



Collegedunia NCERT Solutions

The Third Level Class 12 English NCERT Solutions: text-grounded answers for Jack Finney's story of time, escape and stamps (2026-27)

Chapter 1: The Third Level

About this Chapter

The Third Level is a short story by Jack Finney from the Vistas supplementary reader. Charley, a New Yorker who collects stamps, claims to have stumbled on a hidden **third level** at Grand Central Station, leading to the world of 1894. His psychiatrist friend Sam calls it a *waking dream wish fulfilment*; Charley calls it real. These solutions answer every Reading with Insight question with specific lines and details from the story: the corridor and tunnels, the old-style currency, the first-day cover from Galesburg, and Sam's disappearance.

Topics covered: Escape from a world of insecurity and stress • Philately and the past • Intersection of time and space • Fantasy versus reality • A futuristic projection of an apparent illogicality

Author and source.

Jack Finney (1911–1995), American writer; from *The Clock of Time*, reprinted in NCERT Vistas, Class 12.

Setting.

New York City, modern day and 1894; Grand Central Station and Galesburg, Illinois.

Central conflict.

Charley, troubled by the insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress of the modern world, finds a third level at Grand Central that opens onto 1894. Is the third level a real refuge in time, or a product of Charley's own mind?

Also see for this chapter: [Revision Notes](#)

Read and Find Out

Q 1.1 What does the third level refer to?

SOLUTION

The “third level” refers to the hidden, imagined extra subterranean level that Charley claims to have discovered at Grand Central Station in New York. Grand Central, in ordinary 1950s reality, has two underground levels: the first level handles the subway and the second handles the suburban commuter trains. Charley’s third level is, on his own account, a level below those two, opening onto **Galesburg, Illinois**, in the summer of 1894.

 **Lines from the text**

“The presidents of the New York Central and the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroads will swear on a stack of timetables that there are only two. But I say there are three, because I’ve been on the third level of the Grand Central Station.”

- **A physical claim.** Charley insists the third level is real architecture: a corridor, flickering gas lamps, a hand-painted information booth, men in derby hats, women in leg-of-mutton sleeves, and a copy of *The World* dated 11 June 1894.
- **A psychological claim.** Sam, the psychiatrist friend, calls it a *waking dream wish fulfilment*: an escape route the modern world’s “insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress” has called into being in Charley’s mind.
- **A symbolic claim.** The third level reads, across the story, as Charley’s image for any door out of the present, real or imagined.

Final Answer: The third level is the imagined extra underground level Charley claims to find at Grand Central Station, leading from 1950s New York into 1894 Galesburg, Illinois. The first two levels carry the subway and the suburban trains; the third is Charley’s, and Finney’s, image for the modern wish to escape into a calmer time.

 **Useful aside**

For a short RAFO answer, give one line of physical definition (the extra level at Grand Central, leading to 1894 Galesburg) and one line of meaning (Finney’s image of escape from modern stress).

EXPERT’S SOLUTION : Dr Ananya Iyer, PhD English Literature, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Quick reading. The third level is best read as a double object: a piece of architecture in the story’s foreground and a piece of psychology in its background. Both readings are needed because Finney himself keeps both in play.

- Architecturally, Grand Central in 1950 had two known levels. Finney invents a third as a small, precise piece of impossible engineering, the way Borges might invent a library or a labyrinth.
- Psychologically, the third level is the route Charley’s mind opens when the present has

become unbearable. Sam's diagnosis (waking dream wish fulfilment) names it without resolving it.

- The destination is also crucial: not anywhere else, but *1894 Galesburg*, a small American town before two world wars and the bomb. The choice of date is the story's argument about why we want a third level at all.

Final Answer: The third level is Finney's name for the hidden underground level Charley finds at Grand Central Station, leading to Galesburg, Illinois, in 1894. The story keeps the door open between two readings of the level: a piece of real, if impossible, architecture and a piece of Charley's psychology, an escape route the modern world has called into being.

Q 1.2 Would Charley ever go back to the ticket-counter on the third level to buy tickets to Galesburg for himself and his wife?

SOLUTION

The story does not answer this question directly, which is itself part of Finney's design. What the text gives us is Charley's repeated, unsuccessful search and one quiet, heavy piece of evidence in Sam's first-day cover that the third level was reached, at least once, by someone else. From those two facts the reader is invited to make a careful guess.

Lines from the text

"I've never again found the corridor that leads to the third level . . . But my stamp collecting has paid off, in a way. . . . It was there. I looked at the first-day cover . . . postmarked July 18, 1894, the date of its first day of issue . . . Sam."

