

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: JOURNEY TO THE PAST

Whether by rail, on foot, via stagecoach, in a carriage, or aboard a ship, journeys play a pivotal role in novels of the long-nineteenth century.

What can we learn about what it was like to travel in another time?

In this research activity we'll be using the **CLiC Web App** to learn about modes of transport and the changing culture of travel in this era.

TIP: Remember that the mode of transport your character is using might be a relatively new phenomenon, so they ought to act accordingly. Many in the Victorian era, for example, were concerned that hurtling along in a railway carriage at high speed could shatter nerves, trigger insanity, or otherwise damage one's body. Queen Victoria journeying from Slough to London famously demanded that the driver slow down to less than 30 miles per hour.

LATE GEORGIAN

Walking, horseback riding, stagecoaches, and canal boats were the primary modes of transport. Horseback and private carriage riding (via gig, phaeton or curricule) were largely reserved for the rich. Though this period is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of British canals, stagecoaches were more commonly used for long-distance travel.



Ladies in a phaeton from Gallery of Fashion by Nikolaus von Heideloff (1794), via Wikimedia Commons.

VICTORIAN ERA

More affordable, smaller omnibuses travelling fixed routes gradually replaced traditional stagecoaches. Meanwhile, railway mania swept the nation, spiriting away passengers of all classes from the cities to remote corners of the coastline. The turn of the nineteenth century coincided with the popularisation of the bicycle and an increase in use of steam ships.



First Class: The Meeting (1855) by Abraham Solomon, via Wikimedia Commons.

INSTRUCTIONS

Taking into account the period in which your novel takes place, list as many terms relating to travel and/or modes of transport as you can. Make sure to include synonyms.

You can use this list as guidance.

*boat, canal, carriage, cart, coach, curricule,
distance, gig, journey, miles, outing, passenger,
phaeton, railway, ride, river, road, ship,
stagecoach, station, steam, tour, train, tram,
travel, trek, trip, vehicle, voyage, wagon, walk.*

1.

5.

2.

6.

3.

7.

4.

8.

Select a number of texts according to the period in which your novel takes place. (This is called building your corpora).

Go to cllic.bham.ac.uk, click 'concordance', and select these texts from the drop-down menu under 'search the corpora'. You can automatically select a sample of texts in a given era by using the following links:

- [works set in the Georgian era](#) (1714-1837)
- [works set in the Regency era](#) (1811-1820)
- [works set in the early nineteenth century](#) (1800-1837)
- [works set in the mid-Victorian era](#) (1837-1880)
- [works set in the fin de siècle](#) (1880-1900)

Select 'all text' under the subsets option.

Type one of the terms you noted earlier under 'search for terms' and hit enter.

Remember, an asterisk can be used as a wildcard – so *travel** would also find *travelling* or *travelled*. If you'd like you can type in multiple terms at once, you can do so by selecting the 'any word' option.

What can you learn from your concordance results about what it would have been like to travel in your chosen era?

Does class play into your character's travel circumstances? Are passengers seated according to rank or are social barriers broken down between individuals who may not otherwise have interacted? In the concordance below, we already see a difference between first and second class travel!

3	an indulgence even at the small cost of a double	railway	journey in the carriages of the second class. ¶ The White
4	y bulldog of a man had sprung from a first-class	carriage.	We all three shook hands, and I saw at once basker
5	;" ¶ Our friends had already secured a first-class	carriage	and were waiting for us upon the platform. ¶ "No basker
6	; pursued him, even in the comfortable first-class	carriage,	and was behind him when he looked out of the LadyAud
7	liff comfortably in a corner of an empty first-class	carriage,	coiled up in a couple of railway rugs, and smokin LadyAud
8	eated opposite to Robert Audley in the first-class	carriage	of an express, whirling through the pretty open c LadyAud
9	; classe?--Voila!' And he clambered into the high	train.	They followed. The compartments were already s womenlove
10	empty first-class carriage, coiled up in a couple of	railway	rugs, and smoking a cigar in mild defiance of the LadyAud
11	all your trouble,'and he gets into a second-class	carriage;	and the last I sees of him is a face LadyAud

What is the etiquette associated with this mode of travel? And how does this impact upon the kind of interactions characters have?

Socially acceptable sleeping, for example, might facilitate a private conversation between passengers who remain awake. But it seems falling asleep can also make the journey uncomfortable for others, as you can see in line 8 below where David Copperfield is wedged in between two gentlemen when he travels to London.

7	it! - and being fast asleep in a corner of the	carriage,	I rode by the side and talked to Dora. She	DC
8	aced one and another) to prevent my tumbling off the	coach,	I was nearly smothered by their falling asleep, and co	DC
9	f their faces--Heaven knows how --in their sleep. The	coach	stopped and went on, and went on and stopped, time	MC
10	sleep for any sign of consciousness he gave until the	coach	stopped, when he raised his head, and glancing throu	NN
11	a cart- horses bestow a sleepy glance upon the smart	coach	team, which says as plainly as a horse's glance can	PP
12	sure of this, she arose, and dressed herself for the	journey.	¶ The old man was yet asleep, and as she was	OCS
13	convents got in those days with their boarders. ¶ The	journey	was then resumed. Nicholas fell asleep towards morn	NN
14	modification of the assembled company. Then the whole	train	went to church, where Mr. Benjamin Allen fell fast asl	PP

What was the cost associated with travelling?

Would your characters (like Van Helsing and his team in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*) 'have a good deal of ready money' (see line 1) and thus have no problem procuring a carriage at a moment's notice? Or would even hiring transportation put them at risk of debt?

