

The Vanishing Room

A time-bending epic by Olivia Hirst and David Byrne

16th September 2023– 29th October 2023



The English Theatre Frankfurt Teachers' Resource Pack

This teachers' pack includes information as well as tasks and topics to be dealt with in the classroom. The tasks do not necessarily build on each other. Cut and paste as you please, and please consult the official program for additional information.

Background Information to *The Vanishing Room*



The author and director – David Byrne

David is the founding Artistic and Executive Director of one of London's most vibrant new writing theatres, the New Diorama Theatre (NDT) which won The Stage Award for Fringe Theatre of the Year, 2022.

His latest play THE INCIDENT ROOM, about the Yorkshire Ripper case, was co-written with Olivia Hirst and first performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2019, transferring to the New Diorama in February 2020, ahead of an Off-Broadway run. Screen rights were picked up by Babycow Productions; David and Oliva are writing a 3 x 60' tv adaptation.

His previous productions, SECRET LIFE OF HUMANS and a new, radical adaptation of George Orwell's DOWN AND OUT IN PARIS AND LONDON both played to sold out audiences at the Edinburgh Festival and in London, receiving four and five star reviews in the national press, with both transferring Off-Broadway. SECRET LIFE OF HUMANS has been published by Nick Hern Books.

The Vanishing Room - Synopsis

"The Vanishing Room" by David Byrne deals with the seemingly magical influence one of London's Gentlemen's Clubs had and has on British history. The play is set from 1824 until 2023. While the play is clearly fictional and partly fantasy, it is weaved around actual historical events like the burning of Byron's memoirs and the "Operation Legacy" – Britain's destruction of files that would implicate the British Empire in wrongdoing.

In May 1824, London, Daniel is the youngest porter at England's newest, most exclusive private club. Even on its opening night, the club's powerful members are plotting to commit the greatest crime in literary history. To protect their reputations, a scandalous book is thrown into the fire, the course of history forever altered – and they're only just getting started. With burning Byron's memoirs they set the tune for the members' future meddling in society and politics.

While members and politics change over almost 200 years, the relevance of this club doesn't and mysteriously neither does the staff working as servants at the club. While none of the servants are supposed to know how to read or write in order to keep all the club's secrets, Daniel has a secret of his own. He knows how to do both and uses these skills to keep a secret diary of all the events at the club. When one day one of the founders, John Murray the VI, arrives at the club, he entrusts Daniel with a case full of sensitive documents for him to hide. Soon after, a member, Charly, looking for that case, turns up too and Murray VI is found dead in his bed. Charly befriends Daniel, introduces him to alcohol and leads him to questioning the system.

Daniel, though, knows to keep things secret from Charly. On behalf of Charly, Daniel snoops around the Club seemingly looking for the case, even though he exactly knows where it is. Once he figures out how to open the case, he discovers an archive of diaries written by servants all named the same (Daniel). All of the diaries end mysteriously with an entry documenting the burning of the memory and a new Daniel begins writing the next day. As if this was not enough, Daniel also finds his own diary with only a few entries left following the present day.

When Charly finds out about Daniel's deceit, a gripping time travel story reveals all of the secrets kept hidden in the dark.

The Characters

John Murray I – VI

The Murrays are a publishing family deeply connected to the Members' Club. John Murray I is one of the Club's founders. John Murray the VI wants to publish a book about the club's (infamous) history.

Thomas Moore

Friend of Lord Byron to whom Byron entrusted his memoirs to publish them after his death.

Anne Byron

Lord Byron's Wife

Augusta Leigh

Lord Byron's half-sister with whom he allegedly had an affair.

Henry Luttrell

A friend of Moore's.

In "The Vanishing Room" Murray, Moore, Anne Byron, Leigh and Luttrell are the founders of the club. Their first act was burning Lord Byron's memoirs in order to protect their reputation.

Daniel

Servant at the Club. Sees and hears everything and can read and write even though he is not supposed to be able to. Keeps a diary of events at the club.

Rosa

Cook. Takes care of Daniel – taught him to read and write. Encourages him to keep a diary with all the club's secrets.

Charlie

Member. Looking for Murray VI and the sensitive material about the club he had with him. Knows when someone is lying. Chooses Daniel as his valet. Encourages him to commit increasingly grave indiscretions.

Magrath

Club Secretary

Billy

Valet of the house. Billy is jealous of Daniel and his relationship with Charlie. Sneezy and mistrusting character.

Alistair Crook

Secretary of State for the Colonies. New member to the club – accepted for his connections

Gentlemen's Clubs

In *The Vanishing Room*, John Murray is head of a private club, according to him the most influential one in London.

Private, exclusive clubs such as the one portrayed in *The Vanishing Room*, were an important part of 19th century London's social scene and have a long history. **White's Club**, London's first traditional gentlemen's club, was opened as early as 1693 and is still active today with an exclusive, elite membership and a nine-year waiting list. Usually equipped with a dining room, a bar, a library and other parlours, the traditional gentlemen's club served as a second home for upper-middle and upper class men who sought to socialise with compatriots and was occasionally used for gambling as well. What else went on behind the closed doors of the clubs and how much they influenced the political landscape of 19th century England is not exactly known. However, the clubs provided a place for like-minded men of the elite to discretely exchange information and the clubhouses of White's and Brooks's served as **unofficial headquarters of the two major English parties**, the Tories and the Whigs, for a while, which is some indication that these clubs did play a role in politics at that time.

The houses were private and usually only accessible to members. By the late 19th century, there were over 400 of these establishments in London. To become a member of such a club, one had to be of **high social standing** and be known and recommended by at least two members. **Women were excluded** from membership. Toward the end of the 19th century, several exclusive clubs for women were founded as they sought to break out of the domestic sphere.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentlemen's_club

<https://journalofantiques.com/misc/the-traditional-gentlemens-club-and-its-etiquette/>



White's Club in London

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White's>

Secret Societies

John Murray's club in *The Vanishing Room* turns out to not only serve as an opportunity for wealthy men to socialise but the founders also pursue a political agenda, are involved in world history and seek to gain more power through their members. One might say they operate as a secret society.