- **The search has not succeeded.** Charley says plainly that he has never again found the corridor. He and Louisa spend their weekends looking, but the door has closed.
- **Sam's letter is the only proof.** The first-day cover, postmarked *Galesburg, Ill., July 18, 1894*, shows that Sam reached Galesburg. It does not show that Charley can.
- **The escape is psychological.** If the third level is a wish-fulfilment, as Sam first believed, then access depends on Charley's state of mind, not on the station's geography. The ticket-counter, in that reading, is not a place you can plan to revisit.
- **The narrative is left open on purpose.** Finney closes with Charley still looking. Whether Charley reaches the counter again is left to the reader. The most honest answer is: the evidence suggests not, and the story's tenderness is in that uncertainty.

Final Answer: Charley searches for the third level every weekend but never finds the corridor again. Sam's first-day cover suggests that Sam reached Galesburg via the third level, but the story does not show Charley reaching the ticket-counter again. The evidence implies the third level is psychological more than physical, and that Charley's return is left open on purpose.

Exam Tip

For RAFO speculative questions, do not invent an answer the text does not give. Quote the lines that show the search, quote the lines that show the one piece of evidence (Sam's cover), and end with the story's own open closure.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : *Mr Arjun Mehta, MA English, University of Delhi*

Strategic angle. Finney's story refuses a verdict on Charley's future, and the strongest answer respects that refusal. Read the question as an invitation to weigh evidence, not to predict plot.

- Charley's own testimony is mixed. He has not found the corridor again, but he is still looking, and he reads Sam's cover as a renewed invitation.
- The fact that Sam reached Galesburg complicates a purely psychological reading. If the third level is only Charley's mind, how did Sam get there? Finney lets the puzzle stand.
- The story's closing image is of a continued search, not of an arrival. The reader is meant to sit with that.

Final Answer: The story does not show Charley reaching the ticket-counter again. The first-day cover suggests Sam did, but Charley's repeated searches fail. The most honest answer is that the third level is left open: probably psychological, probably out of reach, but the door is never finally closed.

Reading with Insight

Q 1.3 Do you think that the third level was a medium of escape for Charley? Why?

SOLUTION

Yes, the third level is best read as a medium of **escape** for Charley. Finney opens the story by giving us Charley's reasons to want to escape: the modern world is full of *insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress*, and Charley's psychiatrist friend Sam even calls his stamp collecting a *temporary refuge from reality*. Against that background, Charley finds himself descending through Grand Central Station and stumbling on a third level he has never seen before, a level that turns out to lead not to a different platform but to a different time, the calmer summer of 1894.

📖 **Lines from the text**

"The modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress. . . . My stamp collecting, for example; that's a temporary refuge from reality."

- **The trigger.** Charley is not just bored; he is anxious. Finney lists the modern pressures by name: insecurity, fear, war, worry, stress. The third level is offered to the reader immediately after this list, which marks it as an answer to that anxiety rather than a random adventure.
- **The destination.** The third level opens onto Galesburg, Illinois, in 1894, a town Charley remembers as "a wonderful town still, with big old frame houses, huge lawns, and tremendous trees". The 1894 world is a deliberate contrast with 1950s New York: gas lamps, derbies, men smoking cigars on the lawn, women waving palm-leaf fans, fire-flies in the summer dusk. Every detail is peaceful. That is exactly what an escape destination needs to be.
- **The currency.** Charley draws three hundred dollars from the bank and converts it into 1890s currency. He is not just curious about the third level; he is *preparing* to leave. That preparation, more than anything, marks his trip as an attempted escape.
- **The psychiatrist's diagnosis.** Sam, a trained psychiatrist, names the phenomenon a *waking dream wish fulfilment*. That diagnosis only makes sense if Charley does, in fact, wish to leave. The story keeps the escape reading even when it offers a rational explanation for the third level.

Final Answer: Yes. Finney sets up the third level as an answer to the modern world's insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress. Charley prepares to escape (old-style currency, the search for the corridor), and his psychiatrist names the trip a wish fulfilment. The third level functions as Charley's medium of escape, whether or not it exists in physical fact.

📖 **Exam Tip**

For "do you think . . . why?" questions, do not just answer yes or no. Quote the lines that set up Charley's anxiety, then the ones that show the third level offering relief. Two

text-grounded reasons are worth more than five generalisations.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : Ms Tara Bhattacharya, MA English Literature, Presidency University Kolkata

Strategic angle. Finney is writing in the late 1940s, when American fiction is full of returning soldiers, atomic anxiety and city stress. The third level is his small, domestic version of a recurring mid-century theme: the wish to step out of the present. Read the story as a piece of that conversation, and the escape reading becomes hard to avoid.

