



'I COULDN'T PUT THIS BOOK DOWN'
DANIEL KALUUYA

THE UPPER WORLD

TIME WAITS FOR NO ONE.
UNTIL NOW . . .

FEMI FADUGBA

Suitable for:
Ages 14+

TEACHER RESOURCES

Extracts and notes for KS4/5 students & teachers



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THE UPPER WORLD

A note on the book and the resource:

'*The Upper World*' by Femi Fadugba combines the everyday story of young people growing up in Peckham with the otherworldly physics of space and time. The result is an ambitious YA novel that tackles a multitude of themes from free will to time travel, merging Einstein's theory on time travel and relativity with real-world South London.

This pack serves as an introduction to the book and is best used as a cross-curricular Book Club resource or as inspiration for discussion. Questions and activities can be adapted and delivered at the teacher's discretion.

ABOUT THE BOOK

This epic thriller is soon to be a major Netflix movie starring Academy Award winner Daniel Kaluuya (*Get Out*, *Black Panther*, *Judas and the Black Messiah*).

'Believing is seeing, Esso . . .'

Esso is running out of time and into trouble. When he discovers he has the ability to see glimpses of the future, he becomes haunted by a vision of a bullet fired in an alleyway with devastating consequences.

A generation later, fifteen-year-old Rhia is desperately searching for answers - and a catastrophic moment from the past holds the key to understanding the parents she never got to meet.

Whether on the roads of South London or in the mysterious Upper World, Esso and Rhia's fates must collide.

And when they do, a race against the clock will become a race against time itself . . .



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CONTENTS:

Exploring key themes and concepts

Pages 4–7

Objectives: identify and explore key ideas in the book; record notes about the different themes; use language from the text to look closely at different themes and concepts.

Top five maths and physics concepts

Pages 8–9

Objectives: identify key maths and physics concepts in the book; discuss how the author's biography impacts the story; choose a maths or physics concept to explore and present in more detail.

Looking at an extract

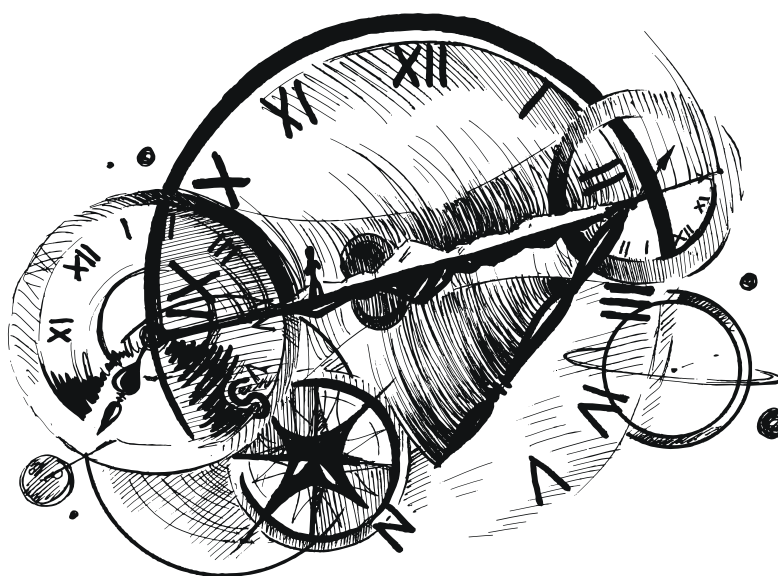
Pages 10–15

Objectives: take a closer look at three extracts from the novel; analyse themes, style and characters and discuss ideas.

Suggestions for further activities

Page 16

Objectives: come up with ideas for a cross-curricular story; research inspirational thinkers and theorists; think about how to adapt 'the upper world' for the screen.





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EXPLORING KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS

1. Cover clues

First, look at the cover of *The Upper World*. Use it to think about the questions below:

1. Who might the central character be?
2. What do the images, colours and text on the cover suggest about the story?
3. Can you guess any prominent themes or concepts explored in the book?

2. Theme Crib Sheet

Themes are the main ideas that lie beneath the surface of a text. When working with a short extract of a fiction text, it helps to look closely at the language to work out the themes.

There are many themes in *The Upper World*. If you have already read the book, think about the themes on the crib sheet and write down some notes about how they feature in the story. If you haven't read the book yet, use this crib sheet to record ideas as you read.

3. Quote-theme match-up!

Look at the quotes from the book included in the worksheet.

Refer back to your Theme Crib Sheet. You might want to colour-code each theme. Can you then match some of the themes to the quotes? Do any of the quotes explore more than one theme?

