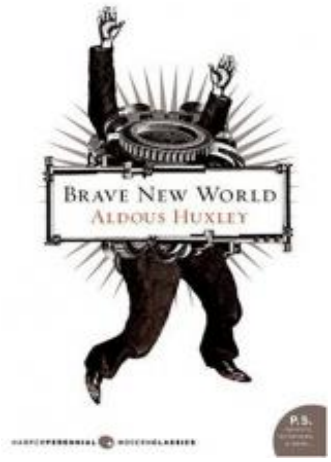
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Brave New World

by Aldous Huxley



About the Book

In **Brave New World** Aldous Huxley conjures up a horrifying, but often comic, vision of a future Utopia in which humans are processed, conditioned, regimented, and drugged into total social conformity. The story, set in a futuristic London, focuses on the misadventures of Bernard Marx. Disaffected with the regimentation of society, Bernard and his girlfriend, Lenina, visit the American Southwest where Native Americans are permitted to live in an "uncivilized" state. There they come upon a fair-skinned young man named John, who turns out to be the son of a Londoner, and Bernard brings John back to "civilized" London.

For a while, the "Savage" creates a sensation. Eventually the Savage becomes increasingly horrified by the "brave new world" and retreats into reading Shakespeare's plays. The Savage has fallen passionately in love with Lenina, but has convinced himself that any sexual contact between them would be a grievous sin--a stance that completely baffles Lenina who has been conditioned to enjoy promiscuous sex without any emotional commitment. In despair, the Savage precipitates a riot. Bernard is exiled for his participation and the Savage holes up in an abandoned lighthouse, where he grows food and mortifies his flesh as penance for his lust for Lenina. In the end, reporters discover the Savage and photograph his bizarre rituals of self-flagellation. A nightly carnival ensues as swarms of London curiosity seekers come to witness the antics of this strange creature. Finally the Savage, in shame and desperation, hangs himself.

Discussion Guide

1. Few of Huxley's predictions have proven to be perfectly accurate, yet many aspects of the Utopia of **Brave New World** feel uncomfortably like our world. Talk about the book as a prophetic vision of the future. Which aspects of the book did you find most disturbing? Which hit closest to home? Which seem the most far-fetched?

2. When **Brave New World** was first published in 1932, the world was plunged in depression, fascism was on the rise in Western Europe, and Marxism appealed to increasing numbers of intellectuals in Europe and America. Place the book in

the context of its historical moment. Which parts transcend its time and place?

3. The two greatest obscenities in the society of **Brave New World** are birth and mother. Why?

4. Toward the end of the book, the Controller Mustapha Mond sums up the benefits of living in the "brave new world" Utopia: "The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get." It sounds like perfection, and yet the world Mond describes is deeply, intentionally horrifying. Why? What exactly is so bad about this society of the future? Is there anything good about it, anything we could learn from and try to adapt to our own uses?

5. As dehumanizing and oppressive as the brave new world Utopia is, the alternative in the "savage reserve" is in many ways worse - dirty, violent, unhealthy, cruel, uncomfortable. What point is Huxley making about human nature and the nature of human communities? Is his vision totally negative - or does the book hold out some shred of hope, some alternative mode that fosters both freedom and community?

6. One of the most striking - and comic - aspects of Huxley's Utopia is the way our sexual mores and assumptions have been turned on their head: monogamy is bad, passion is deviation, casual, meaningless sex is the socially approved norm. What is Huxley getting at here? Is there any expression of human sexuality that he finds acceptable? Is sex at the heart of the "problem" in his view of human nature?

7. Talk about the morality of the book. Is it a Christian morality? Socialist? Anarchist?

8. In many ways, the main characters of the book are cartoon figures - Helmholtz Watson the alienated superman, Bernard Marx the cowardly, hypocritical intellectual, Mustapha Mond the cynical all-knowing leader, John the doomed idealistic. Discuss the book as an allegory and elaborate on what each character stands for.

9. When John first starts reading Shakespeare, he discovers that the words make his emotions "more real" - they even make other people more real. Talk about the power of language in the book, the power of the word to influence thought and behavior. Why did Huxley choose Shakespeare as the medium of John's intellectual awakening?

10. Huxley wrote many other books, yet this is his most popular and most enduring. What is it about this book that has captured our imaginations for so long? Are there aspects of it that seem dated?

11. If you read the book earlier in life - say in high school or college - compare the experience of reading it again later on. Does it hold up to a second reading?

12. Talk about Huxley's use of narrator. Does the fact that Huxley's vision was impaired for part of his life have any bearing on the way he narrates the story and sets the scenes?

13. Could anything like **Brave New World** really happen? Has it happened in some form that we don't fully recognize?

Author Bio

Poet, playwright, novelist and short story writer, travel writer, essayist, critic, philosopher, mystic, social prophet,

Aldous Huxley was one of the most accomplished and influential English literary figures of the mid-20th century. He was born in Surrey in 1894, and his books include **Crome Yellow, Antic Hay, Those Barren Leaves, Point Counter Point, Brave New World**, and **The Doors of Perception**. From 1937 on, Huxley made his home in Southern California. He died in 1963. Today he is remembered as one of the great explorers of 20th century literature, a writer who continually reinvented himself as he pushed his way deeper and deeper into the mysteries of human consciousness.

Critical Praise

"A Fantastic racy narrative, full of much excellent satire and literary horseplay."

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