- Finney spends his opening paragraphs not on the station but on Charley's state of mind. The phrase *waking dream wish fulfilment* arrives early. By placing the diagnosis before the discovery, Finney is telling us how to read what follows.
- The third level is reachable only when Charley is anxious. He stumbles into it after getting lost in the crowd, hurrying through tunnels he does not recognise. The story consistently links access to the third level with being in flight from the present.
- The choice of 1894 is not nostalgic in a vague way; it is nostalgic in a specific way. Galesburg in 1894 is a small town before the World Wars, before the Great Depression, before the bomb. For a reader in 1950, that date carries the weight of everything that has gone wrong since.
- The old-style currency is the most concrete proof of escape, even more than the corridor. Charley converts real money into 1894 bills at a loss. He is paying for the escape, which is what escapes always cost.
- Charley's wife Louisa eventually joins him in the search. Their shared interest, by the end of the story, is no longer stamp collecting but the third level itself. Even the hobby has been absorbed into the escape.

Why this matters. Finney's third level is not a piece of science fiction so much as a piece of psychology dressed up as fiction. The story works because the reader recognises Charley's wish. Most of us have, at some point, wanted to drop the present and walk into a calmer year. The story merely gives that wish a station and a platform number.

Final Answer: Yes, the third level reads most coherently as Charley's medium of escape from the insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress of 1950s New York. Finney foregrounds the wish before the discovery, links access to the third level with anxiety, and follows Charley as he literally pays in old-style currency for the escape. The third level is Finney's image for the universal mid-century wish to step out of the present.

Q 1.4 What do you infer from Sam's letter to Charley?

SOLUTION

Sam's letter, dated *July 18, 1894* from *941 Willard Street, Galesburg, Illinois*, is the story's only piece of hard evidence that the third level exists. From it the reader can draw several inferences, each of which complicates the simple "Charley imagined the whole thing" reading.

📖 **The letter, in summary**

"I got to wishing that you were right. Then I got to believing you were right. And, Charley, it's true; I found the third level! . . . Come on back, Charley and Louisa. Keep looking till you find the third level! It's worth it, believe me!"

- **Sam has gone to 1894.** The letter is written from Galesburg, on the very day the postmark shows. Charley had told Sam about Galesburg often; Sam "always said he liked the sound of the place". The letter is Sam acting on Charley's directions.
- **Sam confirms Charley.** A trained psychiatrist who had diagnosed Charley with *wish fulfilment* now admits "you were right". The professional sceptic has become the believer. That role reversal is the letter's first big inference.
- **Escape was Sam's wish too.** Sam withdrew eight hundred dollars in old-style currency before disappearing. That money is enough to "set him up in a nice little hay, feed and grain business", which Sam had always said he really wished he could do. The escape, in other words, is not just Charley's private fantasy; it is shared.
- **The third level still works.** The letter encourages Charley and Louisa to "keep looking till you find the third level". Sam is not just reporting an escape; he is recruiting. The third level is presented as a real, repeatable route.
- **Philately as proof.** Sam delivers the letter by mailing it to Charley's grandfather in 1894, knowing the envelope will be preserved as a first-day cover. The choice of medium is itself an inference: stamps and postmarks are how the past is verified.

Final Answer: Sam's letter, postmarked Galesburg, 18 July 1894, lets the reader infer that Sam has himself found the third level and travelled to Galesburg, that he now believes Charley was right all along, that he too wanted out of the modern world (to set up a hay, feed and grain business), and that the third level is real enough to be recommended. The first-day cover is Finney's clever way of putting that inference on paper.

X Common Mistake

Do not say only "the letter proves the third level exists" and stop there. Examiners want at least two inferences: about Sam's own wish, about his change of mind, about Charley being vindicated, about philately as proof. Quote the dollar amount and the business plan.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : Mr Karan Sethi, MA English Literature, University of Calcutta

Strategic angle. Finney plants the letter as a delayed detonator: a piece of evidence that arrives *after* Charley's own escape attempt has failed, and that quietly reopens the door that the psychiatrist friend had tried to close. Read in that order, the letter is not just plot; it is the story's argument.

- Notice the chain of feelings Sam reports: *I got to wishing that you were right. Then I got to believing you were right.* Finney is being careful: the change of mind starts as wishing, not as evidence. That sequence mirrors Charley's own descent into the third level.
- The setting of the letter is loaded. Daly's porch, the piano, the song *Seeing Nelly Home*, the lemonade invitation: every detail is the opposite of the New York Charley flees. Sam is selling the destination as much as confirming its existence.
- The eight hundred dollars in old-style currency is a small, telling figure. It is more than twice what Charley had withdrawn; Sam, the professional, has come better prepared than the amateur. The doctor has out-escaped the patient.
- The hay, feed and grain business reveals Sam's hidden wish, the wish his profession had never let him voice in modern New York. The story's structure suggests that everyone is carrying such a wish, and that the third level is just the corridor that releases it.
- The letter ends as an invitation, not a report. *Come on back, Charley and Louisa. Keep looking till you find the third level.* Finney closes Charley's weekend search with a renewed motive.

