific utopian settlements in America from the 1600s through the 1970s.

Utopias in Americas
http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/amana/utopia.htm
The National Park Service offers this overview of Utopian settlements in America in the 19th Century.

Student Assessment

- Focus on observation and anecdotal note taking as students work on their projects to provide ongoing assessment of their progress.
- Use the Blogtopia Rubric to assess students’ projects.
- Review students’ self-assessment reflections from the last session to provide additional feedback and as connections to your rubric-based evaluation of the project.

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=942