

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE TIME MACHINE

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

You can run this session cold. Read the primer below once, and each question comes with facilitation notes, likely student responses, and a text anchor so you can point students back to a specific scene. The timings add up to 45 minutes; the middle three blocks are where the real work happens, so protect them. Nothing here requires slides. A board or a shared doc is enough.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW GOING IN

The Time Traveller, an unnamed Victorian scientist, builds a machine that moves along time the way we move through space, and rides it into the year 802,701. There he finds humanity has split into two species. The **Eloi** live on the surface: small, pretty, gentle, and useless, spending their days eating fruit and playing. The **Morlocks** live underground: pale, ugly, and light-fearing, running the machinery that keeps the world going. The Traveller slowly works out the horror. The Eloi descend from the old leisured upper class and the Morlocks from the laboring class, and the class divide never ended. It hardened into biology. The Morlocks still do all the work, and now they come up in the dark and eat the Eloi. He travels further still, to a dying Earth under a swollen red sun where the last life flickers out on a cold beach, then returns to tell his friends a story they cannot quite believe, before leaving on a second trip and never coming back.

Three ideas run underneath the story, and the discussion turns on them:

- **The class allegory.** The future is the Victorian class system taken to its end point. The twist is that it inverts: the owners become livestock, the workers become predators, and nobody wins.
- **Darwinian degeneration.** Wells studied biology under Thomas Huxley. His claim is that struggle keeps a species sharp, and that comfort, with nothing to push against, lets a lineage soften and decay. The Eloi are that idea given a face.
- **Deep time and the dying sun.** Eight hundred thousand years is enough for a social divide to become a biological one. Push further and the story stops being about humanity at all: the sun cools, the Earth winds down, and the second law of thermodynamics gets the last word.

THE SESSION

1. OPEN

(5 MINUTES)

Put this on the board before anyone talks: **“A perfect life, with every need met and no problem left to solve, is a reward.”** Ask for a show of hands, agree or disagree, no discussion yet. Then tell them the novel they just read is an argument that this sentence is a trap, and that by the end of class they will decide whether Wells is right.

Facilitation note: *do not resolve the hook now. You are planting it so the closing question can pay it off.*

2. THE REVEAL: WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE, REALLY?

(8 MINUTES)

Ask: When the Traveller first meets the Eloi, he thinks he has arrived in paradise. What does he figure out, and what is the exact moment paradise turns into horror?

Text anchor: *the descent into the Morlock tunnels, and the realization that the Morlocks feed on the Eloi.*

What students should surface: *the Eloi are not the innocent survivors of a golden age. The two groups are one broken relationship. Steer them from “the Morlocks are the monsters” toward “the Morlocks still keep the world running.” The horror is not that the underground people are ugly. It is that the arrangement never ended.*

Follow-up if the room is quiet: *Who does more actual work in this future, the Eloi or the Morlocks? Why does that flip our sympathy?*

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3. THE INVERSION: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CLASS DIVIDE?

(10 MINUTES)

Ask: The Eloi come from the rich and the Morlocks from the workers. So why are the descendants of the powerful the ones being eaten?

Text anchor: the Traveller's own explanation of the two species as he pieces together their origins.

What students should surface: the class relationship did not resolve into fairness, it curdled. The class that once lived off other people's labor got everything it wanted and was bred down into helpless livestock. The class that was pushed underground turned predatory. Wells is a socialist, but this is not a revolution where the workers win. Nobody wins. Both classes lose their humanity, in opposite directions.

Follow-up: Is Wells taking the side of the Eloi or the Morlocks? Push until someone lands on: neither. He is indicting the wall between them.

4. THE SCIENCE: IS COMFORT REALLY DANGEROUS?

(10 MINUTES)

Ask: Wells says the Eloi became weak and stupid because life got too easy. What is his actual mechanism? Does comfort make you weak, or does it do something more specific?

Text anchor: the Traveller's reasoning about why the Eloi have lost their strength and intelligence.

What students should surface: the careful version. Comfort does not reach into a body and weaken it. It removes the pressure that used to weed out weakness. Strength and intelligence are expensive, and when survival stops demanding them, they stop being maintained and slowly erode, the same way cave animals lose their eyes. This is the difference between "ease makes you soft" (the loose version) and "ease stops punishing softness" (the real one). If your students have the Scientific Payload, this is the relaxed-selection point.

Follow-up: Name something in your own life that only stays sharp because something keeps testing it. What happens when the test goes away?

5. THE OPEN QUESTION

(8 MINUTES)

Return to the hook on the board. Ask: Wells clearly believes comfort corrodes and struggle keeps us human. Is he right? Or is that just the anxiety of a hard-working Victorian who could not imagine ease without decay?

Facilitation note: this one is not supposed to resolve, and you should tell students that. Wells does not settle it and neither should the class. Your job is to get both readings into the open. If the room leans all one way, argue the other side yourself. The uncomfortable implication, that hardship is good for us, is worth naming out loud, because it is exactly where the story stops being comfortable.

6. CLOSE

(4 MINUTES)

Exit ticket, one or two sentences, collected or posted: **The Traveller pities the beautiful Eloi and recoils from the working Morlocks right to the end. Wells lets him. What is Wells suggesting about the reader who feels the same way?**

What you are listening for: the recognition that the novel sorted the Eloi and Morlocks the way a Victorian gentleman would, invited the reader to do the same, and then held up a mirror. The bias is the point.

IF YOU HAVE EXTRA TIME

- **The cosmic scale.** The final beach under the dying red sun is the second law of thermodynamics dramatized: everything runs down toward cold stillness. Ask why Wells ends not with the Eloi and Morlocks but with the death of the world itself. What does that do to the class story that came before it?
- **Time as the fourth dimension.** The novel opens with the Traveller arguing that time is a dimension like length or width. Ask why a story about class and evolution needs to begin with a physics lecture. Answer worth reaching: without deep time, none of the biology has room to happen.