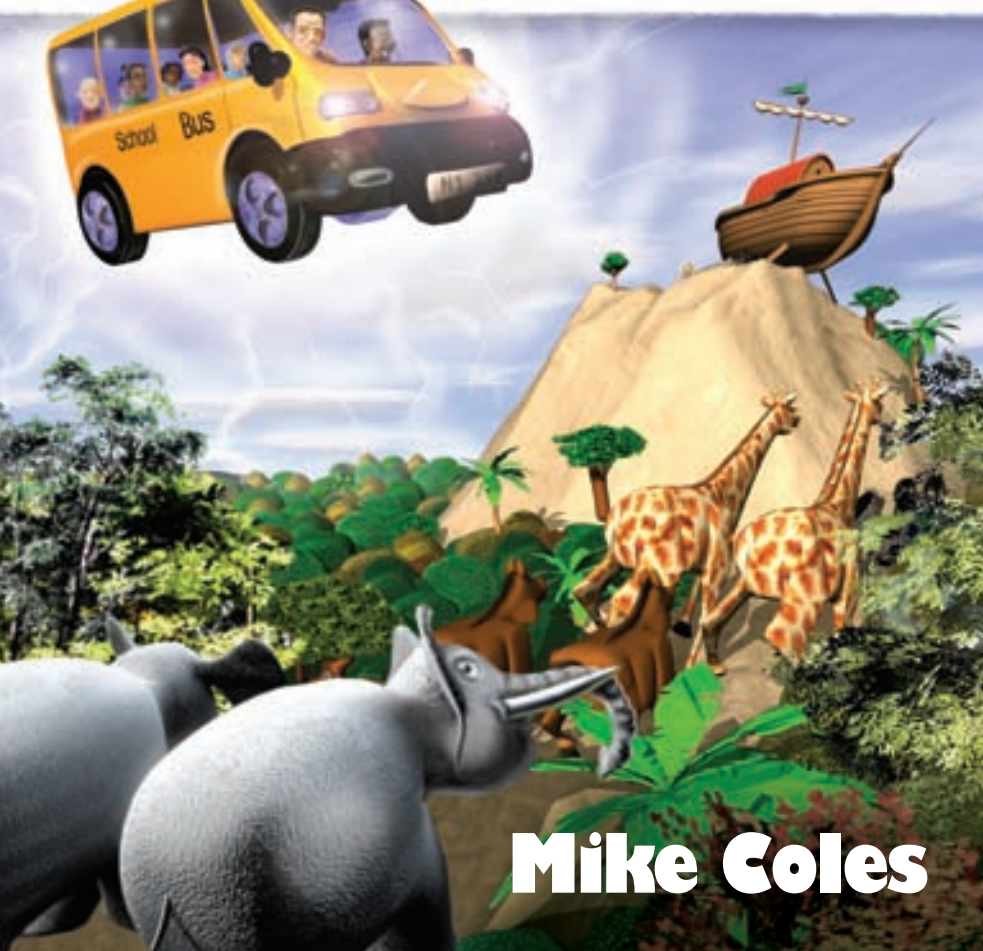


Class 9c and the

Genesis Time Machine



Mike Coles

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Introduction

This is the remarkable story of one teacher, ten pupils, and a time machine! Mike Coles is the Head of Religious Education at a Church of England secondary school in the heart of London's East End.

It's a perfect example of a multi-cultural school. Being a Church of England school, it is there to serve the community. There is a large Muslim population living in Stepney, mainly from Bangladesh, and many of the families send their children to the school.

The school also has many Christian children, whose families are from all over the world. They come from places such as the West Indies, Africa, Ireland, the UK, Russia and the Ukraine, and they have a variety of church backgrounds including Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal and Orthodox. Once again, it's a great mix! Mike finds that being Head of RE in a school like this is an amazing experience. There's no better place to teach.

An important part of his job is organizing school trips for his pupils, to local churches, mosques, Buddhist centres and so on. Now he's about to organize the most amazing trip that any pupil from any school in the world will ever have experienced.

Mike has selected ten pupils from his form, 9C, to attend an RE trip. They have been studying the Bible and the book of Genesis, and he has told the class that he's organizing a special outing to help with their studies. Everybody in the class wanted to come along, but the school minibus can only seat ten pupils, so Mike put all their names in a hat (one of the boys' baseball caps, actually) and drew out five boys' names and five girls' names.

Here are the ten pupils chosen to go on this remarkable school trip. You'll get to learn a great deal more about them as the story unfolds.

The five girls

Bronagh: A Roman Catholic from Ireland, Bronagh is very able academically, but at the same time very down to earth. She has a great sense of humour and she loves listening to rock music.

Shaheda: Shaheda is a Muslim girl whose family is originally from Bangladesh. She is a hardworking girl, and quite shy.

Natasha: Natasha's family is originally from Barbados in the West Indies. She is a Pentecostal Christian, and is diligent, enthusiastic and high-spirited with a great sense of humour and a love of singing.

Sarah: Sarah is from Bethnal Green. She has no real faith, but really enjoys RE lessons. She also has a good sense of humour, although she can be a little cheeky from time to time.

