About the author
Herbert George Wells was born in 1866 in Bromley, England. He was the fourth child of Joseph Wells and Sarah Neal. The family were not well off, but owned a small shop which brought in a comfortable amount of money. At the age of eight, Wells had an accident and broke his leg. He was left bedridden and began reading regularly to pass the time. He became interested in other worlds and lives through the books he read. It was at this time that Wells enrolled in the Thomas Morley Academy. Later, he worked for a short time as a draper’s apprentice and then for his uncle as a part-time student and tutor. Wells eventually won a scholarship to the Norman School of Science in London and it was at this time that his work as a journalist began. Wells was twice married. The first marriage in 1891, to his cousin Isabel, lasted just three years. His second was to a student of his called Amy Catherine Robbins, nicknamed Jane. Although her husband wasn’t faithful, Jane remained married to Wells until her death in 1927 and they had two sons. In 1895, Wells published his first major work called Select Conversations with an Uncle, but it was the publication of The Time Machine later that year that signified the start of his success as a writer. Over the next two years he went on to write a series of novels including The War of the Worlds, which were to establish him as one of the most significant writers of his time. As a life long socialist, and one time member of the Fabian society, Wells’s later writing reflected his political views. Much of his writing was in response to the Nazi uprisings in Germany and his name appeared high on the list of intellectuals and politicians targeted by the Nazis upon invasion of Britain. H.G. Wells died of cancer at home in 1946. A controversial figure both in his personal life and as an author, he has remained one of the most significant writers of the 20th century.

Summary
Stories of Other Worlds is a collection of three short stories. The first story is about how a stranger, finding himself in a place where everyone is blind, comes to terms with his situation. The second is about a well-educated man who is unable to escape the imaginary world he once visited when young. The third is a ghost story, which has serious consequences for the person who is telling it to his friends.

The Country of the Blind
Part 1: The story is set in a valley in the mountains of Ecuador, hundreds of years ago. A climber named Nunez falls down the far side of a mountain and finds himself in a strange and isolated place where the inhabitants are all blind. The valley had, so the story went, been home to generations of people and despite being struck by a disease which caused them to lose their sight and an earthquake which isolated them from the rest of the world, the communities which occupied it prospered. They learnt how to cope with their disability and living without sight became normal. Nunez, mindful of the fact that he can see and no one else can, remembers a phrase: ‘In the Country of the Blind, the One-eyed Man is King.’ He thinks that he will be able to teach and rule the community he has descended upon.

Part 2: However, Nunez soon discovers that in a society where no one has ever been able to see, this is not a hindrance and they are able to function through the use of their other senses quite well. At first he becomes angry and frustrated but eventually, he reluctantly conforms to this new way of life. Nunez goes to work for a villager named Yacob and falls in love his daughter, Medina-saroté. The woman returns his affections but Nunez is faced with a huge dilemma. He is told that he can only marry his chosen bride if he is prepared to sacrifice his sight. At first Nunez considers the prospect of losing his sight in return for the woman he loves but ultimately he is unable to do it. So eventually he decides to escape from the valley whilst the villagers are asleep.

The Door in the Wall
Part 1: The story is narrated by a man called Redmond, an old friend of the central character Lionel Wallace. After a meal one night in a restaurant, Wallace tells his friend about an obsession of his which started when he was very young. He tells him of an unhappy childhood with a distant father and how one day he found a door in the wall. He describes how he eventually went through
Stories of Other Worlds

the door and discovered a beautiful and enchanted place, full of loving and kind people. He describes how different the place was to the cold world he had become used to and how devastated he was when he was brought back to reality. He remembers how nobody believed him when he told them about the place he had been to. When he was a schoolboy Wallace saw the door again, but when he took boys from his school to see it, it was impossible to find. He was ridiculed by the boys for this and became very unhappy.

Part 2: As an adult, Wallace often saw the door again but was too busy or unable to go through it, even though he thought about it a lot. His career and grown up way of life did not allow him time to escape into an imaginary world. At the end of the story, we learn of Wallace’s tragic death. A newspaper report tells how he has died by falling through a hole which had been surrounded by a wall with a small door cut into it. Redmond, the narrator suggests that perhaps Wallace mistook this to be the door in the wall he had looked for constantly during his life. Alternatively, the door may never really have existed, except in Wallace’s mind.

The Young Ghost

Part 1: This story is about a group of friends who meet in a hotel. One of the friends, Clayton, had arrived the night before, and is keen to tell the others about the strange thing which happened to him before the arrival of the others. An excellent storyteller, Clayton’s friends are eager to hear his tale. He tells them how, alone in the hotel but for the waiters and waitresses who were asleep on the top floor, he encounters a ghost. He gives a vivid account of how he spoke at length with the ghost and did not feel afraid since he found him to be a weak and sad character.

Part 2: Clayton tells his friends how he finds out about the ghost’s life before he died and how he had come to the hotel and tried, unsuccessfully, to haunt the guests staying there. His friends want to hear more, gradually believing in the story they are listening to. Clayton then tells them how the ghost wants to return to his other world and how he eventually helps him to do it through a series of gestures. Intrigued by the story one of the men, Sanderson, asks Clayton to show them the gestures. Although some of his friends are wary, Clayton persists in performing the gestures until, to his friends’ horror, he suddenly collapses and dies. His friends are left wondering whether the gestures caused Clayton to be taken to another world or if it was just coincidental and it was simply his time to die.