Challenge 1

Try to add some more themes to your Theme Crib Sheet. Can you pick out any more quotes or important moments in the book that link to these themes?

Challenge 2

Can you draw another diagram to show how these four characters' stories and ideas interweave and overlap?



THE UPPER WORLD

THEME CRIB SHEET

Themes are the main ideas that lie beneath the surface of a text. When working with a short extract of a fiction text, it helps to look closely at the language to work out the themes.

There are many themes in *The Upper World*. If you have already read the book, think about the themes below and write down some notes about how they feature in the story. If you haven't read the book yet, use this crib sheet to record ideas as you read.

Theme	Notes
Time Travel	
Free Will	
Perspective	
Memory	
Love	
Fear	
Mystery	
Violence	
Knowledge	
Connection	
Forgiveness	



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QUOTE THEME MATCH-UP!

Refer back to your Theme Crib Sheet. You might want to colour-code each theme. Can you then match some of the themes to the quotes? Do any of the quotes explore more than one theme?

'At the most basic level, physics is a simple dance between storytelling and equation-writing. It's just metaphors plus maths.'

Dr Esso

'Our brothers and sisters in the East say that each snap of your finger contain sixty-five unique moments (...) Now imagine the vast multiplicity of moments in one breath. One smile. One dream.'

Blaise Adenon's Notebook

'Any question starting 'why' or 'how' was scary to someone.'

Esso

'Instead I can barely see my own hands. Darkness has swallowed them. And inside the darkness are echoes: half-familiar screams and hushed voices, each one loud enough for me to hear, but not clear enough to make out the words.'

Esso

'Whenever your circle of knowledge expands, the world of ignorance that surrounds it does too.'

Esso

'As much as I was suspicious of the man myself, I also felt kinda bad for him. Somewhere between foster homes seven and nine, I'd got acquainted with the fear that came with a first impression.'

Rhia

'It takes an impressive mix of stupidity and bad luck not to be in a gang, but still find yourself in the middle of a gang war.'

Esso



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Challenge 1

Try to add some more themes to your Crib Sheet. Can you pick out any more quotes or important moments in the book that link to these themes?

Consider what you can learn about each of the characters from these quotes. Fill in some of your ideas inside the Character Circles below.

Esso

Rhia

Blaise Adenon

Dr Esso



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Challenge 2

Can you draw another diagram to show how these four characters' stories and ideas interweave and overlap?



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TOP FIVE MATHS AND SCIENCE CONCEPTS

Did you know?

Author Femi Fadugba studied quantum physics at Oxford University! You can read more about him here (<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2021/june/femi-fadugba-upper-world-writing-story-advice.html>). Below are his Top Five Maths and Science concepts in *The Upper World*. Do you recognise these concepts from your work at school?

1 PYTHAGORAS THEOREM (Maths)

For Derivation see Appendix I and application to time-travel physics see Appendix III & IV.

2 ELECTROMAGNETISM (Physics)

This is the idea of light being a hybrid wave that consists of a). an electric wave and b). a magnetic wave which are each constantly inducing one other and hence move forward like a Mexican wave (see Chapter 4). The book also touches on the idea of light having a constant speed “no matter what” (Chapter 8) which can be calculated trivially via Maxwell’s equation (Appendix II).

3 TIME DILATION (Physics)

The fact that the faster something moves in everyday 3D space, the slower it moves through time (Chapter 10, Appendix II).

4 ENERGY (Physics)

The fact that there are different forms of energy and they can be converted from one form to the other but never created/destroyed (energy conservation). There is also some extra emphasis in the book on ‘nuclear/atomic energy’ which comes from the conversion of matter into pure energy (the amount of which can be calculated via the equation $E=mc^2$).

5 BONUS/ADVANCED (E.G. A-LEVEL Maths / Further Maths)

The various calculus methods involved in the $E=mc^2$ derivation (see Appendix V).

“Studying physics showed me from a young age that we live in a mysterious and miraculous universe (did you know there are 10,000 stars for every grain of sand on Earth?), and it’s just weird to me that no one talks about it. But I remember going out with a couple of friends one night in Peckham and them both confessing how they get into deep YouTube rabbit holes watching time travel and quantum physics videos. And in a way, that’s where the inspiration for ‘The Upper World’ came from: the hunch that I could combine the everyday story of a few kids from South London with the otherworldly physics of space and time. And craft a journey gripping enough that the nerds, the mandem – and the rest of us in between – would all want to read it. And would all get it.”

