Comparing Texts

There Will Come Soft Rains
Short Story by Ray Bradbury

Inside the Home of the Future
Newspaper Article by Kelly Greene

The Car of the Future
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Is TECHNOLOGY taking over?

Which technological innovations have improved the quality of everyday life? Which ones have had a negative impact? In “There Will Come Soft Rains,” you will read about the far-reaching consequences of technology on one particular home.

What’s the Connection?

The following short story depicts a futuristic society in which human misuse of technology has had cataclysmic results. After reading “There Will Come Soft Rains,” you will read an expository text and view a visual that share a more positive view of technological innovation.
Ray Bradbury
born 1920

Prophet of the Future
Ray Bradbury is one of America’s best-known science fiction and fantasy writers. His most chilling stories comment on the human consequences of progress. “Science ran too far ahead of us too quickly,” Bradbury once remarked, “and the people got lost in a mechanical wilderness.” Sadly, Bradbury has lived to see some of his frightening concerns become fact.

A Magical Childhood
Bradbury’s interest in science fiction and fantasy emerged when he was growing up in Waukegan, Illinois. He devoured the popular culture of his day, including movies, radio shows, comics, and science fiction magazines. He was also a fan of the local library, where he enjoyed books by such early science fiction writers as H. G. Wells and Jules Verne. While various writers have influenced his style, his themes are drawn primarily from his own childhood.

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

Technology: No Guarantee
Before 1900, electric machines were used primarily in workplaces. With the spread of electricity, however, families enjoyed modern appliances in their homes. In the early 20th century, many household machines, such as the vacuum cleaner and the toaster, became available for the first time.

Science fiction writers of this period often created works featuring utopias—or ideal worlds—in which machines freed people of difficult tasks. In “There Will Come Soft Rains,” Bradbury challenges this idea by presenting a society harmed by modern technology.

Important Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important Details</th>
<th>My Thoughts</th>
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<tr>
<td>It’s morning and the house is empty.</td>
<td>The people are gone. The house still acts as though they’re there.</td>
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Review: Compare and Contrast

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Substitute a different word or phrase for each boldfaced vocabulary word. Write a brief definition of each boldfaced word in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

1. The silhouette of the great oak is visible for miles.
2. Your increasing paranoia is making you a nervous wreck.
3. To manipulate a puppet properly requires practice.
4. The sight of the rattlesnake made Don tremulous.
5. She is oblivious to the mess all around her.
6. This is a sublime piece of cheesecake!

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
In the living room the voice-clock sang,
Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up,
time to get up, seven o'clock!
as if it were afraid that nobody would. The morning
house lay empty. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into
the emptiness.

Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!

In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its
warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunnyside up,
sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

"Today is August 4, 2026," said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling, "in
the city of Allendale, California." It repeated the date three times for memory's
sake. "Today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita's
marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills.

Somewhere in the walls, relays1 clicked, memory tapes glided under
electric eyes.

Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-
one!

But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels. It
was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: "Rain,
rain, go away; rubbers, raincoats for today . . ." And the rain tapped on the
empty house, echoing.

Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the waiting car.

At eight-thirty the eggs were shriveled and the toast was like stone. An
aluminum wedge scraped them into the sink, where hot water whirled them
down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea.
The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry.

1. relays: devices that automatically turn switches in electric circuits on and off.
Nine-fifteen, sang the clock, time to clean. Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The rooms were acrawl with the small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling their mustached runners, kneading the rug nap, sucking gently at hidden dust. Then, like mysterious invaders, they popped into their burrows. Their pink electric eyes faded. The house was clean.

Ten o'clock. The sun came out from behind the rain. The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles.

Ten-fifteen. The garden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted windowpanes, running down the charred west side where the house had been burned evenly free of its white paint. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.

The five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer.

The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden with falling light. Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, “Who goes there? What’s the password?” and, getting no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats, it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical paranoia.

It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird, startled, flew off! No, not even a bird must touch the house!

The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs. But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly.

Twelve noon. A dog whined, shivering, on the front porch. The front door recognized the dog voice and opened. The dog, once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered with sores, moved in and through the house, tracking mud. Behind it whirred angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience.

For not a leaf fragment blew under the door but what the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper, seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows. There, down tubes which fed into the cellar, it was dropped into the sighing vent of an incinerator which sat like evil Baal in a dark corner.

Baal (bā’ēl): an idol worshiped by certain ancient peoples of the Middle East.

silhouette (sī’ōō-ē’t’) n. an outline that appears dark against a light background

paranoia (pär’ə-noi’ə) n. an irrational fear of danger or misfortune
The dog ran upstairs, hysterically yelping to each door, at last realizing, as the house realized, that only silence was here.

It sniffed the air and scratched the kitchen door. Behind the door, the stove was making pancakes which filled the house with a rich baked odor and the scent of maple syrup.

The dog frothed at the mouth, lying at the door, sniffing, its eyes turned to fire. It ran wildly in circles, biting at its tail, spun in a frenzy, and died. It lay in the parlor for an hour.

Two o'clock, sang a voice.

Delicately sensing decay at last, the regiments of mice hummed out as softly as blown gray leaves in an electrical wind.

Two-fifteen. The dog was gone.

In the cellar, the incinerator glowed suddenly and a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney.


