

GCSE (9–1)

Delivery Guide

J352

Accredited

ENGLISH LITERATURE

The War of the Worlds – H.G.Wells

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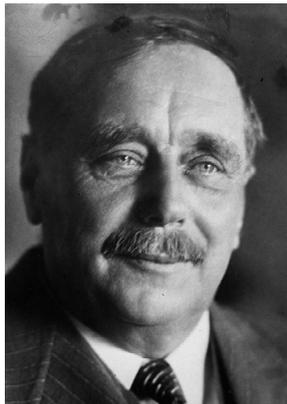
Introduction

Historical and cultural context

In 1898 the British Empire was the most dominant colonial power on earth. London was its political centre, making it a natural starting point for an imagined alien invasion.

Towards the end of the 19th century a very real fear developed that the turn of the century would be the 'end of the age' and the apocalypse would begin. There was also a fear of mass immigration due to colonialism.

HG Wells used his own experiences in the novel and explored fear of the unknown, paranoia and the possibility of the world ending. He also used the novel to explore his own misgivings about imperialism and explore how easily civilisation can



break down when faced with a seemingly unbeatable adversary.

It is important that students are able to link their knowledge of the historical and cultural context of the novel with the events described. In written responses students should integrate contextual understanding throughout, rather than bolting on taught material. Keep

factual historical knowledge to the minimum required for full understanding of the text and try to integrate it fully through the study of each chapter of the novel. Remember:

- *Quality of contextual understanding rather than coverage is important*
- *Focus and relevance of contextual comment are key – any comments should be relevant to the text and/or the task*
- *Context applies to the genre, historical setting, and social/cultural perspectives.*

Other works by HG Wells

The Time Machine – through time travel Wells explores growing class divisions and human greed.

The Invisible Man – Wells explores actions and consequences, centred around one man's descent into brutality, exposing the power of science to corrupt.

The Island of Doctor Moreau – Wells explores the dangers associated with scientific progress, when Man begins to act as God.



Introduction

Setting

Much of *The War of the Worlds* is set in Woking and the nearby suburbs, where HG Wells lived with his second wife, Catherine Robbins. The landing site of the first cylinder in the novel, Horsell Common, was within easy walking distance of the Wells' home.

One of the features of the novel is the small geographical area – the Narrator takes his wife to Leatherhead to protect her from the Martians, then makes his way through a number of small towns including Weybridge and Shepperton.

As the novel progresses, the destruction of the settings and environment is apparent with destroyed buildings, dead and dying people in the streets, black dust and red weed covering everything.

Key settings:

Horsell Common: the site of the first cylinder landing.

Leatherhead: home of the Narrator's cousin, seen as a place of safety.

Shepperton: the scene of a Martian attack.

Sheen: where the fifth cylinder lands and buries the Narrator and the Curate.

Putney Hill: where the Narrator meets the Artillery Man.

London: the Narrator's brother recounts the flight from the city.

Structure

The story is narrated in hindsight about events that occurred six years previously. The events of the novel span about a month.

The plot mostly follows in chronological order what happens between the landing of the first cylinder on Horsell Common and the Narrator's return home after the death of the Martians. Occasionally the narrative is interrupted to include scientific details learned later which are inserted throughout the book.

The Narrator tells the story of his brother and his experiences when escaping from London.

What happens to the Narrator is the main focus of the story and the chapters are broken up by significant events of his life during the time of the war.

The novel is split into two books: Book 1 – *The Coming of the Martians*, and Book 2 – *The Earth Under the Martians*. Each chapter has a title, which is useful to discuss fully to analyse its significance.



Summary

Book 1 – *The Coming of the Martians*

The narrative opens in an astronomical observatory at Ottershaw, where explosions are seen on the surface of the planet Mars, creating much interest in the scientific community. Later what they think is a meteor lands on Horsell Common, near the Narrator's home in Woking, Surrey. He is among the first to discover that the object is actually an artificial cylinder that eventually opens, disgorging Martians who are "big" and "greyish" with "oily brown skin", "the size, perhaps, of a bear", with "two large dark-coloured eyes", and a lipless "V-shaped mouth" that drips saliva, surrounded by "Gorgon groups of tentacles". The Narrator finds them "at once vital, intense, inhuman, crippled and monstrous". They briefly emerge, have difficulty in coping with the Earth's atmosphere, and rapidly retreat into their cylinder. A human deputation (which includes the astronomer Ogilvy) approaches the cylinder with a white flag, but the Martians incinerate them and others nearby with a Heat-Ray before beginning to assemble their machinery. Military forces arrive that night to surround the common, including Maxim guns. The population of Woking and the surrounding villages are reassured by the presence of the military. A tense day then begins, with much anticipation of military action by the Narrator.

