THE TIME MACHINE
A FILM BY GEORGE PAL
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY H.G. WELLS

STUDY GUIDE

TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES
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ABOUT THE FILM

*The Time Machine* was released in 1960 and is based on the classic novel by H.G. Wells. The film follows the adventures of George, an inventor living in England in 1900, who has created a machine that can move through time. He passes through three World Wars and thousands of years beyond, to find a strange future where humans have developed into two races: the peaceful but weak Eloi, and the industrious but savage Morlocks. *The Time Machine* received an Academy Award for special effects and has influenced many of the science fiction films that followed it.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

GEORGE PAL, PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

George Pal was a Hungarian-born American filmmaker who is best known for his science fiction films. He began his career in the 1940s making animation films such as the *Puppetoons* series, for which he won an Honorary Academy Award. In the 1950s he started directing live-action films, including *When Worlds Collide* (1951), *War of the Worlds* (1952), *Tom Thumb* (1960), and *The Time Machine* (1961). He has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and in 1980, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences founded the “George Pal Lecture on Fantasy in Film Series” in his memory.

THINKING AHEAD

Q: If you could travel through time, what period in the past or future would you like to visit first? What would you expect to find there?

Q: Do you think New York City will still exist in a million years? If so, what do you think your neighborhood will look like?

Q: The film *The Time Machine* is based on a famous novel of the same name. Have you ever seen a movie that was based on a book that you read? Did you think it was a good idea to make a movie of the book? Why?
THE FILM IN CONTEXT

THE SOUND OF SIRENS

Throughout the film you are about to see, George the time traveler hears the sound of sirens—loud warning signals like the sound from a fire truck—and watches people react to them in strange and sometimes frightening ways. The sirens are an important part of the film’s story, but they did not appear in the original book. What role do sirens play throughout history, and why did the filmmakers decide to include them in the film? Alarm sirens were invented over 200 years ago and are used during times of crisis to let people know that there is danger and they need to find shelter. Did you know:

SIRENS IN GREAT BRITAIN

• In Great Britain, where the film takes place, there was a terrible battle during World War II (1939-1945) and air raid sirens were used to warn people that enemy airplanes from Germany were coming to bomb the cities.

• When British citizens heard the sirens, they had to stop whatever they were doing and run to the nearest underground shelter, often in a subway station or in the basement of a building.

• A different siren, known as the “all clear”, would sound when the bombing stopped, and only then would people know it was safe to come back out.

SIRENS AROUND THE WORLD

• By 1960, when The Time Machine was made, a powerful new weapon called a nuclear bomb had been invented that could destroy entire cities.

• Many countries, including the United States, Great Britain and their enemies, made nuclear weapons, and there was a worldwide fear of nuclear war.

• Sirens were once again a familiar sound, as Civil Defense Drills (like fire drills) were held regularly in countries around the world to help people practice getting to the underground bomb shelters.

The filmmakers would have been familiar with the sound of sirens and the meaning it would have for their audience. As you watch the film, pay close attention to the use of sirens and how their importance changes throughout the story.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Since The Time Machine was first published, storytellers have invented all sorts of ways to send us hurtling through time, from Hermione’s magical watch in the Harry Potter books to the super-charged car in Back to the Future. In the past century, time travel has become a major theme in science fiction stories, but could science fiction ever become science fact?

Q: Many scientists believe that time travel could be possible, but they still haven’t figured out how to make it happen. Do you think time travel will be possible in your lifetime? Do you think time travel would make our lives better or worse? How would time travel change the way we live?

Q: Time machines take on different forms in different stories. If you invented a time machine, what would it look like? Would you ride inside it, or would it be an object you hold in your hand? Would you tell other people about your time machine, or would you keep it a secret?

Q: Storytellers often depict time travelers as explorers interested in learning about different cultures and strange lands. If you were a time traveler, what three objects would you bring with you from the present that would represent the world you live in today? What would you like to learn from the people you meet?

Q: In science fiction, time travelers often face challenges when they visit the past and future. What would people from the past or future think of you? Would you take a journey through time if you knew there was a chance you could never come back to the present again?
HOW TO BE A CRITICAL VIEWER

Being a critical viewer is different than simply watching a movie. Critical viewing is about being able to examine the information that a movie, commercial, music video or TV show is giving you and ask meaningful questions about the information that you receive. Media makers create work for many reasons: to inform, persuade, entertain, shock, sell, etc. A critical viewer asks, “What goal is the media maker trying to achieve, and what impact do they want to have on me?”

