

# Reading and video: Black Mirror

## Comprehension

Read the text about the TV programme *Black Mirror* and decide if the following statements are true or false.

- 1 *Black Mirror* deals with true events.
- 2 It looks at how technology affects society.
- 3 It is a continuing story with many episodes.
- 4 It tends to have a pessimistic view of the future.
- 5 The creator was influenced by other TV programmes.
- 6 It is set in the future, many years from now.

## Vocabulary

Match the words from the text with the meanings.

standalone	without hope; evil
satirical	not part of a set
dark	critical in a humorous way
controversial	causing disagreement
clumsy	awkward; not skilful

## Speaking

Work in small groups. Discuss the questions about the technologies listed below.

3D printing artificial intelligence big data drones  
self-driving cars social media space travel virtual reality

- 1 Which of the technologies have changed or are changing our lives?
- 2 Which will probably change our lives soon?
- 3 What 'unexpected consequences' have these technologies had, or might they have in the future?

## Video comprehension

You are going to [watch a clip](#) from a *Black Mirror* episode called *Nosedive*. Discuss possible meanings for the title and then check in your dictionary.

What do you think the episode might be about?

Watch the clip and answer the questions below.

- 1 Where is the woman and what does she do in the clip?
- 2 What seems to make her happy?
- 3 What kind of person do you think she is?
- 4 How is the world shown different from today?
- 5 How has technology affected people's behaviour?
- 6 What do you think the main theme of the episode is?



Black Mirror

Pic: [Pexels / ELTbase \(CC\)](#)

*Black Mirror* is a science fiction television series created by British writer Charlie Brooker. It examines modern society, particularly with regard to the unexpected consequences of new technologies.

Episodes are standalone, usually set in an alternative present or the near future, often with a dark and satirical tone, though some are more experimental and lighter.

*Black Mirror* was inspired by older series such as *The Twilight Zone*, which were able to deal with controversial, contemporary topics without fear of censorship.

Brooker developed *Black Mirror* to highlight topics related to humanity's relationship to technology, creating stories that feature 'the way we live now - and the way we might be living in 10 minutes' time if we're clumsy.'

## Featurette with the writer

You are going to [watch a one-minute featurette](#) in which the writer and one of the actors talk about *Nosedive*.

- 1 Which of the video comprehension questions does the featurette answer?
- 2 What else do we learn?

## Discussion

Discuss the questions in small groups.

- 1 How important are 'likes' on social media to you?
- 2 Brooker says the episode is about acceptance. Is the desire for acceptance a bad thing?
- 3 What negative consequences of social media ratings can you think of?
- 4 What are the limitations of number rating systems?

# Word list: Black Mirror

<b>big data</b>	<i>noun</i>	very large sets of data that are produced when people use the Internet
<b>censorship</b>	<i>noun</i>	when the government or others stop a book etc. from being published or remove parts of it because they don't want people to see it
<b>clip</b>	<i>noun</i>	short part of a movie or TV programme
<b>clumsy</b>	<i>adjective</i>	(person) moving in a way that is not careful; without skill
<b>consequence</b>	<i>noun</i>	the result of something, especially if it is bad
<b>contemporary</b>	<i>adjective</i>	happening at the present time
<b>controversial</b>	<i>adjective</i>	causing disagreement
<b>dark</b>	<i>adjective</i>	without hope; evil
<b>drone</b>	<i>noun</i>	aircraft, sometimes very small, without a pilot and controlled from the ground
<b>episode</b>	<i>noun</i>	single TV programme that forms part of a series or serial
<b>inspire</b>	<i>verb</i>	give someone an idea for making or doing something; provide an example that people want to follow
<b>nosedive</b>	<i>verb</i>	(plane etc.) fall suddenly to the ground; (metaphor) suddenly get worse
<b>pessimistic</b>	<i>adjective</i>	tending to think that bad things will happen
<b>satirical</b>	<i>adjective</i>	relating to a book or movie that criticises something in a humorous way
<b>science fiction</b>	<i>noun</i>	type of written story, movie or TV drama that involves future technology and / or imaginary worlds in the future
<b>standalone</b>	<i>adjective</i>	not needing to be connected to other things
<b>virtual reality</b>	<i>noun</i>	kind of computer viewing experience with sounds and moving images that make the viewer feel s/he is physically in the scene

# Answers: Black Mirror

## Page 1

### Comprehension

1.  
False. It is science fiction.
2.  
True. It examines the unanticipated consequences of new technologies.
3.  
False. Each episode is standalone.
4.  
True. Episodes often have a dark and satirical tone.
5.  
True. It was inspired by older series such as *The Twilight Zone*.
6.  
False. It is set in an alternative present or near future.

### Vocabulary

**standalone**

not part of a set

**satirical**

critical in a humorous way

**dark**

without hope; evil

**controversial**

causing disagreement

**clumsy**

awkward; not skilful

### Speaking

1.  
Arguably, big data, space travel and social media
2.  
Common choices would be artificial intelligence, drones and self-driving cars.
3.  
It has been suggested that social media has led to cyberbullying and social withdrawal. Space missions in the 1960s led to the development of the satellites that we use for communication, weather etc. Another idea is that seeing the Earth from space gave us a greater appreciation of its fragility and contributed to the foundation of the environmental movement in the 1970s; 3D printing has been used to make hand guns; big data has been used controversially in political campaigns; there are widespread concerns that AI could lead to a world in which humans are controlled by robots.

### Video comprehension

1.  
She's in an outdoor restaurant. She seems to be rating everything and everyone.
2.  
Her happiness appears to depend on her ratings.
3.  
She seems superficially happy but anxious and eager to please others.
4.  
It is possible to rate everything and everyone and see everyone else's ratings.
5.  
It has made them more superficial and insincere.
6.  
According to Charlie Brooker, the theme is acceptance.

### Featurette with the writer

1.  
Questions 2 and 3 - 'Lacie lives her life trying to please everyone.' 5 'Everyone is a little bit heightened and false.' 6 'Nosedive is a satire on acceptance.'
2.  
The consequences of low ratings are unpleasant. It's similar to the world we live in.

### Discussion

1.  
Students give their own answers.
2.  
Possibly not. We are social animals and the desire for acceptance by others may be a natural trait that has always been there. An interesting question is whether social media is giving too much emphasis to the trait and distorting it.
3.  
There have been reports of bullying on social media with tragic consequences for some people.
4.  
Numbers would seem a crude way of rating complex social relationships.