

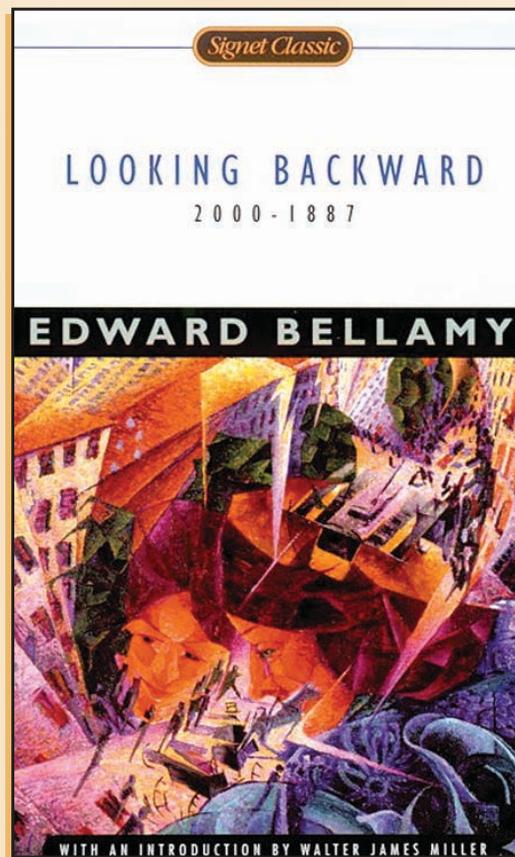
Signet Classic

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

EDWARD BELLAMY'S

LOOKING BACKWARD 2000-1887

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S E R I E S E D I T O R S :

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INTRODUCTION

Looking Backward by Edward Bellamy is a novel that takes the reader from the end of the 19th century into an idealistic vision of the 21st century. In many ways *Looking Backward* is a 19th century romantic novel; yet, on another level the novel is a complex investigation of the possibilities of humanity as the conversations unfold between Julian West, the narrator and time traveler, and Dr. leetee, his 21st century guide and mentor. Through these often Socratic conversations, Bellamy provides the reader with insight into the social problems and ills of the mid-to-late 19th century as well as with a vision of a utopian possibility for the millennium.

This rich, multi-faceted novel can be used successfully in a variety of high school courses. Younger students are fascinated with the time travel aspect as well as the predictions about Julian West's future, which is the contemporary reader's present. Older students are able to explore the frame structure and intricacies of Bellamy's themes.

Edward Bellamy (1850-1898) is also of compelling interest to students who enjoy biographical criticism. Attorney, newspaper reporter, novelist, and social activist, Bellamy enjoyed success in his own time. Utopian societies formed after the publication of *Looking Backward* will also be of some interest to more advanced students.

This guide is divided into three sections. The first section provides a summary of the novel. The second section contains teaching suggestions for the novel. The final section contains further resources for enrichment.

SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO

The novel opens with our narrator Julian West introducing himself to the reader, providing some background information about the state of society in the late 1880s, and illustrating how he, as a man of the upper classes, is irritated by the strikes and protests of the working classes. Peeved that the turmoil of society interrupts the comforts and plans of his own life, West encourages his fiancée to move up the date of their marriage. Securing a promise from her, he returns home and prepares for sleep.

At this point, we begin the adventure. West, an insomniac, makes use of a peculiar medical practice of a "Professor of Animal Magnetism" who mesmerizes him into a deep sleep from which his man-servant must awaken him with prescribed instructions. That this is a regular custom for West when he has gone several days without sleep gives him security, and he closes his eyes on May 30, 1887.

