**Science Fiction: An Ancient Entertainment**

Even though the word science wasn’t part of our vocabulary until 1833 and the term science fiction didn’t appear until 1851, science fiction, as a genre, has much older roots. We know from ancient formations such as Stonehenge and the pyramids, whose builders aligned these structures with the stars, that humans have wondered for centuries about how we fit into the vast universe. In a way, science fiction writers are like these architects: they attempt to write humankind into the cosmos and to answer difficult questions about how we fit into the universe.

To answer these questions, science fiction often changes along with technology. H. G. Wells published *The War of the Worlds*, a novel about an alien invasion, in 1898, when humans experimented with flight. Orson Welles performed his famous radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* in 1938, at the height of radio’s popularity, and caused widespread panic when people thought that the news on the broadcast was real. Several movies were made of *The War of the Worlds*: the first in 1953, in the middle of America’s space race with the Soviet Union, and the second in 2005, a few years after the launch of the International Space station. This one novel, and all of the ways in which it has been reinvented for different media, has mirrored humanity’s own advancements while imagining humankind as part of a more crowded universe.

Today, science fiction is more popular than ever. Every bookstore has a science fiction section. New science fiction movies are released weekly. We collect comic books and action figures and other memorabilia. We stand in lines that circle city blocks to get into comic book conventions filled with costumed participants, actors, and model spacecraft from our favorite science fiction shows. All of this passion reflects more than merely an appreciation for being entertained. It is a testament to humanity’s burning desire to place itself in the stars.

          The desire starts young and makes lifelong fans of science fiction. Cartoons and comic books featuring tales of the future draw in young readers. These readers continue to read the genre because science fiction grows the same way people do: by seeking answers to life’s questions. What will become of us? How will our environment change? How do we fit in the world? Science fiction attempts to answer these questions, sometimes with vivid imaginings, and sometimes with predictions about the future that are, not infrequently, surprisingly accurate.

          Science fiction appeals to our sense of wonder. Young Readers explore the unknown, and seasoned readers dig for answers to life’s biggest questions. If art is a reflection of life, then the art of science fiction is something worse. It does not just reflect our fascination with futuristic technology- it also reflects our search for the meaning of life itself.

**Science Fiction Is a Business Fact**

Science fiction has come very far very fast-one might say at warp speed. Once thought of as the genre best discussed in the back room of the local comic shop, dominated by fantastic plots and not-at-all-serious literature, science fiction now boasts eight of the top ten highest-grossing movies of all time. And thanks to the efforts of huge comic book and film companies and their millions of fans, science fiction is expanding beyond bookstore shelves and box offices.

The popularity of science fiction has always relied on the diversity of its product lines for profit. T-shirts and video games, along with action figures, role-playing games, lunch boxes, and toothbrushes, have crowded shelves all over the country. And these diverse marketing tools have served to feed the flames of science fiction's billion-dollar profit machine. After all, men and women in their fifties sport Darth Vader coffee mugs, but even literature professors do not often have War and Peace ballpoint pens, despite that book's reputation as a serious novel.

Intelligent marketing and solid story lines make science fiction a booming business. Underdogs win on their wits, the guy gets the girl, good beats evil, the world is saved, and the sidekick gets the credit she deserves. And the consumer can wear the shirt, own the cell phone cover, go see the movie for a third time, and buy the graphic novel. There is big money to be made in science fiction, even though it was once considered beneath people who read "real" literature.

However, profit margins don't tell the whole story of science fiction's popularity. Good writing makes science fiction a serious literary form. The characters are well written; even bad guys, such as Magneto and Darth Vader, have a depth that comes from serious development. The characters' backstories rival those of the characters in serious works by Shakespeare, such as Hamlet, for complexity. Themes as universal as love, war, betrayal, and survival appeal to readers and keep them wanting more.

And finally, the serial nature of many of the story lines keeps readers enthralled. Many science fiction writers have 10 or 15 books per series. The Star Wars saga alone is comprised of over 100 novels, not including comic book offshoots or graphic novels. Readers don't just buy a book; they get hooked on a series and follow it for a lifetime.

Science fiction is a corporate titan. Brilliant marketing, amazing visual appeal, universal themes, and enduring characters make science fiction a business fact not to be ignored.

**Writing Task**

Science fiction has become one of the most popular and profitable forms of entertainment in the world today. Think about this statement, and then write an informational/explanatory essay in your own words explaining why science fiction has become so successful. Be sure to use information from BOTH passages in your informational/explanatory essay.

**Writer’s Checklist**

Be sure to:

* Introduce the topic clearly, provide a focus, and organize information in a way that makes sense.
* Use information from the two passages so that your essay includes important details.
* Develop the topic with facts, definitions, details, quotations, or other information and examplesrelated to the topic.
* Identify the passages by title or number when using details or facts directly from the passages.
* Develop your ideas clearly and use your own words, except when quoting directly from the passages.
* Use appropriate and varied transitions to connect ideas and to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
* Use clear language and vocabulary.
* Establish and maintain a formal style.
* Provide a conclusion that supports the information presented.
* Check your work for correct usage, grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Now write your informational essay. Refer to the Writer’s Checklist as you write and proofread your essay.