

**CLASS XII |
VISTAS | SUPPLEMENTARY | ENGLISH
CHAPTER ONE: THE THIRD LEVEL**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Walter Braden "Jack" Finney (born John Finney, October 2, 1911 – November 14, 1995) was an American author. His best-known works are science fiction and thrillers, including *The Body Snatchers* and *Time and Again*.

SUMMARY

The story revolves around a 31 year old man named Charley, who experienced something weird. One day after work coming from the Subway, he reached the third level of the Grand Central station (which doesn't actually exist). He reminisces the entire experience with his psychiatrist friend Sam. Charley thought he experienced time travel and had reached somewhere in the eighteen-nineties, a time before the world saw two of its most deadliest wars. As soon as he realised what time he is in, he immediately decided to buy two tickets to Galesburg, Illinois; one for himself and the other for his wife. Unfortunately, the currency used in that century was different. Thus, the next day he withdrew all his savings and got them converted even if it meant bearing losses. He went looking for the third level but failed to find it. It worried his wife and the psychiatrist Sam who told him that he is hallucinating in order to take refuge from reality and miseries of the modern world which is full of worry. Charley thus resorts to his stamp collection in order to distract himself when suddenly one day he finds a letter from his friend Sam who had gone missing recently. Sam wrote that he always wanted to believe in the idea of third level and now that he is there himself, he encourages Charley and Louisa to never stop looking for it.

WORDS/PHRASES & THEIR CONTEXTUAL MEANINGS

Stack- a pile of objects, typically one that is neatly arranged

Timetables- a schedule showing the departure and arrival times of trains, buses or aircraft

Waking dream- an involuntary dream occurring while a person is awake

Wander- walk; roam

Suburban- residential

Ducked- lower the head or body quickly

Arched- curved

Bumping- knock or run into something

Vest- a garment worn on the upper part of the body
 Snapped- break suddenly and completely
 Locomotive- a powered railway vehicle used for pulling trains
 Swear on- vow; promise solemnly
 Flickering- keeping going on and off
 Spittoons- containers for spitting
 A glint of light- flash of light
 Frowned- made a serious, worried expression
 Staring at- looking at somebody seriously
 Fussing with- paying too much attention

READ AND FIND OUT QUESTIONS (NCERT)

1. What does the third level refer to?

A. Third level refers to an additional floor at the Grand Central Station which originally only had two levels. Charley was hallucinating one night while going home when he reached the third level.

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

A. Charley went looking back for the third level that could take him and his wife to Galesburg because he wanted to go back to his past. He wanted to go back to the world that has not seen two of its deadliest wars that changed everything.

ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Q1. How many levels are there in the Grand Central Station? How did Charley reach the third level of the Grand Central Station?

Ans. Grand Central Station, New York, has only two levels. One evening, Charley reached the station and then walked down to the second level to catch an early train to his home. While he was on the second level, he strangely happened to notice a doorway down. He followed the steps and reached the third level which was never heard or seen by anyone. In the third level Charley saw a hundred year old world and people.

Q2. What is the role of the stamp – collection in the story?

Ans. The stamps collection is the logic behind the story. It was Charley's favourite pastime. In fact, this collection was passed on to Charley from his diseased grandfather. The most important fact about his collection is that this was the only thing that connected the old world and the new: the same thing but existing in two different worlds. This collection turned out to be useful for Sam, the psychiatrist friend when he attempted to convey to Charley the truth

regarding the existence of the third level. It was by keeping his first day cover in Charley's grandfather's collection that Sam could make the same available to Charley.

Q3. How did Charley ascertain that he had reached the 1894 world?

Ans. The World was a popular newspaper which stopped its publication before 1894. Having reached the third level of the Grand Central Station, Charley noticed that The World and the date, June 11, 1894 and confirmed that he was back in 1894. In the beginning, when he reached the third level, Charley was confused. Whatever he saw in the third level told him that he had travelled back to the past. This was confirmed when he saw The World. The lead story said something about President Cleveland and it was printed June 11, 1894.

