Time Machine Lesson

1. I greet the students at the door as they enter the classroom and ask them to answer the day’s bellringer written on the board in the right-hand corner.
2. Written on the board in the right-hand corner is the question: “How do you feel thinking about your own death?”
3. On the left-hand corner of the board are the day’s focus questions, which give an outline of the lesson.
4. The questions are as follows:
5. “What is the Time Traveler’s final view of the Eloi and the Morlocks?”
6. “Which species seems more human?”
7. “What does the Time Traveler find in the far future?”
8. “Why does Wells choose this ending?”
9. We will proceed through these questions in this order during the lesson.
10. The students will likely need a few reminders to sit down and begin writing, and I will provide those, especially at the second bell.
11. Students write on the bellringer for 5 minutes.
12. At the end of the five minutes, to regain student attention and to focus the classroom, I read the poem “There Will Come Soft Rains.”
13. We now move into the lesson proper.
14. I say, “At the start of last night’s reading, the Time Traveler escapes the future of the Morlocks and the Eloi. What is his final view of how the Eloi and Morlocks developed?”
15. The students answer that the Time Traveler believes the Morlocks retained the human capacity of initiative and technology.
16. I ask, “So let’s fight again (the students have spent a good deal of time arguing this question): which species now seems more human: the Morlocks, or the Eloi?”
17. Time is given for the students to discuss with one another through a facilitated discussion. I will call on individual students to present their arguments and beliefs.
18. This discussion could take anywhere from 5-10 minutes; as an AP class, this group of students really loves arguing with one another. So long as the discussion is thoughtful and relevant, I will let it continue; if the length becomes too long but still seems productive, some questions about the Victorian dinner party’s rejection of the Time Traveler later in the lesson will be pruned or even eliminated.
19. I say, “Let’s discuss the social implications. What do you think Wells wanted his Victorian audience to take away from this final view of the Morlocks and Eloi?”
20. The students discuss.
21. If necessary, I will interject here, but to wit: Wells was an avowed socialist and champion of the lower class. In *The Time Machine*, the descendants of a permanent worker class have become the underground Morlocks, who keep the Eloi—descendants of a leisure class—aboveground as their cattle. Wells likely hoped to inspire in his upper-class readers a sense of reflection on how their lives depended on lower-class labor, and that such a system might ultimately prove ruinous.
22. When the discussion is winding down, I write a heading on the board: Social Commentary.
23. I ask: “If you had to summarize *The Time Machine*’s social commentary in one sentence, what would it be? Put another way, what reaction do you think Wells would want his reading audience to have?”
24. I call on several students to answer.
25. For each student answer, I write it down under the Social Commentary heading.
26. 5-7 students give answers to the question until I ask if anyone has other summaries and everyone is satisfied.
27. I ask, “So this might be a reasonable place to end the story with everything tied up. But Wells doesn’t. Where does the Time Traveler go instead?”
28. Students answer that he travels to the far future (heavily implied to be the end of the world).
29. On the board, I write another heading: The Far Future
30. I pose the question, “What does the Time Traveler find at the end of the world?”
31. The students list various answers such as: monstrous crabs, a swollen red sun, encroaching unstoppable darkness, venomous plants, a dead salt sea.
32. As they answer, I write each answer down under The Far Future heading.
33. I then ask, “What do we see no trace of?”
34. Students answer humanity.
35. I write down that there is no trace of humanity under The Far Future heading.
36. “What does this remind you of in our unit? How so?”
37. Students answer “The Ivy Green” and “There Will Come Soft Rains.” Both dealt with the end of humanity and nature continuing on without us.
38. If necessary, I will prompt them with this information, but it shouldn’t be necessary.
39. “Okay, let’s talk about our feelings. How does it feel to encounter this vision of the end of the world? How does it feel to think about your own death and disappearance? This relates a little bit to that Thanatopsis lesson we did a long time ago.”
40. The students likely answer that it is depressing to encounter this vision of the future, or to consider one’s own mortality, because it is.
