

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Time Machine

by H. G. Wells

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Chapter 1

1. The Time Traveller gathers a group of men to have a discussion about time. They are: the Narrator, the Medical Man, the Psychologist, the Provincial Mayor, the Very Young Man, and Filby. Some critics believe that these men are identified only by their occupations because Wells wants the reader to see them as types of men rather than as individuals. Suppose you are the Time Traveller and want to gather together a group of people from all walks of life. Who might you include in the group?
2. The Time Traveller says that it is possible to move about in time. “For instance, if I am recalling an incident very vividly I go back to the instant of its occurrence: I become absent-minded, as you say. I jump back for a moment.” Write about an instance in your life when you might have experienced this same kind of jump back in time.
3. The Psychologist thinks time travel would be very convenient for the historian because he could go back in time to verify historical events, such as the Battle of Hastings. If you could go back in time, what past mystery or event would you like to verify? Why?
4. The Medical Man thinks the Time Traveller is going to do “some sleight-of-hand trick or other” when the Time Traveller claims he can produce experimental verification that time travel is possible. Suppose someone you know claims he or she can travel through time. What would that person have to say to convince you of his or her sincerity?

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5. The Psychologist is clearly upset by the Time Traveller's demonstration with the miniature time machine. "The Psychologist, to show that he was not unhinged, helped himself to a cigar and tried to light it uncut." Relate an incident from life, a movie, or literature where people are so disturbed by what they hear or see that they can no longer perform a simple task.

6. When asked what he thought of the Time Traveller's demonstration, the Medical Man says, "It sounds plausible enough to-night,...but wait until to-morrow. Wait for the common sense of the morning." Write about a time in your life when you agree to do something in a moment of weakness, but after thinking about it later, decide it is not a good idea after all.

Chapter 2

7. The Narrator describes the Time Traveller as "too clever to be believed: you never felt that you saw all around him; you always suspected some subtle reserve, some ingenuity in ambush, behind his lucid frankness." Have you ever had the feeling about someone you know that you cannot fully trust that person, even though he or she has never done anything concrete to cause your distrust? Why do you think we sometimes feel this way?

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8. Complete the following dialogue between students:

First Student: The Time Traveller wants to tell his story, but he thinks the others will not believe him. He knows it will sound like a lie.

Second Student: The others know something happened to him. He is filthy.

First Student: They just think he is crazy. How could they believe him?

You: Some of them might believe him because...

Chapter 3

9. The Time Traveller checks his machine one last time. "I gave it a last tap, tried all the screws again, put one more drop of oil on the quartz rod, and sat myself in the saddle. I suppose a suicide who holds a pistol to his skull feels much the same wonder at what will come next as I felt then." Write a letter to a friend, who does not understand, explaining why the Time Traveller compares his first voyage in Time to a person who is about to commit suicide.
10. The Time Traveller knows that stopping the Time Machine is risky. If he makes contact with other objects while stopping, there may be a chemical reaction and an explosion. He "cheerfully accepted it as an unavoidable risk—one of the risks a man has got to take!" Relate an incident from history or the news describing people who knowingly risk their lives in the name of science.

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11. The Time Traveller worries that the first creature he sees in the future might have
“developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful. I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness.”

Think about the harmful ways powerful societies in the past have treated less technologically developed cultures, such as Native Americans. Why do you think this happens? Should the Time Traveller be afraid of creatures in an advanced society?

Chapter 4

12. At first, the Time Traveller likes the people of the future. “Indeed, there was something in these pretty little people that inspired confidence—a graceful gentleness, a certain childlike ease.” In your experience, how important is physical beauty or attractiveness in helping a person to be liked?
13. The Time Traveller expects humans in the year 802,701 to be intellectually superior to himself. He is disappointed by his childlike hosts and worries that he may have built the Time Machine in vain. Write a letter to the Time Traveller helping him to understand that, despite his disappointment, his accomplishment is important.

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14. The Time Traveller realizes his hosts are indolent and easily fatigued. He says, “It is odd, too, how speedily I came to disregard these little people.” Complete the following dialogue.

First Student: I don’t think it is odd that the Time Traveller starts to think of his hosts as unimportant. He is intellectually and physically superior to them.

Second Student: He is being arrogant. Just because the people are less developed and less powerful than he is does not mean they are worthless and can be disregarded.

You: I think it is part of human nature to...

15. It is difficult for the Time Traveller to differentiate between the sexes of his hosts. He maintains that this sameness is the natural result of a society where there is no violence. There is no need for specialization between the sexes. “We see some beginning of this even in our own time...” In what ways does our modern world promote sameness, as well as equality between the sexes?
16. “Strength is the outcome of need: security sets a premium on febleness.” The Time Traveller believes that when there is no need for strength, society will begin to decline. Write a letter to a friend, who does not understand, explaining why Wells’ theory might have merit.