

Chapter 1

The Third Level

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1. What does the third level refer to?

Answer: The third level refers to the subway of the Grand Central Station that takes passengers to Galesburg, Illinois. The third level on the station was a medium of escape for Charley, the narrator from the harsh realities of modern life. It provided him a base where he could interweave fantasy and reality.

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2. Would Charley ever go back to the ticket-counter on the third level to buy tickets to Galesburg for himself and his wife?

Answer: No, Charley would never go back to the ticket-counter on the third level to buy tickets to Galesburg for himself and his wife because third level was his imagination.

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1. Do you think that the third level was a medium of escape for Charley? Why?

Answer: Yes, I think that the third level was a medium of escape for Charley. Life in modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worries and stress. Man has to confront them all the times. The harsh realities of life make living quite unpleasant and even unbearable. So he wants to escape into a wishful world. Charley talks to his psychiatrist friend about the third level at the Grand Central Station. His friend calls it “a walking-dream wish fulfillment”. Charley possesses an escapist tendency. Even his stamp collecting is a ‘temporary refuge from reality’.

2. What do you infer from Sam’s letter to Charley?

Answer: The way Charley came across Sam’s letter was surrounded in mystery. Among his oldest first-day covers, he found an envelope. The envelope containing the letter bore the address of his grandfather. It was written on July 18, 1894. The postmark showed the Picture of President Garfield. Generally the first day covers have blank papers in them, but this one contained a letter. The letter was addressed to Charley. In the letter Sam had informed

Charley that he was living on the third level. He had also told Charley and his wife to keep looking for the third level. Clearly, the letter was a product of Charley's imagination.

3. 'The modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress.' What are the ways in which we attempt to overcome them?

Answer: We can overcome the anxieties and insecurities bred by our inevitable existence in the modern world by getting involved in some practical and beneficial activities. Cultivating hobbies, spending time with family and friends, going on trips and excursions, pursuing meditation and exercises help us live a balanced and healthy life. Reading good books is equivalent to having good friends with great insight. They not only enrich us with the vast store of knowledge but also help us to learn from other's experience and stay rooted to some basic qualities of humanity. Joining hobby classes or gym, attending social events like birthdays and weddings, going for outdoor games, interacting meaningfully through social networking sites and writing diaries etc can also help us relieve our worries and stay focussed and disciplined in life. Simple activities like listening to music, playing with pets, an occasional dinner out, watching cinema or plays or going to places like parks etc

can go a long way in helping us get rid of stress, boredom and insecurities.

4. Do you see an intersection of time and space in the story?

Answer: Yes, there are certain instances in the story that show an intersection of time and space. Firstly, the first two levels of Grand Central Station were located in the present time while the third level existed in the 1890s. Secondly, Charley and his wife, Louisa, live in the present time yet he rushes to get old currency to buy two tickets to go to the Galesburg of 1894. Further, the old architecture of the platform at the third level is different from the modern platforms of the first two levels. Besides, the archaic manner of dressing by the people, and the newspaper, *The World*, dated June 11, 1984 also overlaps with Charley's real time world and existence. Lastly, the letter that was mailed to Charley's grandfather on 18th July, 1894 highlights the intersection of time and space as the sender (Charley's friend Sam) and receiver (Charley himself) belong to the present time.

5. Apparent illogicality sometimes turns out to be a futuristic projection? Discuss.

Answer: It is true that apparent illogicality sometimes turns out to be a futuristic projection. Before the Wright Brothers invented the first aero plane, nobody could have dared to believe that man could fly. Before Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, it would have been impossible to believe in long-distance talks happening in the real-time interface. Moreover, there are examples of inventions, like that of inventing a modern-day sewing machine with a needle that has hole on its wrong end, which were conceived in dreams but now are part of our everyday reality. All this emphasizes that fantasies of one point of time that seem illogical may turn out to be revolutionary things that change the future of the mankind. Similarly, it would not be farfetched to think about railway stations fitted with time-machine devices that would make travel from one era to another just a matter of time.

6. Philately helps keep the past alive. Discuss other ways in which this is done. What do you think of the human tendency to constantly move between the past, the present and the future?

Answer: Besides philately, there are numerous other ways to help keep the past alive. Collecting historical artifacts, paintings and inscriptions in a museum,

collecting and reading books (including autobiographies, bio-sketches, letters and diary entries) written in different eras, collecting and viewing documentaries and other videos are all a few ways of revisiting history. Besides, we can keep our culture and traditions alive when we follow the rituals in ceremonies, treasure memories in the form of videos, photographs and audio collections. Also, reviving old monuments, buildings and other artefacts may prove a huge learning opportunity to those visiting such places, and promote tourism at the same time.

The capacity to oscillate between the past, present and future is a great intellectual gift. This human tendency enables him to plan for the future in the present by reaping benefits from the past. Consider a very simple example of adopting a study technique for board exams. Considering the past result (of class test or half yearly exams) a student makes a strategy plan to address the weak areas more and score better in the future. Thus, such a tendency helps in ensuring acceptance of the impact of important decisions taken at any point of time and learning from them.

7. You have read ‘Adventure’ by Jayant Narlikar in Hornbill Class XI. Compare the interweaving of fantasy and reality in the two stories.

Answer: In 'Adventure' Jayant Narlikar expressed that many world exist simultaneously though they appear to be separated by time. He expressed that the other world also existed and prospered with the world we are aware of. On the other hand, In the third level, Charley a young new York commuter wandering Grand Central Station by accident finds a gateway that leads to a real past of 1894. Seizing the opportunity Charley attempts to escape the rat race by buying a one way ticket to his childhood town of Galesburg. Not having proper currency for that period, he forced to postpone his plan to escape to the past.