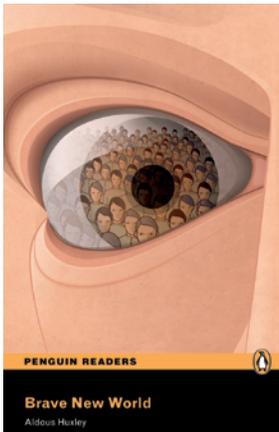




Brave New World

Aldous Huxley



About the author

Born in 1894, Aldous Huxley belonged to a very distinguished family, the most famous of whom was his grandfather, TH Huxley, an eminent scientist and writer. Huxley's elder brother Julian also became a famous biologist and writer. But family distinction could not protect the Huxley boys from misfortune. Their mother died when Huxley was fourteen and at sixteen, he developed serious eye trouble which caused him to become almost completely blind. This did not prevent Huxley from pursuing a brilliant career. After leaving university, he became a journalist and by the age of twenty-five he had already published three volumes of poetry. He wrote a number of successful novels in his twenties and early thirties, including *Antic Hay* (1923), and *Point Counter Point* (1928), and was regarded as a witty commentator on contemporary society. When *Brave New World* came out, the novel was instantly recognized as an important work having a vital message for society. During the 1930s Huxley became very involved in the peace movement in Europe. When this failed, he left Europe in 1937 for California, and spent the rest of his life there, pursuing his interest in spiritual and mystical matters. He continued to write in many genres. He explored the effect of mind-altering drugs and wrote two books, *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956), that had a great impact on young people in the 1960s and 1970s. Huxley died of cancer in 1963 and is today regarded as a man who wrote brilliant and provocative 'novels of ideas.'

Summary

Set far in the future, in the twenty-sixth century, it depicts a society in which people's lives are completely controlled by world government. Foetuses are created by artificial fertilization in test tubes and 'parents' are unknown. Society is divided into different levels, with each level performing different functions, and children are given whispered messages in their sleep that teach them to be content with their place in society. The 'happiness' drug, soma, is freely distributed so that unhappiness is never experienced. It is a society in which freedom has been sacrificed for happiness and stability. Only a few individuals dare to question the society in which they live. Into this society comes a 'Savage', a young man brought up in one of the few places in the world where people are allowed to live under natural conditions. What will be the fate of the Savage and the two brilliant young men who dare to befriend him? Will the Savage succeed in retaining the ideal of freedom that his childhood taught him? And if he does, what price will he pay?

Chapter 1

It is AF 632 in Central London, one of the ten world zones. The Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning guides students on a tour of the laboratory where people are made in five pre-determined castes according to the specific needs of a society whose motto is Community, Identity, Stability. Thanks to the Bokanovsky process it is possible to develop many identical twins from only one embryo.

Chapter 2

Once the babies are decanted, they are conditioned to accept their predestined identity. Catchy messages are drilled into their brains by means of sleep teaching and their likes and hates are electroshocks.

Chapter 3

Lenina, a Beta, takes her friend Fanny's advice not to go out with the same man so long, and announces she will accept Bernard Marx's invitation to visit a Savage Reservation, even though he is rather strange for an Alpha plus.

Chapter 4

Lenina goes out with Henry again. Bernard and his colleague Helmholtz Watson discuss their differences with standard citizens. They have individual ideas.



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Chapter 5

Lenina and Henry pass the Slough Crematorium, where phosphorus is recovered so that people are socially useful even after death. Bernard attends a Unity Service: twelve men and women become one after communing soma and praising the Greater Being. It ends in an orgy.

Chapter 6

Bernard shares with Lenina his desire to be himself, and feel passion. This horrifies and puzzles her. The DHC signs the permit to go to the New Mexican Reservation. He tells Bernard the story of his visit long ago but later regrets it.

Chapter 7

Without her soma, Lenina can hardly bear to watch the dance. They meet John, the Savage, born to Linda, a former civilized citizen, who found it hard to reconcile her conditioning with life in the Reservation.

Chapter 8

Linda retells the horrors of her life there: she became a mother, she was beaten by the local women and she had no soma. She discovers mescal to ease her pain and has Pope to comfort her. John was brought up among Linda's stories from the Other Place, the works of Shakespeare and the local culture. Bernard offers to take him to London and gets permission to do so.

Chapter 9

The DHC is considering exemplary punishment for Bernard when he marches in, followed by John and Linda. On hearing John call him father, he resigns, ashamed.

Chapter 10

Everybody is curious about the new creature so Bernard becomes very popular. Linda goes on a soma holiday, which John feels is not right. After the cinema, Lenina expects an intimate encounter but John leaves her at her door.