CHAPTERS THREE THROUGH SEVEN

West wakes up to the voices of three people and learns that it is September 10, 2000. Mildly disturbed by a young female voice imploring that he not be told about something, West is more distressed to learn that his house had burned, apparently during the night of May 30, 1887 and that, 113 years later, the present occupants of the site found his underground bed chamber with him in it. Nursed to health by Dr. leetee, West begins his slow recovery and orientation to Boston in the year 2000. Surveying Boston from the top of Dr. leetee's home, West first learns that wealth is now employed to enhance the city rather than being "lavished in private luxury," as it was in West's time. Slowly, Dr. leetee introduces West to modern society and the change time has brought to America while West slept in his subterranean chamber. West is shocked to discover that government controls industry and commerce; there are no political parties, no corruption, no wars, and no child labor. Society works to educate the young, protect the elderly, and combat poverty. Moreover, to West's astonishment, all of these changes in American society were accomplished without violence or bloodshed.

CHAPTERS EIGHT THROUGH TWELVE

West awakens to find himself thoroughly disoriented and despondent. Taking matters into his own hands, he sets off to stroll the streets of Boston. Finding things both similar and vastly changed, he becomes more depressed and returns to the leetees' home and to the comfort of Edith, their daughter. West's evident gloom leads to more enlightening conversations with the good doctor. This series of lessons includes information about the equal distribution of wealth and the educational practices of the 21st century. Edith then takes Julian on a shopping trip, during which he learns first hand

about the shopping practices of modern Boston, the use of credit cards and pneumatic transfers of goods. Upon their return home, Edith instructs Julian in the use of phone lines through which all forms of entertainment, which are available twenty-four hours a day at the click of a button, are instantly brought into the home.

CHAPTERS THIRTEEN THROUGH EIGHTEEN

The former insomniac Julian West is lulled to sleep by the musical program offered through these telephone lines. Upon awakening he receives more education from Dr. leetee, learning that there is the equivalent of international currency through the use of the credit cards issued to all citizens. West spends the morning hours reading Dickens after learning that modern society's standards of art equate literary merit with political concerns (p. 110). Dining out that evening, West sees how streets are maintained with coverings against storms and rain and learns that the Boston of the year 2000 is a classless society devoid of social and economic divisions among people. After their meal at the restaurant, West returns to the leetee library and is instructed by Dr. leetee on the fundamentals and changes in publishing. There is no censorship, and the writer himself or herself must finance their first publications.

The following morning Edith greets West before he can slip out alone into the streets. Their conversation reveals the beginnings of a possible love interest and the furthering of the mystery introduced in the second chapter when West heard a feminine voice urging Dr. leetee to keep silent about something. The beginning of a conversation about tracing one's genealogy causes Edith to turn pensive. Dr. leetee then accompanies West on an excursion about the city, visiting the warehouses where goods are stored. The instruction in a classless society is continued and complimented by leetee's lessons about the publishing industry, the service industries, and the intricacies of the functioning of government and the role of the President. A late night conversation with the doctor provides West with additional insight into the integrity and reward offered by service to the national interest. Because of the high status accorded recreation, citizens of 2000 participate in numerous leisurely pursuits negating the need for professional athletes and teams.

CHAPTERS NINETEEN AND TWENTY

The following morning West enjoys a brief visit to Charleston and notices, among other things, the disappearance of prisons. His observation gives Dr. leetee an opportunity to explain how the classless society and equal distribution of wealth have led to a reduction in crime, making the need for prisons and lawyers obsolete. Such crimes as exist are motiveless in a society where no one is hungry, cold or otherwise lacking in the basic necessities of life; therefore, citizens who commit crimes are considered atavistic and treated in hospitals. Furthermore, West learns that the increase in the standard of living for all peoples has ensured equality to the degree that there is no need for lying, and falsehood is unknown. That same afternoon, Edith accompanies West on a visit to his former bedchamber. There he shares with Edith a picture of his former fiancée and his amazement that the gold he had locked in his safe is now useless. While Edith is able to share his interest in the picture in the locket, she is completely unable to comprehend his awe in the decreased capacity of the gold.

