

Lesson Plan: Janelle Monae and Metropolis

Check out this silent film “Metropolis” from the 1920s.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvtWDIZtrAE> (The film is long; you can choose the major plot points to show in class: the character set up, the falling-in-love scene, the conflict and the final resolution. Or, you can opt for showing the trailer in class.)

- Describe the society depicted in this film.
- What is the driving conflict for the workers? For the elites? For the society as a whole?
- What happens at the end of the film? How does the prophet fit into her own prophecies?

This film was a huge inspiration for Janelle Monae, an afro-futurist musician and performer. She adapted elements of the film into her album “Metropolis: Suite I,” and you can see a glimpse of it in her music videos. Take the video for “Many Moons,” for example:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZyyORSHbaE>

- What’s happening in this clip? What social event is being depicted?
- What sets Monae’s characters apart from the other people/characters in the music video?
- Who is Cindi Mayweather? What is her role at the event? How does she fulfill her role?

What elements are similar between the two clips (Metropolis and Many Moons)?

Find a lyric from the song that matches a scene from Metropolis. How does the lyric interpret the silent film? How does Monae add afro-futurist themes to the premise of the silent film?

Compare and contrast the fate of the prophet (heroine) from “Metropolis” and Cindi Mayweather from “Many Moons.”

Read this essay: <https://www.tor.com/2019/10/18/metropolis-meets-afrofuturism-the-genius-of-janelle-monae/> This essay explores the role of an alter-ego and a broad narrative in Monae’s work.

Who is Monae’s alter-ego? Why does Monae use an alter-ego, do you think?

Hint: Look at this quote for some clues.

“I thought science fiction was a great way of talking about the future,” Janelle Monáe told *Bust Magazine* in a 2013 interview. “It doesn’t make people feel like you’re talking about things that are happening right now, so they don’t feel like you’re talking down to them. It gives the listener a different perspective.”

How does Janelle Monae build on the afro-futurist tradition of musicians and artists that came before her?

What is her goal? What message does she hope to convey through her alter-ego and stories?