

## Running Out of Time by Margaret Paterson Haddix

(Simon & Schuster, 1995)

The children of Clifton, Indiana are dying, and in 1840 there is no medicine to help them. But Jessie's mother reveals that it is really 1996 and asks Jesse to do something very dangerous – escape to the outside world to get help before the children run out of time.



### Discussion Questions

1. What kind of a community is Clifton? Describe how Jesse and her family live there?  
In the beginning of the book was there anything about Clifton that seemed odd to you?
2. Jesse's mother tells her that she selected Jesse to go outside for help because the adults couldn't fit into the modern clothes. Do you think there was another reason that she selected Jesse?  
How do you feel about the parents keeping the truth from their children?
3. Initially Jesse is rather excited by the idea of going out into 1996 and discovering a whole new world to explore. Do you think this is realistic? Why do you think she is excited?
4. When she escapes, Jesse who thinks she has been living in the 1830's is suddenly in the midst of 1996. How does the author describe 1996 through Jesse's eyes?  
What is Jesse's reaction to some of the "modern" conveniences she encounters?
5. Let's talk about Mr. Isaac Neely who is really Mr. Frank Lyle: At first he seems to be Jesse's friend, but he really isn't. Did you believe he was her friend at first, or were there things that made you think he might not be?
6. So we find out that Clifton village was just a cover up for a medical research project. At the end of the book, when he is in police custody Frank Lyle insists that his project at Clifton, in the long run, would save lives by strengthening the gene pool. He was doing this for good of humanity; he says "Can't you see that I wanted to save people, not kill them?" (p.176)  
Do you think that what he did wrong? Is he an evil person?
7. When she hears this Jesse wonders "Weren't Abby and Jefferson and all the other Clifton children...more important than whatever experiment he wanted to do?" What do you think? When does it become acceptable to trade lives "for the good of humanity?"  
Is it ever ok to sacrifice a few in order to save many?
8. Why do you think that social services kept the Clifton children from their parents after the whole situation was exposed? Do you think they were right to do so?  
Do you think the parents deserved to get their children back?  
Why does Jesse's father have to be cajoled (talked into) wearing modern clothes?
9. In the last paragraph of the book when they are back in Clifton and Jesse and her mother have that conversation at the rock. The last line says: "It was frightening, plunging through the empty air, but she believed she'd land safely." What do you think this last line means?

10. What do you think the author was trying to say in writing this book? Why do you think she chose to make it a scientific conspiracy?
11. Did you find the story believable? What about it made it seem as if it could be real?