After heavy firing from the common and damage to the town from the Heat-Ray which suddenly erupts in the late afternoon, the Narrator takes his wife to safety in nearby Leatherhead, where his cousin lives, using a borrowed,

two-wheeled horse car. While returning to Woking to return the cart in the early morning hours, a violent thunderstorm erupts. On the road during the height of the storm, the Narrator has his first terrifying sight of a fast-moving Martian fighting-machine. In panic he crashes the horse cart, barely escaping detection. He discovers the Martians have assembled towering three-legged "fighting-machines" (Tripods), each armed with a Heat-Ray and a chemical weapon: the poisonous "Black Smoke". These Tripods have wiped out the army units positioned around the cylinder and attacked and destroyed most of Woking.

Sheltering in his house, the Narrator sees the fleeing Artilleryman moving through his garden. The Artilleryman later tells the Narrator of his experiences and mentions that another cylinder has landed between Woking and Leatherhead, cutting off the Narrator from his wife. The two try to escape via Byfleet just after dawn, but are separated at the Shepperton to Weybridge ferry during a Martian attack on Shepperton. One of the Martian fighting-machines is brought down in the River Thames by the military as the Narrator and countless others try to cross the river into Middlesex. The Martians retreat to their original crater, which gives the authorities precious hours to form a defence-line covering London. After the Martian's temporary repulse, the Narrator is able to float down the Thames in a boat toward London, stopping at Walton, where he first encounters the Curate, his companion for the coming weeks.



Summary

Towards dusk on the same day the Martians renew their offensive. They break through the defence-line of Siege guns and field artillery centred on Richmond Hill and Kingston Hill, employing a widespread bombardment of the Black Smoke.

A mass exodus of the population of London begins. This includes the Narrator's younger brother, a medical student, who flees to the Essex coast after the sudden, panicked pre-dawn order to evacuate London is given by the authorities.

He undertakes a terrifying and harrowing journey of three days, amongst millions of similar refugees streaming from London. The brother encounters Mrs Elphinstone and her younger sister-in-law, just in time to help them fend off a gang of men who are trying to rob them. The three continue on together (Mrs Elphinstone's husband is missing, and his fate is never learned).

After a terrifying struggle to cross a streaming mass of refugees on the road at Barnet, they head eastward. Two days later, at Chelmsford, their pony is confiscated for food by the local Committee of Public Supply. They press on to Tillingham and the sea. There they manage to buy passage to the Continent on a small paddle steamer, part of a vast throng of shipping gathered off the Essex coast to evacuate refugees.

The torpedo ram HMS *Thunder Child* destroys two attacking tripods before being destroyed by the Martians, though this allows the evacuation fleet, including the ship carrying the Narrator's brother and his two travelling companions, to escape. Shortly after, all organised resistance ceases, and the Martians roam the shattered landscape unhindered.



Summary

Book 2 – *The Earth Under the Martians*

At the beginning of Book Two, the Narrator and the Curate are plundering houses in search of food. During this excursion the men witness a Martian fighting-machine enter Kew, seizing any person it finds and tossing them into a “great metallic carrier which projected behind him, much as a workman’s basket hangs over his shoulder. The Narrator realises that the Martian invaders may have “a purpose other than destruction” for killing their victims.

At a house in Sheen “a blinding glare of green light” announces the arrival of the fifth Martian cylinder, and both men are trapped beneath the ruins for two weeks. The Narrator’s relations with the Curate deteriorate, and he eventually is forced to knock him unconscious to silence his now loud ranting. The Curate is overheard outside by a Martian, who finally removes his unconscious body with one of its handling machine tentacles. The reader is then led to believe the Martians will perform a fatal transfusion of the Curate’s blood to nourish themselves, as they have done with their other victims. The Narrator just escapes detection from the returned foraging tentacle by hiding in the adjacent coal-cellar.

