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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Time Machine

by H.G. Wells

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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ISBN: 978-1-58049-047-4

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Item No: 301133

The Time Machine

Introduction

The setting for *The Time Machine* is London at about the turn of the twentieth century. Like many of his contemporaries, H.G. Wells was enthralled by the technological and scientific advances of his time. He could also envision, however, where these great strides forward might lead; and his speculations proved quite provocative and unsettling.

As Ray Bradbury and other later science fiction writers also do, Wells looks at disturbing conditions in his own society and projects what might result. In this regard, keep in mind the socio-economic conditions in England in the last decade of the nineteenth century. There are two classes, the rich and the poor. While the poor are condemned to labor underground in the mines and the factories, the rich are gaining more time, energy, and money to spend in the cultivation of leisurely pursuits. Looking through the telescope of history, where will it all end? H. G. Wells gives us his answer.

All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics Edition of *The Time Machine*, copyright 2006.

The Time Machine

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. recall and identify the events and characters in the narrative.
2. write a character analysis of
 - The Time Traveler
 - Weena
3. define the following literary terms and relate them to this story:
 - point of view
 - verisimilitude
 - realism
 - romanticism
 - foreshadowing
4. identify and discuss the following themes:
 - Man and other living organisms evolve as they adapt to a hostile environment.
 - Eventually, the class struggle will grow violent as the gap between the Haves and the Have-nots grows wider.
 - Civilized people will lose important characteristics such as intelligence, creativity, and combativeness, once they are no longer critical for their survival.
5. prove the following thesis by citing examples and comments from the book:
 - Technological progress will lead to a civilization that is able to subdue nature and reach an apex. As nature is subdued, however, humanity's energy and society will begin to decline because the need to fight to survive will no longer be present.
6. identify why, and in what ways this book is a good example of
 - science fiction
 - classic literature
7. cite specific examples from the book to discuss the balance of power between the Morlocks and the Eloi, and identify factors that may affect that balance.

The Time Machine

Questions for Essays and Discussion

1. A major theme in this novel is that the continued exploitation of the masses by the aristocracy will result in disaster for everyone. Cite and compare actual historical events with the events in the story to support this thesis.
2. Discuss Wells's philosophical view on evolution. How and why does evolution take place?
3. Wells maintains that eventually humans will subdue nature. Define what he means by that, and give examples from the book to support your interpretation.
4. For science fiction stories to work, writers must convince us that what they describe is possible; that is, there must exist in their work an element of verisimilitude. In the first chapter, how does Wells convince readers to suspend their disbelief in regards to the time machine?
5. Discuss the two points of view in this story, and detail why and where each one is used.
6. Argue for or against the following point and refer to the story to support your contention:
 - Weena is unnecessary in this story, and is included only to bring in a romantic plot line.
7. Classic literature is said to be timeless because it deals with ideas of a permanent interest. Identify and discuss the ideas that make *The Time Machine* a literary classic.
8. Identify the ways in which power and fear affect the characters in this book. Cite examples from the story to demonstrate how Wells weaves the two concepts together throughout the novel.
9. Is the ending to this novel, in your opinion, satisfactory or unsatisfactory?
10. Write a detailed character sketch of either the Time Traveller or Weena.
11. Trace Wells's use of figurative language and types of imagery. Draw a conclusion about the purpose or effect of such figurative language in the novel.

3. What defines existence?

4. Identify the characters in Chapter One.

5. What is the significance of Filby's wink at the conclusion of Chapter Two?

6. What is the purpose of these first chapters?

picturesque – scenic, pleasing
portals – doorways, entrances
posterity – related to future generations
precipitous – steep, abrupt
precocious – intelligent, bright, gifted
proportionately – in a corresponding size or degree
proprietary – designating ownership
putrefaction – rotting
quaintly – strangely; prettily
rendering – a depiction, representation
resolute – firm, stubborn
rotundity – plumpness
ruinous – disastrous
slightness – smallness, insignificance
speculation – a rumor, assumption
subjugation – the rule over; conquest
tentative – not finalized
transverse – slanting, sloping
unglazed – unfinished
variegated – multicolored
verification – proof
visage – features
waxen – pale, sickly, colorless

1. Describe the first people the Time Traveller encounters.

2. In what year does the Time Traveller find himself and how does he know?

Chapter XII

Vocabulary

abominations – horrible creatures; atrocities
atrocious – terrible
beheld – saw
bole – a part of tree trunk
calamity – a disaster, catastrophe
carbuncles – skin diseases like boils
decadence – corruption, self-indulgence
destined – meant, intended
encamp – to camp
ere – before
exultation – delight, joy
fermentation – a chemical reaction that turns sugars into alcohol
flourish – to display proudly
folly – foolishness
hawthorn – a type of shrub
impending – about to happen
incessant – not stopping
insidious – sinister, dangerous
manoeuvring – moving in a strategic manner
massacre – a slaughter
outflanked – outmaneuvered
pulsated – throbbed
quivering – trembling, shaking
succulent – juicy, tender
summit – the top
temperate – mild
tumulus – a tomb
uncanny – weird, strange

1. What is the significance of fire in this novel?
