

# Center for Science Outreach



## Introduction to Science Fiction

What do you like to read? For a lot of you the answer is probably **fiction**, a story that is not (entirely) true and comes from the imagination. It may feature real people or places, but the story itself did not actually happen. When the story contains something that does not yet exist in the real world, but is based in science or technology, the story is considered **science fiction**.

Most great stories can be summarized in a “**What If?**” premise. [What if a boy went to wizard school?](#) [What if there was another world in a wardrobe?](#) [What if you could travel to the other side of a mirror?](#) At the 1867 World’s Fair, Jules Verne, one of the “fathers of science fiction” saw a [model of the Plongeur](#) a French submarine, and probably asked himself **what if** an electrically powered submarine could be used to explore the world. He would write the novel [20,000 Leagues Under the Sea](#) about Captain Nemo and his submarine the Nautilus. While electric submarines exist today, at the time of Jules Verne they were a work of fiction. Science fiction authors look at the world around them and try to predict the future.

Now it is your turn. Let’s try creating a new “What if?” question. Think about the science in the world today. Now imagine how the world could be different. If you are having trouble, ask yourself how you would change the technology that you use. Then fill in the question.

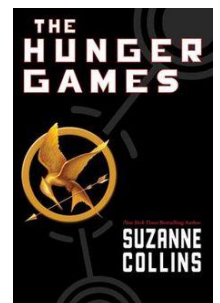
What if \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## Science Fiction makes Social Commentary

Like other genres, science fiction often has a narrative **theme**, an underlying idea that the author wants to convey to the audience. Science fiction writers often comment about the society they live in, in particular the effects of technology on our society or how we interact with each other. For example [The Hunger Games](#) by Suzanne Collins is a **dystopian** science fiction novel set in an imagined society with great suffering and injustice. In this story, children from the 12 districts of Panem are forced to fight to the death while the whole world watches on video. One of several themes of *The Hunger Games* is how we use the suffering of others as entertainment.

Let’s go back to your “What if” question. Try to answer these questions.

1. How would the entire world be different if your “What if” question was true?
2. Would there be any new problems created?
3. If you wrote a story, what might the theme be?



# Inspiring the Future: Why Scientists Love Science Fiction

Many scientists are often inspired to act because they read science fiction when they were younger. Sometimes people are inspired to invent the fictional technology that they read about. The inventor Simon Lake read *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* when he was 12 years old and was inspired to one day build *The Argonaut*, the first submarine that was able to operate in the open sea. You can even read the congratulatory note that Jules Verne sent him [here](#). Jules Verne also inspired the invention of the helicopter, when [Igor Sikorsky](#), the [father of the helicopter](#), read Verne's book *The Clipper of the Clouds* at the age of 10.

Let's go back to your "What if" question one more time. Try to answer these questions.

1. Do you think someone could make what you imagine actually happen?
2. What would you need to study in school?
3. What else might you need to get started?



## Short Stories: Do You Have a Few Minutes to Read a Story?

Not all great science fiction is over 1,000 pages. Some of it is only about 1,000 words. Try to read at least one of the short stories linked below. When you are done take time to reflect on it. What does this story make you think about?

If you like funny stories about aliens: [Grocery Games](#) by Anne Patterson Friedman.

If you like scary stories about aliens: [Real Things We Learned as a Fake Band](#) by James Beamon

If you like funny stories about superheroes: [Last Thursday at Supervillain Supply Depot](#) by Sarah Pinsker

If you like serious stories about superheroes: [Heroes](#) by Craig Lincoln

If you like scary stories about museums: [In the Depths of the Museum](#) by R. Rozakis

If you like stories about robots: [Best Friends Forever](#) by Michelle Ann King

If you don't want to read anything: [The Shortest SF Story Ever](#) by Seth Chambers



## Science Fiction and History

This is just a quick glimpse at science fiction. To see how science fiction has changed over time, and how our world has influenced some of the greatest science fiction authors, check out [this video](#) from PBS Digital Studios.

## Now Try It Yourself!

**When you've written your story, ask for feedback from a friend or family member. When it's ready, send it to us! With your permission, we will showcase it on our website!**

### SHARE WITH US!

We want to hear your thoughts on this lesson, read your story, or hear your thoughts on these other short stories. Click [here](#) to share your thoughts or story with us.