The Martians eventually abandon the cylinder’s crater, and the Narrator emerges from the collapsed house where he has observed the Martians up close during his ordeal. As he approaches West London, he observes the Martian Red Weed everywhere, a prickly vegetation spreading wherever there is

abundant water. On Putney Heath he once again encounters the Artilleryman, who briefly persuades him of a grandiose plan to rebuild civilization by living underground. After a few hours the Narrator perceives the laziness of his companion and abandons the Artilleryman.

In a deserted and silent London, he begins to lose his psychological grip due to his accumulated trauma, finally attempting to end it all by openly approaching a stationary fighting-machine. To his surprise he quickly discovers that all the Martians have since been killed by an onslaught of earthly microbial infections to which they had no immunity: “slain, after all man’s devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon this earth.”

The Narrator journeys on, finally suffering a brief but complete nervous breakdown, which affects him for days; he is finally nursed back to health by a kind group of survivors. Eventually he is able to return by train to Woking via the patchworks of newly repaired track. At his home he discovers that his beloved wife has miraculously survived. The last chapter, entitled “Epilogue,” reflects on the significance of the Martian invasion and the “abiding sense of doubt and insecurity” it has left in the Narrator’s mind.



Characters

Major characters

None of the major characters have names. Ask students to consider why this might be and what impact it has on their responses as readers.

All major characters need to be studied in depth with clear understanding of their role and function in the novel in terms of developing themes and moving the narrative forward.

The Narrator

The Narrator is presented as a likeable, educated, philosophical man. His writing is interrupted by the arrival of the Martians, and he is one of the first people who are aware of the invasion. He faces many close-calls, but survives the invasion, clinging onto his sanity until he finds that the Martians have died. Then he loosens his grip on things for a few days and breaks down. His qualities of determination, good judgement, and a strong will to live, enable him to survive the ordeal more successfully than many others.

The Artilleryman

When the Narrator first meets the Artilleryman in his garden, the latter has survived the Martian's Heat-Ray and he takes the Narrator in. At this point the Artilleryman has a logical and cautious approach to the invasion, guiding the Narrator away from the third cylinder and ensuring they have provisions. He disappears from the narrative when he re-joins the military, until the Narrator meets him on Putney Hill. There is evidence that he has undergone great changes psychologically. He has impractical and implausible plans, but in reality simply drinks and plays games. When the Narrator leaves him the reader does not learn his fate.

The Curate

The Curate does not show religion in a very positive light. He is unable to cope with witnessing the destruction of his church and Weybridge. He clutches on to the Narrator despite their completely incompatible characters. When they become trapped under the house in Sheen, the Curate's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic and unmanageable. He refuses to ration food, or keep quiet to escape the attention of the Martians. Eventually the Narrator has to hit the Curate with a meat chopper, and he is taken by a Martian who comes to investigate. The Curate's cowardice and apocalyptic ramblings make him an unsympathetic character.

The Brother

The brother takes over the narrative to reveal what has occurred in London during the invasion. He is similar to the Narrator, logical and calm in a crisis. He demonstrates courage when he helps the Elphinstone ladies as they also try to flee. His common sense is seen throughout as they reach the Thames to board a ship to get away from England.



Characters

Minor characters

The Wife

The Wife is a fairly passive character. Her impact is through motivating the Narrator's actions and allowing his narrative voice to develop through recounting at the dinner table his first impressions of the Martians. She demonstrates concern but is calm and dignified. The Narrator's need to protect her and get her to safety is indicative of relationships in marriage at that time. The Narrator misses her and plans to reunite with her, which happens by the end of the novel.

Ogilvy

An astronomer who is the first to become aware of the cylinders coming from Mars. He mistakenly assumes that the first is a meteorite. Ogilvy works tirelessly to uncover the cylinder and is eventually one of the doomed deputation.

Henderson

He is a London journalist who accepts Ogilvy's views of the landed cylinder and spreads the news. He goes with Ogilvy to see for himself and is also part of the deputation.