There is a wide range of groups that qualify as such. College fraternities, the Ku Klux Klan and the Mafia can all be called secret societies as well as the groups more commonly known as such like the Illuminati or the Freemasons. A commonality are exclusivity and secrecy. Usually, members are required to keep certain

information to themselves, such as their membership, the inner workings and rituals or even the existence of the society itself. Membership in these organisations is typically highly selective and might be based on wealth and power or other factors such as education. Generally, members of a society follow the same goals. The societies usually operate under a strict hierarchy in which only the inner circle has access to the most guarded secrets.

With that amount of secrecy, it is no wonder that these organisations evoke suspicions on the outside. Conspiracy theories about powerful secret societies who secretly push their own political agenda and play a part in determining global history are still popular. Secret societies may even be attributed with satanic beliefs or rites. In some countries, such as Italy or Poland, they are banned due to suspicion of political conspiracy.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/secret-society>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret_society

Servants

The vast majority of the population in England during **the Regency Period** (late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century) was considered to be part of the working class. The working class often performed manual labor and worked as bricklayers, laundry maids, farmers and factory workers or as domestic servants. The amount of servants that one had was a telltale sign of how much wealth a family owned. The more servants one had, the better well off they were seen. As Judith Terry puts it, "to be without a servant is to be poor indeed". For a family with money, owning several servants was to be expected and completely accepted in Regency society.

There were several different positions that the servants could hold with each title carrying its own tasks and responsibilities. The head positions included the roles of the **butler** and the housekeeper, and these two people were the closest to the master and mistress of the home in which they worked. Below them were the **cook, the valet, the various maids, the coachmen and the footmen**, who all worked within the household. Outside of the household, other servants such as the gardener, the gamekeepers and the steward worked, as well.

Each of these positions held specific responsibilities with varying levels of importance. For example, the **housekeeper** not only kept track of the inventory of goods the family owned and oversaw the other **female servants**, but she also took care of the household while the family was away. Unfortunately, the servants, especially the women, were often uneducated in matters outside of their housework, with very few people to fight for their education. The young boys would sometimes be taught basic language skills in a type of public school, but their education usually did not go further than their childhood years. However, the servants were a vital part to the functioning of everyday life for the upper class during the Regency Era despite their educational disadvantages.

The servants acted as the backbone of high society by making sure that everything was functioning for the wealthy, who fueled the economy. In doing their duties, Regency servants ensured that the lives of the upper class were as comfortable for the wealthy as possible. In turn, the wealthy paid the servants for their services, which kept the Paternalistic system functioning.¹

The **Victorian period in Britain saw a peak in the numbers of servants** employed in households. All upper class houses had several servants, and most middle class households aspired to have at least one or two servants. In 1871 over 4% of the population was employed 'in service', the vast majority of them women.²

In the Victorian era it was not just the aristocracy who employed servants, new wealth had trickled into the cities and led to a burgeoning middle class. Employing a servant was a sign of respectability, but for the lower middle class, where money was tighter, they could only afford one servant - the maid of all work.

¹ <https://brewminate.com/societys-backbone-servants-in-regency-england-1811-1820/>

² https://historyhouse.co.uk/articles/victorian_servants.html

This relentless drudgery played a part in dwindling servant numbers and there were new opportunities in factories and shops where workers received something unheard of in domestic service - evenings and weekend offs.

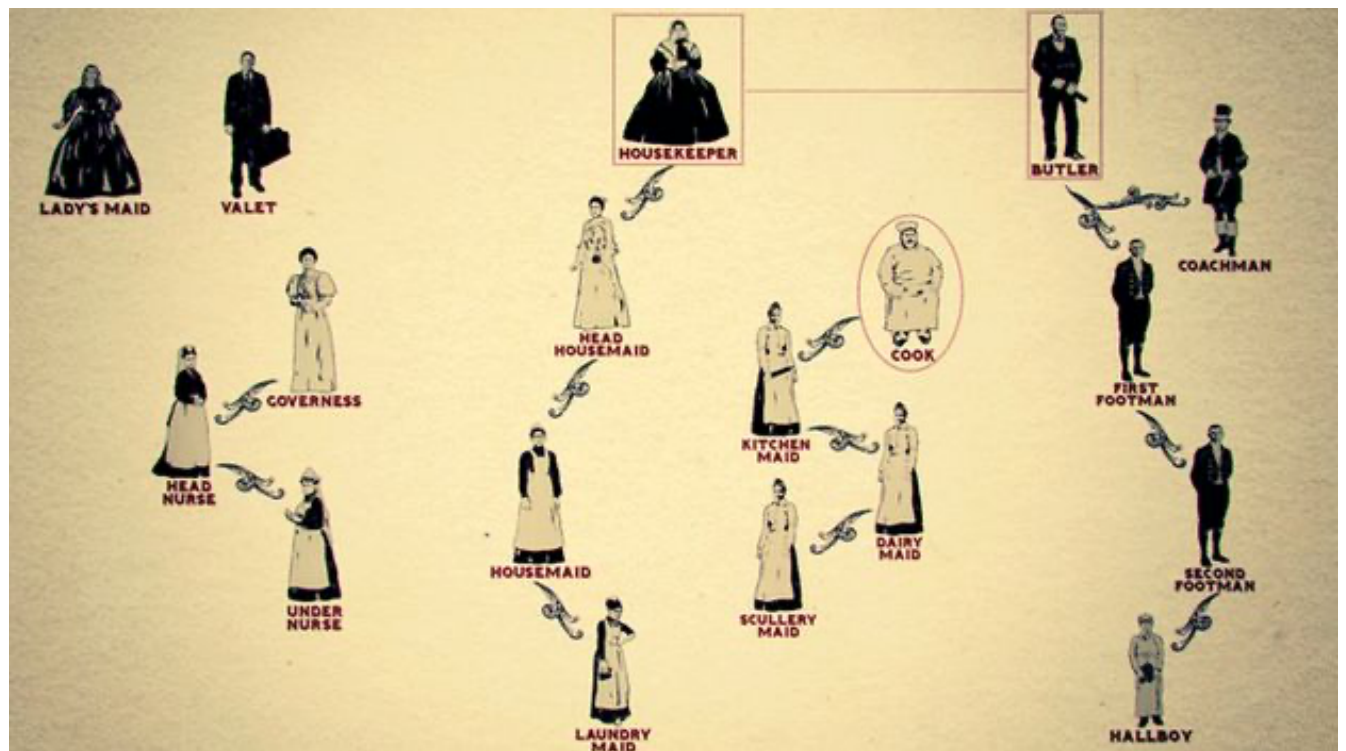
"If we look at the 1891 and 1911 census, we see a really interesting fact emerging. In 1891, the number of indoor domestic servants is 1.38 million, which is a pretty high number," says Dr Pamela Cox, senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Essex.

