Is it Still a Brave New World?

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Abstract:

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley introduced the world to the possibilities and the dangers of some interesting new technologies: genetic engineering, medication to control one’s mood, birth control pills, test-tube babies, and technological mind-control. Yet Huxley could not have imagined the extent to which these have entered the world of the new millennium. Huxley’s view is very pessimistic. Is this the only possible scenario, or is a bright future equally attainable. The goal of this curriculum unit is to use Huxley’s novel as a beginning for an exploration of the promises and the pitfalls of modern advances in biology and neuropsychology. An examination of each area of technology has many arenas for discussion. What are the social implications? How is the health of humans affected? Are we altering the very core of human DNA? How are we affecting the health of our planet? What are the legal and economic ramifications? What are short and long-term psychological consequences to the user and to others? I propose to have students research and debate various medical, biological and psychological cutting-edge technologies followed by full-class discussions of these issues. The overriding question behind each of these debates as well as the main theme of the novel is, “How does science affect the human being?”

This proposed curriculum unit is intended for an eleventh grade English class. The literature focus will be the dystopian novel, Huxley’s Brave New World and a more optimistic point of view in Robert Heinlein’s Beyond this Horizon. Each work was chosen for its literary merit as well as its subject matter. They will provide a wonderful source of topics to be discussed. My objective is for my students to be actively engaged in reading both the longer works of fiction as well as the shorter pieces; to read with a full understanding and enthusiasm; to be actively engaged in their research projects; to be full of ideas for their writing prompts; to be anxious and able to share their ideas; to be more fully informed citizens.