

The H.G. Wells 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

H.G. Wells: *"I Told You So"*

"I told you so."

- H.G. Wells, in his self-epitaph

"The minds of all of us, and therefore the physical world, would be perceptibly different if Wells had never existed."

- George Orwell, 1941

I have been fond, all my life, of reading novel after novel by the same author. Eventually, your brain takes a literary average of the books, and you discern the outline of the author's self as the common fabric of the books. You get to know the writer. You get to know the ideas and the voice.

You know what you are getting if you read a novel by Jack London: big words in a cold world. Lots of teeth. You can spot a Hemingway novel from a hundred yards: wounded personalities, short words, laconic replies, victims going through the motions. Beer in the morning.

You expect the sharp repartee in all Jane Austen novels, and the merciless intellect eviscerating human pretense.

And then there is Robert Louis Stevenson, whose work makes a striking contrast to that of Wells.

You would not read book after book by just anyone, and Stevenson and Wells were not anyones. Each author is *sui generis*; each occupies and even defines a particular kind of novel, a particular art view, a particular philosophy. They are not the same; the more you read both writers, the more you feel that Wells would never let Stevenson's world happen.

Or conversely, for that matter.

They were not friends, these two, Stevenson and Wells; they were only contemporaries in a meaningless way. Their lives overlapped a bit. Stevenson was born in 1850, eleven years before the Civil War began, and he died in 1894, when Wells was twenty-eight, so by the time H.G. Wells wrote his first major novel, *The Time Machine*, in 1895, Stevenson was old and out of reach, sniffing the salt wind of leafy Samoa, where he had retreated to ameliorate his failing health.

There is, however, an unlikely connection of friendship between Stevenson and Wells: both men were

The H.G. Wells Trilogy
Vocabulary Prestudy

Here are twenty-eight words common to all three novels. Let us examine them before beginning the trilogy.

acute: adj. sharp

apprehension: n. fear, anxiety

attenuated: adj. thin

clamber: v. to climb awkwardly with hands and feet

dexterous: adj. skillful

expostulation: n. a strong expression of disapproval

flaxen: adj. pale yellow

forthwith: adv. at once, immediately

furtive: adj. secret, sneaky, attempting to avoid notice

gesticulate: v. to gesture dramatically

grotesque: adj. weird, ugly

intimation: n. a hint

languor: n. tiredness, weariness; **languid:** adj. slow, lazy

latter: adj. or n. the second or last one mentioned

meditation: n. deep, considered thinking

minute: adj. small
oblique: adj. not parallel, at an angle
pallor: n. paleness; **pallid:** adj. pale
perplexity: n. confusion, puzzlement
profound: adj. deep
resolute: adj. determined
ruddy: adj. reddish
serenity: n. peaceful calm
singular: adj. unique
transitory: adj. brief, temporary, fleeting
tumult: n. a loud, confused disorder or noise
vestige: n. a trace
writhe: v. to twist and squirm

acute: adj. sharp
acutely: adv. sharply

“Though my arms and back were presently acutely painful, I went on clambering down the sheer descent with as quick a motion as possible.”

The Time Machine

“The contrast between the swift and complex movements of these contrivances and the inert panting clumsiness of their masters was acute....”

The War of the Worlds

“He was becoming aware of the faint sounds of my movements about him. The man must have had diabolically acute hearing.”

The Invisible Man

The Time Machine

A Comment

H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*—his first major novel—is an enduringly thought-provoking story. Decades after reading it, it lingers in one's imagination. It outlasts books that seem, at first, to be more important than it is or to be greater works of art than it is. After the dust of a lifetime's reading has begun to settle, *The Time Machine* is a book that remains.

Even at first glance, *The Time Machine* turns one's thoughts far beyond the quotidian topics of human interaction and the expectable tragedies. The Time Traveller zooms eight hundred thousand years into the future to find that the human species has diverged into two post-human forms, and after surviving that, he goes to the end of the world.

To comfort children, we say, “Don't worry, it's not the end of the world,” but in this novel the Time Traveller does go to the end of the world, thirty million

years into the future. The sun is a vast red glow, the atmosphere is reddish black, all vestiges of humanity have vanished, and doomed crustaceans scuttle across the cracking beach of the black ocean. In what other novel do we think in such detail about the biological future of humanity or about the details of the final death of our planet?

These visions are strange, not because we do not know that species change or that stars die. They are strange because in our usual thoughts about such things, we isolate ourselves from the reality of the knowledge. We dismiss these facts as quiz items. We categorize the ideas in safe layers of science, of intellectuality, and of academic gobbledywords.

Not Wells. Wells pushes us into a more authentic, braver confrontation with the consequences of our theories. He makes us stop talking and look.

The strangeness of the book, however, does not end with these apocalyptic intuitions. The very stuff of the narration is strange, detached, hard to pin down. Most of the characters have no names. They are shells, uttering a few words each. The protagonist is simply the Time Traveller. The most prominent named character is

The Time Machine

Language Illustration Questions

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

1. Please look through the language illustrations in the first four chapters of *The Time Machine*, and identify three that you find to be particularly interesting. Explain what you think is interesting in each case.
2. The last language illustration in Chapter One is about the sentence "Quartz it seemed to be," using a four-level analysis to explain the structure. Please put the point of this illustration in your own words, as though you were going to explain it to someone else.

The Time Machine
Quotations for Quote Quizzes

Because *The Time Machine* is not filled with dialogue, as most novels are, we will use quotations that call for identification instead. I have provided several quotations per chapter to be read aloud to the students for identification. Each quote begins with the number of the chapter in which it is found.

1. The thing the Time Traveller held in his hand was a glittering metallic framework, scarcely larger than a small clock, and very delicately made. There was ivory in it, and some transparent crystalline substance.
- the model time machine

 1. There was a breath of wind, and the lamp flame jumped. One of the candles on the mantel was blown out....
- the model vanishes
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The Time Machine

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. The Time Traveller told his friends that he went to two future destinations, but actually he went to another one that he did not mention because he thought it would be impossible to convince them of what he saw there. What was the third destination?
 2. At the end of the novel, the Time Traveller launches off into the future once again, but he never returns. What happened? Did his final destination produce a happy ending or a tragic ending?
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The Time Machine

Academic Writing Practice

The Time Machine provides an excellent basis for essay content. It is filled with advanced language and powerful themes. Some of these themes, such as the fate of humanity and the end of the world, are clearly for more mature students. H.G. Wells was a serious student of science and history—and a profound and responsible thinker about social systems—so the more knowledge students can bring to the essays from the beginning, the better. Well-educated students in middle school and high school should find the novel and the following essay questions challenging and appropriate.

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 more than five 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. The color red plays a prominent part in the novel, appearing sixteen times in Chapter Eleven. What part does the color red play in one's interpretation of the novel?
 2. The word *strange* (and its variations *strangeness* and *strangely*) appears throughout the novel. How is this concept important to the story?
 3. What is the Time Traveller's biggest mistake?
 4. Why do most of the characters in *The Time Machine* not have names? If Wells defended this stylistic decision, what might he have said?
 5. What idea in *The Time Machine* is the most original?
 6. Which group of future post-humans is most to be pitied: the Eloi or the Morlocks? Why?
 7. The Time Traveller's friends do not believe him. They do not believe that his invention is real, even when he shows them a working model and blasts it
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