Doyin: Doyin's family is originally from Nigeria. She is always talking and asking questions, particularly about current affairs, which she loves discussing. She is full of life and there is never a dull moment with her around.

The five boys

Jilani: Jilani is a Muslim, born in Bangladesh. He is sometimes the class clown, but although he's noisy, he does work hard and is a really likeable character.

Steven: Steven is of Jamaican origin. He attends a Baptist church with his family. He is very intelligent, but can be lazy—one of those who will do well in his exams with little effort!

Boris: Boris is an Orthodox Christian from the Ukraine. He is quiet, studious and fairly shy.

John: John lives in Stratford, in north-east London, where he goes to an Anglican church. He loves to debate and is always asking questions.

Alan: Born and brought up in Whitechapel, Alan has no faith background. He's a real East End lad, cheeky and a bit of a crafty rogue. He can work well, when he wants to do so!

So these are the ten pupils who have been chosen, but what exactly is this amazing school trip? When Mike wrote a letter to the pupils' parents about it, he told them that it was a trip to help them gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of some of the stories in the book of Genesis. The letter described the journey as a 'mystery tour' and assured parents that the pupils would all thoroughly enjoy the experience.

The parents are happy to sign the letter and give permission, as it is a school trip and will be properly supervised. As it's an RE trip, they are confident that it will be particularly good for the kids! What the parents do not know, however, is that Mike will be taking the ten pupils back in a time machine.

When the pupils get into the school minibus, Mike will explain it all to them, as simply as he can. Yes, hard as it is to believe, they will be travelling back in time. He'll try to tell them a little about how it is possible, about quantum physics and Einstein's theory of relativity. (Good luck to him!)

The pupils will obviously not believe a word of it and will just think that Mike is acting daft, as is often the case. He will reply that he totally understands, but they must believe him. It is an RE trip, so they must have faith! He will give the pupils one last chance to decide whether they would rather stay at school. He'll tell them that it will be an awesome experience and even quite terrifying at first, but they are to trust him.

Before joining Mike and the ten pupils on the time-travelling school minibus, it's worth knowing what they will all be witnessing first-hand. Mike will programme the time machine to return to the

very moment of creation, the beginning of the book of Genesis. They will witness the very beginning of the earth. Will it be exactly as recorded in the Bible, or is the reality quite different? Were there dinosaurs? Did Adam and Eve exist? If they did, did they go around naked, and if so, how will the pupils react when they see this? So many questions... and all about to be answered!

The school party will see what happened between Cain and Abel. They'll experience the terrifying flood and watch Noah build his ark. Mike will try his best to give a commentary on what is happening around the minibus, while also trying to answer the pupils' questions and keep control. The story starts with Mike getting the pupils into the bus, explaining exactly where they are going and how, and giving them strict guidelines about how to behave when time travelling. So buckle up and prepare to experience what really happened 'in the beginning'.

Chapter 1

Back in time

‘OK folks!’ shouts Mr Coles. ‘Let’s all get on the bus now. Alan, could you quickly collect the packed lunches from the staff room, please?’

‘Why’s it always me?’ moans Alan. He runs off towards the staff room, mumbling to himself. He’s there and back within two minutes. Mr Coles helps Alan load the box of food into the back of the minibus.

‘Where is it we’re going, sir?’ asks Sarah. ‘Not to some boring old church to listen to some boring old priest?’

‘When you’re all sat down, I’ll explain everything to you.’ Mr Coles surveys them sternly. They immediately go quiet and wait eagerly to hear what this mystery tour is all about—the tour that is supposed to help them understand ‘a little better’ the first few chapters of the book of Genesis.

Mr Coles continues. ‘What I’m about to tell you is going to sound unbelievable. You’ll think I’m just messing around.’

‘You usually mess around and play silly jokes!’ shouts out Doyin.

‘Yes, thank you, Doyin. You’re quite right, and that is going to make it even more difficult for you all to believe what I’m about to tell you.’

All ten kids on board seem intrigued. They have never been on a mystery tour before, and they are beginning to guess that Mr Coles really does have something quite amazing to tell them.

Mr Coles picks up his copy of the Bible and turns to the book of Genesis. ‘We have been looking at the creation story in this book,’ he says to them. ‘I know that some of you, like Sarah and Alan, think it’s just a daft old story. Steven and Natasha believe the story word for word as they’ve been taught in their churches. And, as

Muslims, Jilani and Shaheda believe in a fairly similar creation account. The rest of you believe that God did create the world, but not in the way it's portrayed in Genesis. We've had some really good discussions in class about this book of the Bible.

'The amazing thing that I now have to tell you is this. Today we are going to find out how the world was created. We're going to discover what it was like at the very beginning. We will witness everything—the whole of creation, Adam and Eve...'

'Hold on a minute, sir,' interrupts Jilani. 'The only way we could know any of these things is if we were actually there. So what are you talking about?'

'We are going to be there. We're going back in time. We're going back to the moment of creation,' says Mr Coles, so excited he can hardly get the words out.

'I think he's really lost it this time!' Alan tells the others. 'How can this clapped-out school minibus even get us to Bethnal Green, let alone chapter one of bloomin' Genesis?'

