



## Overview:

This resource is designed to provide GCSE literature students with a greater understanding of the social and historical context of *The War of the Worlds* while simultaneously challenging them to practise skills required for GCSE English Language.

Students will read a brief article about the fear that rose during the nineteenth century that the UK would be invaded by a foreign power. After that, they will read an extract from *The Battle of Dorking*, a popular story that launched the explosion of 'Invasion Literature' which became very popular in the late 1800s (and of which *War of the Worlds* is one of the best examples).

## Reading activity 1: Skimming for basic meaning

We are going to examine a one-page article about a characteristic of life in the UK during the 1800s. First, we'll skim the article for basic meaning. You will be given 60 seconds to skim the article. After the 60 seconds are up, you will be challenged to guess the title of the article.

When you are ready to begin, click the button at the bottom of the screen.



Students will only have 60 seconds to get the basic meaning of the text.

**In the 19th century, the British feared invasion by the French, Germans, terrorists and even aliens. Mike Ashley explains how these concerns were reflected in literature.**

In the 19th century, Great Britain might have had the greatest navy in the world and ruled the waves, but the potential of new military technology, such as aerial bombardment or powerful artillery, made the British Isles increasingly vulnerable.

### **Invasion by tunnel**

At the height of the Napoleonic wars between Britain and France, both Britain and France staged farces such as *La descente en Angleterre* (The Raid on England, 1797) by Jean-Corisandre Mitié and the anonymous *The Invasion of England* (1803). It was the new technology, though, that was most alarming. The French had first crossed the English Channel by hot air balloon in 1785, and the threat of an aerial invasion fleet was ever present in English minds. This was further aggravated by the idea of a Channel Tunnel, which Napoleon had considered and for which plans had been prepared by Albert Mathieu in 1802.

### **The Battle of Dorking**

In 1871 Lieutenant-Colonel George Tomkyns Chesney caused uproar with the publication of his story 'The Battle of Dorking'. Chesney believed that Great Britain was unprepared for an armed invasion from Germany, especially after Germany's unexpected victory in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. The story is told in retrospect from 50 years in the future when a soldier recounts to his grandson the terrible events. Using a powerful new weapon, the German navy destroys the British fleet. They march upon London and the final battle is at Dorking in the Surrey Hills. Germany takes control of Britain, and the Empire is disbanded.

The reaction to the story was immediate. The British, having grown complacent with their military superiority, were horrified, and the government had to reassure the public that plans to review the army were already in hand. Chesney's alarmist story had catapulted the genre of future-war fiction into the public arena.



### The terrorist threat

The twin ideas of the super-inventor and future war came together at the end of the 19th century with a number of novels in which a scientist creates a machine with which he is able to hold the world to ransom. Jules Verne had sown the seed for this with *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, 1870) where Captain Nemo uses his submarine, the Nautilus, to attack British ships in his hatred of the British.

### The ultimate threat

It was left to H G Wells to develop the popularity of the invasion-threat novel by having the ultimate invader, the Martians, in *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Wells's Martians are technologically superior to anything Earth can throw at them and show that, in the future, whoever is the most scientifically advanced will hold the upper hand in any combat.

*This is an abridged version of The Fear of Invasion by Mike Ashley. The original version is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0 and can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2KsPy3q>*

Now that you have had a chance to skim the article for basic meaning, offer some guesses about what word completes the title of the article (below). As you come up with your guesses, think about what topic links every sentence and every paragraph that you skimmed.

'The Fear of \_\_\_\_\_'

*Discuss with students what word they believe might correctly complete the title, perhaps jotting possibilities on the board. Once the class has offered a few guesses, show them the dropdown choices.*

Click on the choice that best completes the title of the article you've skimmed.

'The Fear of \_\_\_\_\_'

- A) War
- B) Other countries
- C) Invasion
- D) Technology



*Give students an opportunity to discuss the choices available, perhaps comparing them with their own guesses. Once the class has reached a consensus about which choice they believe is correct, click on it.*

*In the follow-up discussion, help students to see why C is the best answer (i.e. although the article does talk about the fears of other countries using new technology to wage war, the overriding fear is that all of these threats would be brought home to the people of Great Britain in an invasion).*



## Reading activity 2: Scanning for detail

Now that you have grasped the basic meaning of the article from skimming, we'll scan the article for specific details. You will have 60 seconds to scan the text and locate the dates of these four events that fuelled British fears of invasion during the 1800s:

- Hot air balloons from France cross the channel to Britain
- The Germans unexpectedly defeat the French in the Franco-Prussian War
- *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* is published
- *The War of the Worlds* is published

*Students will only have 60 seconds. In that time they will need to find the date of each of the four events.*

### The fear of invasion

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Now that you've had a chance to scan the text for specific details, use a keyboard or the onscreen touchpad to fill in the table below with the correct dates.

Event	Year
Hot air balloons from France appear over Britain	
The Germans defeat the French in the Franco-Prussian War	
<i>20,000 Leagues Under the Sea</i> is published	
<i>The War of the Worlds</i> is published	

Event	Year
Hot air balloons from France appear over Britain	1785
The Germans defeat the French in the Franco-Prussian War	1871
<i>20,000 Leagues Under the Sea</i> is published	1870
<i>The War of the Worlds</i> is published	1898

### Reading activity 3: Analysing language

In the late 1800s, the people of the United Kingdom were concerned by the rapid advance of military technology and the growing military might of other nations in Europe. A new genre of literature, called 'Invasion Literature,' became very popular. In Invasion Literature, writers described Britain being invaded by outside enemies who used advanced weapons to win a quick and decisive victory.