CHAPTERS TWENTY-ONE THROUGH TWENTY-THREE

The next morning gives West a chance to learn about the educational system which rests on: (1) the right of every man to the most complete education the nation can give him on his own account, as necessary to his enjoyment of himself; (2) the right of his fellow citizens to have him educated, as necessary to their enjoyment of his society; (3) the right of the unborn to be guaranteed an intelligent and refined parentage (p. 153).

That same evening, West inquires about the mode of production and the current status of money and credit. Dr. leetee instructs West about the dangers inherent in a capitalistic society. According to Dr. leetee, a society based on credit is socially stratified with huge breaches between the classes. These inequities brought America close to catastrophe before a radical restructuring eliminated credit and the classed society which accompanied it.

Later that same evening, West brings himself to tell Edith that the morning he awoke to find himself in the year 2000 he heard her beg her father, "Promise me, then, that you will not tell him" (p. 167). West explains to Edith that this mystery has been of some interest to him and he wants her to resolve his questions. Edith, distressed by West's request, refuses to tell him what he wants to know but promises to tell him at some future time, to be determined by West's readiness to hear. This dialogue furthers the mystery and enhances the suspense of the plot. West finds himself falling in love with Edith.

CHAPTERS TWENTY-FOUR THROUGH TWENTY-SEVEN

The next morning West goes in search of Edith, and when he can't find her, he visits again with Dr. leetee, who tells him of the disappearance of anarchists and other divisive parties and the emergence of the national party which worked to unite all citizens. This conversation, combined with West's increasing interest in Edith, leads him to inquire about the status of women. In the year 2000, women are accorded equal status, having the same rights, choices, and responsibilities as men. They are fully independent members of society and are in no way dependent on fathers or husbands for their security. Motherhood, particularly, is deemed of utmost importance to the health of society in general, and women who choose motherhood are applauded for their service to the unborn and to the future of society.

The following morning, West is treated to a sermon brought into the home via the same phone lines through which music and entertainment is selected. The service Dr. leetee chooses, delivered by a Mr. Barton, is occasioned by the minister's awareness of West's presence, "a critic from the 19th century" among them and is a treatise on the moral inferiority of the 19th century. The message of the sermon, the melancholy mood of Sundays in general, and the feeling that the leetees' kindness to him is born out of society's general respect to others rather than individual kindness leads West to a full realization of his love for Edith. Confronting her in the garden, he reveals his love for her and she, in turn, acknowledges similar feelings for him. Directing him to Mrs. leetee, Edith retreats.

West goes to Mrs. leetee and learns that Edith leetee is the great-granddaughter of his former fiancée Edith Bartlett. From Mrs. leetee, West goes to Edith herself and they profess their love for each other. They both proceed to Dr. leetee, who provides his blessing to the couple, and West learns, at last, that what Edith had not wanted her father to tell him upon his awakening was her kinship to Edith Bartlett. The mystery solved, his love requited, West goes to sleep.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

West awakens to the sound of his man-servant's voice bringing him out of the mesmerism. He finds himself in Boston, May 1887, having dreamed all of his visit to the year 2000. Wandering the streets of Boston, he sees his surroundings as he never has before. Instead of being irritated by the inconveniences of the workers' strikes, he sees with fresh eyes the injustice of the class society and the horrors of poverty. With his recently acquired twentieth-century awareness, West surveys his own 19th-century surroundings and is appalled. Finding himself in front of his former fiancée's house, he joins her, her family, and their guests at dinner. Overwhelmed by what he has seen and experienced, he attempts to enlighten the company about the plight of their fellows who are in less fortunate circumstances. His passion roused, West exhorts those assembled to take action against the ills of society he has witnessed. Outraged, the diners protest his vision of their society and Edith's father throws him out.

West awakens once again to find himself really in Dr. leetee's house and the knowledge that his awakening to life in the 19th century to have been the dream. Freshly aware of his fortune and enlightenment in the year 2000 and for his complicity in the misfortunes of others during his own era, West runs to Edith leetee begging forgiveness, and, happily, receiving it.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS FOR LOOKING BACKWARD

The following are suggestions only and not meant to be prescriptive. Additionally, teachers will want to select from among the possibilities and not use all the ideas.

