



Unit 4 Science fiction

Cross-curricular – Literature

1 Answer the questions.

- Write a short definition for the literary genre 'science fiction'.
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- Name some science-fiction books, films or TV series that you have read or seen. Did you enjoy them? Why?/Why not?
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2 Read the article quickly. Do you still think your definition for science fiction is correct?

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3 In which paragraphs can you find the following?

- a comment by a science-fiction fan?
- the titles of some science-fiction novels?
- some information about a science-fiction writer?
- the names of different branches of science?
- a quotation by a writer?

WORD BOOSTER

Match the words and definitions.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 retain | a fanatic |
| 2 depicts | b insulting |
| 3 blurred | c more incorrect |
| 4 aficionado | d keep |
| 5 bristle | e shows |
| 6 further from the truth | f position |
| 7 status | g unclear |
| 8 pejorative | h become indignant |

4 Read the article again carefully and decide if the statements are true (T), false (F) or not mentioned (NM).

- Defining 'science fiction' is not as straightforward as it may appear.
- Hard science fiction uses technology and scientific facts that are familiar to us today.
- Science fiction is quite closely associated in meaning with science fantasy.
- Science-fiction fans are very strict about the distinction between different sub-genres.
- Space opera can often be seen on television.
- Space opera is considered a lower form of science fiction.
- Alastair Reynolds writes exclusively space opera.

5 After reading this text, which type of science fiction would you prefer to read or see on screen? Why?

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1 For most people science fiction is a literary genre that is all about stories set in a future time where the characters use technology that does not exist in today's world. Quite simple to categorise, wouldn't you think? Well, this may have been true at some point in the past but for science-fiction fans in the 21st century, nothing could be further from the truth. Categorising the sub-genres of science fiction is extremely complicated because over the years this type of fiction has branched out in many various ways. It should certainly not be confused with 'science fantasy'. According to Rod Serling (the famous American screenwriter of *The Twilight Zone*), 'Fantasy is the impossible made probable. Science fiction is the improbable made possible.'

2 Some science fiction is described as 'hard' because it sets out to retain accurate detail of the scientific and technical processes it depicts and tries to stay within the range of developments in science that are possible in the future. The scientific subjects it deals with are mainly physics, chemistry and astrophysics. Writers of hard science fiction are often themselves scientists or ex-scientists, and this type of science fiction has produced some accurate predictions of the future. 'Soft' or 'social' science fiction, on the other hand, depends more on character and emotion and is largely based on the social sciences – sociology, anthropology, political science and so on. Related to this type of science fiction are the famous novels *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Brave New World*, and Zamiatin's *We*. The distinction between hard and soft, however, is often blurred.

3 Within the broad category of science fiction it is possible to find such intriguing sub-genres as cyberpunk (an example of which is the film *Blade Runner*), time travel (H.G. Wells and today's *Doctor Who*), superhuman, apocalyptic, alternate history, military SF and space opera. The list seems endless and the overlaps are considerable. But get your sub-genre wrong and the sci-fi aficionado will bristle. 'It's not military SF, it's space opera, anyone can see that!'

4 One exceptional science-fiction author writing today is Alastair Reynolds. He's British and he generally writes hard space opera. The term 'space opera' was originally coined as a pejorative label – likening the style to soap operas on television. However, it has now achieved a much higher status in the world of sci-fi and is admired and enjoyed by many people. Space opera basically describes dramatic adventure stories that are set in space, a good example being that of the *Star Wars* trilogy of the seventies. Reynolds is known for his space opera but also teasingly overlaps with other sub-genres. If you're looking for a good sci-fi read at the moment, then Alastair Reynolds is your author.