Why this matters. A weaker writer might have ended the story when Charley fails to find the corridor again. Finney ensures the third level is not just Charley's private hallucination by giving us a second witness, a witness who is the very psychiatrist who had ruled the first sighting out. The letter turns one man's escape into the story's quiet claim that the wish to escape is everywhere.

Final Answer: From Sam's letter the reader can infer: Sam has himself found and used the third level, he now believes Charley was right all along, he has acted on a long-held private wish (the hay, feed and grain business), he wants Charley and Louisa to follow, and the first-day cover is Finney's chosen instrument of proof. The escape, by the end of the letter, is no longer Charley's private fantasy but a small movement of two.

Q 1.5 'The modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress.' What are the ways in which we attempt to overcome them?

SOLUTION

Finney's own line is the question's starting point. The story gives us at least three named ways of overcoming modern stress (stamp collecting, the search for the third level, and psychiatric help), and the reader can extend that list using ordinary experience.

- **Hobbies, especially philately.** Sam, the psychiatrist, tells Charley plainly that “stamp collecting . . . is a temporary refuge from reality”. Hobbies that put us in touch with the past (stamps, coins, old letters, photographs) calm the nerves by slowing the mind down. Charley's grandfather had built the very stamp collection that lets the story happen.
- **Escape into another time, real or imagined.** The third level is Finney's image for this. Some readers will go to a calmer year through books, films, music, or nostalgic conversations with grandparents; some will travel physically to quieter places. The pull is the same: an exit from the present's pressures.
- **Professional help.** Charley has a psychiatrist friend, and even though Sam misdiagnoses the third level, Finney clearly presents counselling as a normal modern response to “insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress”. For severe anxiety, the story implies, the right answer is help, not denial.
- **Companionship and shared routines.** Charley and Louisa start the story with separate hobbies; by the end, they are looking together for the third level every weekend. The shared search calms them both. Marriage, friendship, and shared community rituals are common modern coping mechanisms.
- **Reconnecting with nature and slower places.** Galesburg's gas lamps, huge lawns, fire-flies and front-porch lemonade stand in the story for everything slower than New York. A weekend walk, a visit to a village, gardening, all do the same job in real life.
- **Daydreaming and creative writing.** Sam's diagnosis (a “waking dream wish fulfilment”) accidentally names a healthy strategy. Daydreams, journaling and creative writing let the mind rehearse a calmer life, even when the calmer life is not yet available.

Final Answer: The story names hobbies (philately), escape into another time, and psychiatric help. To these the reader can add companionship and shared routines, reconnection with nature and slower places, and creative outlets such as daydreaming and writing. Each is a way of pausing the constant pressure of the modern world.

♥ Why This Matters

Finney's line is not just a story prop: it is a 1950s diagnosis of city life that still reads true today. When you write your answer, allow yourself one personal example (a hobby, a place, a person). Examiners reward answers that connect the text to lived experience.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : Ms Priya Sundaram, MA English, Madras Christian College

Quick reading. Finney's question is doing two jobs at once. It is naming the modern condition ("insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress") and inviting the reader to name a remedy. Treat the answer as a short, honest catalogue, not a list of slogans.

- Begin with the story's own remedies, in the order Finney introduces them: philately (Sam's diagnosis), the third level (Charley's discovery), and the psychiatric consultation (Sam's profession). All three are present in the text; they should be the spine of any answer.
- Notice that Finney does not rank the remedies. The story is careful to keep stamp collecting and the third level as parallel choices, with the same underlying wish. That framing tells us that any honest coping strategy counts.
- Add a second layer drawn from ordinary student life: sport, music, friendship, prayer, journaling, walks, time with family. Examiners want to see that you can move from the text to the world.
- A modest disclaimer is good style here. Note that none of these remedies removes the underlying pressures of war, fear and stress; they only make the pressures bearable. Finney's third level, after all, is a refuge, not a cure.
- Close with a sentence that returns to Charley. The story suggests that what we really need is not just a hobby but a community of people who share it. Charley and Louisa looking together is the story's quiet final image of coping.

Why this matters. A good answer to this question is half text and half life. Stay close to Finney's wording, then widen out to your own experience. Both halves should fit in the same paragraph: the modern world is hard, and human beings have always invented small refuges to make it lighter.