"If we jump to 1911 it has gone down to 1.27m. The population is expanding, the middle class is expanding therefore the demand for service is expanding, but the supply of servants is shrinking."

Employing young people from the Victorian workhouses was thought to be one way of resolving the servant crisis. Poor and destitute orphans were "rescued" from a life in the gutter, educated and sent to work as servants. "They were legally employed but this was child labour," says Cox.

The numbers of servants continued to dwindle in the 20th Century, particularly for the middle classes, and World War I and II had a profound effect. With the men sent off to fight, women dominated traditional male working roles in munitions factories, making aeroplanes and uniforms. After World War II, many women did not return to their domestic service roles.

Gradually the "modern home" of the middle classes was updated with new equipment to accommodate the shortage of servants - the introduction of flushing toilets, washing machines and microwave ovens.



Book Burnings

In the first scene of *The Vanishing Room*, Henry Luttrell and Thomas Moore are strictly against the suggested burning of Lord Byron's memoirs. "It'd be a crime against heaven!", Luttrell exclaims. Indeed, this single destruction of a book sets in motion all future events in the play. The burning of books, documents and even memories becomes the tool the heads of the club use to influence events in the club as well as world history.

The **burning of books** has a long history, dating back as far as 213 BC when the first recorded state-sponsored book burning took place in China. It is a form of censorship, usually coming from a place of opposition - be it cultural, religious or political - to the burned material.

The practice can serve as a form of public condemnation of the work's content. During the Nazi regime, books that were not in line with the ideology were burned, thus condemning them and their authors who were persecuted and prevented from publishing. Book burning in this way has a **highly symbolic character**. "When you destroy a book you are destroying your enemy and your enemy's beliefs," says Rebecca Knuth who wrote two books on the topic. Books contain ideas that can be powerful and dangerous to governments like the Nazi regime who try to **suppress all alternative thinking** and do not tolerate different opinions.

In another way the burning written works such as diaries, ledgers or manuscripts can be used to destroy texts forever, therefore **concealing information from the public eye or making cultural heritage inaccessible** for future generations. In the 1560s, Spanish colonisers of Central America burned Aztec and Mayan manuscripts resulting in a loss of knowledge about their practices, beliefs and history. With these manuscripts, memories of generations of indigenous people were irretrievably destroyed. In the 1950s and 60s, the British Colonial Office intentionally burned documents that were testaments of Britain's colonial crimes in order to conceal information from the public.

The burning of books and documents, however, cannot delete people's experiences. The staff of the club house in *The Vanishing Room* is supposedly unable to read and thus immune to the power of the written word. However, this level of control is not enough for the inner circle to keep their secrets between them which is why they resort to memory burning as well.

Book burnings still occur to **this day** as oppressive regimes attempt to **control public opinion** and **suppress certain ideas and cultures** or individuals voice their opinion through this **symbolic act**. In the Ukrainian city of Mariupol for instance, Russian invaders destroyed the library of the church of Petro Mohyla, which contained unique copies of Ukrainian-language publications. This act is highly symbolic of Russia's attempts to gain back control over Ukraine and suppress its separate history and culture. In Sweden, there has recently been a series of Quran burnings carried out by individuals as a form of anti-Muslim protest. As the Swedish state had difficulty banning those acts referring to the right to free speech, the Muslim world has condemned this as a desecration of their holy scripture. This way, burnings of a book by a few individuals caused international tensions, for instance between Sweden and Turkey. This incident shows how books are not simply words on pages but can carry a lot of meaning.

<https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/en/news/in-mariupol-the-occupiers-burned-all-the-books-from-the-library-of-the-church-of-petro-mohyla/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/the-books-have-been-burning-1.887172>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_burning#cite_note-85

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Legacy#:~:text=Operation Legacy was a British, Empire was at its height](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Legacy#:~:text=Operation%20Legacy%20was%20a%20British,Empire%20was%20at%20its%20height)

<https://www.nytimes.com/article/sweden-denmark-quran-burnings.html>

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-book-burnings-recurring-symbol>

Colonialism and "Project Legacy"

There are many definitions of Colonialism, starting with a broad definition of this phenomenon known to humankind throughout history, to definitions focusing mainly on the European colonization of the global South, especially since the sixteenth century. One of the definitions, that focuses on the power structures in colonialism is from the *Collins English Dictionary*, which describes colonialism as: "*the practice, by which a powerful country directly controls less powerful countries and uses their resources to increase its own power and wealth.*" In the context of Europe, it can also be added, that Colonialism was a "*process of European settlement, violent dispossession, and political domination.*"

One of the biggest colonial powers was the British Empire, which ruled over many territories all over the world. Because of its expanse the phrase "*The empire on which the sun never sets*" became popular in the 19th century. This phrase builds on the presumption, that the empire is so big, that there must always be at least one little territory with daytime at any given time.



