

Comparing Literature

All Summer in a Day

A Short Story by Ray Bradbury



The Fun They Had

A Short Story by Isaac Asimov

BEFORE READING

Build Background

Scientific Context Science fiction writers often imagine the possibilities of future technology, space travel, or exploration of other planets. Today, we know that Ray Bradbury's visions of settlements on Venus are not possible. However, Isaac Asimov's vision of computerized education comes closer to today's reality, in which students can take classes on the Internet.

Reader's Context Have you ever wanted to live in a different time or place? What time or place would you choose?

Set Purpose

The main characters in these two stories both experience a longing for a different time or place. As you read, predict what it is these characters wish for. Are they likely to ever find it?

Compare Literature: Setting

The **setting** of a literary work is the time and place in which it happens. Compare the details each author uses to reveal the setting of "All Summer in a Day" and "The Fun They Had." What do the settings have in common?

"All Summer in a Day"	"The Fun They Had"
Rains for seven thousand years	Mechanical teacher

Meet the Authors



Ray Bradbury (b. 1920) is the author of novels and stories that combine elements of poetry, mythology, fantasy, and technology. His best-known works include *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Martian Chronicles*. Many of his stories offer social criticism and warnings against the dangers of uncontrolled technological development.



Isaac Asimov (1920–1992) wrote more than four hundred books. He is best known as a science fiction writer, most notably for his *Foundation* series and *I, Robot*. Asimov's novels and stories have had a major influence on the works of other science fiction writers.

Preview Vocabulary

con•cus•sion (kən kə' shən) *n.*, strong shaking; collision

slack•en (slə' kən) *v.*, lessen; let up

ap•pa•ra•tus (ə' pə rə' təs) *n.*, machine; instrument

tu•mul•tu•ous•ly (tū mʌl' chə wəs lē) *adv.*, in a wild and disorderly manner

re•sil•ient (ri zil' yənt) *adj.*, flexible and springy



The Book, 1913. Juan Gris. Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France.

The Fun They Had

A Short Story by Isaac Asimov

Margie even wrote about it that night in her diary. On the page headed May 17, 2157, she wrote, “Today Tommy found a real book!”

It was a very old book. Margie’s grandfather once said that when he was a little boy, his grandfather told him that there was a time when all stories were printed on paper.

They turned the pages, which were yellow and crinkly, and it was awfully funny to read words that stood still instead of moving the way they were supposed to—on a screen, you know. And then, when they turned back to the page before, it had the same words on it that it had when they read it the first time.

“Gee,” said Tommy, “what a waste. When you’re through with the book, you just throw it away, I guess. Our television screen must have had a million books on it and it’s good for plenty more. I wouldn’t throw it away.”

“Same with mine,” said Margie. She was eleven and hadn’t seen as many telebooks¹ as Tommy had. He was thirteen.

She said, “Where did you find it?”

“In my house.” He pointed without looking, because he was busy reading. “In the attic.”

“What’s it about?”

“School.”

Margie was scornful.² “School? What’s there to write about school? I hate school.” Margie always hated school, but now she hated it more than ever. The mechanical teacher had been giving her test after test in geography, and she had been doing worse

1. telebooks. Books displayed on a television screen

2. scornful. Having an attitude of dislike or disgust



and worse until her mother had shaken her head sorrowfully and sent for the county inspector.

He was a round little man with a red face and a whole box of tools with dials and wires. He smiled at her and gave her an apple, then took the teacher apart. Margie had hoped he wouldn't know how to put it together again, but he knew how all right, and after an hour or so, there it was again, large and ugly, with a big screen on which all the lessons were shown and the questions were asked. That wasn't so bad. The part she hated most was the slot where she had to put homework and test papers. She always had to write them out in a punch code they made her learn when she was six years old, and the mechanical teacher calculated the mark in no time.

The inspector had smiled after he was finished and patted her head. He said to her mother, "It's not the little girl's fault, Mrs. Jones. I think the geography sector³ was geared a little too quick. Those things happen sometimes. I've slowed it up to an average ten-year level. Actually, the overall pattern of her progress is quite satisfactory." And he patted Margie's head again.

Margie was disappointed. She had been hoping they would take the teacher away altogether. They had once taken Tommy's teacher away for nearly a month because the history sector had blanked out completely.

So she said to Tommy, "Why would anyone write about school?"

Tommy looked at her with very superior eyes, "Because it's not our kind of school, stupid. This is the old kind of school that they had hundreds and hundreds of years ago." He added loftily,⁴ pronouncing the word carefully, "Centuries ago."

Margie was hurt. "Well, I don't know what kind of school they had all that time ago." She read the book over his shoulder for

a while, then said, "Anyway, they had a teacher."

"Sure they had a teacher, but it wasn't a regular teacher. It was a man."

