

This extract is from *The Time Machine*, a science fiction novel, published in 1895, in which a Victorian scientist builds a 'Time Machine' and travels into the future. He is horrified to see the planet appears to be dying.

1. Read the extract carefully and circle words or phrases that use colour.

'I stopped very gently and sat upon the Time Machine, looking round. The sky was no longer blue. North-eastward it was inky black, and out of the blackness shone brightly and steadily the pale white stars. Overhead it was a deep Indian red and starless, and south-eastward it grew brighter to a glowing scarlet where, cut by the horizon, lay the huge hull of the sun, red and motionless. The rocks about me were of a harsh reddish colour, and all the trace of life that I could see at first was the intensely green vegetation that covered every projecting point on their south-eastern face. It was the same rich green that one sees on forest moss or on the lichen in caves; plants which like these grow in a perpetual twilight.

'The machine was standing on a sloping beach. The sea stretched away to the south-west, to rise into a sharp bright horizon against the wan sky. There were no breakers and no waves, for not a breath of wind was stirring. Only a slight oily swell rose and fell like a gentle breathing, and showed that the eternal sea was still moving and living. And along the margin where the water sometimes broke was a thick incrustation of salt - pink under the lurid sky. There was a sense of oppression in my head, and I noticed that I was breathing very fast. The sensation reminded me of my only experience of mountaineering, and from that I judged the air to be more rarefied than it is now.

'Far away upon the desolate slope I heard a harsh scream, and saw a thing like a huge white butterfly go slanting and fluttering up into the sky and, circling, disappear over some low hillocks beyond. The sound of its voice was so dismal that I shivered and seated myself more firmly upon the machine. Looking round me again, I saw that, quite near, what I had taken to be a reddish mass of rock was moving slowly towards me. Then I saw the thing was really a monstrous crab-like creature. Can you imagine a crab as large as yonder table, with its many legs moving slowly and uncertainly, its big claws swaying, its long antennae, like carters' whips, waving and feeling, and its stalked eyes gleaming at you on either side of its metallic front? Its back was corrugated and ornamented with ungainly bosses, and a greenish incrustation blotched it here and there. I could see the many palps of its complicated mouth flickering and feeling as it moved.

'As I stared at this sinister apparition crawling towards me, I felt a tickling on my cheek as though a fly had lighted there. I tried to brush it away with my hand, but in a moment it returned, and almost immediately came another by my ear. I struck at this and caught something threadlike. It was drawn swiftly out of my hand. With a frightful qualm, I turned, and saw that I had grabbed the antenna of another monster crab that stood just behind me. Its evil eyes were wriggling on their stalks, its mouth was all alive with appetite, and its vast ungainly claws, smeared with an algal slime, were descending upon me. In a moment my hand was on the lever, and I had placed a month between myself and these monsters. But I was on the same beach, and I saw them distinctly as soon as I stopped. Dozens of them seemed to be crawling here and there, in the sombre light, among the foliated sheets of intense green.'

Colour connotations in *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells

2. Add your colour quotations to the table. Think about what the author is trying to achieve through these language choices. Make notes on possible connotations for each quotation. One example has been completed.

Quotation	Connotations
'The sky was no longer blue ...'	Time traveller has left behind a fine, sunny day. The 'no longer' could suggest that normality and happiness are left behind.

Teacher's notes

- This activity could be used before a reading exam practice, to explore one aspect of the extract. This extract is available as an Edexcel Paper 1 exam practice.
- Less secure students could be given all the quotations and then explore their connotations in pairs.
- More secure students could widen their analysis by selecting contrasting examples to support a point, e.g. the sky in the present and the future; the contrast between sky, land and sea in the future.
- Afterwards, students could discuss what an understanding of these colour connotations adds to their enjoyment of the extract. They'll fit with similar connotations in other texts e.g. red for heat, danger and anger; white for cold, illness, death etc.

Some possible answers

Quotation	Connotations
'The sky was no longer blue ...'	Time traveller has left behind a fine, sunny day. The 'no longer' could suggest that normality and happiness are left behind.
'... inky black ... blackness'	Night is approaching, can suggest the end of life for the earth.
'... pale white stars ... huge white butterfly'	The universe is cooling; can suggest illness, coldness, death.
'... deep Indian red ... glowing scarlet ... red and motionless ... harsh reddish colour'	Heat could suggest anger, danger, lifeblood and its loss.
'... intensely green vegetation ... rich green'	Simple plants needing light or heat, as if the earth is returning to a primitive, basic state.
'... a thick incrustation of salt - pink under the lurid sky.'	Seawater now concentrated, poisonous; suggests a polluted, dying sea.