

Name: _____ Class: _____

Thousands of Years from Now

By Hans Christian Andersen
1853

Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) was a Danish writer who is best known for his fairy tales including "The Little Mermaid" and "The Snow Queen." Published in 1853, "Thousands of Years from Now" is an essay in which the author imagines what the future might be like. As you read, take notes on Andersen's predictions and how he characterizes the people visiting Europe.

- [1] Yes, thousands of years from now men will fly on wings of steam through the air, across the ocean. The young inhabitants of America will visit old Europe. They will come to see the monuments and the great cities, which will then lie in ruins, just as we in our time make pilgrimages to the ruined splendors of southern Asia. Thousands of years from now they will come!

The Thames, the Danube, and the Rhine¹ still roll in their valleys, Mont Blanc² still stands firm with its snowy summit, the northern lights still glitter over the lands of the North, but generation after generation has become dust. Mighty names of today are forgotten-as forgotten as those who already slumber under the hill where the rich corn merchant sits and gazes out across his flat and waving cornfields.



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"To Europe!" cry the young sons of America. "To the land of our ancestors, that glorious land of memory and legends! To Europe!"

The ship of the air comes. It is crowded with passengers, for this is a much faster crossing than by sea. The electromagnetic wire under the ocean has already cabled the number of the aerial travelers. Already Europe is in sight--the coast of Ireland. But the passengers are still asleep and will not be called until they are over England. It is there that they still take their first step onto the soil of Europe, in the land of Shakespeare, as the intellectual call it, or the land of politics and land of machines, as it is called by others.

- [5] Here they stay a whole day! That is all the time this busy generation can give to the whole of England and Scotland. Then they rush on, through the tunnel under the English Channel, to France, the country of Charlemagne and Napoleon. The learned among them speak of Molière³ and the classic and romantic school of remote antiquity; others applaud the names of heroes, poets, and scientists whom our time does not yet know, but who will in afterdays be born in that crater of Europe, Paris.

1. Names of rivers in Europe
2. The highest mountain in the Alps and the highest peak in Europe

Now the steamboat of the air crosses the country whence Columbus set sail, where Cortez⁴ was born, and where Calderón⁵ sang his dramas in resounding verse. Beautiful, black-eyed women still live in those blooming valleys, and the ancient songs tell of the Cid⁶ and the Alhambra.⁷

Then through the air, across the sea, to Italy, where once stood old, eternal Rome. It has vanished! The Campagna⁸ is a desert; a solitary ruined wall is shown as the remains of St. Peter's,⁹ and there is even doubt that this ruin is authentic.

On to Greece, to spend a night in the hotel at the top of Mount Olympus, just so they can say that they have been there. Then to the Bosphorus,¹⁰ for a few hours' rest and to see the spot where Byzantium¹¹ stood; and where legends tell of the harems of the Turks, poor fishermen are now spreading their nets.

Over the ruins of the mighty cities of the Danube, cities that we in our days know not yet; and on the rich sites of some of those which time shall yet bring forth, the air travelers sometimes descend, only to depart again quickly.

- [10] Down below lies Germany, which was once covered with a massive network of railways and canals. Germany, where Luther¹² spoke, and Goethe¹³ sang, and Mozart once held the scepter of music! Great names of science and art now shine there – names still unknown to us. One day's stopover for Germany, and one for the other – the country of Oersted¹⁴ and Linnaeus,¹⁵ and for Norway, land of old heroes and young Norwegians. Iceland is visited on the journey home; the geysers burst forth no more, the volcano Hecla is extinct, but that great island is still fixed in the foaming sea, mighty monument of legend and poetry.

"There is really a great deal to be seen in Europe," says the young American proudly. "And we've seen it in eight days; and it is quite possible, as the great traveler" (and here he names one of his contemporaries) "tells us in his famous book, *How to See All Europe in Eight Days*."

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3. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, also known by his stage name as Molière (1622-1673), was a French playwright and actor; he is considered one of the great masters of comedy in Western literature.
4. May be referring to Hernán Cortés/Cortez (1485-1547), one of the first notable Spanish conquistadors of the New World, who led an expedition that led to the fall of the Aztec empire.
5. Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600 – 1681), was a dramatist, poet, and writer of the Spanish Golden Age.
6. Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (c. 1043-1099) was a Castilian nobleman and military leader in medieval Spain. He was called El Cid (the Lord).
7. A palace and fortress complex located in Granada, Andalusia, Spain
8. The low-lying area surrounding Rome in the Lazio region of central Italy
9. St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the location of the Vatican
10. A strait that forms part of the boundary between Europe and Asia
11. The ancient Greek city that later became Constantinople (which is now modern Istanbul)
12. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German friar and professor of theology who was a major figure in the Protestant Reformation.
13. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German writer and statesman.
14. May be referring to Hans Christian Ørsted (1777-1851), a Danish physicist and chemist; he discovered that electric currents create magnetic fields and is known today for Oersted's Law.
15. Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) was a Swedish botanist, physician, and zoologist. He is the father of modern taxonomy, and is considered one of the fathers of modern ecology.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. How does the depiction of Europe reflect the central themes about time and the future? [RL.4] [RL.2]
 - A. The depiction of Europe in ruins contributes to the central themes, for few things last or go unchanged over time.
 - B. The depiction of Europe as the ancient center of society contributes to the themes, in that the human concept of history is inconsistent and will shift over time.
 - C. The depiction of Europe as the ancestral home of Americans contributes to the themes, for it asserts that people in the future will always keep ties to the past.
 - D. The depiction of Europe in ruins contributes to the central themes, in that the future does not guarantee peace, prosperity, and progress for all.

2. What impact will advanced technology have on the future, according to the text? [RL.3]
 - A. Technology will make people idle and restless, because it will eliminate their jobs and grant them more leisure time.
 - B. Technology will allow people to study history more in depth and overall grant them better access to education.
 - C. Technology will make certain things easier, such as communication and travel, however these benefits are far off in the future.
 - D. Technology will make certain things easier, such as communication and travel, however this may be at the cost of genuine experience.

3. PART A: How does the narrator depict the Americans traveling to Europe? [RL.3]
 - A. The narrator depicts uncultured and crude, having lost the connection to ancestral European roots.
 - B. The narrator depicts partly as students and partly as tourists who sweep quickly through Europe.
 - C. The narrator depicts as in awe of the sites and ruins of Europe, taking their time to appreciate all the continent has to offer.
 - D. The narrator depicts American as entirely uninterested in the history and culture of Europe, only in its sights.

4. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. "To Europe!" cry the young sons of America. "To the land of our ancestors, that glorious land of memory and legends! To Europe!" (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "Already Europe is in sight--the coast of Ireland. But the passengers are still asleep and will not be called until they are over England." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "Then through the air, across the sea, to Italy, where once stood old, eternal Rome. It has vanished!" (Paragraph 7)
 - D. "There is really a great deal to be seen in Europe," says the young American proudly. "And we've seen it in eight days; and it is quite possible, as the great traveler" (and here he names one of his contemporaries) "tells us in his famous book, *How to See All Europe in Eight Days*." (Paragraph 11)

5. Which of the author's predictions are the most accurate and in what ways? [RL.5] [RL.2]

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In what ways do technological advancements affect the pace of our lives today?
2. People often say, "Less is more." When might this be true? How does this story reflect this?
3. How does technology affect human experience and perception?
4. What does the narrator believe the future should look like? Use evidence from the text in your answer.
5. What do you believe the future should look like? Use evidence from your own experience, current events, art, literature, or history.