

**CLASS XII**  
**ENGLISH**  
**THE THIRD LEVEL**

**Brief Introduction**

The Third Level by Jack Finney is about the harsh realities of war. War has irreversible consequences thus leaving people in a state of insecurity. It is also about modern day problems and how common man tends to escape reality by various means. In this story Charley reaches the third level of the Grand Central Station which only has two levels.

**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 actually didn't exist). He reminisces the entire experience with his psychiatrist friend Sam. Charley had reached somewhere in the eighteen-nineties, a time before the world saw two of its 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 in the first day covers 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.

**Description of the Third level**

- Small room, few ticket windows and train gates, wooden and old looking information booth.
- Men had beards, sideburns, fancy moustaches
- Women wore skirts, high buttoned shoes and leg of muttons sleeves.
- A man looking at a pocket watch
- Old style locomotive with the funnel-shaped stack
- Open gaslights being used
- Brass spittoons on the floor
- Wants to visit his home town, Galesburg
- Past is quiet and peaceful
- Tries to buy two tickets to Galesburg (one ticket for his Wife Louisa)
- Clerk grows suspicious as Charlie doesn't have old-style currency.
- Back to the present-day world

### **People's reaction to Charlie's experience**

- Presidents of NY railroads swear on the existence of two levels.
- Psychiatrist friend Sam refuses to believe
- Interprets it as an escape from insecurity, fear, war and worry of the modern world.
- Louisa too disbelieves Charlie

### **Charlie's determination to find the Third Level**

- Withdraws money buys old currency worth 300 dollars.
- Fails to find the Third Level
- Louisa and Psychiatrist worried
- Unexpected Ending
- Sam disappears
- Charlie finds a first-day cover, never seen before

### **Note from Sam dated 18th July 1894 from Galesburg**

- Sam asks Charlie and Louisa to come to Galesburg and enjoy a quiet and peaceful life
- Charlie discovers Sam had bought old currency worth 800 dollars
- Enough to help him start hay and grain business in 1894 at Galesburg

### **First Day Cover**

- Stamp collectors buy stamps on the day of release
- Mail the envelopes with blank paper in it with the postmark of the date to themselves
- Covers remain unopened
- Charley inherited stamp collection from his grandfather

## **Vocabulary**

Suburban- residential

Ducked- lower the head or body quickly

Arched- curved

Bumping- knock or run into something

Snapped- break suddenly and completely

Locomotive- a powered railway vehicle used for pulling trains

## Question & Answers

1. What does the third level refer to?

A. Third level refers to an additional level at the Grand Central Station which originally only had two levels. Charley one night while going home 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.

3. 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 escape. 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 heave a sigh of relief, Charley resorted to escaping reality, although unintentionally.

4. 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.

5. ~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 oneself of all these miseries, one can indulge in creative activities from time to time. Taking 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. The story offers escapism as a route to get away from the modern life.

6. 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 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

7. 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.