The Elphinstone Ladies

The Elphinstone ladies travel with the Narrator's brother. The wife is passive and almost exclusively wrapped up in her concerns for her absent husband. The sister-in-law shows great spirit and courage, using a revolver to scare off the men and later persuading Mrs Elphinstone to get on the steamer.



Themes

Imperialism

"Before we judge of them [the Martians] too harshly, we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?" Chapter 1, *The War of the Worlds*.

At the time of the novel's publication the British Empire had conquered and colonised dozens of territories in Africa, Australia, North and South America, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and Atlantic and Pacific islands.



While Invasion literature had provided an imaginative foundation for the idea of the heart of the British Empire being invaded by foreign forces, it was not until *The War of the Worlds* that the reading public was presented with an enemy completely superior to themselves. A significant motivating force behind the success of the British Empire was its use of sophisticated technology; the Martians, also attempting to establish an empire on Earth, have technology superior to their British adversaries. In *The War of the Worlds*, Wells depicted an imperial power as the victim of imperial aggression, perhaps encouraging the reader to consider imperialism itself.

This also challenged the Victorian notion that the British Empire had a right to rule by its own superiority over subject races.



Themes

War and Conflict

"It's all over," he said. "They've lost one—just one. And they've made their footing good and crippled the greatest power in the world..... This isn't a war... It never was a war, any more than there's war between men and ants." Chapter 7, *The War of the Worlds*.

The novel explores a war where one side dominates and annihilates the other. Through this scenario HG Wells is able to explore the impact of war on human beings, as well as portray the horror of invasion. This includes not only increasingly frequent scenes of dead bodies and buildings in ruins as the Martians advance, but also the mental suffering caused by war. The Artilleryman, who had been a devoted soldier, becomes an impractical dreamer. The Narrator ends up physically attacking the Curate to save them both from discovery by the Martians. In the mass migrations, people turn on each other in their fight for survival. The novel explores courage and resilience but also cowardice and panic.

Interestingly, the weapons given to the Martians – the Heat-Ray and Black Smoke, and even the Tripods themselves - were HG Wells' predictions for the future of warfare - chemical warfare, laser-like weapons, and industrial robots.

The destruction of civilisation / Social Darwinism

HG Wells was fascinated with Darwinian evolutionary theory and it influences many of his works. Darwinian theory argues that life evolves by means of "natural selection": those species that are able to adapt to their environments thrive, while those who are not, do not - a process known as 'survival of the fittest' or 'the struggle for existence'. Although Darwin was concerned with biology, not intending his theories to be applied to humans, they were developed into a philosophy of 'social Darwinism', the law of natural selection in human society. The theory gained popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. *The War of the Worlds* explores this theory by suggesting that all humanity, regardless of strength or social class, suffers collectively under the Martians' rule. It forces its readers to revise their view of humanity's place in the cosmos: no longer on top, but as one species that may very well be inferior to another. It is notable that in the early chapters when people gather around the pit, they represent all social classes. The Martian invasion is thus seen as a great leveler: no individual can avoid the calamity by virtue of social class, education, or wealth.

The Artilleryman advocates that following the Martian invasion only the strong like him will survive, yet he shows himself unable to actually carry out any of his grandiose plans. The Narrator's calm logic and perseverance are far more useful in facing the atrocities.

Interestingly, in the end the Martians are wiped out because they have no resistance to the bacteriums on Earth that humans have resistance to. This gives Man a chance to recover, rebuild and re-think.



The Martians

The Martians represent all that is bad about imperialism. We are told that as their planet, Mars, threatens to stop supporting life, they see the Earth and set out to take it over using physical force and weaponry. They do not seem to consider peaceful cohabitation. It is not even made clear whether the Martians view mankind as having any intelligence, thought or feeling. This reflects HG Wells' views that during a period of great colonial expansion, native populations were often treated unacceptably and their needs and views ignored.

The Martians are portrayed as highly technologically advanced compared to Man. They also seem incapable of emotions and feelings such as guilt, remorse, or empathy. This reflects HG Wells' concerns that with scientific development comes great power and a tendency to play 'God'. In war, common human decency is often cast aside for ruthless pursuit of victory.

