

Utopia 2050?

This lesson looks at possible societies that might be developed, technologies that might be needed for their development, and whether individuals think their developments are ethical or unethical.

Humans have always sought to better themselves and their society, often through engineering new approaches to society. Advances in technology, such as television, the internet and mobile phones, have brought about great changes to the way our societies operate. But they can also have detrimental effects by isolating individuals or dividing societies by those who have access to the technology and those who do not.

Imagine what types of societies we might have in the year 2050, and what technologies and social decisions we will need to make to reach them.

What to do:

1. Examine the following 'utopian' hypotheticals, and then discuss:
 - what technological advancements will be necessary to bring them about
 - what societal decisions will be necessary to bring them about
 - at what point you think the decisions have crossed from being ethical to being unethical.
2. Work in groups, or as a class, to discuss these three points as they relate to any of the hypotheticals.
3. How likely might each of these scenarios be? What might prevent them from ever happening?

1. Living to 150

Due to advances in medical technology, people can now easily live to 150 years old. Organs are grown in organ farms to replace body parts as they wear out. Advanced drugs ward off lifestyle diseases such as obesity and heart disease. Stem cell treatments are used to combat cancer and other degenerative diseases. The cost of this medical support is very high and is limited to those who can afford it – about 20 per cent of the population.

2. A woman's world

By 2050, no men are being born. As numbers of women slowly outgrew the numbers of men, more and more parliaments were taken over by a majority of women. They decided that to prevent wars, more women than men should be born. Initially, pregnancies were screened to select for female children, but with advances in human cloning, sexual reproduction became inefficient. Now, by law, only women are clinically reproduced.

3. Plants rule

By 2050 we no longer farm animals or mine for minerals and oil. Plants have been genetically modified to provide the proteins and vitamins that would have once been obtained from meat, fish and dairy products. Plants are also used to obtain oils and minerals. As a result, plants deemed inefficient – such as potatoes and wheat – are now considered weeds. They have been replaced by newly created plants such as protowheat and biowheat, which are higher in nutrients and vitamins.

4. A new elite

By 2050, all children are genetically screened before they are born. Their roles in life are determined by their genes. Those with the best genes are given highly-paid jobs in corporations and government. Those with inferior genes, which might make them more liable to medical conditions or poor eyesight, are given manual jobs with lower salaries. Athletes, musicians and scientists are pre-selected before birth and enrolled in training programs. People with the most inferior genes have this marked down on their identity cards. They are ineligible to seek education or work reserved for those with superior genes.

5. A servant in every house

Manual work and housework are no longer performed by humans. Servants called Dumbats have been developed using human and wombat genes. They are strong, but slow, and possess a low IQ. Every house has at least one Dumbat, and some even have two or three. They are ideally suited for cooking, cleaning and child minding. They have yet to be successfully trained to operate computers and drive cars, but if more human genes are inserted into them, this may be possible.