*Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood
Study Guide Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Margaret Atwood’s 2003 novel, *Oryx and Crake*, paints a terrifying picture of a not so distant future in which genetic engineering runs amok and all of human civilization lives in ruins, the victim of a deadly viral plague. Although some classify the novel as science fiction Atwood prefers the term *speculative fiction* as this term suggests that the story is rooted in ideas concepts and events already present in contemporary society. Indeed, the advances in bioengineering in years since the novel’s publication eerily parallel some of the events in the story.

Oryx and Crake is not a children’s book. Readers should be aware that there are troubling scenes depicting violence, drug use, pornography, and sex. The post apocalyptic setting is frightening. It is also a satire of contemporary society, a heartbreaking romance, and an exciting quest story.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Pre-Reading

If you could create an improved, biologically viable human being, what features would you incorporate? Why?

Look up the two epigraphs. Summarize their meaning in their original context. What tone does each set?

Define the following terms.

Intertextuality

Neologism

Portmanteau

Discuss the following questions from the novel[[2]](#footnote-2).

1. What is the connection between a utopia and a dystopia?
2. What is wrong or right? How does the continuum work?
3. How is changing the genetic make-up of multiple organisms affecting the natural order? How does one define what is natural and what is modified?
4. Can businesses one day take the place of government?
5. What is at the heart of storytelling? Isn’t everyone a compilation of their own stories?
6. Why is language (especially naming) important?

Reading

The novel is narrated by a character called Snowman who tells the story both in the present and in flashback when, as a child and young man, he was known as Jimmy. The book opens in a strange and forbidding setting, and the reader must piece together both the past and the present to make sense of the story.

Main Characters

**Snowman (Jimmy)** is the protagonist of the book who has renamed himself Snowman. The novel is told from his point of view from the current time when he is Snowman to his memories of his past when he was still Jimmy.

**Crake (Glenn)** is Jimmy’s best friend. He takes on the name Crake when playing the online game Extinctathon with Jimmy.

**Orxy** is a mysterious woman whom both Jimmy and Crake love. Born in a poor village, she is sold by her mother at an early age.

**Secondary Characters/Creatures:** Write the name and description of other characters below.

For each assigned reading, please complete the following.

1. Prepare resonance commentary and/or a discussion question. These will lead the class discussion on the due date.
2. Create and hand in a list of vocabulary that is new to you, and a six-ten sentence paragraph personal reaction to the reading.

Sections 1-5 (p1-110) due: **Tuesday 21**

Sections 6-9 (p113-238) due: **Monday 3**

Sections 10-15 (p 241-end) due:  **Tuesday 11**

1. A study guide for Margaret Atwood's "Oryx and Crake" – Gale, Cengage Learning [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Guide for Oryx and Crake St. Cloud University [↑](#footnote-ref-2)