One of the Empire's territories was India. The direct British rule over India is also known as the British Raj. It started in the year eighteen fifty-eight and ended with the announcement of Independence in nineteen forty-seven. Before the direct rule of Britain in India, the Empire controlled the country through its **British East India Company**, this company was founded in the year eighteen fifty-eight and later on possessed powers similar to a political government. India was very important to the British Empire because of its spices and other resources, supply of cheap workers, and a significant amount of trade. India's fight for independence emerged from Indian nationalism. The first big and organized sign of India's nationalism was the founding of a political party, the Indian National Congress in Bombay. Years later, a leading member of the Congress, Mahatma Gandhi became the leader of India's struggle for independence.

Mahatma Gandhi was an Indian lawyer, politician, writer, and anti-colonial activist. He was the leader of the nationalist movement, where he used his tactic of non-violent resistance. He came up with this strategy in South Africa, where he campaigned for civil rights before coming back to India in the year 1915. Non-violent resistance is a practice that consists of civil disobedience methods such as strikes and boycotts and the complete rejection of violence even for self-defense. Gandhi left the Indian National Congress because he was not happy with the way his colleagues embraced the non-violent resistance strategy. He was imprisoned for two years after demanding British withdrawal from India. Mahatma Gandhi, who was perceived as the father of the Indian nation by many, was murdered in the year 1948 by an Indian nationalist.

The years 1945 - 1965 were the times of decolonization. This process was accelerated by the Second World War and answered to the many struggles for Independence around the world.

In the year 1947, when India won its Independence the country known before as British India was separated into two independent states, India and Pakistan. Two years later India decided to remain a member of the Commonwealth.

Preparing for the Independence the British were withdrawing from the continent and preparing everything to be taken over by the local authorities. Thousands of documents detailing some of the most shameful acts and crimes committed during the final years of the British Empire were



systematically destroyed during that time. The Monarchy feared that these documents could fall into the hands of post-independence governments, which could lead to an international conflict. Many of these documents contained racial prejudice and/or religious bias. The program that covered the destruction and partly shipping of documents back to London was called **Operation Legacy**. Despite it being a secret program, it was not always successful in taking place unnoticed. An example of that is the infamous document burning in Delhi, India, in the

year 1947, when the burning caused so much smoke, that it got noticed by the local media. The known truth about the existence of this program was further disclosed 2013 when more secret files were declassified from the archive.

[Mahatma Gandhi | Biography, Education, Religion, Accomplishments, Death, & Facts | Britannica](#)
[Mahatma Gandhi | The British Library \(bl.uk\)](#)
[NobelPrize.org](#)
[Mahatma Gandhi - Wikipedia](#)
[India's independence campaign - The British Empire - KS3 History - homework help for year 7, 8 and 9 - BBC Bitesize](#)
[Colonialism \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)
[Colonialism - Wikipedia](#)
[The empire on which the sun never sets - Wikipedia](#)
[British Empire - Wikipedia](#)
[Britain burnt 'embarrassing' documents of colonial crimes - Times of India \(indiatimes.com\)](#)
[Britain destroyed records of colonial crimes | National Archives | The Guardian](#)
[Revealed: the bonfire of papers at the end of Empire | National Archives | The Guardian](#)



Pictures:

[An Empire on which the sun never sets. : r/WesternCivilisation \(reddit.com\)](#)
[The saying 'The empire on which the sun never sets' - meaning and origin. \(phrases.org.uk\)](#)
<https://socialistworker.co.uk/background-check/operation-legacy-when-britain-burned-the-paper-trail-of-its-imperial-crimes/>

Lord Byron



Lord George Gordon Byron was a British poet, playwright, and a member of the House of Lords. He was born in 1788 and died at the age of thirty-six in year 1824 in Greece where he was actively involved in the Greek War of Independence on the side of the Ottoman Empire.

He is considered one of the leading figures in the Romantic movement, which was strongly influenced by the so-called "Byronic Hero", an archetype that first appeared in his work, and later inspired other romantic poets and writers. The Byronic Hero can be described as an idealized but at the same time flawed character. He has great passion and talent and possesses both social rank and privilege, which he disrespects. A Byronic Hero's love is thwarted because of social conventions or death. Typical for this type of character are arrogance, rebellion, unsavory secret past, and their search for exile.

Byron's famous work includes a long narrative Poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which embodies the disillusioned melancholy of his generation that was weary of the wars of the post-Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. His work also includes the satiric epic picaresque verse tale, *Don Juan*, depicting an unsophisticated innocent hero, who represents the rational norm and through that makes the absurdities and irrationalities of the world obvious to the readers.

Byron also used poetry in his political work, when writing political poems. His political beliefs included support of social reform and dedication to freedom of thought and action.

Famous are his Memoirs that had been destroyed before ever being published, in fear that they would make his name and everyone connected to him infamous forever. The Memoirs however were not destroyed by Byron himself as he was already dead at the time being. Before his death, Byron gave his manuscript to the Irish poet, writer, and lyricist Thomas Moore. Moore sold them to Byron's publisher John Murray, probably with the intention to publish them. After Byron's death, their opinion seems to have changed. After two meetings that were attended by gentlemen Murray, Moore, John Cam Hobhouse, Moore's friend Henry Luttrell, Colonel Francis Doyle, and Wilmot Horton the group decided to burn the memoirs. Wilmot Horton was speaking in these meetings in the name of Byron's half-sister Augusta Leigh. Who probably had a personal interest in destroying the memoirs, as it has been widely speculated that Leigh and Byron had an affair together, which resulted in the birth of Augusta's daughter Elizabeth Medora Leigh. The burning has been called the greatest literary crime in history.