Femi Fadugba

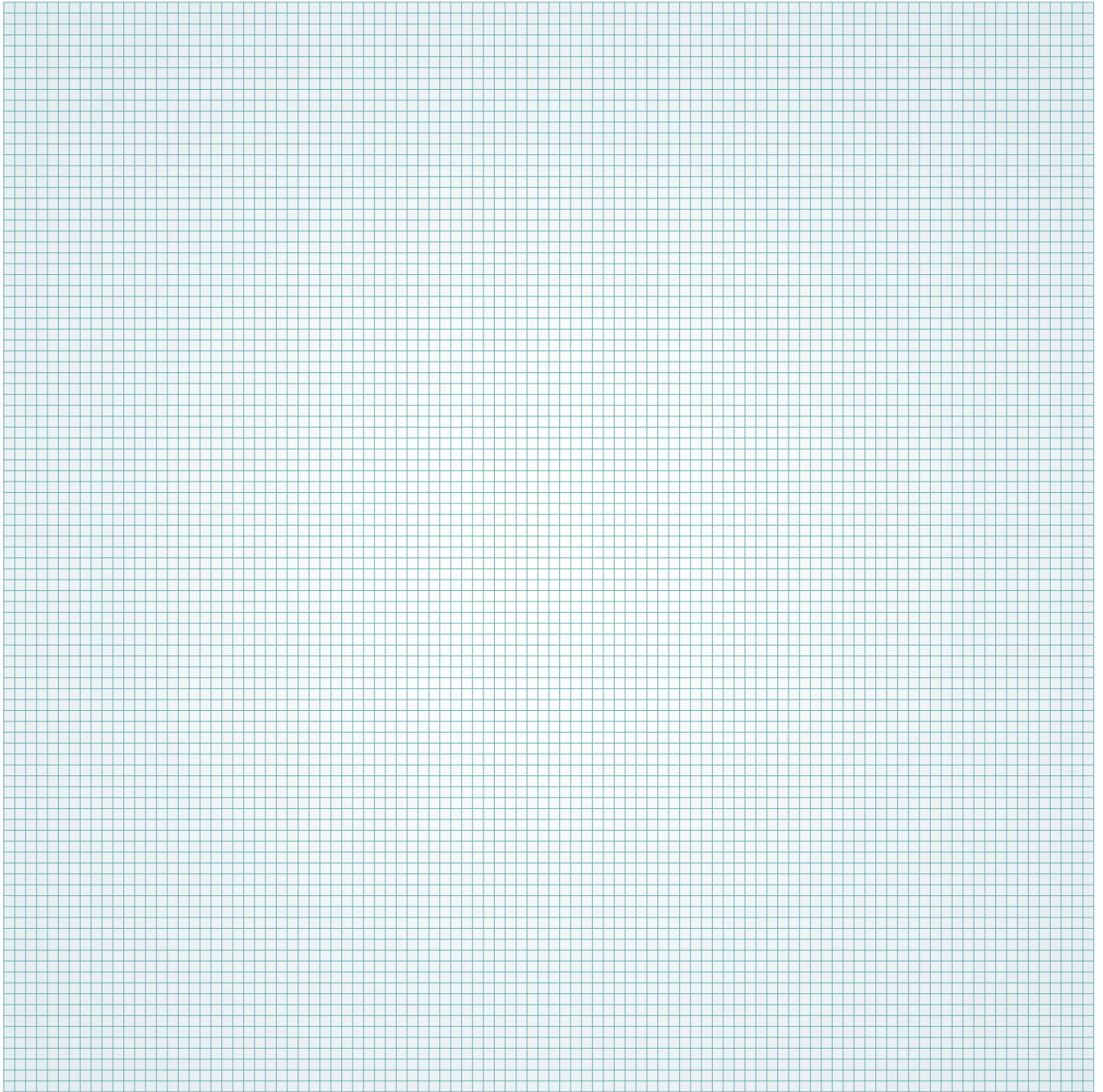


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MATHS AND SCIENCE CONCEPTS ACTIVITY

Pick your favourite Maths or Science concept from the novel. How does Femi Fagduba make the concept relevant to the story? How does he make it easier to understand?

Imagine you are Rhia taking a lesson from Dr Esso. On the notebook page below, write down or draw one of your own diagrams to elucidate an important scientific or mathematical concept in the novel.



