Round the World in Eighty Days

Jules Verne

About the author

Jules Verne is sometimes considered to be the father of science fiction. However, in *Round the World in Eighty Days*, he shows that he is also the master of the 'road' type story, in which the action is constantly moved forward by the physical movement of the main characters from place to place.

Jules Verne studied law in Paris and then became secretary of the Theatre Lyrique before working as a stockbroker. His first fictional works were plays and the words for operas. Then, at the age of thirty-four, he wrote the adventure story *Five Weeks in a Balloon* which was quickly followed by the science fiction classic *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, published in 1864.

Verne was very good at combining an exciting adventure story with a fantastical idea, supported by scientific knowledge or speculation. Verne was fascinated by exploration and he wrote a history of this, spanning from the Phoenician times to the mid-nineteenth century. In all his well known works, his characters use the latest 'inventions' to explore the moon, ocean depths, the centre of the earth, or as in this story, simply to travel further and faster than ever before. Amongst the inventions he predicted in his writings are flights into space, submarines, helicopters, air conditioning, guided missiles and motion pictures.

Summary

The story begins in a gentlemen's club in London in 1872. Phileas Fogg is introduced and we learn that he is a cold man and very strict in his habits. Fogg makes a bet with his friends in the club that he can travel around the world in eighty days. They accept the bet of £20,000 and Fogg and his servant Passepartout set out on their journey. They have adventures in Egypt, India, Hong Kong, China, Japan and America. They are followed all the time by a determined policeman, Detective Fix, who is convinced that Fogg is a bank robber. Fix slows down Fogg's progress on several occasions. Also, in India his journey is interrupted when he decides to save a young girl, Aouda, from certain death, and in America when he rescues Passepartout from the Indians. Fogg arrives back in Liverpool and is arrested by Fix. This delays him, apparently crucially, for a day and Fogg and Passepartout think they have arrived back in London one day too late. Fogg then realises his love for Aouda is more important to him than money and asks her to marry him. In the end, Passepartout discovers that by travelling round the world to the east, they have actually gained a day, and therefore Fogg has won the bet after all.

Chapters 1–2: Phileas Fogg dismisses his servant, and employs a new, French servant Jean Passepartout. Then he goes to his club. There, his friends are talking about a bank robbery. Then Fogg bets his friends £20,000 that he can travel around the world in eighty days. He has to be back in the club on 21 December. Fogg returns home and tells Passepartout to prepare for the journey. His friends say goodbye to Fogg and Passepartout at the railway station. Some days later, the police receive a letter from Detective Fix telling them he is following Phileas Fogg, who he believes is the bank thief.

Chapters 3–4: Fix, Fogg and Passepartout arrive in Suez, Egypt. Fix talks to Passepartout in the street and learns that Fogg is in a great hurry, has a lot of money and is travelling to Bombay. Fix gets on the same ship to Bombay. In Bombay, Passepartout gets into a fight in a temple because he is wearing shoes. Fix wants to arrest Fogg, but the warrant is still in the post from England. They take a train from Bombay to Calcutta, but it stops half way and they have to complete some of the journey on an elephant. They see a lot of people taking a dead man and his beautiful young wife, Aouda, to a temple. The guide tells Fogg that the people are going to burn the woman with her dead husband.

Chapters 5–6: Fogg decides they must rescue Aouda. The next morning, the people prepare the fire for the drugged Aouda and her dead husband. Suddenly it appears as if the dead man gets up and carries Aouda away from the people. In fact, it is Passepartout. They continue their journey to Calcutta and Fogg tells Aouda he will take her to Hong Kong to escape from her dead

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husband's family. In Calcutta, Fogg and Passepartout are taken to the police station. Passepartout is threatened with prison because of what happened in the temple in Bombay, but Fogg decides to pay the bail money and is released. Detective Fix witnesses this and is very angry.

Chapters 7–8: The group, including Fix, travel to Hong Kong. In a bar in Hong Kong, Fix tells Passepartout that he is a policeman and that Fogg is a bank robber. The captain of the *Carnatic* tells Passepartout that the ship will leave that evening and not the next day as Fogg thinks it will. Passepartout wants to tell Fogg about this change of plan but falls asleep in a bar because Fix put something in his drink. When Passepartout wakes up, he gets on the *Carnatic* alone. The next morning Fogg and Aouda cannot find Passepartout and they discover that their ship, the *Carnatic*, left the previous evening. Fogg looks for another ship. He finds a seaman who will take them to Shanghai and Fix, Fogg and Aouda travel there in a terrible storm.

Chapters 9–10: The group travels to Yokohama and meets up with Passepartout. Passepartout sees Detective Fix and hits him. Fix tells Passepartout that he wants to help Phileas Fogg get to England so he can arrest him there. The group arrive in San Francisco. From there they take a train to New York. They are attacked by Indians and the train driver is killed. Passepartout manages to stop the train near a fort and the soldiers come to help. The Indians run away, but they take Passepartout and three other people with them. Fogg and thirty soldiers rescue Passepartout. The delay means they cannot arrive in New York in time to catch their ship to England.

