

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Time Machine (Unabridged)

by
H.G. Wells

Book Information

H.G. Wells, The Time Machine (Unabridged)

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Interest Level: UG

An incredible invention enables the Time Traveller to reach year 802701.

Topics: Adventure, Discovery/Exploration; Classics, Classics (All); Popular Groupings, College Bound; Power Lessons AR, Grade 7; Science Fiction, Future; Science Fiction, Time Travel

Main Characters

Eloi the carefree, fun-loving, and childlike species of future human beings who live above ground

Morlocks the frightening and mechanically-minded species of future human beings who live below ground

Narrator an unnamed member of a group of men invited to the Time Traveller's home to hear his story and witness his invention

The Time Traveller the main character of the story; a scientifically-minded individual who discovers a way to travel through time and relates his adventures to a group of men

Weena the affectionate female Eloi the Time Traveller befriends in the future

Vocabulary

camphor a gooey, potentially explosive compound used to protect fabrics, manufacture celluloid, or be used as an ingredient in certain medicines

paleontology the study of past life, especially fossils

paradox something that seems contradictory or unreliable, but in reality may be true

velocity the speed at which something travels

Synopsis

The novel begins with the Time Traveller convening with a group of men mostly referred to by their occupations. He speaks of scientific and geometric theories, then subtly hints at the purpose of their gathering: to introduce them to the reality of time travel. The Time Traveller then produces a small, glittering, metallic item: a model of his Time Machine. To prove its authenticity, he has the Psychologist pull a lever and the little machine disappears. Most of the men ponder its whereabouts and speculate over the possibility of some trick or illusion. He then shows the men his Time Machine and agrees to show them more at a later date.

Once again, the men have gathered at the Time Traveller's house. The Time Traveller arrives a bit late for supper, looking quite disheveled and hungry for meat. One of the men asks him if he has been time travelling, and he replies that he has. After dining, he proceeds to tell the men of his adventure into the future.

The Time Traveller describes the many sensations and sights he experienced while traveling in the Time Machine. The days and nights quickly flash by him and he eventually lands in what would prove to be an extremely futuristic England, hundreds of thousands of years from his own time. He is approached by very small and pretty creatures called Eloi. They are simple-minded and childlike, possessing short attention spans and a very simple language.

Shortly after his arrival, the Time Traveller notices his Time Machine is missing. He suspects it is hidden in a statue he calls the White Sphinx, but the Eloi become frustrated or scared when he tries to approach them about it. He decides the only way to retrieve his machine is to bide his time and learn as much about them as he can. He soon discovers that they have only one fear, the ghastly, underground-dwelling Morlocks. He concludes that the Morlocks took his Time Machine and decides to seek them out. Meanwhile, his new friend, an Eloi named Weena, has become quite attached to him. She does not want him to go down the well that

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leads to the Morlocks realm.

After descending into their lair, however, he is accosted by the Morlocks' touches and strange sounds. They attempt to drag him away, but he manages to stave them off with a lit match and returns to the surface. He learns that the Morlocks are afraid of fire and light. He also comes to the realization that the Morlocks are raising the gentle Eloi like cattle and feeding off them. He becomes determined to leave and take Weena back to his own time.

After a suspenseful skirmish, the Time Traveller manages to defeat many Morlocks by inadvertently starting a forest fire. Unfortunately, Weena is lost. He assumes she is consumed by the fire. The Time Traveller finds the Sphinx open and his Time Machine inside. The Morlocks intend to trap him in there, but he narrowly escapes in his machine.

Back in the present, most of the Time Traveller's colleagues seem very skeptical about his experience. The narrator, however, determines to come back and see him again. The Time Traveller promises to show him proof of time travelling if he will only wait for him a short while. The narrator witnesses the disappearance of the Time Traveller and is convinced his story is true. In an epilogue, the narrator wonders where the Time Traveller is because he has been missing for three years.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

The Time Traveller often describes the Eloi as being childlike. Why does he think this?

The Time Traveller assumes that human intelligence would have increased greatly in the future. Instead, the Eloi have very simplistic ideas and explanations for things. They think the Time Traveller has come from "the sun in a thunderstorm." Plus, they are easily distracted and have short attention spans. They also lack the ability to read and write and are quite ignorant about many things.

Literary Analysis

How are the Morlocks antagonists in this book? Who is to blame for the Morlock's behavior?

The Morlocks are antagonists in the story because they steal the Time Machine and pose the extreme conflict the Time Traveller needs to resolve before he can return home. Students may debate whether the Morlocks are evil or not. In one sense, they are no longer human and seem to act only out of animalistic instinct. They raise the Eloi for food, just as we raise cattle. In another sense, they are human and participate in organized cannibalism. If one does not fault the Morlocks themselves, then students will probably relate them to present-day society and its division of social classes. The story explains the evolution of the Morlocks and Eloi from the "have nots" and the "haves." They could also blame technology because of the way it changes and misplaces people.

Inferential Comprehension

What do you think would have happened if Weena had lived and returned to the past with the Time Traveller?

The Editor and the Journalist, among others, would have most certainly learned about her and turned her into a media sensation. She would likely have been exploited by the media and experimented on by scientists. It is unlikely that she would just fit right into life with the Time Traveller. She would probably be very disoriented and perhaps even resentful of the Time Traveller for bringing her to his world.

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Constructing Meaning

What might be some of the benefits of time travel?
What might be some of the drawbacks?

Time travel could perhaps be used to change traumatic events of the past. One might be able to stop Hitler from his extermination of the Jews. John F. Kennedy's death might be prevented with a warning. Medical technology could be brought to the people of the past. Drawbacks would include physical stress to the body and the dangers of arriving in a society in which we really know nothing about. Other possible dangers are being trapped in the past or future and altering the course of events so that the world today is not as we know it.

Teachable Skills

Understanding the Author's Craft H.G. Wells wrote several articles for various magazines and publications before becoming a famous book author. Wells dealt with the theory of time travel in articles written for the *National Observer*, *Science Schools Journal*, and *New Review*. See if you can locate these articles and share them with the students. How do they compare with *The Time Machine*? How do they differ? What stylistic similarities can you see among Wells's various writings?

Comparing and Contrasting The Time Traveller describes the Eloi as being simplistic and having no abstract terms and little use of figurative language (chapter five). At first he seems to think they are the ideal society, though. This is similar to the situation Gulliver faces when he meets the Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver's Travels*. Naive Gulliver completely idolizes the Houyhnhnms, but they are not as wonderful as they appear. With all their seeming perfection, they do not have strong affection and, in a sense, they are not really free because they are so unaware. Have students read the story of the Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver's Travels* and write an essay comparing and contrasting the Eloi and the Houyhnhnms.

Making Predictions H.G. Wells wrote a collection

of articles that later collectively became known as "Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought." In it, he made predictions for the future. Have students write an article and make their own predictions for the future of our world, one hundred years from now. How will we live? What will life be like? Will we still live on this planet?

Recognizing Cause and Effect H.G. Wells was born during a time of change. Such inventions as steam engines and farm equipment were transforming the world. Have students make a list of the inventions of Wells's time and how they changed society. Then have students make a second list of recent inventions (Internet, satellite technology, laser technology, etc.) and how they have changed our society.