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LOOKING AT AN EXTRACT 1: TIME DILATION

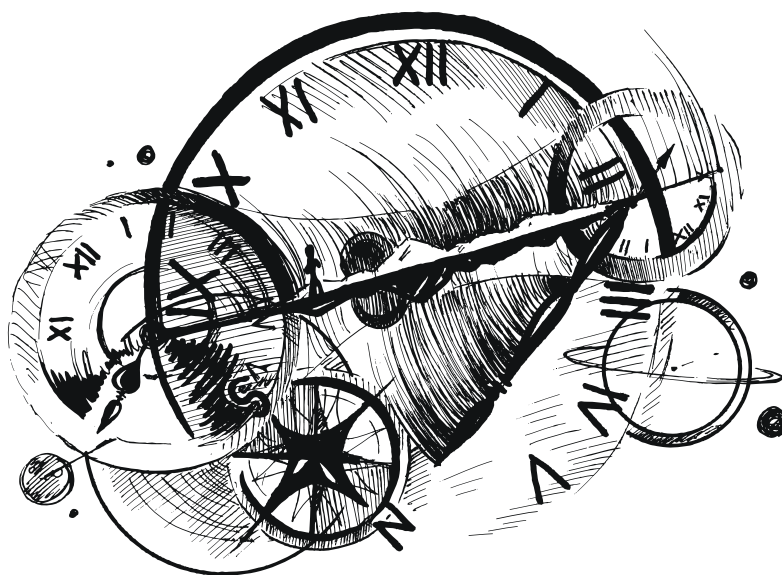
Read the extract below, taken from Chapter 10:

'We grow up assuming there's some invisible silent grandfather clock out there that sets the time that the universe marches to.' I could feel my pulse rising again, but I forced most of my excitement into hiding. 'But that's all completely wrong. We actually have our own clocks: some ticking at one place over here, others ticking slower over there. And turns out, the faster you move, the slower your clock ticks compared to everyone else's.' I pointed back to the napkin. 'So, because Tony was in a speeding car, he saw the same event take half as much time as you did.' I paused to let the next line really bang. 'Fewer seconds passed in that car, which means time literally went slower for him and Poppy.'

'When time stretches out like that,' I continued, 'it's called time dilation. It happens all the time in real life, and the effect is just too tiny for us to notice...'

Use the worksheet to mindmap 'Time' using the prompt questions below:

1. What do we assume about time?
2. What is wrong with our assumption?
3. What is 'time dilation'?
4. How important is time in the novel, *The Upper World*?



THE UPPER WORLD

TIME -A MINDMAP

Create a mindmap for 'Time' using the prompt questions below:

What do we assume about time? What is wrong with our assumption?
What is 'time dilation'? How important is time in the novel, *The Upper World*?



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LOOKING AT AN EXTRACT 2: THE 'REAL' WORLD

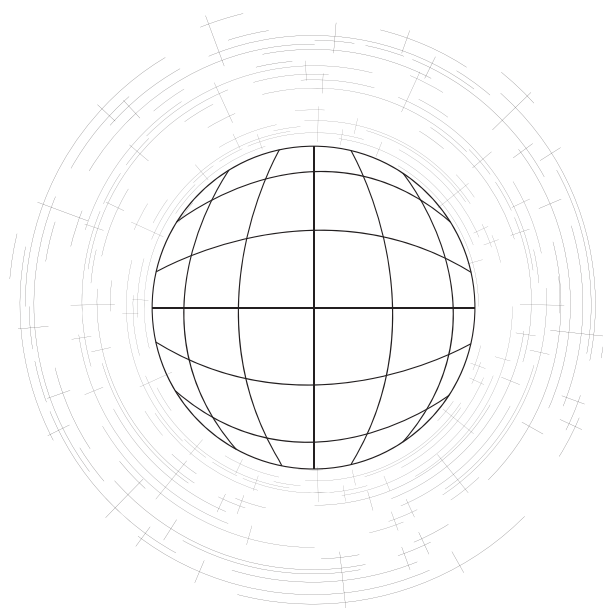
Read the extract taken from Chapter 7:

After the collision, I expect to turn and see a carrot-coloured bench stuffed with people waiting for the 78, 381, 63 or 363. And, on the other side of the road, I expect a barbershop, followed by a Western Union, then a pub, then a corner shop selling fufu and Oyster-card top-ups – the same rota of shops that repeats itself across Narm, interrupted only by the odd pound shop or chain cafe. I expect to see a Range Rover with a dent in its front end and I am ready to go ballistic on the driver, threaten to sue him, punch him, both. I expect – no, I hope – to see a little boy, sitting safely on the pavement, in roughly the same shape and condition I met him.

Instead, I can barely see my own hands.

Use the worksheet to mindmap The 'Real' World using the prompt questions below:

1. What does Esso 'expect' to see? What kind of world is Esso used to?
2. What do you learn about Esso here?
3. How does Femi Fadugba create a vivid setting? Can you draw it?
4. Do you get the impression Esso's world is about to change? Why?



