

David Mitchell buries latest manuscript for a hundred years

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

Imagine you have a box into which you can put five small objects that will represent the early years of the twenty-first century. The box will be sealed and then buried to be opened in a hundred years' time. What five objects would you include and why?

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

manuscript
surrender

contender
seal

relief
doomed

compile
enduring

scribblings
polish

1. A _____ is someone who competes with other people for a prize.
2. _____ is a relaxed, happy feeling you get because something bad has not happened.
3. A _____ is a writer's original copy of a book, article or document before it is published.
4. If you _____ a document, you give it to someone in authority who does not give it back to you.
5. If someone or something is described as _____, they are certain to fail or to be destroyed.
6. If you _____ a piece of writing, you make changes to it to make it as good as it can possibly be.
7. If you _____ a list or an archive, you make it by bringing together information from many different places.
8. If you _____ a container, you close it so that air cannot get in or out.
9. _____ are words written down quickly and carelessly.
10. If something is described as _____, it lasts for a long time.

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. Where is the Nordmarka forest?
2. When will Oslo's new public library open?
3. When will David Mitchell's book be read?
4. How many books will be sealed and placed in the library?
5. How many pine trees have been planted as part of the project?
6. What is the nationality of the composer who wrote *From Me Flows What You Call Time*?

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Author of Cloud Atlas delivers his new work – which won't be read until 2114 – to Oslo's Nordmarka forest as part of the Future Library project

Alison Flood

30 May, 2016

- 1 David Mitchell, a regular contender for the Man Booker literary prize, is used to his novels being picked over by the critics. So, it's something of a relief, says the British author, that his latest work – completed at 1am one Tuesday morning before a car arrived to take him to the airport to catch a flight to Norway – won't be seen by anyone until 2114.
- 2 Mitchell is the second contributor to the Scottish artist Katie Paterson's Future Library project, for which 1,000 trees were planted in 2014 in Oslo's Nordmarka forest. Starting with Margaret Atwood, who handed over the manuscript of a text called *Scribbler Moon* in 2015, each year for the next 100 years, an author will deliver a piece of writing that will only be read in 2114, when the trees are chopped down to make paper on which the 100 texts will be printed.
- 3 Each author – their names revealed year by year and chosen by a panel of experts and Paterson, while she is alive – will make the trek to the spot in the forest high above Oslo, where they will surrender their manuscripts in a short ceremony.
- 4 "It's a little glimmer of hope in a season of highly depressing news cycles, which affirms we are in with a chance of civilization in a hundred years," said Mitchell. "Everything is telling us that we're doomed but the Future Library is a candidate on the ballot paper for possible futures. It brings hope that we are more resilient than we think: that we will be here, that there will be trees, that there will be books and readers, and civilization."
- 5 Mitchell said he found writing the book "quite liberating because I won't be around to take the consequences of this being good or bad ... But, I'm sandwiched between Margaret Atwood and no doubt some other brilliant writer. So, it better be good. What a historic fool of epochal proportions I'd look if they opened it in 2114 and it wasn't any good."
- 6 Usually, says Mitchell, who was shortlisted for the Man Booker for his novels *number9dream* and *Cloud Atlas*, he "polishes and polishes" his writing. "Actually, I over-polish. But, this was very different – I wrote up to the wire. So, the first two-thirds were polished and the final third I didn't have time. And, it was a liberation."
- 7 Future Library creator, Paterson, whose past works have involved her mapping dead stars and compiling a slide archive of the history of darkness through the ages, asked the writers to tackle "the theme of imagination and time, which they can take in so many directions". Mitchell revealed only the name of the manuscript, *From Me Flows What You Call Time*, during a ceremony in the Norwegian woods next to where Paterson's 1,000 trees are planted. The title is taken from a piece of music by Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu but, other than admitting that "it's somewhat more substantial a thing than I was expecting", the author would say nothing.
- 8 Handing over his text in the forest, sheltered from the intermittent rain by an umbrella and amid the foot-high shoots of 1,000 pine trees, Mitchell read his damp audience of children and adults a short story and William Wordsworth's *A slumber did my spirit seal*. Its ending, "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course / With rocks, and stones, and trees", felt appropriate in this small section of forest, carpeted with blueberry bushes, which will be carefully tended to for the next 98 years before it is turned into Future Library's manuscripts.
- 9 "How vain to suppose the scribbles of little old me will be of enduring interest to future generations. Yet, how low-key and understated, to slave over a manuscript that nobody will ever pat you on the back for and say: 'Nice one' or 'God, I loved the bit where she did that and he did this ...'" Mitchell wrote in a piece for the Future Library.
- 10 His manuscript, now delivered, will be sealed and placed alongside Atwood's in a wood-lined room in Oslo's new public library, which will open in 2019. Watched over by a trust of experts until it is finally printed, it is now, says the novelist, "as gone from me as a coin dropped in a river".