A critical viewer is someone who:

• Listens carefully to what is being said in the movie
• Pays attention to the details used by the filmmaker to convey the message of the film
• Asks meaningful questions

Being a critical viewer will help you understand:

• The themes and issues that the filmmaker is addressing
• The reasons why the filmmaker chose to make the movie
• The message of the movie

In this study guide you will find background information, activities, and questions that will help you practice being a critical viewer.
CRITICAL VIEWING REFLECTION

Now that you’ve watched the film and worked through the Study Guide, take some time to reflect on the following questions. These worksheets are an important step in practicing your critical viewing skills. Write down your answers and compare with your friends and classmates.

Every film has a **MESSAGE** that the filmmaker wants to communicate. There are a few key questions you can ask yourself to help figure out a film’s message.

What do you think the film is about?

What is the filmmaker trying to say about the subject? What evidence is used?

Why do you think the filmmaker made this film?

**PRODUCTION** describes the process of making a film and includes writing the script, choosing different types of shots while filming, editing the final footage, and choosing music. The choices made during production affect how we experience the movie.

How is the story of the film told? Does it remind you of other films you have seen? If so, which ones and how? If not, how was it unique?

How does the way the film is made change the way you understand the topic? (Think about the structure of the film, the music, etc.)
When you CRITIQUE a film as a critical viewer you are doing more than saying whether you like it or not, you are forming your own opinions about the quality of the film, clearly explaining your thoughts, and using evidence from the film to support these opinions.

What did you find interesting about the film? Why?

Why is the film interesting to other viewers (even if it wasn’t interesting to you)?

Why do you think the filmmaker took the time to make this film?

What would you have done differently if you were the director?

What kind of audience is the film targeting? (Remember, one film can target many different kinds of audiences!)
A Wrinkle in Time
By Madeleine L'Engle
Winner of the Newbery Medal in 1963, this is the story of the adventures in space and time of Meg and her friends as they search for Meg's father, a scientist who disappeared while engaged in secret work for the government.

Justice and Her Brothers
By Virginia Hamilton
Eleven-year-old Justice has identical twins brothers: Thomas is mean while Levi is kind. One summer, they develop mysterious, extrasensory powers that threaten to tear the entire family apart.

Tuck Everlasting
By Natalie Babbitt
Young Winnie Foster discovers a spring on her family's property whose waters grant immortality and the Tuck family who have been drinking from it for a century without growing older. Should Winnie reveal the Tucks' secret or join them on their never-ending journey?

A Sound of Thunder
By Ray Bradbury
A hunter goes travels sixty million years in the past to hunt dinosaurs and discovers that small changes in the history can have a big impact on the present.

Wall-E
In the distant future, a small waste-collecting robot inadvertently embarks on a space journey that will ultimately decide the fate of mankind.

Back to the Future
In 1985, Doc Brown invents a time traveling sports car that sends Marty McFly back to 1955 where he accidentally prevents his parents from meeting. With his existence at stake, can Marty fix the past and get back to the future?

Planet of the Apes (1968)
An astronaut crew crash-lands on a planet in the distant future where intelligent talking apes are the dominant species, and humans are the oppressed and enslaved.

The Iron Giant
A boy makes friends with an innocent alien giant robot that a paranoid government agent wants to destroy.

The Time Machine
is a classic story by H. G. Wells that has influenced science fiction storytelling since it was published in 1895. The story has been adapted into feature films, radio plays and television productions as well as several comic books and is responsible for popularizing the theme of time travel.
ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES

This program provides NYC public school students and teachers with access to free, educationally-relevant and challenging films. Each screening is followed by a Q&A, study guides and supplemental educator materials are provided, and teachers are strongly encouraged to utilize films as part of their curriculum. This monthly-series strives to expose New York City students to independent films and help educators and students incorporate film-viewing into their classroom work. For more information about TFI’s youth programs, please visit www.tribecafilminstitute.org/youth or email youth@tribecafilminstitute.org

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