<https://www.bl.uk/people/lord-byron>

[Lord Byron | Biography, Poems, Don Juan, Daughter, & Facts | Britannica](#)

[Lord Byron - Wikipedia](#)

[Augusta Leigh - Wikipedia](#)

Time Travel

In "The Vanishing Room", members of the club are able to travel through time. The room that gives the play its title enables them to visit any period of time with the limits of space. They can only travel within the club's walls. Charly as well as John Murray VI use that opportunity to travel from 2023 London to 1959 – John Murray in order to hide, Charly because he wants to find Murray and to help the historical "Operation Legacy" to an easier start. After being attacked, Charly, heavily injured, travels further back to the 1920s.

Even though, time travel is a concept dealt with commonly in philosophy and fiction, there are also renowned scientists like Einstein or Hawking, who have been fascinated with the subject in relation to reality. It is uncertain if time travel to the past is physically possible, and such travel, if at all feasible, may give rise to questions of causality. Forward time travel, outside the usual sense of the perception of time, is an extensively observed phenomenon and well-understood within the framework of special relativity and general relativity. However, making one body advance or delay more than a few milliseconds compared to another body is not feasible with current technology. As for backward time travel, it is possible to find solutions in general relativity that allow for it, such as a rotating black hole. Traveling to an arbitrary point in spacetime has very limited support in theoretical physics, and is usually connected only with quantum mechanics or wormholes.

Mostly, time travel is the hypothetical activity of traveling into the past or future, though. Time travel is a widely recognized concept in philosophy and fiction, particularly science fiction. In fiction, time travel is typically achieved through the use of a hypothetical device known as a time machine. The idea of a time machine was popularized by H. G. Wells' 1895 novel *The Time Machine*.

Time travel is a common theme in fiction, mainly since the late 19th century, and has been depicted in a variety of media, such as literature, television, film, and advertisements.

In general, time travel stories focus on the consequences of traveling into the past or the future. The central premise for these stories often involves changing history, either intentionally or by accident, and the ways by which altering the past changes the future and creates an **altered present or future** for the time traveler upon their return home. In other instances, the premise is that the past cannot be changed or that the **future is predetermined**, and the protagonist's actions turn out to be either inconsequential or intrinsic to events (e.g. **time loops**) as they originally unfolded. Some stories focus solely on **the paradoxes as the grandfather paradox e.g. and alternate timelines** that come with time travel, rather than time traveling itself. They often provide some sort of **social commentary**, as time travel provides a "necessary distancing effect" that allows science fiction to address contemporary issues in metaphorical ways.

Time loops

According to its basic definition, a time loop (also called a temporal loop) is a fictional plot device that causes characters in a story to re-experience a span of time which is repeated, sometimes more than once: Some time loops are an intrinsic part of the story and are meant to repeat indefinitely (Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban) and some occur with some hope of breaking out of the cycle of repetition (Groundhog Day).

Grandfather paradox

The grandfather paradox is an example of a problem arising from the effect of time travel on causality, the idea that a cause must precede its effect. The paradox suggests that a cause is eliminated by its own effect, thus preventing its own cause and essentially becoming reverse causation.

The classic analogy for this, and the one that gives the paradox its name, is a time traveler journeying back in time and killing their own biological grandfather before they can sire children. This means the time traveler could never have come to exist and, as a consequence, can't travel back in time and

thus can't kill their own grandfather. That means they then are born and *can* go back in time, hence the paradox.

Alternative timelines

User can travel to/between alternate timelines where any event could have played differently with infinite possibilities of variation. Multiple timelines would allow you to travel to a different timeline and kill your grandparents without causing a paradox. The model does have a major drawback, at least for narrative purposes: time travel won't do any good for your own timeline.

The storyline of "The Vanishing Room" firstly really starts in the 1950s when Daniel tells the other staff members about his dream. He dreamed he and all the others were preparing a feast in the 1920s when a stranger arrives, badly hurt. Rosa, the cook and his mentor, stops him and keeps him from telling the story further.

When Daniel is confronted by Charly who threatens to erase all his and his friends' memories, Daniel hurts him badly and, Charly, as a consequence, hides in the Vanishing room, travelling back in time to the 1920s where he is found and cared for by Daniel.

The plot suggests that the protagonists deal with a time loop, since Daniel remembers the arrival of Charly in the 1920s, back then being a stranger that was badly hurt and afraid of Daniel, later abusing him without apparent reason at first. Jessica, who has been there in the 1920s too, connects the dots first, when examining Charly's shoes and coat. She realizes that she has seen these shoes and this jacket before when they were completely torn.

Another hint for the time loop is that John Murray VI has had the remains of a body examined that was clearly related to his family but could not have been his uncle's, who had lived during that time. Right before he travels back in time to the 1950s, he realizes that the remains found were his own. In consequence, he had travelled back before to the 1950s in order to die there, even though he was still alive at this particular point in time in 2023, perfectly able to find his own remains. He soon would travel back in time to the 1920s to be found by himself in 2023. And so on.

The grandfather paradox is hard to determine in that case, since even though changes are made to history, they seem to be minor and do not really affect the protagonists. As Charly says, drugging Alistair Crook does not change the outcome of history but it speeds along the desired effect. Above all, the rules of mortality do not imply, since the staff as well as the founders seem to be immortal.

The theory of alternative time-lines does not seem to apply since Daniel's diaries are successive starting in 1824 and ending in the 1950s.

Pre-Watching Activities

Association Task Title: The Vanishing Room

The play you are going to see is called "The Vanishing Room". Collect ideas what the play could be about. Give reasons for your ideas.

In class: After your visit, see which ideas panned out and which did not.

Pair/share: Discuss whether you think the title is fitting. If not, suggest others. Give reasons.

The purpose of memory

Memories and the loss of them play an important role in "The Vanishing Room".

