

# Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*

Background and Significance

# *Utopia* Facts

- Sir Thomas More created the word “utopia” in 1516.
- The word comes from two Greek words: “oi” (not) and “topos” (place) = “nowhere.”
- More wrote *Utopia* in Latin, but due to its instant popularity, it has been repeatedly translated into English and other languages.



# Utopia Facts continued

- Though a work of fiction, the characters of More, Giles, and Morton all correspond to actual historical people: Sir Thomas More (author of *Utopia*), the Humanist Peter Giles, and former Chancellor of England Cardinal John Morton.



# *Utopia's* Context

- More was an English lawyer and humanistic philosopher during the Renaissance.
- More was executed for treason during King Henry VIII's reign.
- More saw the greed and poverty in England and wanted to change it by closing the gap between the upper and lower classes.
- *Utopia* (1516) is a social criticism of the Renaissance England; More identifies the problems and provides utopian solutions for them.

# *Utopia* Summary

- While traveling, Giles introduces More to Raphael Hythloday, a philosopher and world traveler.
- Hythloday describes how he once proposed alternatives to many evil civil practices of England to Cardinal Morton and his advisors. The advisors ridicule him, and his proposals are dismissed.



# Utopia Summary continued

- Hythloday shows how pointless it is to counsel a leader when the he can always expect his other advisors to agree with his own beliefs or policies.
- Hythloday then describes his travels to the island of Utopia, explaining their policies, laws, and practices as superior to their own.