Chapters 11–12: In New York, Fogg looks for a ship to take them to Liverpool. Fogg pays the captain of the *Henrietta* and they arrive in Liverpool on 21 December. Fogg is taken to the police station. Here, Fix admits he made a mistake and that Fogg is not a bank robber. Fogg hits him. They get a train to London but arrive five minutes too late to win the bet. Fogg and Aouda decide to get married. Passepartout goes to the church to make arrangements and when he comes back, he tells Fogg that they have made a mistake and that they have arrived in England one day earlier than they had thought. They rush to the club and arrive just in time to win the bet.

Background and themes

Love and friendship: At the beginning of the book, Phileas Fogg is portrayed as a cold and distant character, obsessed with punctuality. He is determined from the beginning to achieve his goal, but is diverted from his purpose when people are in danger. He wants to save the beautiful Aouda from her fate and risks his life to rescue Passepartout from the Indians. As the journey progresses, Fogg's icy character begins to melt, culminating in his realisation that his love for Aouda and Passepartout's friendship are more important to him than having money or winning the bet.

Science: As in other Verne novels, the power of science, in this case science in the form of various forms of transport, is used to make the world a smaller place. The record breaking challenge narrated in the book could not have been achieved, or even contemplated, in a world without trains and powered ships. However, Verne does concede that nature is still a powerful force. The weather, animals and unforeseen accidents all play a part in frustrating Fogg's attempt to go round the world.

Humour: The detective in the novel could be seen as a clumsy, comical character. His efforts to arrest Fogg always come to nothing, partly due to Fogg's cunning and partly because the arrest warrant never catches up with him. He is also completely wrong in thinking that Fogg is a bank robber.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 **Discuss:** Put students into groups and ask them to make a list of famous travellers and explorers throughout history e.g., Christopher Columbus, Marco Polo, Captain Cook, Livingstone, Neil Armstrong and the Apollo missions. Get feedback and write the list on the board. Tell students to discuss the following questions.
When did they travel? How did they travel? Where did they go? Why did they go? How did things change because of these people? What have we got today because of these people?

Chapters 1–2
After reading

2 **Pair work:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to make a list of things that they would pack in a small bag for a journey around the world. About five things are sufficient. Write their suggestions on the board. Tell the students they now have to vote for the three things they think are the most useful from the complete list. Go through the list and count the number of votes each item receives to see which three the class as a whole considers to be the most important.

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Round the World in Eighty Days

Chapters 3–4

Before reading

3 **Research:** In groups students find out as much as they can about either Egypt or India. This should include information about history, population, language, main cities, the weather, customs, music, festivals, typical food etc. Students give either an oral or written and illustrated presentation about the country.

After reading

4 **Discuss:** Ask the students *'Why were the men in the temple angry with Passepartout?'*
Elicit the answer. Talk about how different cultures/ religions often have their own norms about appropriate behaviour. Put students in groups to talk about what the dominant norms are in their own culture or religion and in any other cultures or religions they are familiar with.

Chapters 5–6

After reading

5 **Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapters 5 and 6. Tell then to write it again, making five changes to words in the text. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students, who have to identify the mistakes.

Chapters 7–8

Before reading

6 **Pair work:** Tell the students that Phileas Fogg and his friends are going to Hong Kong. Put the students into pairs and ask them to talk about Hong Kong:
Where is it? Is it a big or small? Are there a lot of people there? What kind of food do people eat? Is it noisy? Is the weather hot or cold, dry or wet?

After reading

7 **Discuss:** At the end of Chapter 8, the *Tankadere* is travelling in very bad weather. Put the students in small groups and ask them to think of a journey they or someone they know has made that was frightening. Alternatively, students can invent a frightening journey.
Were you in a car, a train, a ship or a plane? Where were you when things started to go wrong? What happened? What did you think at the time and after?
Students then tell their stories to the rest of the class.

Chapters 9–10

Before reading

8 **Write:** Tell the students that Fogg is going to travel across America. Put the students in small groups and give them five minutes to make a list of every famous thing or person they know that is American. These could be famous actors, politicians, sportspeople, cities, food, buildings, or geographical features. The group with the longest list wins.

After reading

9 **Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *garden, buffaloes, soldiers, thief, guns, Indians*. Have the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapters 9 and 10.

Chapters 11–12

While reading (p. 54. After the sentence 'Do you know that I love you?')

10 **Write:** Divide the class in half and tell one group they are Phileas Fogg and the other Aouda. In pairs, students then write a love letter saying why they want to marry. Suggest the following reasons, some are real and some are invented. Encourage them to be imaginative.
Student A: (Fogg) Aouda is very beautiful. She has no family or any money. She is a good cook. She likes playing cards.
Student B: (Aouda) Fogg is very rich. He lives in London. He is strong. He is very nice.

After reading

11 **Write and ask:** Write *'Who was the captain of the Henrietta?'* on the board and elicit the answer (Captain Speedy). Ask students to write another question about something in Chapters 11 and 12. Check their work as they do this. Now have students stand up and mingle, asking and answering each other's questions.

12 **Write:** Put students in pairs to write a short description of one of the main characters in the book. (Phileas Fogg, Passepartout, Detective Fix, Aouda).

13 **Discuss:** Put the students in small groups to imagine what will happen in the future.
Fogg
Will he be a good husband?
Will he go round the world again?
Passepartout
Will he work for Fogg in the future?
Will Fogg give him some money from the bet?
Detective Fix
Will he be a policeman in the future?
Will he see Fogg again?
Aouda
Will she go back to India?
Will she like London?

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