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4 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

1. Why is David Mitchell's new book different from his previous works?
 - a. because it deals with the theme of imagination and time
 - b. because he will never know what the critics thought of it
 - c. because it was written on paper made from pine trees
2. How did the writing process of his new book differ from his previous works?
 - a. He wrote it by hand instead of using a computer.
 - b. He only completed two-thirds of the final manuscript.
 - c. He wrote right up to the deadline and a third of the book was not as polished as usual.
3. Who is behind the Future Library project?
 - a. Margaret Atwood
 - b. David Mitchell
 - c. Katie Paterson
4. What does David Mitchell hope the Future Library project will symbolize?
 - a. the quality of twenty-first-century literature
 - b. the fact that there will be books, readers and civilization in 98 years' time
 - c. the liberating effect of being able to write without fear of negative criticism

5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *talk about something in detail* (para 1)
2. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *make a tree fall down by cutting through it* (para 2)
3. a four-word noun phrase meaning *a very small sign that something might improve* (para 4)
4. an adjective meaning *able to become healthy, happy or strong again after a problem* (para 4)
5. a four-word phrase meaning *until the last possible moment* (para 6)
6. an adjective meaning *happening sometimes but not regularly or often* (para 8)
7. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *take care of something or someone* (para 8)
8. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *work very hard on something* (para 9)

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6 Verb + noun collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------|
| 1. tackle | a. hope |
| 2. compile | b. a manuscript |
| 3. hand over | c. a theme |
| 4. pat | d. someone for a prize |
| 5. bring | e. an archive |
| 6. shortlist | f. someone on the back |

7 Word-building

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

- David Mitchell is the second _____ to the Future Library. [CONTRIBUTE]
- He thinks he would be a historic fool of _____ proportions if his book wasn't any good. [EPOCH]
- His book is more _____ than he was expecting. [SUBSTANCE]
- He describes the news at the moment as highly _____. [DEPRESS]
- He found writing the book quite _____. [LIBERATE]
- Katie Paterson is the _____ of the Future Library. [CREATE]

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- The world will not be here in a hundred years' time.
- In a hundred years' time, people will no longer read books, so this project has no purpose.
- Books are the most important element in any culture.

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KEY

2 Key words

1. contender
2. relief
3. manuscript
4. surrender
5. doomed
6. polish
7. compile
8. seal
9. scribbles
10. enduring

3 Find the information

1. Oslo, Norway
2. 2019
3. 2114
4. 100
5. 1,000
6. Japanese

4 Comprehension check

1. b
2. c
3. c
4. b

5 Find the word

1. pick over
2. chop down
3. a glimmer of hope
4. resilient
5. up to the wire
6. intermittent
7. tend to
8. slave over

6 Verb + noun collocations

1. c
2. e
3. b
4. f
5. a
6. d

7 Word-building

1. contributor
2. epochal
3. substantial
4. depressing
5. liberating
6. creator