

Individual World Building Exercise

“[T]he real work is not to convert those who hate us but to change the world so that haters don’t hold disproportionate power and so that others are not sucked into the nightmare.”

– Rebecca Solnit, [“Progress is Not Inevitable”](#)

Part One: Creative Notes that Build Your World (1-2 pages)

Choose **one** social justice issue that you want to address, and imagine a world in which this problem has been solved. Write a short (one or two page) **creative description** of this imaginary world. Look at the short stories in *Octavia’s Brood*, as well as the world building example in *The Dispossessed*, for ideas. NK Jemisin’s discussion of world building (in your short readings handout) may also be helpful.

- Pick **one** social justice issue that would be solved/ treated differently in your world, and work backwards from there. Consider what else would be necessary in your world in order to enable this difference. **What political structures, environments, tools, or social practices would exist in your world?** Would your world have clear demarcated or irredentist borders, or be geographically interrelated with other cultures nearby? You can imagine your world any way you want as long as it makes sense and is coherent. Remember that the goal is not to change people’s hearts, but to change the organization of power.
- Identify physical rules that govern your world. They can be rules of physics (does your world have flying? magic?) or a geography, size, and scale. Your world can be a real place you imagine changed (such as a specific city, a region, or a whole continent), or it can be an allegorical or metaphorical world or other kind of space that you make up, but that has consistent rules and a reason for them (a space station, an island on a remote planet, the cavity of a dormant volcano). Remember that borders are a human invention and can be different, or even nonexistent, in your world if you wish.
- As an alternate option, you can if you wish imagine what a specific place today would be like if a specific historical event had gone a different way, or you can imagine a future world that has not yet occurred, based on a concrete structural change in the future. For example, what if the ‘Continuous Journey’ regulation had never been passed? What if settler colonization had never happened here? Or what if in the year 2022, all North American jurisdictions dismantled their police forces and prisons, and all conflict and harm was handled through Transformative Justice practices instead?
- You can bring your reader right into the world, describing it using your five senses, just as Shevek describes Annares by walking through a community describing the place. Or you can describe it factually; as you wish. Either way, **merge aesthetics and ethics** together if you are able.
- If you wish you can imagine yourself as a member of that world, writing backwards to your younger self or to yourself as an ancestry, telling yourself how things have gotten better and how you created the good world from where we are here and now.
- What might be the limits and failings of this world? Perfection would entail no more change, and life is change. What are the inner weaknesses or vulnerabilities of your Utopia? What problems are likely to arise, and how might your world handle them? What conflict resolution structures do your community members have in place? Think beyond our current culture’s emphasis on punishment and carcerality. What are good ways to handle conflict and harm?
- Be aware of authoritarian (or fascistic) impulse in Utopian thought and work to counter it. Many famous Utopias, such as Plato’s *Republic* or More’s *Utopia*, have top-down, authoritarian impulses. Imagine yourself as the people who have the least power in this society, and therefore see this culture from below. How would you like your own life to feel if you or those you care about were the ones at the ‘bottom’ of this society? As the [Iceburg model](#) proposes, think in generative, bottom-up ways that allow human beings room to create and to shape their own lives.

Part Two: analysis (300-500 words, informal writing)

“Utopia is on the horizon. I move two steps closer; it moves two steps further away. I walk another ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps further away. As much as I may walk, I'll never reach it. So what's the point of utopia? The point is this: to keep walking.”

– Eduardo Galeano

In a paragraph or two, informally, discuss your reasoning to support the world you have created. How does the world you've described address the social justice issue you've chosen? This does not need to be a formal essay, but just brief (one page or less) analysis that explains the challenges and insights that your world building project raises. Begin with one sentence that names the issue you chose, and says whether your world does or does not address the social justice issue that you have chosen. Do not describe the world! Analyze it instead. Discuss the drawbacks or limits of your world, and discuss changes that you made as you were building your world that let you avoid authoritarian impulses that tend to make their way into the popular imagination. Reference class texts (with citations in MLA format), including the novels and short stories we have read, concepts from lecture if they help you make your case, and any secondary texts on the class website that can help you connect your world to class themes and readings. You do not need to find any additional outside sources for this assignment.

- Use evidence, examples, and reasoning to persuade the reader that the imagined political, social, or environmental structures of your world would successfully address the social justice issue and/or lead to the outcomes you described in Part One.
- Reference at least three literary and/or critical readings **from class** to strengthen your analysis. Use appropriate and reputable sources including the novels, technical concepts discussed in class if they are helpful, and resources from the class website (no Wikipedia, no random unverified websites, no quotes from famous quote websites, no dictionaries).
- Discuss any potential authoritarian impulses that you noticed arising as you crafted your imaginary world, and how you countered them, to create a world that would be livable and enjoyable for those at the **bottom** of your society.
- Your creative **notes** will be marked for completion, clarity, logical coherence, originality, vividness of the five-senses description of the world, and whether it effectively addresses one specific explicitly named social justice issue. Your **analysis** (part two) will be marked on logic, organization, mechanics, effective use of sources and connections to class readings, and precision of thought. These two parts are worth 2%.
Your **five minute presentation** to class, in which you present your world idea to the group, will be marked on communication effectiveness, preparation, and content, including effective connections to class readings with references. This five minute presentation will be worth 3%.
- Use MLA format for your notes, including standard 12 point font such as Times New Roman, Calibri, or Garamond, page numbers, formatted works cited, one sided-pages. Clearly write 'part one' and 'part two' at the top of each section.
- Cut and paste the Individual Utopia Worksheet below into your document as the first page, before your notes. Fill in the worksheet thoroughly. It will help you think through your world.
- Submit your completed notes to the One Drive folder by the Sunday before the presentation, and then practice and time your presentation so that you stay at or under five minutes.
Work that is mislabeled or misfiled will not be considered handed in.

Individual Utopia Worksheet

Name: _____

Answer in point form, and cut and paste to the front of your Utopia assignment

My Individual Utopia addresses this one specific, focused social issue:

What would be different about the world I imagine, in which this issue did not exist, would be:

What *else* would logically be different in the world I imagine, if the things listed above were in place:

Our imaginations have been deeply shaped by the cultures that we are exposed to in our media and culture, and it takes effort to think beyond what we know. Note any authoritarian practices that arose as you were imagining your world. (examples: absolute rulers, robot cops, highly militarized 'zones,' instant death for transgressions, isolating prisons and punishments, etc). How did you create a world that was not repressive instead? What more liberatory structures did you replace these ideas with?