Mr Coles and all the others find Alan's comment funny, and they exchange grins.

'Let me try to answer that if I can,' says Mr Coles, waving with his hand to get their attention. 'I don't really want to spend any time explaining how we're going to manage this trip. You have to trust me totally. You've been on many trips with me before and you've always enjoyed them. Today's trip will be the most amazing one that any school pupil from any school on this planet has ever been on. You can't get more exciting than that.'

Mr Coles then opens up a small cabinet on the dashboard of the minibus. The pupils suddenly find themselves looking at the most bizarre metallic object they have ever seen.

'That looks like something out of *Star Trek*,' John blurts out.

'In a way, it is,' Mr Coles replies. 'All I can tell you is that this strange object was given to me by someone, and it doesn't matter who. I was told it comes from the future, and quite simply it enables us to travel back in time. There's no point you all asking me how it works, because I haven't a clue.'

'How does it work?' asks Jilani.

'Very funny,' says Bronagh and pulls a silly face at Jilani.

'This trip will be both terrifying and spectacular at the same time,' Mr Coles goes on. 'I'm not forcing anyone to go. If you feel that it will be a little bit too much of a mystery tour, you may leave now. Also, if any of you start finding it all too much when we get started, we can always return to this point in time immediately.'

'I suppose we could return to yesterday if we wanted,' says Boris thoughtfully. 'Or we could go back to last year!'

'Time travel is a confusing concept for any of us even to begin to understand.' Mr Coles turns to him. 'But no matter. We have a device here that will enable us to go back to the creation of the earth.'

'I'm not sure if you're winding us up or not,' says John, 'but it sounds like it's going to be a fun trip, no matter what.'

'I think John's right,' adds Natasha. 'Let's get going.'

'Well,' sighs Mr Coles, 'I suppose the only way any of you are going to believe me is if we just get this show on the road. I should point out one thing, though. When we do travel back in time, this strange device on the dashboard will emit a beam all around the minibus. When we get to the places we'll be visiting, we must always stay within the beam. By doing this, we will prevent any quantum paradoxes from occurring.'

'What's one of those when it's at home?' asks Doyin.

Mr Coles looks at Doyin. 'To put it simply, we must not interfere with anything from the past. We must not breathe the air, pick up a blade of grass or step on an ant. If we were to do this, we might change everything. Imagine if you went back in time and somehow ended up killing your great-grandmother! You would cease to exist and you would change the whole course of history. And even making a tiny change—like stepping on an ant—could have a huge effect. But don't worry, the beam will keep us safe.' He smiles round at the group.

'Well, we could stand here all day discussing time travel and we'd be just as confused. I'd like you all to buckle up—that's if you're

sure you still want to go on the trip. Would anyone like to leave now?’

They all look around at each other. Will anyone leave? No one seems to want to lose face in front of their mates. No hands go up. They sit there in silence. Things have suddenly got a little tense on board the bus. Then Alan suddenly lets rip a loud burp. For a few moments their thoughts are taken away from the mystery that lies ahead and they giggle wildly, as kids do whenever someone burps in front of the teacher.

‘Sorry, sir,’ says Alan. ‘It must be nerves!’

‘Settle down now, folks,’ says Mr Coles. ‘We’re going to set off. I’ll be driving for about half an hour, first heading towards Essex on the A12. We need to find a quiet stretch of road before we can activate the time machine.’

‘I still think we’re off to some boring old church,’ moans Sarah.

‘We’ll see,’ Bronagh says to her, with a wink. ‘I think we need to keep a close eye on Mr Coles!’

After a slow trek through the east London traffic and up the A12, they reach a quiet little country road just outside Brentwood. Mr Coles stops the minibus and says, ‘Now’s the time. This device allows me to type in a sentence about a moment in history, and we will be transported straight there. I’ve typed in “The Creation of the World (Genesis)”. This is your last chance to say if you’d like to go back to school. It will be scary at first, but trust me: no one will be in any danger. You will find out once and for all exactly what it was like “in the beginning”. OK, sit back and enjoy the ride. We’re going back in time!’

It's the most mind-blowing school trip ever—back to the very beginning of the world! Thanks to an amazing device that Mr Coles has managed to get hold of, he and ten members of Class 9c are able to ride in their customized school minibus/time machine to watch the story of creation unfold. Bibles in hand, they see how events from the book of Genesis might actually have taken place.

It's not just an amazing spectacle, though, as they witness the devastation brought about by the Fall, the first murder, and the terror of the Flood. The time travellers wrestle with the implications of what they see, discussing insights drawn from their own different faith backgrounds. At the end of it all, even the most sceptical members of the class come to admit that they have seen the power of God at work.

Mike Coles is well established as an innovative and highly imaginative presenter of Bible stories to a wide and diverse audience. Drawing on many years of teaching experience, he has now written a total of six books for BRF, including *The Bible in Cockney*, *More Bible in Cockney*, *So You Think You're a New Testament Writer*, *God's Reality Show* and *Dear Bible, I Have a Problem*. He is Head of RE at Sir John Cass Church of England Secondary School, in East London.



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