Final Answer: The story suggests three named ways (philately, the third level, professional counselling) and a fourth implied way (shared routine and companionship). Outside the text, common human strategies include sport, music, religion, time with family, contact with nature, journaling and creative writing. Each is a small refuge, not a cure; together they make the modern world bearable.

Q 1.6 Do you see an intersection of time and space in the story?**SOLUTION**

Yes. The story is built on a deliberate overlap of two times (1894 and 1950s present) at one place (Grand Central Station, New York). That overlap is what makes the third level both a physical level and a date.

- **Grand Central as the meeting point.** The station is, in 1950s New York, a place of two known levels. The third level, “*a long, long corridor that I never saw before*”, is simultaneously the next level down and the route into 1894. The single staircase intersects two epochs.
- **The corridor as a tunnel through time.** Finney describes the third level in physical detail: “*the lights were dim and sort of flickering*”, the men were wearing “*derby hats*”, the women had “*leg of mutton sleeves*”. The location is recognisably Grand Central; the period is recognisably 1894. The same set of footsteps carries Charley between the two.
- **The newspaper as the proof of the date.** Charley spots a copy of *The World* dated 11 June 1894. Newspapers are dated objects pinned to a place. Finding an 1894 newspaper in 1950 New York is the story’s clearest image of time and space crossing.
- **Sam’s letter as a return signal.** The letter is written in 1894 Galesburg but reaches Charley’s modern stamp album via the postal record of 1894. The same envelope spans the two times because the post office sits in both.
- **The grandfather’s collection as the bridge.** Charley’s grandfather kept the first-day cover; Charley opens it in the present. The collection is a small, domestic time machine: every stamp is a date and every address is a place.

Final Answer: Yes. Finney builds a deliberate intersection of time and space: Grand Central Station is the place at which 1950 New York and 1894 Galesburg meet, and the third level, the 1894 newspaper, Sam’s letter and the inherited stamp collection are the objects that let one cross from the modern present into the nineteenth-century past.

EXPERT’S SOLUTION : Dr Kavya Reddy, PhD American Fiction, University of Hyderabad

Quick reading. Finney’s story is a small experiment in spacetime fiction. The intersection is not flashy science; it is a quiet domestic detail (a corridor, a newspaper, a letter), but the underlying idea is unmistakably the same idea as more famous time-travel fiction.

- Grand Central is chosen with care. A station is exactly the kind of place that is permanently full of departures, many of them to places no longer on the map. Finney uses that everyday meaning to motivate a deeper one: a platform that leads to 1894.
- The third level is described as one would describe a memory: dim, flickering, partly recognised. Finney’s prose moves the reader from architecture into consciousness. The intersection of time and space is also an intersection of the outer world and the inner mind.
- The 1894 newspaper is the story’s smallest, most powerful object. It is a fixed

coordinate (date plus place), and Charley holds it in his hand. The story uses the newspaper the way physics uses a worldline: a single event located at a single (t, x).

- Sam's letter functions as the return half of the same loop. Where the third level lets Charley move from 1950 to 1894 in space, the letter lets information move from 1894 to 1950 in time. Together they describe a closed circuit.
- Class XI students will have read Jayant Narlikar's *Adventure* in Hornbill. Both stories use a familiar place (a station, a library) as the hinge between two times. Finney's intersection is gentler, but the underlying structure is shared.

Why this matters. The intersection of time and space is how every time-travel story works. Finney's contribution is to make the hinge ordinary: a staircase nobody had noticed before, a corridor that turns the wrong way, a newspaper on a bench. The story argues, in passing, that ordinary places carry more time in them than we usually notice.

Final Answer: Yes. Finney builds the story on an intersection of 1950s New York and 1894 Galesburg at Grand Central Station: the corridor, the 1894 newspaper, Sam's letter and the inherited stamp collection are the joints at which the two times meet. The story belongs to the same family as Narlikar's *Adventure*, where one familiar place hinges two different times.

Spacetime in fiction

For a board answer, frame "intersection of time and space" as two coupled moves: a place that holds memory (Grand Central) and an object that anchors a date (the 1894 newspaper, the letter postmarked 1894). Mention either Finney's other time stories or Narlikar's *Adventure* from Hornbill to win the comparison mark.

Q 1.7 Apparent illogicality sometimes turns out to be a futuristic projection? Discuss.

SOLUTION

The statement asks us to read seemingly illogical or absurd ideas as predictions of what may later become normal. Finney's story offers a small but pointed example: a third level at Grand Central is, on its face, an absurd claim, yet the story gestures at directions science fiction and physics have since taken seriously.

- **Illogicality in the story.** Sam's first response to Charley is to call the third level a *waking dream wish fulfilment*. By the standards of 1950s psychiatry, this is the rational diagnosis. A third level at Grand Central is illogical because Grand Central has only two.