41. I write down these feelings under The Far Future heading.
42. I will also encourage them to go deeper than just “Sad.” The book’s ending clearly points toward human smallness and insignificance in a major way, and this needs to be drawn out.
43. I say, “The Time Traveler has all these crazy adventures, he gets back to the present and what’s his dinner party’s reaction?”
44. Students answer they don’t believe him.
45. “What’s Wells’ point about these upper-class Victorians?”
46. Students answer and discuss. Again, we’re trying to draw out that the upper-class Victorians really don’t seem to have much of a clue in Wells’ vision; they miss or disregard nearly everything of importance in the story.
47. A note that this is the part of the lesson that could be pruned or eliminated depending on earlier discussions. The reason for that is Wells has some other pretty harsh critiques of the upper-class Victorian mindset that will be brought out in other discussions, so this is a place that can be emphasized, but no information will really be lost.
48. “This is how the novel ends: a horrible vision of the end of the world, the Time Traveler vanished like a dream, none of the Victorians believing him, and the only evidence of his journeys is the flowers from Weena. What mood or tone is present at the finish?”
49. The students answer that it’s pretty depressing, because it is.
50. I ask, “Why do this to us? Why do you think Wells chooses to end the Time Traveler’s adventures here instead of him fleeing the Morlocks?”
51. Students answer and discuss related to Wells’ life and philosophy.
52. During this discussion, I will interject after several minutes to add new pieces of information.
53. I ask, “What do we learn about the Time Traveler’s beliefs about human nature and progress during the epilogue?”
54. Students answer that we learn he thinks human civilization will destroy itself.
55. I ask, “What does the narrator believe about human nature and progress?”
56. Students answer that the narrator is more hopeful and believes humanity will continue to evolve and improve.
57. I ask, “Which vision do you think Wells subscribes to/wants readers to leave the book with? Support your argument with evidence from the book and what we know of Wells’ own philosophies.”
58. The discussion continues.
59. If there is time, or if the students have not yet brought it up, I will interject an additional piece of information here as well: “What is symbolism or significance of the white flowers that ends the book?”
60. The discussion continues.
61. This is a discussion which I anticipate taking 10-15 minutes. If it seems to be running long but it seems all major opinions have been shared, I may have to cut it off and move on.
62. I say, “*The Time Machine* pretty clearly presents a dystopia. We very much would not want to live in this world, right?”
63. Students answer no, no one would want to live in this world.
64. I say, “What sort of dystopia is this? One of tradition or of progress (Note: this has been the main theme of the dystopian literature unit)?”
65. The students discuss amongst themselves, but they are likely to say progress given that it is in the future. We’ll hear arguments either way!
66. The lesson now begins to gear down.
67. I say, “We’ve now spoken a lot the last two weeks and today especially about H.G. Wells: his life, his philosophies, and his writing choices. Do you feel you have a sense of what was important to him and what he believed?”
68. Students answer yes (hopefully).
69. If I get a sense the students might be shaky here, I will ask multiple students to state some of Wells’ beliefs so there is a review.
70. I say, “That’s great! Because now you’re going to get a chance to be H.G. Wells!”
71. “For the rest of the time in class, and/or for your homework, you are going to pretend you are H.G. Wells writing in 2019 A.D. You will write the outline of a sequel to *The Time Machine* that explains where the Time Traveler has gone at the end of the novel.”
72. “You do not have to write the story itself, but you must write an outline of at least a half-page describing the world to where the Time Traveler has gone.”
73. “In addition, you must write at least an additional half-page of complete sentences explaining what social commentary or philosophical beliefs are included in your outline AND why H.G. Wells would include this. Remember: you’re writing as Wells!”
74. These directions will already be in a Google Doc assignment, which I will then make live in class (but not before, because they read ahead).
75. “You are not being graded on the quality of your story. It’s due tomorrow. Channel H.G. Wells and have fun!”
76. I answer questions from students on the assignment and *The Time Machine* until class ends.