BEFORE READING THE NOVEL

Teachers may want to introduce students to the genres of science-fiction and utopian literature prior to beginning the novel. The concept of time travel is handled beautifully in the motion picture *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986). Teachers may introduce the movie by asking students to note the confusion encountered by the crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise as they travel back to Earth. For example, teachers may want to point out that the crew of the Enterprise, living in a world with fewer prejudices and no cold-war animosities, is completely unprepared for the suspicion with which the Russian Chekov is treated when he is found aboard a navy nuclear vessel. This discussion might segue into further exploration of how many science fiction writers envision the future as a utopian society that has eradicated many of the problems of our present society.

To examine fully the ramifications of science fiction and utopian literature, students might also read Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron." This short story examines the negative ramifications of a culture that forces equality on its citizens. Discussions of how equality might be achieved without the horrific results described by Vonnegut will prepare the students to engage the ideas advanced by Bellamy.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

The following questions can be answered in discussion or journal format. Students can respond to the following questions in a variety of ways, as there are no “right” or “wrong” responses. If students respond individually, they should share responses so that they may be aware of the variety possible.

1. What will our society be like in 100 years or at the next millennium? What would the ideal society be?
2. If someone 100 years from now were describing the faults of our society, what would the faults include?
3. If you were to awaken tomorrow to find yourself in a different century, what/whom would you miss most?
4. If you had the opportunity to visit our city in the future, what questions would you most want to ask?
5. What novels have you read or movies have you seen that used the dream structure? What was your response to finding that the action had all been a dream? Less able readers might be reminded of the film version of *The Wizard of Oz*, in which Dorothy awakens at the end of the movie, suggesting that all her experiences in the Emerald City have been a dream. Another possibility for discussion is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland or Through the Looking Glass*. Creative writers might try their hand at writing a short story that includes the dream device.

WHILE READING THE NOVEL

The following are activities from which to choose while students are reading the novel.

1. Keep a response journal to record your responses, observations, and questions as you read and reflect on the novel.
 2. Maintain a graphic organizer contrasting Bellamy's fictional depictions of Boston in the year 1887 with his idea of Boston in the year 2000. Students can draw a chart or cluster diagram that illustrates the characteristics of the differences in Boston over time. As students read more, they can add to the diagram. Generally, the novel will prove a rich source for educating students about the history of American life in the late 1800s. Additionally, to help students have a historically and culturally situated reading experience, teachers may want to include brief mini-lectures that fill in the gaps in student knowledge about late 19th-century American life, including discussions of tenement life, industrial sweat shops, workers' strikes, and African-American and women's rights activism.
 3. Chart the accurate predictions made by Bellamy such as the credit system, pneumatic transmitters, etc. Include possible parallels such as the use of phone lines compared to modems. Students may want to make double columns with a list of Bellamy's predictions on the left and a check mark on the right for those predictions that are proving true.
 4. Keep a log of the plot and subplots, charting the progress of Julian West's awareness of developments in society as they parallel his growing love for Edith leetee.
 5. Maintain a vocabulary log to increase understanding of unfamiliar words. Many students profit from recording unfamiliar words and defining them from context clues or from dictionary definitions. Suggested words are:
 - aphelion p. 31
 - perihelion p. 31
 - objurations p. 33
 - desultory p. 33
 - draught p. 38
 - demagoguery p. 57
 - cornucopia p. 81
 - pneumatic p. 84
 - atavism p. 139
 6. Develop a timeline illustrating where West goes and what he learns about society on each day of his guided tours through Boston.
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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

While student discussions are usually more productive when students generate their own questions for whole-class discussion, the following questions are suggestions for prompting discussion until students are engaged in the conversation about the novel. To promote engaged discussions, teachers should assemble students in small groups or pairs to discuss the following questions prior to whole-class discussions.

CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO

1. What is the cause of Julian West's discomfort and frustration at the outset of the novel?
2. What are some of the sources for the unrest among the working class of 1887?
3. Why would class-based activism cause distress to someone of West's station?
4. Why would a man like West resort to something as unusual as Animal Magnetism? What are some practices of today that some might regard as unusual?
5. What does his willingness to succumb to Animal Magnetism suggest about his character at this point in the novel?

CHAPTERS THREE THROUGH SEVEN

1. Where and when does West wake up?
2. What happened to his home? How did he survive?
3. How is his long sleep explained?
4. What is the source of mystery when he first awakens?
5. In chapter four, Dr. leetee claims that the citizens of Boston in 1887 used surplus wealth for private luxury, whereas Bostonians in 2000 use surplus wealth for the "adornment of the city, which all enjoy in equal degree" (p. 46). What major change in thought had to occur before society could manage such a shift in the use and distribution of wealth?
6. What is the government of Boston in the year 2000 like? How has this modern society eliminated political parties and politicians?
7. How has corruption and dishonesty been eliminated? What essential changes in thought and belief were necessary to these developments?
8. Explain the process by which people choose their vocations. What does Dr. leetee say, at this point in the novel, about the role of women? How do you think society has advanced, or not, in its treatment of women?

CHAPTERS EIGHT THROUGH TWELVE

1. What new developments in Boston frighten and confuse West as he travels alone?
 2. Explain Dr. leetee's discussion of equal distribution of wealth? What social system subscribes to the belief in equal distribution of wealth?
 3. Why would a person work, if not for wages? What are the incentives afforded people in the year 2000?
 4. What is the educational system like in the year 2000?
 5. What role is afforded women in this belief system?
 6. What forms of entertainment are available to citizens of the year 2000?
 7. What technology today is related to those imagined by Bellamy?
 8. How do you suppose Bellamy might have regarded technology?
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CHAPTERS THIRTEEN THROUGH EIGHTEEN

1. How has the question of debtor nations been resolved in Bellamy's society?
2. What are the standards of art in the society which Bellamy envisioned? How are those standards different from those taught in most schools?
3. According to Dr. leetee, why is a classless society ideal?
4. Why would it be a good idea for a writer to pay the initial cost of a first publication?
5. How is the mystery initiated in Chapter Three advanced in Chapter Seventeen?
6. How are people elected to public office? What are the requirements for the Presidency?
7. What led to the dissolution of professional sports?

CHAPTERS NINETEEN AND TWENTY

1. Why might the structure of Bellamy's society lead to a reduction in criminal behavior?
2. Why are false statements rare in this society?
3. What has replaced attorneys? Why?
4. Why was Edith unimpressed with the storehouse of gold West had hidden in his underground safe?

CHAPTERS TWENTY-ONE THROUGH TWENTY-THREE

1. What are the three main grounds on which the novel's educational system rests?
2. Why have insanity and suicide virtually disappeared from society?
3. How is the credit system of the 19th-century explained by Dr. leetee?
4. Why does Dr. leetee believe that "the principle of share-and-share alike" is "the only humane and rational basis for a society"?
5. How is the mystery regarding West's past advanced still further in Chapter Twenty-three?

CHAPTERS TWENTY-FOUR THROUGH TWENTY-SEVEN

1. What led to the disappearance of anarchists and other divisive parties?
2. What is the advantage of the national party?
3. What changes in the status of women have occurred?
4. What is the role of motherhood to the health of society?
5. What is the subject of the sermon to which West listens?
6. How does West realize the extent of his feelings for Edith?
7. How is the mystery at last resolved?

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

1. When West "awakens" to find himself in the 19th century again, what horrifies him about his society?
 2. Why is he treated so harshly by family and friends when he attempts to caution them about the folly of their civilization?
 3. Why are those who sound the alarm about the pitfalls of a current civilization treated harshly by their contemporaries?
 4. About what does West feel remorse when he awakens to find himself back in the 21st century?
 5. Why is this novel considered a vision of the "perfect society" by many critics?
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AFTER READING THE NOVEL

These response activities and questions are designed to be used in either small or large group settings. Teachers should select carefully from the following to match student ability and interest to the activity. Moreover, the activities are not meant to be done only at the completion of the novel. It may be useful to provide opportunities for completion of the following ideas at strategic points during the reading to keep students engaged.