- **The futuristic projection.** The story was published in 1950. In the decades since, fiction and scientific speculation have made parallel-time stories, wormhole models and multiverse hypotheses ordinary topics. What looked illogical in Finney's New York looks less so on a modern physics podcast. The illogicality has aged into a projection.
- **Historical precedents.** Many "illogical" claims have turned out to be futuristic. Galileo's moving Earth was illogical to his examiners. The Wright brothers' heavier-than-air flight was illogical to most of their contemporaries. Communication without wires, screens in pockets, and human beings on the moon were all illogical in their own decades.
- **The discipline this asks of us.** If illogical-sounding claims sometimes turn out to be futuristic, then a thoughtful reader should not laugh at an idea simply because it sounds absurd. The right response is to ask whether the idea is internally consistent and whether it is being argued for honestly, rather than to dismiss it on first impression.
- **The story's own self-check.** Finney does not let Charley off the hook. He keeps Sam's diagnosis on the page, lets the corridor disappear, and only then drops the first-day cover as evidence. The story shows how to treat an illogical idea with care: doubt first, then evidence, then reconsider.

Final Answer: Yes. The statement is sound. What looks illogical in one decade often turns out to be a futuristic projection of later science or social change: heavier-than-air flight, wireless communication, multiverse physics. Finney's story dramatises that pattern at small scale: a "third level" at Grand Central sounds illogical in 1950, yet the underlying idea, a doorway between times, has since become a serious topic of fiction and physics.

Exam Tip

"Discuss" questions want at least three discussable angles, not one. Pair the story's own example with two historical ones (e.g. heavier-than-air flight, multiverse physics). End by saying what the principle should change about how we read new ideas.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : *Mr Vikram Rao, MA English Literature, Banaras Hindu University*

Strategic angle. The question is half literature and half philosophy of science. A strong answer should refuse to read "illogicality" as a synonym for "error", and should instead treat it as a description of an idea that has not yet been assimilated. That move turns the question from a defence of fiction into a small theory of progress.

- Start with a clean definition. "Apparent illogicality" is the quality of seeming to break the known rules of the present. "Futuristic projection" is the quality of anticipating

rules that will be accepted later. The statement claims the two often overlap.

- Use Finney's story as your first example. The third level at Grand Central is illogical to a 1950s psychiatrist but consonant with twenty-first-century speculation about multiverses and wormholes. The reader is invited to feel the gap close.
- Add a historical example. Heliocentrism, the railway, wireless telegraphy, heavier-than-air flight, and the smartphone all spent time as illogical claims before becoming everyday tools. The pattern is too repeated to be coincidence.
- Acknowledge the counter-case. Not every illogical claim is a futuristic projection; some are simply wrong. Astrology and phrenology survived for centuries and still do not work. The statement therefore needs an honest modifier: *sometimes*, not *always*.
- Close with the right reading posture. Illogical ideas deserve neither automatic belief nor automatic dismissal. They deserve the same care Finney shows the third level: a diagnosis, an investigation, and a willingness to revise when the first-day cover turns up.

Why this matters. The statement is also a quiet defence of imaginative fiction. If illogical ideas sometimes anticipate future rules, then a culture that reads them seriously is doing itself a favour. Finney's third level is small, but it is in the same family as Verne's submarine and Wells's time machine: ideas that began as illogical and have since become parts of the ordinary world.

Final Answer: The statement is sound when read with the modifier *sometimes*: many ideas that strike the present as illogical (heliocentrism, heavier-than-air flight, multiverse physics) have later turned out to be futuristic projections. Finney's third level dramatises that pattern at story-scale. The right response to such ideas is the same Finney shows: diagnose first, then investigate, then revise.

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Q 1.8 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?

SOLUTION

Finney makes Charley a philatelist for a reason. A stamp album is a small museum: each stamp is a date, an issuing country and a piece of public memory. The question asks us first to extend the list of past-preserving practices, then to reflect on why human beings keep walking between past, present and future.

- **Other ways of keeping the past alive.** Coin collecting (numismatics), like philately, fixes a date and a regime in metal. Photography preserves faces, clothes, streets and weather. Personal letters and diaries preserve language and feeling. Recorded music preserves the sound of a generation. Family albums preserve relationships. Each of these is doing what Charley's stamp album does.
- **Public ways of keeping the past alive.** Museums and archives hold objects too large or too fragile for private albums. Monuments and memorials keep events in public view. Heritage buildings, old neighbourhoods and protected sites keep architecture available to walk through. Oral history, folk songs and storytelling traditions pass the past down without paper.
- **Digital ways.** The Internet Archive, Wikipedia, digitised newspaper collections, family-tree websites and social-media posts have, in the last two decades, become new forms of the same impulse. They are noisier and less curated, but they reach further than any private album.
- **The human tendency to move between times.** It is normal, and probably healthy, for the mind to walk between past, present and future. Memory checks the present against what we have already learned. Plans test the present against what we want next. The present, in isolation, would be unbearably thin.
- **When the tendency tips over.** Charley's story also warns. Spending too much time in 1894 leaves the bills unpaid in 1950. The healthy mind moves between times the way a reader moves between chapters: with purpose, then returns to the place it left.