"A man? How could a man be a teacher?"

"Well, he just told the boys and girls things and gave them homework and asked them questions."

"A man isn't smart enough."

"Sure he is. My father knows as much as my teacher."

"He can't. A man can't know as much as a teacher."

"He knows almost as much I betcha."

Margie wasn't prepared to dispute⁵ that. She said, "I wouldn't want a strange man in my house to teach me."

The mechanical teacher had been giving her test after test in geography, and she had been doing worse and worse...

Tommy screamed with laughter. "You don't know much, Margie. The teachers didn't live in the house. They had a special building and all the kids went there."

"And all the kids learned the same thing?"

"Sure, if they were all the same age."

"But my mother says a teacher has to be adjusted to fit the mind of each boy and girl it teaches and that each kid has to be taught differently."

3. sector. Area or division

4. loftily. In a proud or superior tone of voice

5. dispute. Disagree with

“Just the same, they didn’t do it that way then. If you don’t like it, you don’t have to read the book.”

“I didn’t say I didn’t like it,” Margie said quickly. She wanted to read about those funny schools.

They weren’t even half finished when Margie’s mother called, “Margie! School!”

Margie looked up. “Not yet, Mamma.”

“Now,” said Mrs. Jones. “And it’s probably time for Tommy, too.”

Margie said to Tommy, “Can I read the book some more with you after school?”

“Maybe,” he said, nonchalantly.⁶ He walked away whistling, the dusty old book tucked beneath his arm.

Margie went into the schoolroom. It was right next to her bedroom, and the mechanical teacher was on and waiting for her. It was always on at the same time every day except Saturday and Sunday, because her mother said little girls learned better if they learned at regular hours.

The screen was lit up, and it said: “Today’s arithmetic lesson is on the addition of proper fractions. Please insert yesterday’s homework in the proper slot.”

Margie did so with a sigh. She was thinking about the old schools they had



And the teachers were people....

when her grandfather’s grandfather was a little boy. All the kids from the whole neighborhood came, laughing and shouting in the schoolyard, sitting together in the schoolroom, going home together at the end of the day. They learned the same things so they could help one another on the homework and talk about it.

And the teachers were people....

The mechanical teacher was flashing on the screen: “When we add the fractions $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ —”

Margie was thinking about how the kids must have loved it in the old days. She was thinking about the fun they had. ♣

6. nonchalantly. In a relaxed or unconcerned manner



How do you feel about a system of education where students learn only by computer? What do you think the advantages and disadvantages of such a system would be for middle school students?

Comparing Literature

AFTER READING

Find Meaning

1. (a) At the beginning of "The Fun They Had," what does Margie write in her diary? (b) Why does she choose to write this?
2. How is the book Tommy found different from the books that Margie is used to?
3. (a) What is the book about? (b) How is the school described in the book different from the kind of school Margie is used to?

Compare Literature

Setting The setting of a work of fiction is often revealed through descriptions of landscape, scenery, buildings, clothing, the weather, and the season. Setting can also be revealed through dialogue, or conversation involving two or more characters. Use your comparison chart to answer the following questions.

Make Judgments

4. (a) What does the county inspector do to Margie's teacher? (b) How is her "mechanical teacher" similar to a desktop computer of today?
5. (a) What does Margie hate the most about her teacher? (b) What does Margie like about the school described in the book?

1. Using the details you recorded, compare and contrast the settings of these stories.
2. How does each author reveal the setting using literary elements such as figures of speech, sensory details, and dialogue?
3. How do the details the authors use to reveal the setting in these stories affect the mood or atmosphere?

Extend Understanding

Writing Options

Creative Writing Pretend that you belong to an online fiction writing club and you are writing a short sequel to "All Summer in a Day" to share with club members. Write a **story scene** that is a continuation of "All Summer in a Day." In your scene, describe what happens when Margot is released from the closet.

Expository Writing Write a brief **comparison-and-contrast essay** examining the similarities and differences between the settings, points of view, and themes of "All Summer in a Day" and "The Fun They Had." You may organize your essay either by examining all three elements first in one work and then in the other or by discussing each literary element in turn. Share your work with the class.

Collaborative Learning

Create a Time Capsule The characters in "The Fun They Had" are curious about what school is like for kids today. In small groups, write descriptions that present accurate pictures of a day in the life of your classroom for a time capsule designed to be opened in 150 years. Ask group members to suggest materials for the time capsule, such as books, homework assignments, or photos of your teacher and classmates.

Critical Literacy

Hold a Panel Discussion Form small groups to research experts' predictions for the future. Select one student from each group to be a panelist for a panel discussion about the future. Select two panelists to be Bradbury and Asimov and to present their views on the future. The panel can field questions and suggestions from the rest of the class.



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