

The Time Trilogy

A Four-Level Literature
Parent 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 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 occurs 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

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Vocabulary Prestudy

Here are fifteen words and phrases common to all three novels. Let us examine them before beginning the trilogy.

abyss: n. a deep or bottomless space

“...an abyss of thirteen centuries yawning between me and you...”

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court

hither and thither: here and there

“The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste....”

A Christmas Carol

humbug: n. false talk

“...it’s all humbug, you know.”

The Time Machine

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

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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 language illustration on page 29 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.

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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 child 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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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. 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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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 a child can bring to the essays from the beginning, the better. Well-educated students at the middle school and high school levels 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 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. 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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