

Name: _____

(Real) Date: _____ Hour: _____

Looking Backward (Edward Bellamy)

Published in 1888

In his introduction, Bellamy explains that while to his readers (supposedly in the year 2000, it may seem impossible to believe, that in the time from whence he came (over a hundred years before) America was an industrialized nation operating according to the principles of capitalism and a certain amount of Social Darwinism. He promises to tell them the truth of what it was like back then, as unbelievable as he's sure it will seem to their 21st Century minds. Things in the 21st Century, of course, were MUCH better, and all men work for the common good of those around them. The government's primary job is to coordinate all of this goodwill.

Chapter 1 (excerpt)

I first saw the light in the city of Boston in the year 1857. "What!" you say, "eighteen fifty-seven? That is an odd slip. He means nineteen fifty-seven, of course." I beg pardon, but there is no mistake. It was about four in the afternoon of December the 26th, one day after Christmas, in the year 1857, not 1957, that I first breathed the east wind of Boston, which, I assure the reader, was at that remote period marked by the same penetrating quality characterizing it in the present year of grace, 2000.

These statements seem so absurd on their face, especially when I add that I am a young man apparently of about thirty years of age, that no person can be blamed for refusing to read another word of what promises to be a mere imposition upon his credulity. Nevertheless I earnestly assure the reader that no imposition is intended, and will undertake, if he shall follow me a few pages, to entirely convince him of this...

As every schoolboy knows, in the latter part of the nineteenth century the civilization of today, or anything like it, did not exist, although the elements which were to develop it were already in ferment. Nothing had, however, [managed to bridge the gap between] the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant. I myself was rich and also educated, and possessed, therefore, all the elements of happiness enjoyed by the most fortunate in that age. Living in luxury, and occupied only with the pursuit of the pleasures and refinements of life, I derived the means of my support from the labor of others, rendering no sort of service in return. My parents and grand-parents had lived in the same way, and I expected that my

1. Why is this book called "Looking Backward"? _____

2. When was this book written? _____

3. What year does it claim to be IN the book? _____

4. What is 'Social Darwinism'? _____

5. Why would 21st Century Americans (hopefully) find the realities of the late 19th Century so hard to believe, according to Bellamy? _____

6. Summarize the first full paragraph of Chapter 1 in a single sentence. Use plain, simple English: _____



7. Summarize the second paragraph in a single sentence. Use plain, simple English: _____

8. What sort of background did the narrator come from? In what city and time period did he grow up? _____

9. What phrases does Bellamy use to show his disapproval of those with money who do not use their wealth and time to benefit society? _____

descendants, if I had any, would enjoy a like easy existence.

But how could I live without service to the world? you ask. Why should the world have supported in utter idleness one who was able to render service? The answer is that my great-grandfather had accumulated a sum of money on which his descendants had ever since lived. The sum, you will naturally infer, must have been very large not to have been exhausted in supporting three generations in idleness. This, however, was not the fact. The sum had been originally by no means large. It was, in fact, much larger now that three generations had been supported upon it in idleness, than it was at first. This mystery of use without consumption, of warmth without combustion, seems like magic, but was merely an ingenious application of the art now happily lost but carried to great perfection by your ancestors, of shifting the burden of one's support on the shoulders of others.

The man who had accomplished this, and it was the end all sought, was said to live on the income of his investments. To explain at this point how the ancient methods of industry made this possible would delay us too much... [but it worked because the wealthy exploited and lived off of the labors of the poor.]

By way of attempting to give the reader some general impression of the way people lived together in those days, and especially of the relations of the rich and poor to one another, perhaps I cannot do better than to compare society as it then was to a prodigious coach which the masses of humanity were harnessed to and dragged toilsomely along a very hilly and sandy road.

The driver was Hunger, and permitted no lagging, though the pace was necessarily very slow. Despite the difficulty of drawing the coach at all along so hard a road, the top was covered with passengers who never got down, even at the steepest ascents. These seats on top were very breezy and comfortable. Well up out of the dust, their occupants could enjoy the scenery at their leisure, or critically discuss the merits of the straining team.

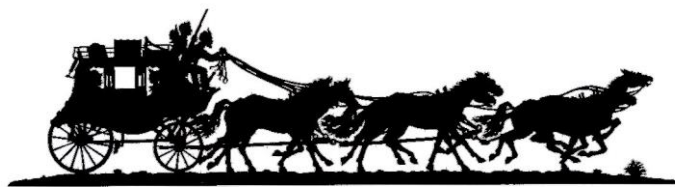
Naturally such places were in great demand and the competition for them was keen, every one seeking as the first end in life to secure a seat on the coach for himself and to leave it to his child after him. By the rule of the coach a man could leave his seat to whom he wished, but on the other hand there were many accidents by which it might at any time be wholly lost.

