Unit 3 — Dystopias and Utopias — Teacher copy

Track E · Klasse 13 · Niveau E (Basisfach / Leistungsfach) · Abitur year

Niveau E

1. Reading

Read the text and use it for the activities below.

Reading — three extracts (paraphrased)

More — Utopia (1516): The island of Utopia has no private property and limited working hours; decisions are made by elected magistrates; the regime is humane but homogeneous.

Le Guin — The Dispossessed (1974): The anarchist moon Anarres has no government, no property, no money — and a very real culture of informal social pressure that makes dissent exhausting. The subtitle *An Ambiguous Utopia* is load-bearing.

Atwood — The Handmaid's Tale: Gilead's regime speaks the *language of utopia* (purity, order, fertility) while functioning as dystopia. The structural mirror is exact.

Vocabulary — utopia / dystopia

positive utopia, ambiguous utopia, eutopia (good place / nowhere), dystopia, dystopian inversion, the imaginary blueprint, social engineering, informal coercion, homogeneity-as-control.

2. Practise

Niveau E — controlled

1. Match: eutopia → good-place / nowhere; ambiguous utopia → utopia with disclosed costs; dystopian inversion → utopia turned inside out.
2. T or F: More's *Utopia* is straightforwardly humane; Le Guin's *Dispossessed* hides its costs; Atwood's Gilead speaks utopia's vocabulary.

Niveau E — productive

3. Build 4 sentences applying utopia-dystopia vocabulary to one extract pair.

3. Your turn

Comparative essay, 450 words. Argue that Le Guin's *ambiguous utopia* clarifies Atwood's Gilead. Use 4 integrated quotes + 7 academic discourse markers + 2 cleft structures.

Sample

Ursula K. Le Guin's subtitle to The Dispossessed — An Ambiguous Utopia — is the most useful single phrase for reading Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The reason is structural rather than thematic. Le Guin's anarchist moon Anarres has no government, no property, and no money. By contrast with More's classical *Utopia* (1516), however, Le Guin discloses the costs of her imaginary society as part of the imagining. Anarres is held together by informal social pressure that the novel describes as exhausting. *"To break a promise to a stranger is the smallest thing,"* one character thinks; *"to break a promise to a comrade is to be unmade."* Accordingly, the utopia is not corrupted into dystopia — the dystopian element is structurally embedded from the start. It is precisely this ambiguity that Atwood's Gilead inverts. Gilead *speaks* the language of utopia — purity, order, fertility — while *functioning* as dystopia. The two novels are mirror images: Le Guin discloses the costs of a humane society; Atwood discloses the cosmetic that hides an inhumane one. By contrast with More's homogeneous *Utopia*, both Le Guin and Atwood understand that homogeneity is itself a form of social engineering. More specifically, the *Historical Notes* of *The Handmaid's Tale* enact the third move that More's 1516 text could not: a satirical reading of the act of academic recovery itself. Where More gives us a single voice, Atwood gives us three layers — Gilead's utopian rhetoric, Offred's silent counter-narrative, and the academy's well-meaning future appropriation. In this regard, reading Atwood through Le Guin clarifies that the dystopian inversion is not the opposite of utopia but its disclosed underside. Both genres ask the same question: *what would a deliberately imagined society have to be willing to lose?* More gives one answer; Le Guin a more honest one; Atwood the most disturbing — that the society in question may already be losing it.

4. Further reading / listening

- Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516).
- Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (1974).
- Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*.

5. Teacher answer key

Controlled. 1. all true.

2. F (More's *Utopia* is also disturbingly homogeneous), F (Le Guin discloses the costs — that is the point), T.

Productive. 3. Open.