1. Create the front page of a fictional Bostonian newspaper in the year 2000. Include as one of the featured articles the news that a 19th century citizen has awakened to find himself a resident of the late 20th century. Compare your creation to an actual newspaper of today.
 2. Create a weekly diary for Edith leetee that parallels West's stay in her home. What are her feelings? How does she view the events that we see only through West's eyes?
 3. Research race relations in the late 1800s. What does Bellamy's novel say about equality? How might this apply to race relations?
 4. It takes Bellamy until Chapter Twenty-five to address the status of women. Using your response log, investigate your own reading process. Did you question how the vision of the year 2000 affected women before the novel addressed that issue? What, in Bellamy's vision of the ideal society, do you find appealing as far as women are concerned? What do you find problematic? What about his vision do you find visionary? What strikes you as essentially 19th century in orientation and thought?
 5. Listen to a recording of the song "Sunday Morning Coming Down" written by Kris Kristofferson. (There are many versions of this song available, including a 1998 recording by Shawn Mullins on SMG records.) Compare the mood of this song to the melancholy described by West at the beginning of Chapter Twenty-seven. How are the song and the novel similar? What might account for the melancholy of a Sunday? How does this mood impact West's actions? Select music that reflects the changing moods in the novel.
 6. If you lived in a society such as the one described in *Looking Backward*, what do you think you would do? Would you like it? Would you want to conform or would you be more likely to rebel? Explain your answers.
 7. Create a talk show format for West to appear publicly to Boston society. Write the dialogue and act out the show. What questions would the host and audience ask of West? How would he respond?
 8. Research the Nationalist Party movement of Bellamy's day. What were the utopian experiments like? Who participated?
 9. Compare the themes and issues of Bellamy's novel with a contemporary movie set in the future (see the list of suggested movies at the end of this guide). What are the most dramatic differences?
 10. Research the ideas of utopia and dystopia and explain how those concepts influence the novel *Looking Backward*.
 11. Read the final chapter of the novel again. How are your perceptions of the dream sequence altered by the realization that the perceived reality is actually a dream and the perceived dream is the reality? How are your prior experiences with the dream structure altered by this twist?
 12. Choose one of the social issues relevant to our own time period (i.e., credit card debt, poverty, class divisions, and social unrest) addressed by Bellamy. Write an editorial or a leeter to the editor proposing your own solution.
 13. Make a timeline for the novel. How many days does West spend in the year 2000 before dreaming himself back in 1887? What does he do on each of those days? What aspects of society does he learn about on each of those days. What do you suppose was Bellamy's plan for introducing each of those issues when he did? How do they feed into each other?
 14. View pictures of the 1960s sanitation strikers in Memphis wearing signs saying, "I Am a Man." Read Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. Re-read pp. 76-77. Compare the concept of humanity offered by all three of these situations. What does it mean to be a man/woman? What defines humanity?
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RESOURCES FOR ENRICHMENT**ABOUT EDWARD BELLAMY**

Franklin, J.H. "Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 11 (December 1938), pp. 739-772.

Guttek, G. "Analysis of Formal Education In Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*." In *History of Education Quarterly*. Volume IV. Number 1. March 1964.

Gwartney, J. D. and Richard L. Stroup ed., *Economics: Private and Public Choice*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1995.

Morgan, A. E.. *The Philosophy of Edward Bellamy*. New York: King's Crown Press, 1945.

Patai, D. ed., *Looking Backward 1888-1888: Essays on Edward Bellamy*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

Thomas, J. L. *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd & the Adversary Tradition*. Harvard University Press. 1983

Widdicombe, R. T. *Edward Bellamy: An Annotated Bibliography of Secondary Criticism*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, Vol. 827, 1988.