1) *In class:* Discuss the relevance of memory for our everyday life and personality.

2) *Pair/share:* Think and discuss the relevance of memory for the society we live in.

Operation Legacy³

- 1) Collect your knowledge about the British Empire and British colonialism. If you need to brush up your knowledge. Take a look at the BBC overview.
- 2) When the British Empire started to fall apart, British government sought to control possible future damage by hiding their wrongdoings. "Operation Legacy" was a secret destruction of files in the 1960s.

In class: Watch the Youtube clip. Collect what you understood.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPGVGckn7kQ>

In class: Watch the first 2.25 minutes of the clip again. *Pair/share:* Answer the following questions.

- Where did the people come from that went to the British Prime Minister's office?
- What has happened to them?
- What happened to the files documenting the treatment of the colonies' citizens?
- Which reasons are given for the destruction/the hiding of the files?

In class: Watch the rest of the clip again. *Pair/share:* Answer the following questions.

- Name the British course of action when colonizing other countries.
- How did the indigenous people react?

³ Overview British Empire:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z7kvf82/articles/zpjv3j6#:~:text=Test%20your%20knowledge-.Key%20points,benefitted%20economically%20from%20the%20empire>

- How did the British treat members of the resistance?

Think/Pair/Share:

- Think about and discuss the relevance of these files for the survivors personally as well as for history in general.

Time Travel

Warm-Up



Flashlight:

Imagine travelling through time was possible. Would you rather go to the past or the future? Give a short reason.

Share:

Think of a particular moment in time you would like to visit. Give reasons.

Discuss in class and take notes of the results:

Name possible **problems and challenges** in relation to time travel. Come up with **rules for time travelling** derived from these problems. You can also refer to movies and works of fiction you know dealing with time travel. ⁴

Language help

Time loop Zeitschleife

alternative time-line alternative Zeitachse

time traveller Zeitreisende/r

time machine Zeitmaschine

paradox

science Wissenschaft

decade Jahrzehnt

century Jahrhundert

go back in time In der Zeit zurück reisen

travel to the future In die Zukunft reisen

to advance Fortschritt machen

to invent erfinden

to jeopardize gefährden

⁴ With these tasks, students can revise the conditional sentences.

While Watching Activities

Comprehension Quiz

- 1) At the beginning of the play Lord Byron's descendants burn his memoirs. Why?
 - a) It was literary rubbish and would have ruined his name as an author.
 - b) They revealed politically incorrect views
 - c) The content was too frivolous and revealed secrets that would have destroyed the descendants' reputation.
- 2) Why is Daniel the one who gets to burn the documents?
 - a) Because he supposedly cannot read and therefore cannot tell anyone what they say
 - b) Because he is one of the most trusted servants
 - c) Because he loves playing with fire
- 3) Who teaches Daniel to read and write?
 - A) Charly
 - B) Rosa
 - C) Magrath
- 4) What is his teacher's reason to help him read and write a diary?
 - a) He is supposed to spy on the members.
 - b) His imagination is so vivid, he could be a brilliant writer.
 - c) So that he and the events at the club will be remembered and learned from.
- 5) What is peculiar about the dead Mr Murray?
 - a) He is wearing unfamiliar clothes
 - b) He has devices on him, that have not been invented yet.
 - c) He still seems to be alive
- 6) What happened between Daniel and Alistair Crookes when they first met?
 - a) Crookes pushed Daniel down the stairs
 - b) Crookes wants Daniel as his personal valet
 - c) Daniel scolds Crookes with coffee
- 7) Choose the most correct answer: What is the real reason Charlie visits the club?
 - a) He visits the club to find out information about Daniel.
 - b) He visits the club to solve the murder of Mr. Murray.
 - c) He visits the club to stop Mr. Crookes from attending meetings.
- 8) After Daniel finally manages to open Murray's suitcase, he finds a notebook titled "Notes on the Vanishing Room" and something else. What else does he find?
 - a) His own diaries
 - b) The book written by Mr. Murray
 - c) The memoirs of Lord Byron
- 9) How does Jessica identify the stabbed man as Charlie?
 - a) By his trousers and ring
 - b) By his pocket watch and socks
 - c) By his jacket and shoes
- 10) Which one of the servants could remember everything in 2023?
 - a) Rosa
 - b) Magrath
 - c) Billy

- 11) What does the "Vanishing Room" allow the members of the club to do?
- Time travel
 - Time travel but only within the club building
 - Time travel but only a maximum of 100 years into the future and past
- 12) Why does Billy betray Daniel in revealing his secret to Charly?
- Billy wants Charly to take him on as his personal valet which would enable him to leave the club.
 - Billy is in love with Charly and hopes to win his affections.
 - Billy is a most loyal servant and feels he owes it to the club.

a) 9-12 correct answers	4-8 correct answers	0-3 correct answers
😊😊 Congratulations! You understood a lot!	😊 Quite good already! Talk to your classmates again about the play, you might tap into new levels of understanding!	😐 Don't give up! Talk to your classmates about the parts of the play that are still a bit fuzzy to you.

Post-Watching Activity

Time Travel in "The Vanishing Room"

- 1) Time travelling is a tricky business and comes with all kinds of challenges. However, each work of fiction creates its own rules for time travelling.

Collect the means and rules for time travelling in *The Vanishing Room* and compare them with your results from the beginning of the unit.

- 2) Even though each work of fiction creates its own world and rules, there are certain aspects considered to be relevant in terms of logic when creating a time travel story.

Watch the following video together. Take notes on the different concepts of time travelling.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVR8BlvoPcs>

- 3) Explain the following terms. How do they relate to *The Vanishing Room*?
- The Grandfather Paradox
 - Parallel time-line/ parallel universe
 - Closed causal loop / time-loop
- 4) Evaluate *The Vanishing Room*'s time travel concept in terms of logic in class. Is there something that you would have done differently? If so, write an alternative scene/ending.