The Martians are therefore presented as killing machines, but they have also evolved to work extremely efficiently as living organisms. They no longer have complex digestive or reproductive systems. However, they are physically weakened and rely on machinery to do their work for them. This reflects the growing industrialisation of the 19th century, which saw many working class people forced into jobs in factories and mills, using huge machinery. Quality of life was low as people worked long hours and earned little.

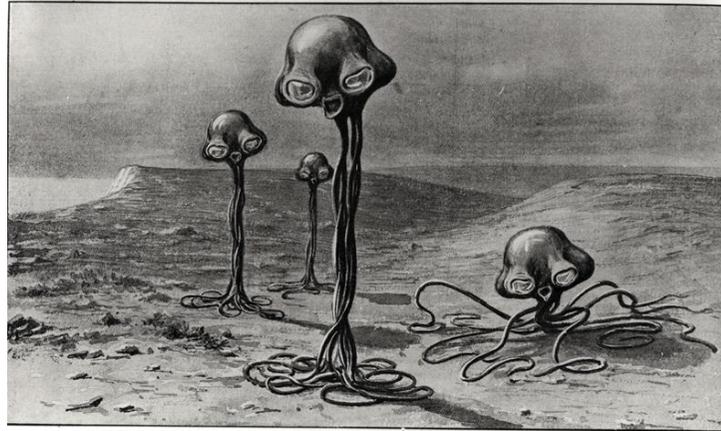
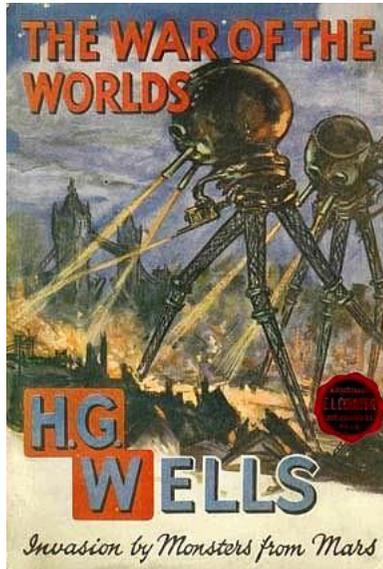


*Sculpture of a Martian invader in Woking town centre on 14 August 2012. Sculpted by Michael Condron to commemorate local author of *The War of the Worlds*, H.G. Wells.*



The Martians

Popular images to depict a Martian invasion



Les MARTIENS, tels qu'ils ont été conçus par l'imagination du romancier anglais WELLS (d'après les dessins de M. Dudouyt, qui illustre le roman *la Guerre des Mondes*).



Assessment preparation

Assessment Objectives:	
AO1	Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response• use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
AO2	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.
AO4	Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Required Skills

Learners should be able to reflect critically and evaluatively on their reading. Learners are expected to respond to some of the following:

- themes, ideas and issues
- atmosphere and emotion
- plot development
- characters and relationships
- language
- relevant social, historical or cultural contexts, or literary contexts such as genre.
- pay attention to the details of a text: understanding the significance of a word, phrase or sentence in context
- demonstrate the ability to read at a literal level and also explore deeper implications
- explain motivation, sequence of events and the relationship between actions or events
- identify and interpret key themes
- make an informed personal response, justifying a point of view by referring closely to evidence in the text
- reflect critically and evaluatively on a text, using an understanding of context to inform reading
- recognise and evaluate the possibility of different valid responses to a text
- explain and illustrate how choice of language shapes meaning
- analyse how the writer uses language, form and structure to create effects and impact
- use relevant subject terminology accurately to support their views
- produce clear and coherent pieces of extended writing
- select and emphasise key points and ideas for a particular purpose
- develop and maintain a consistent viewpoint
- use textual references and quotations effectively to support views
- use accurate Standard English and spelling, punctuation and grammar.