INTERNET SITES

These sites contain information about Bellamy or critical essays about *Looking Backward* :

<http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/edtext.html>

<http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/bell.html#source>

<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/bellamy.html>

<http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/bellamy.html>

For information about utopian societies, access:

<http://www.georgetown.edu/bassr/exhibition/utopia/utopia.html>

SUGGESTED READINGS FOR PAIRING WITH LOOKING BACKWARD

These novels could be paired with Bellamy's novel for enrichment and discussions about varying perspectives on the future. Various versions of utopia or dystopia could be explored with engaged students.

Adams, Douglas. *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Harmony, 1979.

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. Ballantine, 1987

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1993.

Twain, Mark. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Signet Classic, 1990.

Wells, H. G. *The Time Machine*. Ace Books, 1988.

More, Thomas. *Utopia*. Penguin, 1965.

O'Brien, Robert C. *Z for Zachariah*. Atheneum, 1973.

SUGGESTED MOVIES FOR PAIRING WITH *LOOKING BACKWARD*

For students who wish to explore the themes of man's follies and the impact they will have on future societies, teachers may wish to show one of the following movies to advance discussions.

Blade Runner (1982). Ridley Scott, director. Blade Runner Partnership and the Ladd Company.

Planet of the Apes (1968). Franklin J. Schaffner, director. 20th Century Fox.

Soylent Green (1973). Richard Fleischer, director. MGM pictures.

Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home (1986). Leonard Nimoy, director. Paramount.

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). Stanley Kubrick, director.

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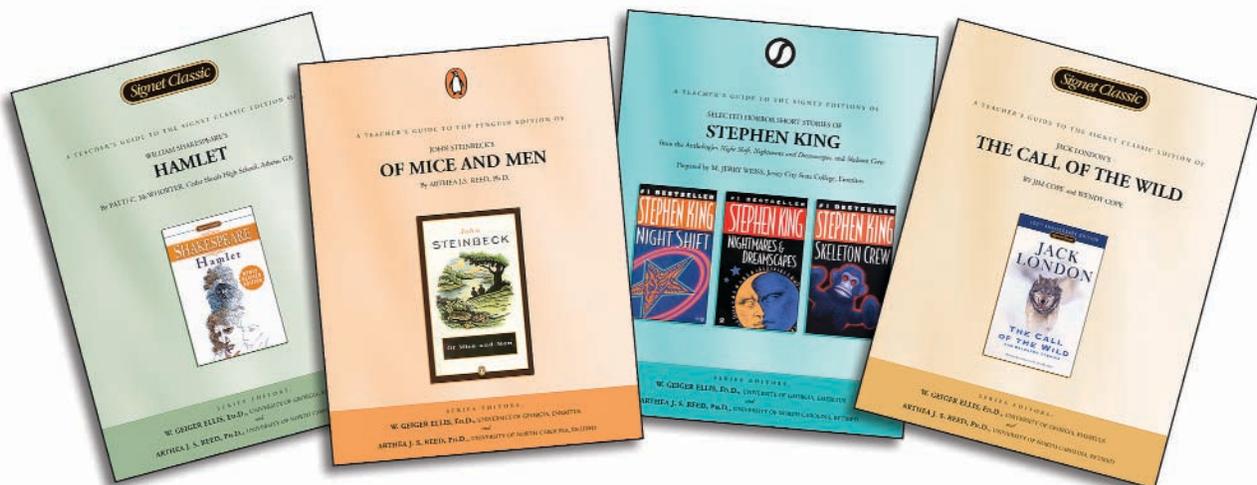
W. GEIGER ELLIS, Professor Emeritus, University of Georgia, received his A.B. and M.Ed. degrees from the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) and his Ed.D. from the University of Virginia. His teaching focused on adolescent literature, having introduced the first courses on the subject at both the University of Virginia and the University of Georgia. He developed and edited *The ALAN Review*.

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