Discussion - Memory

In "the Vanishing Room" Byron's memoirs are burned as well as files documenting history of the British colonies and actual memories.

Pair/Share:

- 1) Discuss the underlying meaning of "burning" in "The Vanishing Room". What kind of purposes do the burnings fulfil?
- 2) Explain the relevance of memory on the one hand and the consequence of the lack thereof in "The Vanishing Room".
- 3) Read the quote by Hermann Hesse from 1921 and connect it to the play you have just seen:

"Where they burn books, they will, in the end, also burn people."

Distinction Servants / Slavery

In the Regency Period as well as in Victorian Britain, working as a servant was a regular field of work for lower class citizens.

- 1) Read the text about slaves and servants below.
- 2) Discuss whether the Club's employees in "The Vanishing Room" are in fact servants.

Domestic servants generally worked long hours, seven days a week, for relatively modest wages. Their work was physically demanding. They were clothed, fed, and housed, but had little privacy. Whatever social life they enjoyed in town was limited in the country. The particular duties of each category of domestics (cook, maid, waiter, attendant, wash woman, nurse) and those who worked outside (gardener and coachman) were fairly straightforward. Those working in the public areas of the house were expected to complete their tasks without disrupting family activities.

Many servants lived a life similar to that of slaves, but they were hopeful of freedom after the end of their contract and earned wages in order to help their families or to spend on "luxury" goods. A servant offered his service voluntarily as a means of earning a living, and he/she chooses a master and can apply to other positions while slaves were at their position involuntarily and were not free to leave.

Slavery is a condition in which one human being was owned by another. A slave was considered by law as property, or chattel, and was deprived of most of the rights ordinarily held by free persons. The slave was removed from lines of natal descent. Legally, and often socially, he had no kin. No relatives could stand up for his rights or get vengeance for him. As an "outsider," "marginal individual," or "socially dead person" in the society where he was enslaved, his rights to participate in political decision making and other social activities were fewer than those enjoyed by his owner. The slave was deprived of personal liberty and the right to move about geographically as he desired. There were likely to be limits on his capacity to make choices with regard to his occupation and sexual partners as well.

Servitude/Slavery today?

- 1) Brainstorm whether there are kinds of servants today.
- 2) *In modern Europe slavery does not exist anymore.*

Position yourself within the classroom according to your degree of approval, the far left standing for "I agree completely" – the far right meaning "I do not agree at all"

- 3) One of each extreme and one person standing in the middle: Explain your position.
- 4) Read *The Guardian* article below. Look up words you do not know and highlight important passages.
- 5) *In class:*
 - Briefly sum up Guevarra's story.
 - Name the reasons why people still work as servants. Compare their situation to what you know about the characters in "The Vanishing Room".
 - *Pair/share:* Reflect on your former position within the classroom. Would you choose the same spot? Say why.
 - *In class:* Brainstorm ideas what would need to be done to truly make it more difficult to exploit domestic servants.

'I want them to feel human again': the woman who escaped slavery in the UK – and fights to free others

The streets of west London were dark and empty as Analiza Guevarra walked towards a large, white mansion block in South Kensington in February 2019. Just after 5am, she stood at a corner, well away from any street lights. "I'm here," she tapped into her phone. Seconds later, her phone pinged back. "I'm coming, I'm carrying a green bag. Please wait for me."

Guevarra squinted down the gloomy street until she saw a woman emerge from one of the buildings clutching a holdall. She beckoned to her. The woman, panting with fear, slid up the icy street towards her. When she got close, Guevarra grabbed her hand and told her to run.

When they arrived at the nearest underground station, Guevarra turned towards her companion. "She kept looking around to see if she was being followed," she says. "But I was telling her: 'You're safe now.'"

The woman was Gloria, a Filipino domestic worker who had been brought to London by a wealthy Qatari family and exploited and abused. Gloria had posted frantic calls for help on a Facebook message board and the Filipino Domestic Workers Association (FDWA) had responded. This small but very busy organisation, which operates from a church in south London, has rescued hundreds of women from domestic servitude behind the closed doors of London's most exclusive neighbourhoods.

Domestic servitude is one of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery in the UK and largely affects foreign domestic workers from places such as the Philippines and Indonesia. "The places we go in London, the streets are full of expensive cars and the houses cost millions of pounds, but inside there are women being treated like slaves and nobody knows," says Guevarra. [...]

I meet Guevarra at the FDWA's church, where many Filipino domestic workers come to worship and share stories about their lives. She is tiny and softly spoken, her face opening into a beautiful smile when she shows me photos of her four children in the Philippines. Yet she carries a heavy sadness, the legacy of all she has endured.

She and her brother and sister grew up in a small town in the south of the Philippines. "Everyone around us was poor, but we were poorer," she says. [...] When she met her husband, it felt as if she had found a place of safety. "He wasn't perfect, but I had someone I trusted and he made me feel like I wasn't lonely for the first time in my life," she says. They were just 18, but their families put pressure on them to marry. [...] "By the time I was 25, I had four young children and we were struggling. We were both working many different jobs, but there was never enough money." [...]

As with many women in the Philippines, the decision to move abroad for domestic work began to seem less like a choice and more like a necessity. "There is nothing in the Philippines. All the women in my neighbourhood eventually have to leave," she says.

There are now at least **53 million domestic workers in the world**, the vast majority of whom are women such as Guevarra, who travel from poor countries to richer ones to work in private households. In the Philippines, nearly 17% of people live in poverty. [...]

According to the UN's International Labour Organization, **domestic workers are one of the workforces most vulnerable to abuse, trafficking and exploitation**. "We'd all heard the stories about the terrible things that happen and I knew that it was like the roll of a die," Guevarra says. "But I had to go for my children. I planned to go for three years, make enough money to get them through school and pay off our debts and come home." She signed up with an agency and got a job in Qatar. [...]