Background and themes

Disability: In the first story, Wells tackles the issue of disability and how a community will often overcome and learn to live with this. The blind villagers adapt to their environment and perceive their lack of sight to be normal. With the arrival of Nunez, the story explores how it may be circumstances alone which define the word disability.

Escapism vs Scepticism: In the second story Wells explores how the fantasies and imaginary worlds we inhabit as children are more difficult to accept in an adult world. The character Wallace seeks solace from an unhappy childhood by entering a happy world through the door in the wall. However, as he grows up he is confronted by adults with whom he cannot share this world and so feels unable to visit it himself.

Supernatural: The third story deals with the consequences of trying to make contact with another world. When the main character, Clayton, shows his friends how he helped a ghost to return to the other world we are left wondering whether he is taken there too.

Discussion activities

The Country of the Blind (Part 1)

Before reading

1 **Discuss:** Write the word *disability* on the board and explain the meaning to the students. Elicit different kinds of disabilities that people suffer from. Ask students to discuss the problems that people with disabilities face and their experiences of how people with disabilities are perceived or treated by others. Do students feel that their own attitudes or behaviour towards people with disabilities have altered through first hand experiences?

While reading (p. 3, after ‘He had to stay in town.’)

2 **Write:** Ask students to write the diary of the man when he realises he is not able to get back home. Tell them to describe his thoughts and feelings about what has happened and about not being able to return to his home, his wife and his children.

After reading

3 **Discuss:** Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: What things can Nunez teach the blind people? What things can the blind people teach Nunez? Will Nunez become their king?
Stories of Other Worlds

The Country of the Blind (Part 2)

Before reading
4 Write and guess: Ask students to write two or three questions which they would like answered as they read Part 2 of the book. Share the questions with a partner and make predictions about what might happen.

While reading (p. 13, after ‘To them he was a stupid man with strange ideas.’)
5 Role play: ‘Hot seat’ one student as Nunez. Ask the other students to question him as if they were villagers.

After reading
6 Write: Ask students to write a letter to Medina-saroté as if they were Nunez explaining to her why he had to leave.

The Door in the Wall (Part 1)

Before reading
7 Discuss and write: Ask students to think of an imaginary place that they would like to ‘escape’ to, to get away from the pressures and stresses of everyday life. Ask them to discuss their ideas in small groups and then write a description of this place.

While reading (p. 26, after ‘Don’t talk about this again,’ he said.)
8 Role play: In pairs ask students to role play the conversation between Wallace and his father when he first tries to explain about the door in the wall.
9 Write (p. 27, after ‘Every night I cried. My schoolwork was bad and I was very unhappy.’): Ask students to write a school report from Wallace’s teacher explaining their concerns about his schoolwork and behaviour at school.

After reading
10 Discuss: Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: Why are some children unhappy at school? How are children sometimes unkind to other children? Is this problem getting worse? How can we stop this problem?

The Door in the Wall (Part 2)

While reading (p. 34, after ‘We all spoke about him but I said nothing about Wallace’s garden.’)
11 Discuss: In small groups ask the students to discuss why Redmond made the choice not to discuss the garden. What do they think the reactions of the others would have been if he had?

After reading
12 Write: Ask students to write the newspaper article which recounts the accidental death of Wallace. Ask them to think of a suitable headline and to include quotes from Redmond as if interviewed by the reporter as a friend of the deceased.

The Young Ghost (Part 1)

Before reading
13 Discuss: Ask students if they believe in ghosts. Have they had any experiences which have caused them to feel this way? Tell them to discuss their feelings and experiences with other students. What ghost stories have they heard or read? What films about ghosts have they seen?

After reading
14 Role play: In pairs ask students to imagine they are waiters or waitresses in the hotel and that they heard the conversation between Clayton and the ghost that night. Imagine one of them believes in ghosts and the other doesn’t. Ask them to act out the conversation.
15 Write: Ask students to write about why Clayton thought that the ghost wasn’t a very good ghost.

The Young Ghost (Part 2)

While reading (p. 53, after ‘I don’t think this is a good idea.’)
16 Discuss: Ask students to discuss why the friend did not think it was a good idea for Clayton to carry on. What might he have said to try and persuade him not to do it?

After reading
17 Pair work: Ask one student to take on the role of the ghost’s girlfriend when he was alive. Ask the other student to interview her about him to find out what sort of person he was.
18 Write: Ask students to write a diary entry as one of Clayton’s friends. Describe the events of the day and their thoughts and feelings about what happened.
19 Game: Put the students into small groups. Ask one student to write down the name of a character from any of the stories without showing the rest of the group. The others have to guess who the character is by asking questions which can only be answered by ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers. Students take turns with different characters.
20 Write, ask and answer: Write Where was Nunez from? on the board and elicit the answer (Bogotá.). Now tell students to write similar questions about any of the three stories in the book. Students now interact, asking and answering each other’s questions.