1	deal of ready money, as we are to buy a	carriage	and horses. We shall drive ourselves, for we have	dracula
2	the streets (she had no money to pay for a	carriage),	and never stopped until she came to Sir Pitt Craw	vanity
3	y determined that she should not run into debt for	carriage	hire. He was not a curmudgeon with his money; h	alli
4	in the streets, and she rides by in a gay	carriage	of her own.' ¶ 'You mean when she has your mon	OCS
5	hunchback a piece of money, and returned to the	carriage.	¶ The man followed to the chariot door, uttering th	OT
6	with him directly, threw down the money, and the	carriage	was mine." ¶ "And I am sure," said Catherine, "I k	northanger
7	grumbled Rawdon. ¶ "We might take Southdown's	carriage,	which ought to be present at the funeral, as he	vanity

Pay close attention to the words that sit on either side of your chosen term (in corpus linguistics, these are called 'collocates').

Keep in mind the book each concordance line originates from (this is listed on the right-hand side).

If you detect a pattern, you can filter your results further using the '*filter rows*' option or the KWIC Grouper.



You can run a concordance search for a mode of transportation and then filter your results using [female pronouns and possessives](#) (*she, her, hers*) if you would like to examine the cultural restrictions placed on the mobility of girls and women.

The railway, for example, presented nineteenth-century women with new opportunities and new dangers in equal measure.

For the first time, they could travel on their own over long distances without the need for a chaperone. But, (like their twenty-first century counterparts) they often felt unsafe or vulnerable on public transport.

Crowded trains meant that they could easily find themselves sharing a carriage with a group of male strangers, who could be rowdy or even predatory. What's more, a woman who was being harassed could not quickly get away, as carriages were only accessible from a door at either end.



"Der lästige Kavalier" or "The Annoying Gentleman" (1874) by Berthold Woltz, via Wikimedia Commons.

To counter these concerns, ladies-only carriages were introduced in the latter half of the century. These carriages (which numbered over 1,000 by 1888) were usually located at the front or back of the train. Some women also took the precaution of dressing in a more conservative manner, adopting high necklines or long skirts.

See lines 10 and 11 of [the concordance search below](#), where Miss Rosa Bud (from Charles Dickens' *Edwin Drood*) is escorted to the train station under male protection; or line 8 where Lydia Gwilt (the shrewd anti-heroine of Wilkie Collins' *Armada*), remarks on the 'rude men' she has met while travelling alone on the railway. As she explains to her landlady, though she dresses 'quietly' her red 'hair is so very remarkable' - so to deter unwanted male attention she is accustomed to wearing a 'thick veil'.

8	t time." One meets such rude men occasionally in the railway," she said to the landlady. "And though I dress quietly arma
9	xt day Mrs. Davilow accompanied her daughter to the railway station. The sweet dews of morning, the cows and h Deronda
10	than another minute she was on her road to the railway, under Joe's protection. Joe waited on her when she c ED
11	her when she got there, put her safely into the railway carriage, and handed in the very little bag after her ED

What can you ascertain from your results in terms of what it would have been like to travel – as a woman – in your chosen time?

Look for patterns that offer contextual insight. You might notice, for example, that the word *airing* [collocates with the word carriage](#).

Carriage airings were a popular and socially acceptable way for women to see and be seen by society outside of one's family. Though health was often cited as the reasoning behind such a journey, women also made an event of the enterprise itself, inviting friends, dressing up, and driving to a picturesque location.

2a3a120	Left	Node	Right	Book
1	council of medical authority that she should take a	carriage	airing every day, and that it was important she sho	DS
2	ernoon the Simpson family were gone out to take a	carriage	airing. Shirley, never sorry to snatch a reprieve from	shirley
3	Lucas and Mrs. Long. Kitty, run down and order the	carriage.	An airing would do me a great deal of good	pride
4	J. M.) D., J. M. and J. took airing in	carriage.	J. looking out of window, and barking violently at d	DC
5	ore setting out for an "airing," in the closely shut-up	carriage.	¶ So the three girls were by themselves in the com	mary
6	two nurses, and to enjoy an airing in a close	carriage,	supported by soft pillows. At the present moment h	sketches
7	nce or regard be repulsed. An airing in the Hartfield	carriage	would have been the rack, and arrowroot from the	emma

Keep an eye out in your research for writing strategies crafted to bring specific modes of transport to life.

See, for example, Dickens' descriptive railway panorama in *Dombey and Son* that utilises repetition, rhythmic punctuation, and cyclical syntax to evoke what it would have felt like to journey aboard a train for the first time.

"Away, with a shriek, *and a roar, and a rattle, through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through the chalk, through the mould, through the clay, through the rock* [. . .] *Through the hollow, on the height, by the heath, by the orchard, by the park, by the garden, over the canal, across the river, where the sheep are feeding, where the mill is going, where the barge is floating, where the dead are lying, where the factory is smoking, where the stream is running, where the village clusters, where the great cathedral rises, where the bleak moor lies, and the wild breeze smooths or ruffles it at its inconstant will.*" - Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, Chapter 20.

You can note down what you have discovered on the page overleaf and post your findings under [#CLiCCreative](#), or by tagging us [@CLiC_fiction](#) on Twitter.



The Railway Station (c1862-1909) by William Powell Frith, Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023.

BONUS WRITING ACTIVITY: JOURNEY TO THE PAST

Write a scene in which one of your characters is taken outside of their comfort zone while in transit. What is it about this journey that enables them to meaningfully interact with the world around them? Along the way what do they learn about themselves, or another character? How does the journey itself inform this internal growth? Weave in what you have learnt in the previous research activity.

Why not post your findings under [#CLiCCreative](https://twitter.com/CLiCCreative), or by tagging us [@CLiC_fiction](https://twitter.com/CLiC_fiction) on Twitter?
