

Out of Time

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME -
OR MIND

Exploring the Text

Check with your teacher about which questions to try.

- ① Look carefully at the front and the back covers of the book. Now that you have read the story, how well do you think they prepare the reader for what is to come?
- ② A review quoted on the back cover says that *Out of Time* is '... a book filled with magic that will certainly appeal to both teenager and adult readers'. Comment on the idea of 'magic'. Would you use that word to describe the novel? Why or why not?
- ③ Mr Woodforde said, '**Maybe that's why I don't really think it'll work. I can't imagine it**' (p. 13). Do you have to be able to imagine something before you can do it or make it work? Explain. Why do we have an imagination?
- ④ The contents of the atlas spark James's very lively imagination (p. 14). What else do James' imaginings tell you about him?
- ⑤ What do you think about Sister Agnes' theory about Grigor? (p. 20). List the points that might support her theory. Is there a flaw in her theory? Explain.
- ⑥ The meaning of Mr Woodforde's death began to take shape in James' mind. It meant 'never again'. Have you ever had a 'never again' experience? It need not have been a death. It may have even been something that gave you a fright, enough for you to say to yourself, or others, 'Never again!'
- ⑦ Time machines – are they possible? If Mr Woodforde was not making a time machine, what was he doing? Explain your theory.

Page references are to the Pan 1994 paperback edition of *Out of Time*.

8 John Marsden loves stories and collects them. It seems that in *Out of Time* he is telling us lots of stories, each one adding more and more to the mystery. Is James really 'out of time' or is he escaping to an imaginary world?

9 What reason might James have for escaping to an imaginary world?

10 Let's begin to sort out some of John Marsden's 'stories'. Read them all and answer one.

James: It seems he doesn't talk. Why might this be?

Ellie: She suffers badly from asthma. What effect does this ultimately have on James' life and his capacity to take 'time out'? (pp. 133–5).

The footballers: This short episode seems as though it is unconnected to the rest of the story. How is it important? (p. 37).

Tiffany: She is a barrister pleading a hopeless case because of lack of information. The killer remains a mystery. Tiffany, years later, still remembers the cry of the news boys, 'Mystery killer to hang!'. You be the judge, on the little evidence we have been given. How might we connect this story to James? (pp. 40–4).

The girl: While James is 'out of time' he is able to help the girl by timing his arrival before her accident took place, finding and following her parents and guiding them to her. Is James really out of time or is James entering a world of delusion? For what reason might James 'fly' to the world of the girl? (pp. 51–3, 78, 87, 102–3, 116–25, 131–2).

Max and Sybil: Max and Sybil occasionally took James out. Max told a funny story and James choked back his laughter. '**Impassivity, one of his most reliable defences, was threatening to abandon him**' (p. 54). Max later, while trying to play cricket, put his foot in a rubbish bin by mistake and fell over taking the bin and the rubbish with him. James '**collapsed in helpless laughter, losing control completely**' (p. 55). James was relieved that the others had not noticed him laughing.

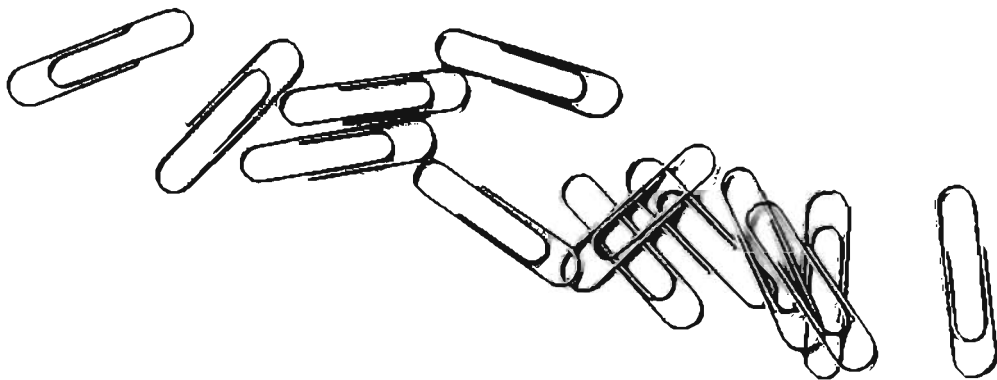
(a) Why was James so determined to remove himself from natural responses such as laughter, conversation and games?

(b) James began thinking of the origin of the term 'Bless you', said when someone sneezes. Why did he whisper, so quietly that he hears himself in his mind rather than through his ears, the words: '**Bless me**'? (p. 56).

There are many more characters. Perhaps you could list them and sort them into groups, perhaps those who are related to James, those related to Ellie, and those who seem unrelated to anybody. In this latter grouping, could these characters represent some emotion? Give examples.



