English 1B Pathways Fall 2015 **Critical Analysis Project**

**Overview**: For this assignment, you will write a critical analysis and response to a work of fiction (film, play, or fiction) that addresses enduring human concerns about the role of science and technology in our lives. You will consider the work in its specific historical and cultural context, discussing how it reflects and comments on the concerns and values of the society that produced it. Note: You can use the book you are reading for your book club for this project if you want, even if it isn’t fiction, but the criteria on which you judge it will be somewhat different.

**Themes**:

1. The power of science and technology to improve or damage the quality of human life
2. The relationship between technology and political power
3. The relationship between education and human rights (individual and collective)
4. The ways that humans relate to the natural world and its resources, on a spectrum from short-term exploitation to long-term sustainable management of resources
5. Continually evolving definitions of human consciousness and human nature, especially as these definitions relate to advancements in science and technology
6. Evolving scientific and theological explanations of the universe, especially as these explanations have differed over time and among different cultures.
7. The relationship between scientific advancements and business concerns
8. The ethical dimensions of science and technology
9. The complexities and controversies inherent in any effort to conceive and work toward a better world (especially in the genre of utopian/dystopian fiction).
10. The role of artists as creators and interpreters of human experience. (The term “artists” is meant broadly here to include storytellers, writers, and musicians, as well as those who paint, draw, and sculpt.)

**Details/Content:**

* **Audience:** Write for an educated audience who would be interested in the work and is familiar with it. (Don’t retell the story for them except as necessary to make your points.)
* **Length/format:** Approximately 1200 words, typed, MLA format
* **Introduce the film or story**, *briefly*, by saying what it is about; identify the filmmaker/writer, when it was made, when/where the story takes place.
* **Set the film or story in its specific cultural and historical context**: Tell us what timely issues the film addresses. For example, *Caprica* reflects our contemporary anxiety about religious extremism, terrorism, scientific hubris, exposure of our young people to graphic sex and violence in their entertainment, the growing power of super-rich and ethically challenged business tycoons, particularly in the “military-industrial complex,” and our complex feelings of pride and fear provoked by the machines we make to do our dirty work for us. Feel free to use outside sources for this section if you want, but cite them properly.
* **Identify the film’s or story’s enduring human concerns, as well**. For example, in addition to the specifically contemporary themes, *Caprica* also explores timeless problems like power struggles between parents and children, the desire to defeat death, and the struggle of marginalized minorities to establish their human worth, both in their own minds and in the hierarchy of the dominant society.
* **Interpret a theme and thesis in the work:** Choose a central theme of the work and articulate what the filmmaker or writer is saying about it. This is likely to be complex, so don’t oversimplify it. (We’ll work on this in class.) Even though you will likely identify more than one concern of the film in your introduction (sections described above), you should focus on just one to fully explore and interpret in your paper.
* **Analysis and Evaluation:** Discuss how well the film or story works and why. **Be specific about the criteria** you are using, and **offer specific details** from the film or story to support your evaluation. Some criteria to consider are these: Are the ideas interesting, explored in enough depth, expressed well? How engaging are the characters? How good is the acting? Is the story complex enough to be interesting but not so much as to be confusing? How is the cinematography (if it’s a film) or imagery if it’s a book? Special effects (if any)? Choose 3 or 4 criteria--it’s a short paper. In all cases your discussion should explain how each element you examine contributes to (or detracts from) the overall effectiveness of the work.
* **Response:** You can also include your personal response to the film/book, most likely in the beginning or the end, but don’t take up too much space doing that.

**Procedure**:

1. **Select a title** below based on your own interests and background. Note: Don’t choose one you have already written about in another class. Expand your horizons.
2. **Write a topic proposal** telling me briefly which one you chose and why (1 short paragraph). DUE:
3. **Watch/read the work**, and **read what others have said about it**, especially professional critics (at least 2). You should cite at least one in your paper and respond to it. It is also good to read what the filmmaker/writer/director has to say about it, if you can.
4. **Write a 1-page outline that includes your thesis.** This will be submitted for comment and graded as a homework assignment. DUE:
5. **Write a full rough draft** in proper MLA format, clearly citing your sources, print out two copies, and bring them to the peer review on the assigned day. (You can earn 15 points *only* for 2 printed copies of the full draft.) DUE:
6. After the peer review, consider the advice you got and **revise the paper**.
7. **Print** out the paper, after **submitting your final draft to Turnitin.com**. Staple the final draft to the peer review sheet and the rough draft you got comments on. **Submit the stapled bundle** at the beginning of class on the day it is due. DUE:

**Suggested Film/Reading List**: The titles below are films except as noted. Feel free to pitch other titles to me if you have more candidates, but be ready to defend your suggestions of the grounds of depth and appropriateness.

Speculative Fiction (SF):

* Tomorrowland (DVD available by October)
* Serenity
* Caprica
* Avatar
* Princess Mononoke
* Mirrormask
* Ender’s Game (novel/film)
* Her
* Ex Machina
* Blade Runner
* The Last Enemy
* Children of Men
* Never Let me Go (novel/film)
* “N-Words” (short story)
* Harrison Bergeron (short story/film)
* Brave New World (novel/film)
* The Time Machine (novel/films)
* The Circle (novel)
* Oryx and Crake (novel)
* The City Not Long After (novel)
* As Far as Thought Can Reach (play)

Bio-pics and reality-based feature films:

* Swades (great Bollywood film with a NASA engineer as the hero)
* Waste Land (documentary) Born into Brothels (documentary)
* Promised Land (fracking)
* Erin Brockovich (evil corporation vs a plucky legal secretary)
* The Constant Gardener (corporate thriller in Africa)
* Gorillas in the Mist (bio-pic of a heroic biologist)
* Stand and Deliver, The First Grader (education themes)
* Pirates of Silicon Valley, The Social Network (recent tech bio-pics)
* Einstein and Eddington, The Imitation Game (bio-pics of historical turning points)