



19.1 Jules Verne

Jules Verne was an enormously successful nineteenth century author. He introduced the world to science fiction. His stories of adventure and imaginative methods of travel were decades ahead of their time. His ideas have entertained and inspired generations of readers. Several of his books have been made into popular movies.

A great imagination yearning for adventure



Jules Verne was born on February 8, 1828 in the busy port city of Nantes, France. The oldest of five children, Jules came from a family with a strong seafaring tradition rich with the spirit for travel and adventure.

The family's summer home just outside the city of

Nantes may have inspired Jules to search for adventure. The house was on the banks of the Loire River. Jules and his younger brother Paul would often play outside and watch ships from all over the world sail down the river.

The boys would make up stories about these ships; where they were from, where they were going, the characters aboard the vessels, and especially the wild escapades they had during their journeys.

While Jules' father was part of a family that included many travelers, he did not intend his sons to follow in those footsteps. Both Jules and Paul were sent to a boarding school, right in their hometown of Nantes. There they were expected to get an education that would take them out of the seafaring class and into wealthy society.

Expectations and creativity clash

After graduating from the boarding school, Verne's father sent him to Paris in 1847, where he was expected to study law. While he studied and prepared for the bar exam, Verne found his time was increasingly spent writing.

An uncle that had been asked to check up on Verne saw that he was having some quiet success writing the words for operas. This uncle understood Verne's true calling. He began to introduce Verne to people involved with Paris' literary circles.

Verne managed to get a few plays published and even performed. Although busy, he still was able to get his

law degree. This came in handy, because as soon as Verne's father found out about his writing, he furiously stopped sending his son money. With his money supply gone, Verne took a job as a stockbroker. He hated this job, yet was quite good at it.

A career takes off

Around this time Verne began to meet important authors like Alexander Dumas and Victor Hugo. They offered advice to the young writer. In 1857 Verne married, and was encouraged by his wife to pursue his dream of writing.

Verne became a fan of Edgar Allen Poe, modelling some of his early work on Poe's style, and in 1897 he wrote a sequel to one of Poe's unfinished novels. In 1862 Verne met Pierre-Jules Hetzel, an editor with a keen eye and feel for what a story needed to be successful.

Verne's writing had often been criticized for being too scientific. Hetzel knew how to make Verne's stories appeal to the common person. In 1863, Verne began publishing his "Extraordinary Voyages" series of novels and thankfully quit his stockbroking job.

In rapid succession Verne tackled the sky, the sea, the land, and even space in his novels. In 1863 he wrote *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, a story about exploring Africa in a hot air balloon. In 1864 he wrote *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, a trek by scientists down a volcano on their way to Earth's core. In 1865 he wrote *From Earth to the Moon*, a visionary work that preceded NASA missions by 100 years. He published *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* in 1869, introducing the world to Captain Nemo, a mysterious genius who built the futuristic submarine *The Nautilus*.

Jules Verne's 65 novels took readers on marvelous adventures, introducing futuristic ideas that while not always based on scientific facts, incorporated concepts that inspired future thinkers and entertained millions. Verne died in 1905, as the world's most translated author, making up for his lack of scientific training and actual travel experience with a vivid imagination.



Reading reflection

1. Why do you think Jules Verne's novels appealed so widely to readers around the world?
2. **Research** which novels written by Verne have been made into movies. Have any of them won awards?
3. **Research** the bar exam. Why would Jules Verne need to pass it?
4. **Research** Victor Hugo and explain why meeting him may have been important to Verne.
5. **Research** some of the machines, ideas, and predictions Verne made in his novels that have come to exist today.