

Visions of the future – Utopia/dystopia, Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence

by Rainer Jacob



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Wie wird die Welt in 50 Jahren aussehen? In 100 Jahren? In 1000? Erwartet die Menschheit eine Utopie oder eine Dystopie? Mittels der drei Themenkomplexe „Utopia/Dystopia“, „Virtual Reality“ sowie „Artificial Intelligence“ suchen die Lernenden Antworten auf diese und weitere Fragen. Die Schüler setzen sich mit verschiedenen Szenarien auseinander, erweitern ihren Wortschatz zum Thema und schulen außerdem ihre Lese- sowie ihre Hör-/Sehverstehenskompetenz.

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Facts	1
Notes on the material	1
Topic 1: Utopia/dystopia	3
Topic 2: Virtual Reality	18
Topic 3: Artificial Intelligence	28

Competences and skills:

By working with several informative and fictional texts, students enhance their **reading comprehension**. They also improve their **writing skills** by writing comments on various questions related to the topic. Additionally, students demonstrate their **viewing competences** by answering questions on a video and practise their **listening competences** by working with a podcast. Students' **speaking skills** are improved by giving presentations. Additionally, students enhance their vocabulary knowledge and engage in creative tasks. **Interpretative skills** are improved by analysing two cartoons.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

C Comment

LC Listening comprehension

PR Presentation

T Working with a text

W Writing

CT Creative task

M Mediation

R Research

V Vocabulary work

D Discussion/debate

P Working with a picture

RC Reading comprehension

VI Working with a video

Topic	Material	Method
1: Utopia/dystopia	M1–M5	C, D, PR, R, RC, T, V, W
2: Virtual Reality	M6–M8	C, CT, P, PR, R, RC, T, V, VI, W
3: Artificial Intelligence	M9–M15	C, CT, D, LC, M, P, PR, RC, T, VI, W

technology have expressed concern in the media and via open letters about the risks posed by these techniques. Be it as it may, we live in exciting times of rapid and continuous change and it is difficult to predict what the future holds.

[803 words]

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Utopia

- The term is derived from the Greek language, meaning “No Place” or “Nowhere Land”.
- A utopia presents a vision of a perfect world existing in the future.
- Function: criticism by contrast; forces readers to compare the real world with the imagined ideal world
- Model of utopian novels: work by English humanist Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516)

Dystopia (anti-utopia)

- A dystopia shows an imagined state or society in which everything is unpleasant or evil.
- A dystopian setting is typically a totalitarian or environmentally destroyed place.
- Function: warning about undesirable developments; expresses fears for the future of mankind.

M4 *Children of the New World*

In Alexander Weinstein's short story *Children of the New World*, an elderly couple spends a lot of time in an online world. In the excerpt, the narrator relates his experiences as a father of virtual children.



We recall the first steps we took in our new house. To reach out and touch the world was to be illuminated, and we walked outside to see the homes lined up along our street shining and new, other users emerging from doorways, waving as they crossed their lawns to make introductions. Isn't this incredible? Where are you using from? Las Cruces, Copenhagen, Austin. We were like babies. Like Adam and Eve, some said. We reached out towards one another to see how skin felt; we let our neighbors' hands run across our arms. In this world, we seemed to understand, we were free to experience a physical connection that we'd always longed for in the real world but had never been able to achieve. [...]

5

Mary's pregnancy took us both by surprise. She had gone through menopause a decade earlier and we'd resigned ourselves to living childless lives. We'd waited too long, had debated the pros and cons too many times, had placed our jobs first, and then it was too late. It was only when Mary's belly began to swell that we accessed the FAQ tab. It was all there, no great mystery:

10

pregnancy worked the same as in the real world, fully explained in the tutorial. We had planned to watch the walk-thru at some point, had gotten as far as the instruction to roll our thoughts to the left to select our tattoos and piercings, up and down for musculature and age, but then we began playing with landscapes and playlists, and before we knew it, we had the basics of navigation down.

20

This is how you upload music to the home speakers; this is how you project your photos onto the living room wall; this is how you place one hand on your wife's hips; this is how she puts her hand behind your neck; this is how you kiss. And then she was pregnant. The FAQs informed us we could remove an unwanted pregnancy as easily as dragging a file to the recycle bin, but we

25

were curious. Here would be another being formed from the combination of our genome preferences. The birth promised to be as quick and painless as a download. So we held each other, scrolled through online baby names, and agreed to bring new life into this world. In the New World, Mary and I proved to be a completely different couple. Our bodies became freed from habit,

world everything was much easier to deal with than in real life. Making a home, finding friends, developing a loving partnership – everything was just a piece of cake. No efforts required. Immediate rewards. However, Mary and her husband had a price to pay. The escape from reality into a dream world, a fantasy, a substitute, was bound to end in disappointment. What now, what will the future hold for them? The text is just an excerpt, it is not the ending of the story. We can only hope the dreadful experience has taught them a lesson. To concentrate their efforts on the “here and now”, not on some illusionary “New World”, and invest their energy in creating a loving relationship. Online games, Virtual Reality games should not substitute what is important in life. What these media offer, and this is what they are very good at, is entertainment, distraction, relaxation, just like books. They can never and should never replace reality. This is what the narrator and his wife should learn from having had to delete their children. Reality can offer pleasures and rewards which cannot be wiped out so easily by some virus. What they must do, however, is: Learn to love again and communicate with each other.

VORSCHAU

M8 Worksheet – Virtual Reality in education

Approaching the topic

1. Describe the picture. Discuss: What could be advantages/disadvantages of using Virtual Reality in education?



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Group and project work



2. Work in groups researching these Internet sites on VR in education. Then decide on the relevant information and compile material for a presentation.



You can give the presentation by using a white board, Google Drive Presentation, Evernote, PowerPoint, an overhead projector, transparencies, slides, videos, music, or handouts.

Websites:

- <https://www.theamegroup.com/virtual-reality-education/>
- <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20160627005621/en/Survey-Finds-Teachers-Virtual-Reality-Reality-Classroom>
- <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/students-recreate-hiroshima-before-after-atomic-bomb/4515871.html> (Students Recreate Hiroshima Before, After Atomic Bomb)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMzouTzim0o> (360° Travel inside the Great Pyramid of Giza – BBC)

Creative activity



3. Why should Virtual Reality be used in education? Imagine you were a “YouTuber”. Present your opinion on this question in a video message.

- VR enables intensive learning by repetition: you can repeat a task until you master it
- offers opportunity to cope/deal with unexpected or dangerous situations
- saves resources
- provides a safe environment: mistakes can be made without causing damage (to people or objects)

Key: M8 Worksheet – Virtual Reality in education

Approaching the topic

1. *Describe the picture. Discuss: What could be advantages/disadvantages of using Virtual Reality in education?*

The picture shows four students sitting in a classroom and wearing Virtual Reality glasses. In the background you can see the teacher who is explaining something to the students. The students seem to be enjoying the lesson.

Advantages of using Virtual Reality in education: students might be more interested and motivated; it offers the possibility to show things which are not there in reality and thus make lessons more vivid and explain things better.

Disadvantages of using Virtual Reality in education: would be expensive to get VR glasses for every student; students might get distracted and get lost in VR; they may lose touch with reality and with each other.

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Group and project work

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Individual results.

Creative activity

3. *Why should Virtual Reality be used in education? Imagine you were a "YouTuber". Present your opinion on this question in a video message.*
Individual results.