

AI in Literature Class: Critical Exploration of Our Dystopian and Utopian Futures

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Abstract:

While students all over the world embraced AI tools, like ChatGPT, without looking back, a literature class where students explored how human-machine bondage could challenge our humanity, has revealed striking concern among even science and engineering majors about the unchecked growth of algorithmic intelligence that could bring with it more peril than promise. Reading texts and watching films that take students on a journey of humanities' unraveling, becoming redundant, defeated, or replaced by advanced intelligence, fascinating as those trips of imagination are, is an experience that gives young people pause. Close reading of "Frankenstein," Isaac Asimov's and Ted Chiang's stories and watching episodes from Black Mirror, Westworld, Star Wars) makes students in today's classrooms ask where this disruptive technology might lead us.

Data for this study came from several literature classes offered at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts, USA, where students discussed, debated and reflected on literary texts that developed both scary and hopeful scenarios for the world that embraced the dominance of humanoid robots or superhuman intelligence. The students explored how AI affected human selfhood and identity, how it challenged relationships and what it did for human societies. Classroom discussions, freewrites, personal reflections, research papers and creative media assignments served as the foundation for this qualitative inquiry. The goal was to foster careful and critical assessment of emergent AI technology among its future developers and also to suggest that such concerns are real among students who need to develop a civic stance towards technologies that will transform their future.

Keywords:

AI in education, literature class, utopias and dystopias, critical assessment, emergent technology, innovative teaching, civic values.