Chapter 11

John refuses to meet some guests, who blame Bernard. John introduces Shakespeare to Helmholtz, who is thrilled at his skill as a writer.

Chapter 12

On Fanny's advice, Lenina visits John. He declares his love for her but when she undresses, he withdraws at such immorality. He gets a call from the hospital about Linda's condition.

Chapter 13

Linda dies while there is a round of children being death-conditioned in the hospital.

Chapter 14

Blaming soma for his mother's death, John throws away the soma being distributed freely in the hospital. The police come and gas soma over the crowd. John is taken prisoner.

Chapter 15

Mond explains to John that art and history are forbidden for the sake of happiness and stability, and how he gave up science to become a controller.

Chapter 16

Mond explains there is no need for God where there is comfort. John argues for suffering and poetry and God, although they make you sad.

Chapter 17

John retreats to a lighthouse to be alone. He is stalked by the media. He kills himself.

The original text

First published in 1932, the book was instantly recognized as an important novel that warned the reader about the dangers of science when it is misused. This prophetic book remains, in the twenty-first century, astonishingly relevant to our times.

Background and themes

From time to time a book appears that has something vital to say to society. *Brave New World* is such a novel.

As a teenager, Huxley's first love was science; his near-blindness prevented him from pursuing science as a career, but his interest remained, and it is Huxley's understanding of the directions in which science is likely to lead the world that forms the basis of the novel.

Brave New World is a vision of a future in which a world government is able, through scientific methods, to totally control people's lives, from the moment of conception to the moment of death. Three main scientific methods are used: *genetic engineering* – the genes of a foetus are scientifically manipulated to produce a specific kind of human being, fit to work at a certain level of society; *conditioning* – young children are given powerful messages that teach them to think and feel in certain ways, and the use of *soma* to induce 'happiness'.



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In the novel, the World Controller for Europe, Mustapha Mond, explains that these methods of control are used for the good of society, in order to ensure happiness and stability. And it is true that society in this 'brave new world' is both happy and stable. Huxley does not make the naive mistake of idealizing a life that is not controlled by science. The Savage, who was brought up on an American Indian reservation, lived a life that was in many ways uncomfortable and unpleasant. But – and Huxley makes the point powerfully – the Savage has free will, something that is denied to the inhabitants of the brave new world. Thus, the author brilliantly poses the reader with a profound question. Is free will – the freedom to choose – worth the suffering that must go hand in hand with it? This is the question that his novel explores.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Pair work:** Ask students in pairs to think of an ideal life. Where would it be? What would they be allowed to do? What would they have to do? Would they have any limitations? Then have a class discussion to see if there are ideas in common.

Chapters 1–3

Before reading

- Group work:** Write the first paragraph of the book (see below) on the board. Put students in pairs. Tell them that the title of the book is *Brave New World* and that the first paragraph of the story is on the board. Ask students, using this information, to write a short paragraph about what the book could be about, using dictionaries where necessary. Then ask pairs to read their paragraphs aloud. As a whole, the class then has to reach an agreement as to what the book is about, finishing with a paragraph written up on the board.

A low grey building, of only 34 floors. Over the main entrance the words CENTRAL LONDON HATCHING AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and below that the motto of the World State, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY.

While reading

- Group work:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to write down what they think are the three defining characteristics of the future described in *Brave New World*. Then elicit these characteristics from students and write them up on the board until there is general agreement that the class has described the important ones.

After reading

- Discuss:** Ask students to discuss the following: *Do you think that methods such as sleep conditioning and conditioning (e.g. pairing electric shocks with flowers) are effective? Give reasons for your opinion.*

Chapters 4–6

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask students whether the story so far has any similarities to their ideal worlds discussed before they started to read the book.

While reading

- Pair work:** Put students into pairs and ask them to discuss the following questions:
 - Describe the differences between Lenina and Bernard.
 - What is your opinion of Bernard so far? Then have a class discussion.
- Role play:** (page 33) Lenina wants to visit the New Mexico Reservation, but has mixed feelings about Bernard. She thinks he is odd and that she should not risk a trip with him. Ask students to act out a conversation in which Lenina shares her doubts with Fanny.

After reading

- Group work:** Lenina and Bernard fly over Malpais and can have a view of the Reservation. The guide who is taking them refers to the place and the people using very negative images. There is also the report they can read and the Director's description of his own trip. Ask students in small groups to offer a more positive description of the place from the point of view of the local people. Warn them they cannot twist the facts, only make them appear in a more positive light.

