

The Fog Trilogy

A Four-Level Literature
Teacher Manual

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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 classroom teacher. The classroom environment presents the teacher with unique limitations and opportunities. The classroom is a good environment for discussions and Socratic explorations

of ideas. The dynamic relationships between students and teacher provide moments of intense learning that are amplified by the group interactions. On the other hand, classroom teachers see students for limited amounts of time; teachers may have students of various readiness levels in the same classroom, and they usually have to report grades to an administration according to a system that can affect the classroom dynamic adversely. The activities that generate numerical scores may not be activities that increase student enthusiasm for content. Many of the most important things to teach are also the least scorable. Furthermore, classroom teachers have course content and test content that they are expected to cover, and this may limit the amount of time available for a literature program.

Teachers also work in a social culture that can be unintellectual or even anti-intellectual, and this may afford scant support for a teacher determined to bring rigorous, superb reading experiences to the students. The public understanding of the importance of literary classics, of long works, of works with rigorous vocabulary, and of works from previous generations or centuries is not always what a literature teacher would desire. The

teacher may be confronted with not only a lack of understanding but even an intractable opposition to these elements, even though these elements are the very heart of an authentic education.

All too often, great reading that includes these characteristics is rejected as “old-fashioned.” People who know literature well do not think that; it is an impediment to a credible program of literature, and it escalates the very weaknesses that our program is designed to strengthen.

Serious literature—including great children’s literature—is not old-fashioned, regardless of when it was written. High genius does not go out of fashion. Furthermore, Western civilization did not begin thirty years ago. It is no advantage to be able to read only entry-level books of the present generation. Great readers of every age read great writers of every age, and the great readers of our present avidly devour the best books of the past.

Books are the time machine of culture. Whenever they were written, it is now that we read them. It is one of the great joys of the educated mind to read back through time, to read back through the centuries, to read great

books written in the nineteenth century, the eighteenth century, and before. It is exciting to immerse oneself in the English of Jane Austen or of Daniel Defoe. There is a romance in the history of the English language. It is not better if one cannot read the *Declaration of Independence*, or *Gulliver's Travels*, or Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, or Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. We do not want our children's minds to be trapped in contemporary English or contemporary beginner's vocabulary.

Imagine that you lived in a spectacular mountain range, surrounded by famous peaks, but did not know it; you had a high fence, and all you had ever seen was the yard around your house.

We also do not want our children to be capable only of reading short works or excerpts. We want their attention spans to be developed and strengthened. Minds grow from struggle. Life is filled with problems that require long and complex thinking. There is a growth of intellect that occurs in following a story or argument for 300 pages that is unknown to everyone who has not experienced it, and almost all famous works are long. To eliminate long works from the educational program is to eliminate the educational program. It is to eliminate

almost all famous novels. It is to eliminate almost all of the reading that makes one educated. To avoid the long books is to be unread. The current emphasis on short works and excerpts, however well-intentioned, is an educational disaster. Long works are essential.

Short works and excerpts are geared to the instructional minutes available in a one-hour class period. They are not geared to the serious needs of an educated life, and there are abundant ways to incorporate long works into the classroom—ways that have been standard educational practice for centuries.

Finally, we do not want children's reading to focus on works of mere entertainment. Fun is desirable, but there is more to educated reading than fun, and fun is not the most important goal. Greater than fun is meaning. We want children to learn the excitement of thinking, of books that use fiction or nonfiction to disclose important ideas. We do not want children's reading experience to be limited to works of distraction. The educated mind is not a state of oblivion; it is a state of illumination. We want children to know the attraction of serious books with serious ideas that have the chance of being right or wrong. There are novels with memorable characters that

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.
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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. Students are not asked to comment on every quotation but are given a choice of several, allowing them to choose their favorite quotation or the one that they think 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 students 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 students may wish to go to the book to read the context of the quotation or to use additional quotations in their essays. Choice is good, so it is also acceptable for the

students 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.
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The War of the Worlds

Creative Questions and Activities

These options are designed to expand the students' creative and imaginative interaction with the literature. I do not expect every option to be undertaken, and I would like for the students to play a part in choosing the creative activities that they 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.
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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 students 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 students. 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 students make with quotations. This means that students may use their books during the essay session in order to quote from them.

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?
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