

The Time Trilogy Literature Program

“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

— T.S. Eliot

I have always enjoyed a good time travel story. The mere possibility of being able to travel through time, catching glimpses of the future and potentially altering the past, has fascinated me from a young age. Most of my exposure to writing within this genre was offered far away from any classroom. What a joy it was for me then, upon opening the pages of the *The Time Trilogy* (Royal Fireworks Press, 2012) by Michael Clay Thompson, to find a comprehensive literature program that I wish was available when I was a student. Thompson’s direction and clarity, written from a practitioner’s perspective, leaves all other reading programs in the dust, or in this case, in the past. The author suggests early on that “this program is a magic synergy of book, student, and teacher.” I could not agree more.

The Time Trilogy presents a collection of three works of literature, *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells, *A Connecticut Yankee in the Court of King Arthur* by Mark Twain, and *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, all complete and unabridged, accompanied by a *Teacher Manual*.

In each of the works, Thompson annotates the text with what he calls “Language Illustrations.” Much like visual illustrations found in texts, these “illustrations” provide a moment to reflect upon the written word from another perspective. It works! Thompson explores poetic techniques, analyses of grammar, definitions of vocabulary, and information regarding writing strategies and styles, hallmarks of other Thompson curricular materials. He notes that this series is, “not a place to teach the principles of grammar and poetics, but rather a place to take pleasure in them.” While I agree that these offerings are not intended to “teach” the myriad skills related to language study, a lot of learning occurs as the illustrations offer time to reflect on the written word.

The three novels are intended to be read in a particular order, as direction and activities found in the *Teacher Manual* build upon each other. In this way, students can analyze themes and characters, styles, and vocabulary across all three works, uncovering the interrelationships that exist between them. I had actually never thought of *A Christmas Carol* as a time travel story. Arranging the work in this way provides for rich reading experiences for the teacher and the students. Each title also presents author information in the context of historical and cultural facts. Additionally, the books are also set in great text, font, and spac-

ing in a size that makes them easy to handle and read.

The 110-page *Teacher Manual* covers all that the educator needs to know about and work with when using the selected texts. Thompson presents his premise—

that students need to experience literature as literature—in a conversational and suggestive tone. The reader has a chance to soak in the purpose, much like the students will do with the work at hand. The bulk of the manual offers a program strategy to be used by the teacher through a four-level process. Each novel receives its own set of directions, suggested activities, and explanation.

During the first level, **Preparing**, Thompson suggests pre-study activities that include research about the author, time period, and culture as well as a study of pertinent vocabulary. He offers a great list of words common to all three novels.

The second level, **Reading**, utilizes identified quotes as the jumping off point for discussions. There are no comprehension questions, quizzes, handouts, or worksheets. The goal is for the reading to be natural and fluid. Thompson offers advice for homework, pacing, and monitoring and most importantly, explanations of the language illustrations.

The third level, **Creative Thinking**, looks at the reading from a divergent thinking perspective. Thompson presents a fantastic progression through the novels of creative questioning intended to spark student thought in a meaningful way. My favorite, found after the last novel is read, is “Scrooge, Hank, and The Time Traveler have dinner together and discuss what it is like to go through time. What do they say?”

The last level, **Writing**, suggests instructional techniques and prompts to use when practicing and completing written *Modern Language Association* (MLA) papers. Thompson provides some excellent examples too.

The past, we know. The future, we do not. The present, experienced through reflection and projection, offers pause for decision making and understanding. *The Time Trilogy* provides a fresh and interesting look at sharing three classics with students. For me it is as if I have explored these texts for the first time. I wish the same for you and your students. **THP**

