

Name: _____ Period: _____

Broad Themes in Science Fiction Stories and Novels

Over the last two centuries, science fiction has developed, and certain basic themes have evolved. Each of these themes incorporate some aspect of change – that is something new has been introduced, which makes things happen in the novel. This is the nature of science fiction. Some stories might fit under several different themes.¹

Far Travelling (changing the scene)	The wonders of the world or universe; extraordinary voyages; space travel; travel into the very large or very small; time travel; alternate worlds or universes
Humans and the Machine	Wonderful inventions; gadgets; the Mad Scientist and the terrible invention; uncontrolled technology; change gone wild
Humans and Society (and its opposite)	Utopias and anti-utopias; human condition will become better if only, or human condition will grow worse, if....
War	Changing the weapons or the nature of war
Humans and the Environment	Catastrophes in nature; might concern the earth, the solar system, the universe and its natural laws, and the consequences of actions; often focuses on “the way things work.”
Superpowers (changing abilities)	Such as strange talents, invisibility, immortality, mental control over people, things or events; sometimes the pattern of power add up to a new species
Humans and the Alien	Invasion, contact, conflict, alien problems, thoughts, ways of life
Humans and Religion	Beginnings (where did we come from?) meanings (why are we here?) and endings (where do we go from here?)
The Future and the Past	Glimpses of...

¹ James Gunn, Alternate Worlds: The Illustrated History of Science Fiction. Englewood: Prentice Hall, 1975. p. 242.