

## **Utopia on Trial: The Science of Society, 2009**

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### **Synopsis**

The unit, “Utopia on Trial: The Science of Society,” occurs within the context of a larger thematic unit entitled “The Challenge of Society” and incorporates two texts, *The Giver* and *Frankenstein*, that are part of the 8th-grade standard course of study. Modern science unfolds during the study of *The Giver*, a novel in which society maintains “utopia” through euthanasia, chemically controlled emotional suppression, and controlled fertilization and procreation. Amidst this scientifically sterilized community, an unlikely transgressor in the form of a twelve-year-old “Receiver of Memory” named Jonas, challenges the scientific suppression of pain at the expense of emotion. Jonas’ internal crisis and subsequent transgression parallels a number of modern scientific questions with which students themselves will grapple. While reading *Frankenstein*, and analyzing Dr. Frankenstein’s role as a transgressor, students examine the consequences of scientific discovery unleashed on a society unprepared to accept the subsequent alterations to accepted cultural norms. Expanding upon the scientific issues within both texts, students then examine the pros and cons of scientific advancement as they engage with nonfiction articles on sterilization, cloning, and euthanasia and examine in detail the moral and ethical ramifications of science’s impact on society, especially society’s driven by utopian desires.