She arrived in Doha in November 2015 after a long, exhausting flight. "When I came into the house, I thought they would show me to my room or give me something to eat, but my new employer said: 'Put your bag down and start work!' It was the middle of the night, but I had to leave my bags in the hallway and start cleaning the floors."

Guevarra was one of four domestic workers employed by the family in a large house with eight small children, including one-year-old twin boys and a three-year-old. At the time, the *kafala* system, which made it illegal for migrant workers to change job or to leave the country without their employer's permission, was still in place (it has since been reformed). The domestic workers were expected to work 14 hours a day, seven days a week. Guevarra's employer would scream at them for not working hard enough and encouraged her children to abuse them, spit at them and pull their hair. "We were treated like we were not human," she says.

In July 2017, the family told Guevarra that they were travelling to the UK for medical treatment for one of their children – and that she was going with them. "I didn't want to go to the UK, but I wasn't given a choice," she says.

The family applied for an overseas domestic worker visa on her behalf. This allows foreign families **travelling to the UK** to bring their domestic staff – maids, chauffeurs, nannies – with them for up to six months. Domestic workers who apply for this visa – which costs £516 – are **supposed to have a confidential interview** at a British consulate before it is granted and another when they arrive in the UK with an immigration official. Guevarra says that **neither happened**.

"We went to the British embassy in Doha, but my employer was there and they just gave him the visa," she says. "When I arrived in the UK, my employer just passed my passport over. **I was not told that I had a right to the national minimum wage, that I had any employment rights or that if I was abused then I could get help.**"

Guevarra says her life in London became a living hell. Without her colleagues, she **had to work from 5am until 1am every day**, sleeping just three or four hours. She was made to sleep on the floor of the nursery and was woken up constantly by the children. She was soon delirious with fatigue.

The family did not even give her food, so she had to scavenge and steal what she could without them noticing. They also refused to pay her full wages. In total, she was paid **£680 for two months of working 18- to 20-hour days**, seven days a week.

But the worst thing, she says, was the **isolation**. She was not allowed to leave the house without a member of the family and was told not to talk to anyone, especially other Filipinas.

Guevarra also bore the brunt of her employer's stress and anger. [...] [H]er employer went from verbally to physically abusive. She started to slap Guevarra on the face and head and push her over. One day, she beat her to the ground, kicking her repeatedly in the stomach as she lay on the kitchen floor. [...]

Yet she was too scared to go to the police. "In Qatar, if you leave your employer without their permission, you can end up in jail. I had no idea it was any different in the UK," she says. The family had recently moved apartments, but a Libyan couple who lived in their old building had become aware of her plight and offered to help her.

One day, very early in the morning in September 2017, she slipped out of the apartment with a bag and made her way there. The couple gave her a job. However, it soon became clear that, while they were not abusive, they still expected her to work relentlessly for less money than she had been promised and controlled her freedom of movement. They did, though, allow her to go to church – which is how Guevarra found the FDWA. "[...]The moment I walked in, they told me: 'Now you are in good hands. You are no longer a slave.'" And I just cried. On that day, I felt free for the first time in a year and a half."

That Sunday, another three women had come to the church seeking help. "One woman, her family was from Dubai, she suffered very bad violence. I realised that it was happening all over London."

The FDWA gave Guevarra a place to stay and accompanied her to the police. Since then, she has been confirmed as a survivor of modern slavery by the government, but has also been trapped in **immigration limbo**. She wants to get discretionary leave to remain, so that she can work to pay off the £4,000 debt that she says her family owes their creditors in the Philippines. "If I go back now, I'll have no option but to leave again to the Gulf and I'm scared the same will happen again," she says.

She may not be able to control her own fate, but that has only made her more determined to fight for other women found by the FDWA. "They saved my life and now I want to save others," she says. [...] She says that she and a small band of FDWA volunteers **rescue more than 100 domestic workers in London every year**. [...]The FDWA says that the **abuse of domestic workers has got worse during the pandemic**: sick people dumped outside apartment buildings or at hospitals; extreme violence; wage theft. [...]

Guevarra hasn't seen her own children for six years. When she arrives home, she will have missed their childhoods. I ask how she keeps going. "This work is my life; it keeps me hopeful," she says. "Our employers felt like they could treat us like animals. When I found the FDWA, I felt human again. I want to make others feel that, too. It makes it all worth something."⁵

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jun/30/i-want-them-to-feel-human-again-the-woman-who-escaped-slavery-in-the-uk-and-fights-to-free-others>

Appendix

Comprehension Quiz

- 13) At the beginning of the play Lord Byron's descendants burn his memoirs. Why?
 - d) It was literary rubbish and would have ruined his name as an author.
 - e) They revealed politically incorrect views
 - f) **The content was too frivolous and revealed secrets that would have destroyed the descendants' reputation**
- 14) Why is Daniel the one who gets to burn the documents?
 - d) **Because he supposedly cannot read and therefore cannot tell anyone what they say**
 - e) Because he is one of the most trusted servants
 - f) Because he loves playing with fire
- 15) Who teaches Daniel to read and write?
 - D) Charly
 - E) **Rosa**
 - F) Magrath
- 16) What is his teacher's reason to help him read and write a diary?
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 - d) Crookes pushed Daniel down the stairs
 - e) Crookes wants Daniel as his personal valet
 - f) **Daniel scalds Crookes with coffee**
- 19) Choose the most correct answer: What is the real reason Charlie visits the club?
 - a) He visits the club to find out information about Daniel.
 - b) He visits the club to solve the murder of Mr. Murray.
 - c) **He visits the club to stop Mr. Crookes from attending meetings.**
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 - c) The memoirs of Lord Byron
- 21) How does Jessica identify the stabbed man as Charlie?
 - a) By his trousers and ring
 - b) By his pocket watch and socks
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 - b) **Magrath**
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- a) Time travel
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