Q4. Why did Charley run away from the third level?

Ans. Charley was greatly amazed when he reached the hundred year old third level and was planning to buy two rail tickets to Galesburg where he had spent his childhood. But when he took out his money to pay the fare, the clerk found out that his notes were fake and thought that Charley was attempting to fool him. He warned him that he would call the police. Seeing that there was nothing good about police and jail in the hundred year old Galesburg, Charley ran away.

Q5. What was Sam's answer to Charley's dilemma?

Ans. Charley met his psychiatrist friend Sam and told him about this experience. The psychiatrist interpreted it as a mental disorder. Indicating his hobby of stamp collection and this sort of experience, the psychiatrist explained his abnormality to be escaping from the struggles of life by fantasizing. Soon his friends and wife began to consider Charley as a mental patient. But how! Charley was not abnormal. He was a happy man who loved his wife and friends and stamps. But the rest of the world believed that Charley was looking for an exit to escape his reality.

Q6. Why was Charley not able to get to Galesburg?

Ans. Next day Charley went to a particular shop that sold old currency. He paid more for less old money and ran to the railway station. He hoped to buy train tickets this time to go to his old village. He reached the first level, went down to the second and searched for the door to the third level. Alas! The door had vanished. He searched and searched but could not find it again.

Q7. How did Sam reach Galesburg? How did he settle down there?

Ans. Sam was smarter than Charley. From Charley's experience, he learnt that one can get into the third level only once. He also believed that once out of the third level, one could never get back. Keeping this in mind, Sam first got old currency from the shop and then went to the railway station. He found the door to the third level as claimed by Charley, purchased ticket and reached the 1894 Galesburg, Charley's village. Having reached there, Sam settled himself in hay business.

Q8. How did Sam's mail reach Charley?

Ans. When Sam reached the third level and landed in Galesburg, he became part of a hundred year old world, the year 1894 a world devoid of the modern media of communication. He had to depend only on postal system but there was no link between his old world and Charley's present world. In order to send a mail to Charley, Sam sent it to Charley's grandfather who still existed in the third level and the grandfather kept the mail in his stamp collection and consequently Charley received the mail.

Q9. What was Charley's strange experience at the Grand Central Station?

Ans. One night, while in a hurry to catch a subway train from the Grand Central Station, Charley took a path, which led him to the third level of Grand Central Station. On arriving here, he encountered something, which appeared outright strange to him. The information booth was made of wood, the lights were open flame gaslight and therefore dim. There were old fashioned railway engines, men and women in old fashioned clothes, carrying old fashioned accessories, such as the gold pocket watch. There were brass spittoons on the floors. By now Charley had an inkling that the path had brought him to the past. In order to confirm his doubt he decided to check the newspaper. The newspaper was 'The world' and the date on it read June, 11, 1894. Publication of the same had been stopped hundred years ago. When Charley went to buy two tickets to Galesberg, Illinois, the clerk refused to sell him tickets because he did not recognise the new currency, which Charley was offering.

Q10. Do you think Charley was really a worried man as his psychiatrist friend and others believed?

Ans. No, Charley was a happy man. Even though the modern man is generally unhappy and worried, Charley appears to be quite a normal man. The day when he found out the third level, Charley was in a hurry to reach home, to meet his wife. A man who longs to get home and happy with his wife is a happy man. Moreover, Charley had a good collection of stamps which he enjoyed in his free time. Yes, Charley seems to be a worried man, an escapist and a maniac dreamer also. Charley belonged to the post World War time, 1984 and anxiety and insecurity were a part of everyone's psyche. Everyone wanted to escape to a peaceful place but there was probably none. Charley, being a similar escapist, found peace by escaping into his world of stamps and unknown places in his imagination.

DO-IT-YOURSELF QUESTIONS

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