

The Fog Trilogy

A Four-Level Literature
Parent Manual

by Michael Clay Thompson

Royal Fireworks Press
Unionville, New York

Four-Level Literature: General Comments

The purpose of this literature program is to immerse children in great books so that they experience literature as literature and not as a drudgery of tedious school activities. I want children's minds on the books themselves and not on attendant assignments. It is by loving to read that children become literate.

The pedagogy of this program is grown-up and reflective; it is deliberately simple, focusing entirely on the reading of the book and avoiding all traditional worksheet activities in favor of rich discussion and thoughtful writing. Busywork has been eliminated. The activities that are included are flexible options, not a rigid system requiring every step every time. In the end if the child does not love reading, we have failed.

This manual is for the homeschool parent. The homeschool environment is different in many dimensions from the traditional school environment, and the recommendations take full advantage of the

unique flexibility and purity of concentration that occur in the homeschool setting. In writing a manual for homeschool use, however, I am mindful that the homeschool environment itself exists in many variations. Some children are homeschooled individually, others in small groups or classes. There will be homeschool children using this literature trilogy who are eight or nine years old and others who are of middle school age. There will be homeschool parents who want a grade-free, creative environment and others who want to establish a classical academic rigor that they may feel is lacking in the school system.

My strategy in this manual, therefore, is to provide paths for all of the above. I may refer to the *child*, or I may refer to the *class*, thinking of a small homeschool class. I may provide options for a fifth grader, and I may provide options for a seventh grader, who is by no means too old to read the books in this trilogy. Every activity in this manual can be conducted as an ungraded, creative activity, or it can be graded by a parent who wants the child to learn how to navigate a grading system. I do not provide any system for grading.

It is important that the approach to literature be

literary, focused on the texts, and simple. I do not want a noisy panorama of activities, worksheets, and other busywork to be the program. The program is the books. I want our approach to be deft and quiet, rather than loud. I want us to behave with literary grace. I want our activities to cuddle up to the books. We will do some creative and academic work in conjunction with the books, with our hearts turned at all times toward the books.

Accordingly, we can think about the program strategy in terms of four simple levels. The four levels are preparing, reading, creative thinking, and writing.

1. Preparing

Prior to reading the book, we might use an encyclopedia or the internet to look up the author and learn about the author's life and the place of the book in cultural history. This content, however, is secondary to the content of the book itself; it would not be important if the book were not important. An alternative is to do this research after reading the book, when the child may be even more curious about the details.

We might also prestudy the vocabulary by studying

The Fog Trilogy
Vocabulary Prestudy

Here are ten words or sets of words common to all three novels. Let us examine them before beginning the trilogy.

adjacent: adj. next to, side by side

attitude: n. posture, position

clamber: v. climb awkwardly

despondent: adj. discouraged

din: n. a loud, long, unpleasant noise

hither / thither: adv. here / there

latter: n. the last mentioned

presently: adv. soon

remonstrance: n. a forceful protest

singular: adj. unique

adjacent: adj. next to, side by side

“He pointed out to me how unlikely it was that organic evolution had taken the same direction in the two adjacent planets.”

The War of the Worlds

“He stood, erect and tranquil, watching the attack begin against a part of the line that made a blue curve along the side of an adjacent hill.”

The Red Badge of Courage

“Yet my presence was known before I left to all the people in Balquhidder and the adjacent parts....”

Kidnapped

The War of the Worlds

A Comment

Is an alien invasion possible?

H.G. Wells's roaring novel of alien invasion, *The War of the Worlds*, first appeared in 1898. It depicted the invasion of the Earth by an advanced extraterrestrial species armed with destructive technology more powerful than anything known to humanity. In Wells's vision, our blue-world Earth had been scrutinized long and hard by the red-world Martians who were intent on colonizing it, wiping out humanity to do it.

At the time that Wells wrote the novel in 1897, scientific interest in Mars—the next planet out—was increasing. Percival Lowell was beginning the process that would lead to his publication of illustrations depicting what he thought were canals on Mars, and speculation ran amok that Mars might be the site of alien life, even intelligent alien life. Telescopes then, though, were not what they are now. Mars was still a

blurry image in the lens, and the smudgy shapes left much to the imagination.

The astronomers' discoveries primed readers for a terrifying account of alien invasion, and Wells filled his story with just enough science to make the invasion believable.

The story would be harder to accept today, now that we have telescopes of near-unimaginable power and now that we have sent exploratory robots to Mars.

Human beings have not yet set foot on Mars, but we have landed—at this point—seven spacecraft on the planet, including brilliant rovers that have crawled across the red dunes, transmitting photographs of the Martian landscape back to us.

We now know parts of Mars better than we know some areas of Earth. We have trekked, via our rovers, across Martian plains and valleys, up hills and mountains, and around boulders. We have seen dust devils dance across the Martian barrens. We have zoomed in on rocks and on strata, and we have clambered down into craters to have a look-see.

We have seen Earth glimmering high in the Martian sky.

The War of the Worlds

Language Illustration Questions

The following questions concern the language illustrations that appear in this edition of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. These questions will promote a thoughtful involvement with what the illustrations reveal about Wells's writing.

1. What do you think is the point of the language illustration on page 30? Please explain.
 2. Explain, in your own words, the common point of the language illustrations on pages 53 and 54.
 3. Explain the meaning of the language illustration on page 66.
-

The War of the Worlds

Quotations for Discussion

The War of the Worlds does not lend itself to the kind of quote quizzes that I like to use. Most of the text is simply by the anonymous narrator; the other words are often by minor characters who speak briefly and do not appear again. The entire novel has the feel of a historical narrative in order to give the impression of reality.