- 11 Almost in the middle of the novel we find the story of James' flight to the ancient city of Tikal (pp. 64–75). A young boy led him through part of the city, and he began to feel fearful and **'checked again that the machine, now finely laced with drops of his sweat, was still in his hand'** (p. 72). James was pushed into a deep well and would have drowned, pushed under the water by a man **'who had ceased to be a human'**, who was now **'a force, an idea, evil'** (p. 75). He finally managed to press the 'return' button, just in time.
- Suppose James were moving in and out of a world of delusion, what might have been the outcome of this particular flight 'out of time'? Why do you think John Marsden placed this scene in the middle of the book?
- 12 Machine, memory or mind? (pp. 132–6). What do you think? Explain in detail.
- 13 The door that James was too frightened to open: was it the door to Ellie's bedroom or was it a different kind of door? Who opened the door? What difference did the knowledge of what was or was not behind the door make to James? (p. 136).
- 14 How much, if at all, was James to blame for Ellie's death? If James was not to blame where did the blame lie?
- 15 What was the cause of James' pressing need to spend much of his waking moments 'out of time'?
- 16 Can guilt ever be a helpful or useful emotion?
- 17 James ran **'across the square to the Technicians' Store'** (p. 137). He asked a young man to recharge the battery. The impossible had happened, the battery was flat and could not be recharged.
- (a) Can you explain why, for the first time, James did not run around the edges of the square? **'Nowhere did he take the shortest distance between two points'** (pp. 10–11).
- (b) The time machine no longer worked. Why had the impossible happened? (p. 138).
- 18 Go back to page 23. Read the words of the song. Now think of James at the very end of John Marsden's final 'story'. Do you think James can now 'see where he's been'? Justify your answer.
- 19 Do stories always have to have a beginning, a middle and an end?



Think it through talk it over

In groups or as a class, discuss one or more of these topics.

1 Imagination and success

Mr Woodforde stated:
 'But there's a failure
 of my imagination
 somewhere. Maybe
 that's why I don't
 really think it'll work.
 I can't imagine it' (p. 13).

How do you make an idea work?

Do you have to 'see' something happening to make it happen?

If you 'see' something happening, is it easier to achieve?

Is imagination the beginning of ideas?

What comes first: the image or the idea?

2 Out of time

Was James escaping when he was 'out of time'? If so, from what?

Was James free when he was 'out of time'?

Can we ever really escape from something we would rather not face?

If you put something out of your mind, where does it go?

Is something *in* your mind different from something *on* your mind?

3 James

How is James different from the usual kind of hero? In what ways is he the same?

What makes James, James?

Is James the same person 'out of time' as he is when he's back?

How would you have solved the problem of the closed door?

4 Inevitable

Tiffany was thinking about her client and 'his limited, inevitable future' (p. 41).

Define 'inevitable'.

What makes something inevitable?

What is inevitable in your life?

Can your attitude change the inevitable?

If you believe that 'anything is possible', does this affect the inevitable?

5 Truth or not?

'Ellie had her pink ski-suit on, which James privately thought looked revolting, but he told her she was looking good and she beamed' (p. 48).

Did James lie?

What might James have had in mind when he told Ellie she was looking good?

If you were Ellie, would you rather be told the truth?

Is it better to make someone feel good than to tell the truth?

Do the members of your family always tell you the truth?

Is the truth always good?

6 Real or imaginary?

'I've got a new game. It's called Frankie. Sometimes I know it's a game and sometimes I don't. But even when I don't, I still do' (p. 63).

Can you know something and not know something at the same time? Give an example.

Why did James need an imaginary friend?

Can an imaginary friend make you do things?

In what ways, if any, can an imaginary friend be real?



The remarkable tale of James's adventures is packed with ideas, images, stories and emotions. Let your imagination soar as you try one or more of the following activities.



tree of emotions

There was a huge tree outside the window ... Old and oak, it was a treasury of hollow places. In its dark green curves dwelt old air, unbreathed pockets ... It seemed that the tree itself was reaching into the room ... When the windows were open it became a living curtain of green' (p. 10).

Draw this wonderful, living tree. On one side, in the 'unbreathed pockets' write all the emotions James would have experienced when he thought of what lay behind the closed door. On the other side, in the 'treasury of hollow places', write all the emotions James would have experienced when he was able to open that door. Make your tree 'live' on the page. 'Its green was too green, its brown too brown for him to believe in it' (p. 23).

time machine model



Draw a working model of James's time machine, showing the exterior as well as all the interior workings of the machine. Clearly label your drawings so that others may follow your plan to construct their own machines.

write a song Read the words of the song on page 23. This is the chorus; write two verses to go with it, and, if you can, write the music as well.



brainstorm '... only occasionally bursting into long rhapsodies of genuinely fast movement' (p. 48). How could you illustrate this image? Brainstorm for really original ideas.



sound effects Think about the passage beginning 'She paused again in the middle of the square ...' and finishing with '... a Heaven and Hell of noise' (pp. 52-3). Record a series of sound effects to illustrate the images of both Heaven and Hell.

