



Class: XII	Department: ENGLISH	
Question Bank	Topic: THE THIRD LEVEL - JACK FINNY	Note:

The Third Level

- JACK FINNY

SUMMARY-

Grand Central Station of New York has two levels. But Charley, a thirty-one year old dweller of the city, talks about there being three. Not only does he believe in the existence of this hypothetical third level but also claims to have been there.

A visit to his psychiatrist friend

Charley visits a psychiatrist friend to talk about this problem. The psychiatrist calls it a "waking-dream wish fulfilment" and rationalises Charley's psychology by saying that the "modern world is full of insecurity, fear, worry, and war..." and everybody wants to escape to some "temporary refuge from reality." According to him, even hobbies like stamp collection is a manifestation of this escape.

Charley loses his way at Grand Central

The fast growing Grand Central station at times seems to be a maze to Charley. He had lost his way a couple of times earlier too while taking the subway. Once, he entered the lobby of the Roosevelt Hotel while the other time he emerged at an office building that was three blocks away. But this time when he loses his way, something unique happens. He visits the third level!

The Third Level

Charley keeps walking in the quiet corridor, angling left and slanting downward, till he reaches an architecturally old station that is completely

different from the two familiar levels. The antiquated small room with fewer ticket counters and train gates, a wooden information booth, flickering open flame gas lights and brass spittoons reminds him of the architecture of the 1800s. He also finds that people are dressed in outmoded outfits. He notices that the date on the newspaper *The World* is printed June 11, 1894. As he tenders money to the clerk at the counter to buy two tickets, he realises that he need to have old currency bills to do so.

Charley's plan for a journey not realised

He had always wanted to travel to Galesburg with his wife, Louisa. In his mind, it is “a wonderful town still, with big old frame houses, huge lawns, and tremendous trees...” It is a place with long and pleasant summer evenings and where people have ample of time. So, the next day during lunch, he exchanges three hundred dollars for old style bills amounting to some two hundred only. The loss doesn't bother him much as he believes that in Galesburg everything will be cheaper and that he can manage even with a small amount. But, he could never again find the corridor leading to the third level.

Sam goes missing!

His wife Louisa is worried after knowing all this and asks him not to look for the third level any further. Suddenly Charley realises that his friend, Sam Weiner, is nowhere to be found, so he and his wife keep looking for him in the weekends. Sam was the one with whom Charley used to share his ideas about Galesburg.

Philately & the first day covers

Philately is not just stamp collection but a broad term including the study of stamps, postal history and other related items. When a new stamp is issued, on the first day, people mail a blank paper to themselves and then retain that unopened letter with the date on the postmark. Charley has inherited the hobby and the collection from his grandfather.

A letter from Sam

One day while fidgeting with his stamp collection, Charley comes across a letter that was not there earlier. It bears the postmark on a faded six-cent stamp with a picture of the President Garfield. The envelope was sent on July 18, 1894 to Charley's grandfather in Galesburg and is addressed to

Charley. The letter reads that Sam has reached Galesburg and is having whale of a time there. He also invites Charley and Louisa to Galesburg. When Charley goes to the stamp and coin store, he is apprised of Sam's exchanging eight hundred dollars for the old currency bills to establish his business of hay feed and grain in Galesburg. The letter was written by Sam Weiner, who was Charley's psychiatrist!

The Third Level - Question and Answers

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.

Read with insight

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

A. Yes, the third level of the Grand Central Station was a medium of escape for Charley. Modern world offers a lot of challenges and in order to take refuge from reality, one might resort to day-dreaming or hallucination. We all understand the miseries of the modern world which is full of worry and pressure, thus, in order to take the burden away from his shoulders and have a sigh of relief, Charley resorted to escaping reality, although unintentionally.

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

A. The way Charley discovered Sam's letter was rather peculiar. It was one of those first-day covers people used to mail to themselves back in time with a blank page inside. So to begin with, the cover had a letter in it and not a blank page in it. Secondly, the letter dates back to 18 July, 1894 when Sam (the writer of the letter) didn't exist because both Sam and Charley exist in the present times. Thus, it is sound to conclude that it was just 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?

A. One cannot count on fingers the negative aspects the modern lifestyle has to offer. There is stress, pressure, fear, insecurity and worry. In order to relieve yourself of all these miseries, one can indulge in creative activities from time to time. Making time for yourself and what you love without worrying about a productive outcome is a crucial thing many people tend to ignore in the hustle and bustle of daily lives. Secondly, one can read a good book or even meditate. Long walks in the lap of nature are not to be underestimated because nature has its own healing power. Apart from these, a short weekend getaway, movie night with friends or even alone at home can be done in order to dissociate oneself from the routine.

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

A. Yes, there are a lot of instances that tell us about the intersection of time and space in the story. First intersection being the one between the first two levels of the Grand Central Station and its third level which is based somewhere in the 1890s whereas the former exists in the present times. Also when Charley went to buy tickets for Galesburg which existed in 1894 while he and his wife exist in the present times. Not to ignore the old fashioned architecture of the third level in contradiction to the modern interiors of the first two levels. Lastly, the letter dated 18th July, 1982 that Charley found also throws light upon the intersection of time and space as both the sender (Sam) and the receiver (Charley) exist in the present times.

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

A. While a lot of the world's greatest inventions were made by people who were criticised for their ideas. Audiences used to mock at them for being illogical. Sighting the example of Thomas Edison who invented the light bulb, no one believed in him at first but all he had was an idea and it's realistic projection in mind. The idea here tells us how important it is to sometimes follow one's insight and have hope for it holds the capacity to change the world through its futuristic projections.

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?

A. Philately does indeed help in keeping the treasures of past alive. It gives one a chance to revisit and embrace the past of one's existence. Some of the

other ways in which it can be done is by keeping a record of all the letters, ancient manuscripts, things that are discontinued but were a significant part of the past, images, videos and written records of experiences.

Human beings are a collection of all the experiences they have been through. Their tendency to connect with the past from time to time helps them stay connected to the roots while helping them to face the present and future challenges with more strength. Connecting with the future on the other hand, is just as important to know the outcome of one's current actions and decisions. If one doesn't seem satisfied with the realistic interpretation of future, it can certainly help in altering current actions to direct towards a better future.