10. In Bellamy's picture of the 21st Century, what was apparently expected of someone whose needs were already taken care of? _____

11. Why does Bellamy call his life 'idleness' and not 'luxury' or 'comfort' or some other NICE word? _____

12. What are some other words or phrases Bellamy uses to show his disapproval of living such a life? _____

13. Bellamy tries to explain society in the late 19th Century with a metaphor. What is a 'metaphor'? _____



14-15. Draw a picture that will help make Bellamy's stagecoach metaphor clear. Label the various people:



For all that they were so easy, the seats were very insecure, and at every sudden jolt of the coach persons were slipping out of them and falling to the ground, where they were instantly compelled to take hold of the rope and help to drag the coach on which they had before ridden so pleasantly. It was naturally regarded as a terrible misfortune to lose one's seat, and the apprehension that this might happen to them or their friends was a constant cloud upon the happiness of those who rode.

"But did they think only of themselves?" you ask. Was not their very luxury rendered intolerable to them by comparison with the lot of their brothers and sisters in the harness, and the knowledge that their own weight added to their toil? Had they no compassion for fellow beings from whom fortune only distinguished them? Oh, yes; commiseration was frequently expressed by those who rode for those who had to pull the coach, especially when the vehicle came to a bad place in the road, as it was constantly doing, or to a particularly steep hill. At such times, the desperate straining of the team, their agonized leaping and plunging under the pitiless lashing of hunger, the many who fainted at the rope and were trampled in the mire, made a very distressing spectacle, which often called forth highly creditable displays of feeling on the top of the coach.

At such times the passengers would call down encouragingly to the toilers of the rope, exhorting them to patience, and holding out hopes of possible compensation in another world for the hardness of their lot, while others contributed to buy salves and liniments for the crippled and injured. It was agreed that it was a great pity that the coach should be so hard to pull, and there was a sense of general relief when the especially bad piece of road was gotten over. This relief was not, indeed, wholly on account of the team, for there was always some danger at these bad places of a general overturn in which all would lose their seats.

It must in truth be admitted that the main effect of the spectacle of the misery of the toilers at the rope was to enhance the passengers' sense of the value of their seats upon the coach, and to cause them to hold on to them more desperately than before. If the passengers could only have felt assured that neither they nor their friends would ever fall from the top, it is probable that, beyond contributing to the funds for liniments and bandages, they would have troubled themselves extremely little about those who dragged the coach.

16. What does the jolting and falling off the top of the coach represent? (Keep in mind that Bellamy is trying to explain the relationship between rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots, and the educated and the uneducated in the late 19th Century.) _____

17. What question is Bellamy putting in the mouths of his listeners? Rephrase the question(s) in a single question, using plain, simple English. _____

18. Did the people at the top ever feel bad for those doing the work? How do you know? _____

19. What did they do about it? _____

20. How does Bellamy apparently feel about religion and why do you think so? _____



21. Bellamy doesn't seem to give the riders much credit for their sympathies and kind actions. Why? _____

22. Summarize the last paragraph on this page in a single sentence. Use plain, simply English! _____

I am well aware that this will appear to the men and women of the twentieth century an incredible inhumanity, but there are two facts, both very curious, which partly explain it. In the first place, it was firmly and sincerely believed that there was no other way in which Society could get along, except the many pulled at the rope and the few rode, and not only this, but that no very radical improvement even was possible, either in the harness, the coach, the roadway, or the distribution of the toil. It had always been as it was, and it always would be so. It was a pity, but it could not be helped, and philosophy forbade wasting compassion on what was beyond remedy.

The other fact is yet more curious, consisting in a singular hallucination which those on the top of the coach generally shared, that they were not exactly like their brothers and sisters who pulled at the rope, but of finer clay, in some way belonging to a higher order of beings who might justly expect to be drawn. This seems unaccountable, but, as I once rode on this very coach and shared that very hallucination, I ought to be believed. The strangest thing about the hallucination was that those who had but just climbed up from the ground, before they had outgrown the marks of the rope upon their hands, began to fall under its influence. As for those whose parents and grand-parents before them had been so fortunate as to keep their seats on the top, the conviction they cherished of the essential difference between their sort of humanity and the common article was absolute.

The effect of such a delusion in moderating fellow feeling for the sufferings of the mass of men into a distant and philosophical compassion is obvious. To it I refer as the only extenuation I can offer for the indifference which, at the period I write of, marked my own attitude toward the misery of my brothers...

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*Pretend you found this concept and this excerpt absolutely fascinating, and that an expert on this time period (the one in which it was WRITTEN) is visiting tomorrow. What are three really THOUGHTFUL-sounding questions you could ask him or her?*

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Bellamy here offers 2 reasons for the apparent insensitivity of those 'at the top' (in this case, the top of the coach). In PLAIN, SIMPLE ENGLISH, what are his two explanations for this?

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24. \_\_\_\_\_

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25. Put this last partial paragraph into plain, simple English: \_\_\_\_\_

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