Quote quizzes are appropriate for novels that have an identifiable and usually relatively small group of characters who appear in most chapters and who create quotable dialogues. That format allows us to select particular quotes that are characteristic of characters, quotes that are memorable, quotes that illustrate themes.

In lieu of quote quizzes to assess daily reading for *The War of the Worlds*, I recommend brief, enjoyable, collaborative reviews of the chapter or chapters. I also have provided quotations from the novel that are not dialogue. These quotations are for reflection and

discussion, which could take the form of essay writing if that is one's preference. The child is not asked to comment on every quotation but is given a choice of several, allowing him or her to choose a favorite quotation or the one that he or she thinks is most interesting or meaningful.

These quotations are selected for their richness and potential for interpretation. There is not an answer key because there is not a right answer. These are open-ended Socratic reflections, not convergent questions that require the child to copy right answers onto a worksheet.

We want to foster extended, uninterrupted reading before pausing for reflection. This affords a more authentic reading experience than if we required paperwork after each chapter. We do not want these quotations to become major assignments that interrupt the flow of the book.

In other words, this assignment should not be heavy or overly time-consuming. The idea is good reflection without anxiety. This is an open-book assignment, and the child may wish to go to the book to read the context of the quotation or to use additional quotations in his or her essay. Choice is good, so it is also acceptable for

the child to select and discuss an interesting quotation not given here, instead of the ones that I provide. Each quotation is accompanied by the page number where it can be found.

15. Yet so vain is man, and so blinded by his vanity, that no writer, up to the very end of the nineteenth century, expressed any idea that intelligent life might have developed there far, or indeed at all, beyond its earthly level.

 58. The fear I felt was no rational fear, but a panic terror not only of the Martians, but of the dusk and stillness all about me. Such an extraordinary effect in unmanning me it had that I ran weeping silently as a child might do. Once I had turned, I did not dare to look back.

 68. But the trouble was the blank incongruity of this serenity and the swift death flying yonder, not two miles away.
-

The War of the Worlds

Creative Questions and Activities

These options are designed to expand the child's creative and imaginative interaction with the literature. I do not expect every option to be undertaken, and I would like for the child to play a part in choosing the creative activities that he or she will do. If you assign these as written essays, first person is acceptable.

1. Consider this quote from the novel: "And then, within thirty yards of the pit, advancing from the direction of Horsell, I noted a little black knot of men, the foremost of whom was waving a white flag.

"This was the Deputation. There had been a hasty consultation, and since the Martians were evidently, in spite of their repulsive forms, intelligent creatures, it had been resolved to show them, by approaching them with signals, that we

too were intelligent.”

The result of this action was that the Martians turned the Heat-Ray on the Deputation, vaporizing them all. What might have been a better approach on the part of the men if they wanted to offer friendship but still remain safe?

2. If you had been a newspaper editor in England when the first smoking cylinders landed, and glowing hatches began to unscrew from them, what would you have wanted your headline to be, and how would you have presented the story?

 3. As the chaos of the Martian invasion increases, and the sweeping Heat-Rays begin to destroy the local architecture and landscape, the narrator procures a cart and removes his wife to Leatherhead, thirty-eight miles to the northeast, where he believes that she will be safe. He leaves her there and returns to the scene of the invasion. Should he have remained in Leatherhead, near London, with his wife? Defend your answer.
-

The War of the Worlds

Academic Writing Practice

The War of the Worlds is a book that formed the basis of seemingly countless other novels and films about alien invasions, and Wells's depiction of aliens as enormous cephalopods continues to influence the shape of alien morphology. The novel contains interesting ethical and scientific details and ideas that provide opportunities for academic essays. These essays can combine quotations from *The War of the Worlds* itself and also from additional sources that the child might like to include; *The War of the Worlds* need not be the only source.

In my own courses I use open-book essay questions exclusively as the assessment for literature. I insist that essays be written in standard academic English. They must be true essays, with introductions, bodies, and conclusions centered on single ideas. Students must use the standard conventions of formal style: no contractions, no first person. *Essay Voyage* and my *Advanced Academic*

Writing books provide the guidelines for the essays. I like to provide four or five study questions in advance, and I give students several days to prepare for the essays. The actual essay test presents students with three of the study questions, with one being mandatory. Each student chooses one of the remaining two to answer. Making one question mandatory causes students to prepare for all of the study questions, requiring substantial thought and rereading. I do not spring surprise questions on the students. I do believe that some student choice is important.

I provide seven questions here, and you can select those that you wish to give to the child. You also may replace any of these questions with questions of your own.

These are Socratic questions that do not favor one answer over another; the evaluation of the essays is based on the English, the essay structure, and the force of the case that the child makes with quotations. This means that the child may use his or her book during the essay session in order to quote from it.

1. Initial human assessment of the meaning and nature of the Martian landings was significantly inaccurate. What were the reasons that humanity failed to understand the essence of the Martian intentions?
 2. Why did the Martians use both the Heat-Ray and the black fog? Was the Heat-Ray alone insufficient?
 3. Does the narrator make mistakes as he navigates his way through the scene of the invasion? What are his two most serious mistakes?
 4. What parts of *The War of the Worlds* are most credible or believable? If a modern version of this story were actually to occur, would humanity today respond in a similar manner, or did Wells misunderstand how humanity would act?
 5. Which two characters, other than the narrator, are best drawn, are most realistic and believable?
-