Chapters 7–9

Before reading

- Guess:** Ask students to guess what they think is likely to happen in the next chapters. Then write down their predictions on the board.

While reading

- Discuss:** (page 37) Bernard says 'we are infants where feelings and desire are concerned.' Ask students in small groups to discuss how the social order in *Brave New World* contributes to this.
- Pair work:** (after page 45) Put students into pairs. Ask them to discuss the following question: In his descriptions of Indian life on the New Mexican Reservation, what do you think Huxley is trying to tell the reader about the local lifestyle?



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- 12 Role play:** (page 51) Ask students to imagine they are Linda. You have just come to the Reservation and describe to a local woman why you came to live in the Reservation and how you feel about your life there. Ask them to act out the conversation.

After reading

- 13 Role play:** Divide students into pairs. *Student A* is a worker in the Fertilizing room who witnesses the scene between the Director, Bernard and Linda. *Student B* is a reporter. Have *Student B* ask *Student A* questions and have *Student A* answer them. Ask students to practise the interview and select a few to share their role play with the rest of the class.

Chapters 10–13

Before reading

- 14 Discuss:** Ask students to discuss what should be done to the Director, now that it is clear John is his son. *Does he deserve punishment? Which? Must he leave his job? Why/why not?*

While reading

- 15 Pair work:** (after Chapter 10) Put students into pairs. Ask them to prepare a brief presentation in which they:
- Describe the Savage from the point of view of a typical Alpha.
 - Describe London society from the point of view of the Savage.
- Then they share their ideas with the class.

- 16 Group work:** (after Chapter 12) Ask students in small groups to discuss these questions:
- Who is your sympathy with in this chapter? Explain why.*
 - What do you think the telephone conversation is about?*
- Have a whole class discussion with the ideas generated in the small groups.

After reading

- 17 Discuss:** Ask students to discuss the following:
Are Linda and John better off in the civilized world than they were in the Reservation? Why/why not? Use examples to support your arguments.

Chapters 14–17

Before reading

- 18 Guess:** Ask students to guess what is going to happen to the Savage in the next four chapters. Why do they think these things will happen? Include some examples from the book.

While reading

- 19 Discuss:** (page 95) Mustapha Mond says: 'We believe in happiness and stability.' *What are his arguments in favour of these things? How does he say they are achieved? Do you agree with him?* Encourage students to give reasons for their opinions.
- 20 Pair work:** Ask students in pairs to imagine that they could have a conversation with Mustapha Mond. They write down what they would say to him. Have students practise having the conversation and select a few pairs to share their conversation with the rest of the class.

After reading

- 21 Pair work:** Put students into pairs. Ask students to imagine that the Savage comes back to life. *Student A* plays the Savage. *Student B* plays his questioner. *Student B*, as his questioner, asks him to explain why he killed himself and tries to get him to see that it was not necessary.

Extra activities

- 22 Debate:** Organize a debate, in which the class is divided in half. Half the class must support the following statement:
'Happiness and stability in society are more important than freedom.'
The other half must support this statement:
'An individual's freedom is more important than his/her happiness and the stability of society as a whole.'
Divide each half into smaller groups and ask the groups to prepare their arguments. Then have the debate. First a student from one side speaks and then the other. At the end of the debate, take a vote on the two positions.
- 23 Pair work:** Ask students in pairs to select their favourite quote from the text. Then they share it with the rest of the class. Encourage them to account for their choice and to place it in the context of the story so that it is clear to the rest. You can ask them to write it on a poster and find a suitable picture to go with it. After the activity, the poster can be displayed in the classroom.
- 24 Group work:** Few of Huxley's predictions have proved to be perfectly accurate, yet many aspects of the Utopia of *Brave New World* remind us of our world. Ask students in groups to discuss the following questions:
The novel was published in the 1930s. Can it be considered as a prophetic vision of the future? How so? Which aspects of the book did you find most disturbing? Which strike you as most familiar? Which seem the most far-fetched?



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25 Group work: Explain to students that themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. Elicit from them what themes they can find in the novel. If this proves too difficult, write these on the blackboard.

The use of technology to control society

The consumer society

The conflict between happiness and truth

The dangers of an all-powerful State

The conflict between community and freedom

The role of science

Divide the class into groups and assign one theme to each group. Ask students to discuss how they are dealt with in the novel.

26 Discuss: Tell students that the Greek word utopia means 'an ideal place'. Its opposite, dystopia, is a negative utopia or anti-utopia. Ask students to explain why *Brave New World* is considered a novel in that genre.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.