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THE 'REAL' WORLD -A MINDMAP

Create a mindmap for The 'Real' World using the prompt questions below:

What does Esso 'expect' to see? What kind of world is Esso used to? What do you learn about Esso here?
How does Femi Fadugba create a vivid setting? Can you draw it?
Do you get the impression Esso's world is about to change? Why?



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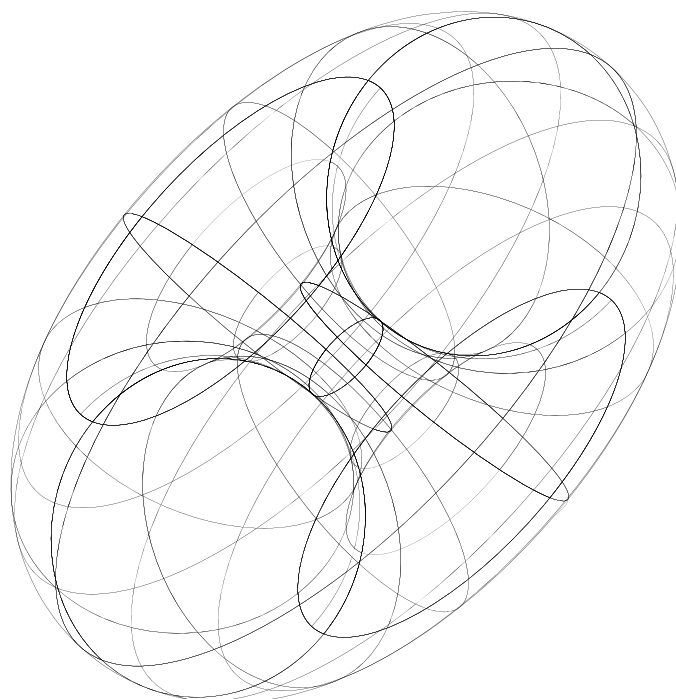
LOOKING AT AN EXTRACT 3: THE UPPER WORLD

Read the extract taken from Blaise Adenon's Notebook: Letter 2:

In a few months you will leave your world and be born into ours, my child. You will be told that what you see with your physical eyes is final, and that men like me who claim otherwise are fools. But know that just beyond the tug of our chains and the warmth of this cave, a clearer, more terrifying world awaits us.

Use the worksheet to mindmap The Upper World using the prompt questions below:

1. What is '*The Upper World*'?
2. What will Esso be told when he finds it?
3. What is the significance of the cave metaphor?
4. How is this passage connected to Blaise Adenon's Notebook: Letter 1?



THE UPPER WORLD

THE UPPER WORLD -A MINDMAP

Create a mindmap for The Upper World using the prompt questions below:

What is ‘*The Upper World*’? What will Esso be told when he finds it?

What is the significance of the cave metaphor?

How is this passage connected to Blaise Adenon’s Notebook: Letter 1?



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FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1: Cross-curricular ideas and inspiration

- *The Upper World* is a mixture of many different ideas and subjects – from philosophy, to maths and science. At the centre of the story are key concepts from different academic disciplines. Discuss with a friend or classmate: why is this a successful approach to writing? How does it make the book unique?
- Choose a key concept or theory that you have studied in another lesson outside of English class. It could be Science, Geography, R.E. or Art, Design and Technology! Mindmap some ideas to create a story based on that concept or theory.
- You might even choose to incorporate more than one theory or concept from more than one subject. Create a 'Story Recipe' full of your favourite ideas and interests. What are the ingredients of your ideal novel?

2: Inspirational ideas and thinkers

- Because *The Upper World* is so steeped in knowledge from different disciplines, there are several references to important thinkers and inspirational people.
- Carry out some research into the following people mentioned or alluded to in the story: SOCRATES, EINSTEIN, BLAISE PASCAL, PYTHAGORAS, AL-KHWARIZMI, LEBOMBO BONE. Which of these people or items interest you the most? Why?
- If you could choose an important thinker or theorist to inspire your own book, who would it be?

3: Adapting for the big screen

- When you've read the whole book, have a go at summarising the key events in the story.
- Then, create a Storyboard showing these key events. Consider how you might present each character's story arc – will you show events in tandem, or in the exact order that they are written in the book?
- Write a casting list for the adaptation and ideas for where the filming might take place.
- Create a Film Trailer and promotional posters for *The Upper World*. Consider how you can convey the key ideas and themes in the story and engage audiences so that they want to watch it!
- When you watch *The Upper World* on Netflix, consider how it is similar or different to what you imagined – and enjoy!

Two blank worksheets are included here for use with further activities.



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