In a moment, we will read an extract from the first of these invasion stories, entitled 'The Battle of Dorking.' Although written in 1871, the story is set in the 1900s. In this 'future war' story, an old man is telling his grandchildren about the invasion of Britain that took place when he was a young man.



How does the narrator show his frustration that the country did not foresee the danger posed by the enemy?

You should comment on:

- What he says
- His use of language and tone

The danger did not come on us unawares. It burst on us suddenly, 'tis true; but its coming was foreshadowed plainly enough to open our eyes, if we had not been wilfully blind. We have only ourselves to blame for the humiliation which has been brought on the land.

Fools that we were! In our blindness we did not see that we were merely a big workshop. We were so rich simply because other nations from all parts of the world were in the habit of sending their goods to us to be sold or manufactured...it might have lasted, if we had only taken proper means to keep it; but, in our folly, we were too careless even to insure our prosperity.

...If ever a nation had a plain warning, we had. If we were the greatest trading country, our neighbours were the leading military power in Europe. They were driving a good trade, but it was on their army that they prided themselves most. And with reason. They had beaten the Russians and the Austrians, and the Prussians too, in bygone years, and they thought they were invincible. A scheme of army reform was brought forward by the Government. It was a half-and-half affair at best; and, unfortunately, instead of being taken up in Parliament as a national scheme, it fell through. It was in organisation and forethought that we fell short, because our rulers did not heartily believe in the need for preparation. So army reform was put off and the militia and volunteers were left untrained as before, because to call them out for drill would "interfere with the industry of the country."



### Suggestions

Below is a list of some of the words and phrases that you might have selected from the extract that show that the narrator's frustration that the country did not foresee the danger. How many did you include in your answer? Do you include any that do not appear here?

- The narrator suggests that people should have seen the danger: it was 'foreshadowed plainly enough'.
- The narrator accuses himself and his countrymen of being 'wilfully blind'.
- The narrator insists 'We have only ourselves to blame'.
- The narrator uses words such as 'humiliation' and 'fools' to make the British seem foolish.
- The narrator argues that the country could have been saved 'if we had only taken proper means to keep it'.
- The narrator includes words such as 'folly' and 'careless' to make the British seem irresponsible.
- The narrator points out that the country had a 'plain warning' because the enemy was 'the leading military power in Europe' had already defeated 'the Russians and the Austrians, and the Prussians too'.
- The narrator criticises the country's scheme of army reform, describing it as 'a half-and-half affair at best'.
- The narrator criticises the country because it 'fell short' in 'organisation and forethought'.
- The narrator criticises the government: 'our rulers did not heartily believe in the need for preparation'.
- The narrator quotes the government's suggestion that calling troops for drill would "interfere with the industry of the country," highlighting that the government put industry ahead of national security.



## Reading activity 4: Comparing writers' ideas and perspectives

### Question:

The narrators of both texts think back and discuss how unprepared the people of the UK were for the invasion that was to come.

Compare the feelings of the narrator of *The War of the Worlds* towards the people of the UK before the invasion with the feelings of the narrator of *The Battle of Dorking* towards them.

No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter. It is possible that the infusoria under the microscope do the same. No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger, or thought of them only to dismiss the idea of life upon them as impossible or improbable...

Hundreds of observers saw the flame that night and the night after about midnight, and again the night after; and so for ten nights, a flame each night...

...All unsuspected, those missiles the Martians had fired at us drew earthward, rushing now at a pace of many miles a second through the empty gulf of space, hour by hour and day by day, nearer and nearer. It seems to me now almost incredibly wonderful that, with that swift fate hanging over us, men could go about their petty concerns as they did ... For my own part, I was much occupied in learning to ride the bicycle, and busy upon a series of papers discussing the probable developments of moral ideas as civilisation progressed.



### *Suggested response*

We have discussed how the language of the narrator of *The Battle of Dorking* shows that he is frustrated and angry when he thinks back on how the people of the UK acted before the invasion.

In comparison, the narrator of *The War of the Worlds* is less emotional and more thoughtful in discussing how the people of the UK acted before the invasion. Rather than criticizing their stubbornness in refusing to acknowledge an outside threat, he makes observations about how oblivious they were to the threat. He seems almost amused rather than angered by their focus on everyday concerns.

Here is a list of some of the words and phrases that you might have selected from the extract that suggest the feelings of the narrator of *The War of the Worlds* towards the people of the UK prior to the invasion:

- He compares humans to ‘the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water.’ This suggests that people are less knowledgeable or important than they might like to think
- He describes how people ‘went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs’ and wonders that they could go about ‘their petty concerns’ as they did before the invasion. This implies that people’s activities were trivial and unimportant.
- The narrator pokes fun at himself as well, saying ‘For my own part, I was much occupied in learning to ride the bicycle,’ reinforcing his suggestion that most humans were engaged in trivial activities and oblivious to the reality of the universe around them.

What other differences did you notice between the attitudes of the narrators towards the people of the UK?



## Writing follow-up

Write a story that begins:

'I was not prepared for what would happen that day.'