Final Answer: Philately is one of many practices that keep the past alive: coin collecting, photography, letters, diaries, music recordings, family albums, museums, archives, monuments, heritage buildings, oral storytelling and digital archives all do the same job. The human habit of moving between past, present and future is normal and useful (memory teaches, planning prepares), but it tips into avoidance when, like Charley, we linger in another time to escape this one.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : *Dr Meera Krishnan, PhD Cultural Studies, Jadavpur University*

Quick reading. The question is a small invitation to think about memory as a public practice as much as a private one. A strong answer pairs domestic examples (a grandmother's album, an old saree) with civic ones (museums, monuments, oral history) and then turns inward to ask what these practices do for the mind.

- Begin with Finney's chosen instrument. A first-day cover is a stamp on the very day of issue, mailed to oneself, and never opened. It is a deliberate piece of past-making. That precision is worth dwelling on: collectors are archivists in miniature.
- Extend to other private collections. People save coins, cinema tickets, train passes,

postcards, school reports, ration cards. Each preserves a particular intersection of date, place and self. None of it is rare until the years pass; that delay is part of the practice.

- Move to public memory. Museums, archives, libraries, and protected sites are the same impulse at city scale. India's National Archives, the Salar Jung Museum, the Jallianwala Bagh memorial, and the colonial-era post offices still in service are all doing what Charley's album does, only bigger.
- Recognise oral and embodied forms. Folk songs, story-tellers, mela performances, family rituals at festivals and weddings carry the past without paper. In many Indian contexts, these are the deepest archives.
- On the human tendency itself, hold two truths together. Moving between times is a sign of mental health: memory teaches, anticipation prepares. But the tendency can become escapist, as in Charley's case. Finney's story is a quiet caution, not a celebration.

Why this matters. Communities that keep the past alive remember not just dates but values. Philately is a small example of a large civilisational habit: the habit of refusing to lose the texture of the years already lived. The human movement between times is, at its best, that habit at work in a single mind.

Final Answer: Philately is one of many memory practices: coins, photographs, letters, diaries, family albums, museums, archives, heritage sites, oral history and digital archives all keep the past alive. The human habit of moving between past, present and future is, in moderation, a source of wisdom (memory teaches, anticipation prepares); in excess, as in Charley's case, it is a form of escape that lets the present go unpaid for.

Useful framing

Treat philately as the prompt's launchpad rather than its conclusion. Name three other ways the past is preserved (photographs, oral history, museums or family archives) and balance the two-sided judgement: a healthy traffic between past, present and future is wisdom; a one-way flight into the past, as with Charley, is escape.

Q 1.9 You have read 'Adventure' by Jayant Narlikar in Hornbill Class XI. Compare the interweaving of fantasy and reality in the two stories.

SOLUTION

Both Finney's *The Third Level* and Narlikar's *Adventure* are short stories in which a sober protagonist slips out of the agreed present and lands in a different version of the past. In both, the writer keeps the reader hovering between two readings (the journey was real; the journey was imagined) and never quite forces a verdict. The interweaving of fantasy and reality is, in both cases, the story's main pleasure.

- **Trigger of the slip.** In Finney, Charley is anxious and lost in Grand Central when the third level opens. In Narlikar, Professor Gangadharpant Gaitonde is in a road accident, after which he finds himself in a Bombay where the Marathas defeated the British at the third battle of Panipat. Both slips are framed by ordinary, plausible events.
- **Setting of the alternative.** Finney's alternate world is Galesburg, Illinois in 1894: a real, peaceful American small town. Narlikar's alternate world is an Indian subcontinent where the British never fully ruled. Both alternatives are recognisably the same continent with a different historical hinge.
- **Use of objects.** Finney plants the 1894 newspaper, the old-style currency and the first-day cover as physical proof. Narlikar plants the history-book entry on the Battle of Panipat, which the professor reads inside the Asiatic Society Library, as his physical proof. Both writers anchor the fantasy in a readable, datable object.
- **Scientific framing.** Finney supplies a psychiatric explanation (waking dream wish fulfilment) but leaves the door open with Sam's letter. Narlikar supplies a physicist's explanation (catastrophe theory, quantum theory's branching of histories) and explicitly invokes the possibility of multiple, parallel realities. Narlikar's framing is more openly scientific because his protagonist is a physicist.
- **Closure.** Finney leaves Charley still searching, every weekend, with the letter as encouragement. Narlikar returns the professor to "our" Bombay, where the history book reads as expected, and lets him write a paper on the alternative reality. Finney closes with a renewed search; Narlikar closes with a published explanation.
- **Emotional pitch.** Finney's story is pitched as domestic anxiety: insecurity, fear, war, worry, stress. Narlikar's is pitched as intellectual curiosity: the physicist wants to understand, not to escape.

