

The Flux Capacitor Project

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The classroom hummed with the energy of a hundred tiny motors and the frantic whispers of students. Today was the big day for **The Retro-Futuristic Invention Fair**.

Ms. Davies tapped her pencil against a corkboard showcasing pictures of flying cars, self-lacing shoes, and dehydrated pizzas. "Ten minutes, everyone! Final adjustments."

Leo, a kid whose denim jacket and perpetually messy hair always made him look a little like he'd just stepped out of 1985, gave his project a nervous pat. It was a boxy, silver contraption with blinking red and green LEDs, a prominent digital display that read '88.0 MPH,' and a coil of wire tucked inside.

"How's the 'flux capacitor' prototype looking, Leo?" asked his partner, Maya, who was meticulously polishing a small 'OUTATIME' license plate sticker on the front.

"I think... I think it's ready," Leo whispered, his voice thick with anticipation. "I just hope I got the timing right. The whole *point* of the flux capacitor is that when this baby hits 88, you travel through time. So, I programmed the lights to hit max flash intensity right as the timer I set goes off."

Maya frowned. "Wait, you programmed the lights to go 'max flash intensity' at 88 seconds. You didn't, like, actually build a real working flux capacitor, did you?"

Leo just grinned. "Where's the fun in a fake one?"

Just then, Mr. Harrison, the school's perpetually bewildered history teacher, walked by, carrying a massive box of documents. He tripped over the extension cord running to Leo and Maya's project.

There was a shower of sparks, a deafening *CRACKLE*, and then the box's LEDs flashed with an intensity that rivaled a supernova.

When the light faded, Mr. Harrison was standing next to the table, completely unharmed, but his usual tweed jacket had been replaced by a bright yellow plastic raincoat, and his thinning hair was slicked back in a dramatic pompadour.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, looking around the room in confusion. "Where are my students? And why does this place smell of... instant coffee and grunge music? Wait a minute... is that a smartphone?" He held up his hand, which was now adorned with a heavy, gold ring. "Where's my pocket watch?"

Leo and Maya exchanged wide-eyed, terrified glances.

"Did you... did you just accidentally send Mr. Harrison to **1992**?" Maya stammered.

Leo frantically checked the digital readout. The '88.0 MPH' was now replaced with '0.0 SECONDS.'

"Uh, good news," Leo said, swallowing hard. "The project worked. Bad news... we now have a historical inaccuracy in the room. We need to get the flux capacitor back up to 88, like, *yesterday*!"



Writing Prompts

Here are a few prompts to get your students' pens moving, inspired by the spirit of *Back to the Future*:

1. The Ripple Effect

You travel back in time one week and realize you accidentally convinced a young Thomas Edison to invest in a chain of gourmet hot dog stands instead of inventing the lightbulb. You can't go back again. Write a story about the challenges you face when you return to your *present* where the world is now lit by flickering gas lamps and everyone wears a chef's hat.

2. My Future Self's Warning

You receive a frantic, heavily encrypted email from a version of yourself 30 years in the future. The subject line is simply: **DO NOT WEAR THE RED SHOES**. Write a story about the next 24 hours as you try to figure out what happens if you wear those red shoes—or even worse, what happens if you don't.

3. The Forgotten Artifact

A dusty, old **high school yearbook** from 1955 falls out of your grandmother's attic. As you flip through it, you notice two students who look *exactly* like your parents, but they are labeled with completely different names and have very different personalities. Write a story about how you investigate this strange discovery and try to reconcile your family history.