Assessment preparation

Approaching the text

Before reading the text:

1. Discuss the science fiction genre:
 - Ask the class to give you names of other famous science fiction stories from literature, film or television.
 - Students work in pairs to write a list of the typical features of a chosen science fiction story.
2. Research Victorian attitudes to extra-terrestrial life, and attitudes to scientific discovery.
 - Use the Internet and available books. Each student writes down the most interesting piece of information discovered and shares it with the class.
3. Research the British Empire and the effect of increasing colonisation in the 19th century on people's attitudes.
 - Use the internet and ask students to present their findings in pairs.
4. Discussion: In 1938, Orson Welles' radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* had a dramatic and shocking effect on its listeners.
<http://www.transparencynow.com/welles.htm>
Ask students if they know what happened. If not, can they guess? After you have gathered students' ideas, ask them to read the Introduction to the novel (pages v–vii). Did anyone guess correctly? Could the same thing happen today? Why/why not?
Play an extract from the original recording. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs0K4ApWl4g>
5. Discussion: Read the first two sentences in italics at the beginning of the Introduction to the class:
Ask students why the Martians may have chosen to invade England. Would they choose England if they invaded today? Why/why not? What has changed?
6. How might the response to a Martian invasion be different at the end of the 19th century compared with today?



Assessment preparation

When reading the text

7. Split the text into sections – some chapters can be studied together.	
8. Explore social, cultural and historical context as you move through the text, linking it firmly to the events and characters' responses/actions.	
9. Remember that as the examination is 'closed text' you will need to assess students' knowledge as you move through the text.	
10. Students could usefully identify key quotations as they study the text. These could be organised in themes and characters.	
11. Look at specific passages from the text and use them to closely analyse language. Then encourage students to make links to other parts of the text. The links could be concerned with themes, character development and/or plot development.	

Responding to examination questions

In the new OCR GCSE English Literature (9-1) J352 specification, there will be a choice of two questions on the 19th century text. The first question will offer a short extract from the studied text, followed by a question that will require the student to refer closely to the given extract but also refer to elsewhere in the novel. As all questions are now considered whole text questions, it is important for answers to include references to other parts of the text and it will not be possible to answer the question fully or to be awarded the highest marks without moving beyond the re-printed extract.

The second question will be a discursive question where the student chooses which parts of the text to refer to in their response. They should select the most relevant and appropriate moments from the text to answer the question.

When teaching students how to approach examination questions, remember the following:

- Students will need to know the novel well, remind them that they will not have a copy in the examination
- It's useful for students to learn a number of short quotations to support their response – it's not about how many are used but how well they are used, in terms of being integrated into an answer and backing up key points
- Although they may have learnt taught material, students must focus on the question set rather than regurgitating information; all questions will encourage a personal, informed response
- Help develop students' ability to integrate comments on the social, cultural and historical context of the text and avoid including it simply as 'bolted-on' information. See the OCR GCSE English Literature resource Exploring context (insert link when available)
- A film version of the text can enhance students' appreciation and understanding, but it's worth reminding them that in the examination, they must refer to the novel only
- Encourage students to consider carefully which question to choose. Don't assume that the extract-based question will be more accessible
- Students will be expected to comment on and analyse the writer's use of language and its effects
- Students need to develop a personal response to the text, supporting their views and ideas with textual details and references.



Assessment preparation

Extract-based questions:

- The extract will lead the answer but students will be required to move beyond the extract and show understanding of the wider text
- It is crucial to focus on the question, commenting on the relevant points raised in the extract
- Some well chosen textual references including quotations from the wider novel should be included in the response.

Discursive questions:

- Focusing on the question is key – formulating a short plan before students begin writing is advisable
- Students should select appropriate moments from the text to focus on in support of their response
- The response should include well selected textual references and quotations.

Useful links/resources:	Resources
On-line copy of the complete text of The War of the Worlds: https://www.fourmilab.ch/etexts/www/warworlds/b1c1.html	
Map of the British Empire over time: http://vis7ahum.wikispaces.com/Growth+and+Change+in+the+Borders+of+the+British+Empire	
Orson Welles' 1938 reading of The War of the Worlds: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs0K4ApWl4g When it was broadcast in 1938 it caused mass panic in the States, with many listeners thinking that the invasion was real.	
The War of the Worlds Albums 1 & 2 by Jeff Wayne, with Richard Burton narrating: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Phl8vxpD47s	
Revision sheets on chapters/multiple choice knowledge tests http://www.ereadingworksheets.com/free-reading-worksheets/literature-units/the-war-of-the-worlds/	





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