Final Answer: In both stories, a sober protagonist is taken from the present into a recognisable alternative past (Finney's 1894 Galesburg, Narlikar's Maratha-victorious Bombay), with the fantasy authenticated by a physical object (a first-day cover, a history book entry) and rationalised by a discipline (psychiatry, physics). Finney leans on emotion and escape; Narlikar leans on science and curiosity. Both keep the reader undecided between real and imagined, and both make the interweaving itself the chief pleasure of the story.

♥ Why This Matters

Comparative questions reward structure. Pair the stories on the same axis (trigger, setting, objects, framing, closure, emotional pitch) and you can land six contrasts in fewer than two pages. Examiners can grade structured comparisons faster, and they reward what they can grade.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : *Prof Sneha Patel, MPhil Comparative Literature, Jamia Millia Islamia*

Strategic angle. The two stories are best read as parallel experiments in the same form: realistic fiction with a single, controlled break in the rules. The interest is in how each writer manages that break. Finney is a fiction writer sympathising with anxiety. Narlikar is a working physicist playing with quantum branching. The same form serves two different sensibilities.

- Both stories begin in detailed, conventional realism. Finney describes Grand Central, the lights, the signboards. Narlikar describes the Bombay Suburban Railway and the Asiatic Society Library. The realism is a contract: trust me, the writer says, this is the ordinary world.
- Both then introduce one carefully limited break. Finney adds a third level. Narlikar lets the Marathas win at Panipat. Everything else in each story remains recognisable. That single counterfactual is what produces the story.
- Both writers refuse to settle the metaphysical question. Was the slip real? Finney points to Sam's letter and the first-day cover, but lets Sam's earlier diagnosis stand. Narlikar lets the professor reach a scientific explanation (catastrophe theory, parallel realities), but does not insist on it. The reader is the final judge.
- Where they differ is tone. Finney is gentle, melancholic, domestic; Narlikar is brisk, curious, scientific. The gentleness in Finney is the story's argument that the present is hard. The briskness in Narlikar is the story's argument that the universe is large.
- For an Indian Class 12 reader, the deeper pleasure of the comparison is that both stories use one's own country's history as the setting of the alternative. The Maratha victory is local; Charley's 1894 is American but the underlying wish is universal.

Why this matters. The comparative reading shows that the interweaving of fantasy and reality is a controlled craft, not a free fall. Both writers choose one rule to break, plant one object to anchor the break, and leave the door deliberately ajar. That is what makes both stories satisfying long after the genre has gone out of fashion.

Final Answer: Both Finney and Narlikar interweave fantasy and reality by setting a believable present, allowing one controlled counterfactual (a third level at Grand Central, a Maratha victory at Panipat), anchoring it with a physical object (a first-day cover, a history-book entry) and a discipline (psychiatry, physics), and refusing to resolve whether the slip was real or imagined. Finney leans towards melancholy escape; Narlikar towards scientific curiosity. The result, in both cases, is a story whose chief pleasure is the unresolved gap.

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Key Takeaways

- Jack Finney's *The Third Level* reads, at the surface, as a fantasy story about a hidden platform at Grand Central, and, underneath, as a meditation on escape from the insecurity, fear, war, worry and stress of the modern world.
- The story's strongest evidence for the third level is Sam's first-day cover, mailed from Galesburg, Illinois, on 18 July 1894. Sam, Charley's psychiatrist friend, has reversed his earlier diagnosis and gone there himself.
- Finney builds a deliberate intersection of time and space: Grand Central in 1950 New York is also a doorway to 1894 Galesburg. The 1894 newspaper, the old-style currency and the first-day cover are the joints at which the two times meet.
- Philately, like coin collecting, photography, letters and museums, is one of many practices that keep the past alive. The story celebrates the practice while warning, through Charley, that the habit of moving between times can become escape.
- Compared with Narlikar's *Adventure*, Finney's story uses the same form (one controlled break in the rules of the ordinary world) with a different sensibility: emotional and domestic where Narlikar is scientific and brisk.

End of The Third Level NCERT Solutions