COMPARE AND CONTRAST
Compare the actions of the dog with those of the house. What does the dog's death suggest about the house?
But the tables were silent and the cards untouched. At four o'clock the tables folded like great butterflies back through the paneled walls. Four-thirty. The nursery walls glowed. Animals took shape: yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers cavorting in crystal substance. The walls were glass. They looked out upon color and fantasy. Hidden films clocked through well-oiled sprockets, and the walls lived. The nursery floor was woven to resemble a crisp, cereal meadow. Over this ran aluminum roaches and iron crickets, and in the hot still air butterflies of delicate red tissue wavered among the sharp aroma of animal spoors! There was the sound like a great matted yellow hive of bees within a dark bellows, the lazy bumble of a purring lion. And there was the patter of okapi feet and the murmur of a fresh jungle rain, like other hoofs, falling upon the summer-starched grass. Now the walls dissolved into distances of parched weed, mile on mile, and warm endless sky. The animals drew away into thorn brakes and water holes. It was the children’s hour. Five o'clock. The bath filled with clear hot water. Six, seven, eight o'clock. The dinner dishes manipulated like magic tricks, and in the study a click. In the metal stand opposite the hearth where a fire now blazed up warmly, a cigar popped out, half an inch of soft gray ash on it, smoking, waiting. Nine o'clock. The beds warmed their hidden circuits, for nights were cool here. Nine-five. A voice spoke from the study ceiling: "Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?" The house was silent. The voice said at last, "Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random." Quiet music rose to back the voice. "Sara Teasdale. As I recall, your favorite..."

“There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground, and swallows circling with their shimmering sound; and frogs in the pools singing at night, and wild plum trees in tremulous white; robins will wear their feathery fire, whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;"


**DRAW CONCLUSIONS**
What do the nursery’s furnishings tell you about the family and their relationship to the natural world?

**manipulate** (mə-nĭp’ə-lăt’) v. to move, operate, or handle

**tremulous** (trēm’ə-ləs) adj. trembling, unsteady
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DRAW CONCLUSIONS
What do you think is the theme, or main message, of the poem?

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER
How has the marking of time changed in the story? Explain.

COMMON CORE L5b

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE
Personification is the giving of human qualities to an inanimate object. Reread line 141. How does the personification of the house in this line reflect the rise of artificial intelligence technologies?
But too late. Somewhere, sighing, a pump shrugged to a stop. The quenching rain ceased. The reserve water supply which had filled baths and washed dishes for many quiet days was gone.

The fire crackled up the stairs. It fed upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings.

Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, changed the colors of drapes!

And then, reinforcements.

From attic trapdoors, blind robot faces peered down with faucet mouths gushing green chemical.

The fire backed off, as even an elephant must at the sight of a dead snake. Now there were twenty snakes whipping over the floor, killing the fire with a clear cold venom of green froth.

But the fire was clever. It had sent flame outside the house, up through the attic to the pumps there. An explosion! The attic brain which directed the pumps was shattered into bronze shrapnel on the beams.

The fire rushed back into every closet and felt of the clothes hung there. The house shuddered, oak bone on bone, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat, its wire, its nerves revealed as if a surgeon had torn the skin off to let the red veins and capillaries quiver in the scalded air. Help, help! Fire! Run, run!

Heat snapped mirrors like the first brittle winter ice. And the voices wailed Fire.

4. Picassos and Matisses: paintings by the famous 20th-century artists Pablo Picasso (pi-kä’so) and Henri Matisse (ma-tës’).

**Language Coach**

**Word Meanings**

The suffix -s usually means “more than one,” but sometimes it gives a new meaning to the base word from which it derives, or comes. In line 154, reinforcements refers to additional troops. How does that meaning apply in the story? What does the singular form, reinforcement, mean?

**Analyze Visuals**

Review all of the illustrations in the story. Together, how effective are they at conveying the story’s chronological order of events? Explain.
Comparing Texts

fire, run, run, like a tragic nursery rhyme, a dozen voices, high, low, like children dying in a forest, alone, alone. And the voices fading as the wires popped their sheathings like hot chestnuts. One, two, three, four, five voices died.

In the nursery the jungle burned. Blue lions roared, purple giraffes bounded off. The panthers ran in circles, changing color, and ten million animals, running before the fire, vanished off toward a distant steaming river. . . .

Ten more voices died. In the last instant under the fire avalanche, other choruses, oblivious, could be heard announcing the time, playing music, cutting the lawn by remote-control mower, or setting an umbrella frantically out and in the slamming and opening front door, a thousand things happening, like a clock shop when each clock strikes the hour insanely before or after the other, a scene of maniac confusion, yet unity; singing, screaming, a few last cleaning mice darting bravely out to carry the horrid ashes away! And one voice, with sublime disregard for the situation, read poetry aloud in the fiery study, until all the film spools burned, until all the wires withered and the circuits cracked.

The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down, puffing out skirts of spark and smoke.

In the kitchen, an instant before the rain of fire and timber, the stove could be seen making breakfasts at a psychopathic rate, ten dozen eggs, six loaves of toast, twenty dozen bacon strips, which, eaten by fire, started the stove working again, hysterically hissing!

The crash. The attic smashing into kitchen and parlor. The parlor into cellar, cellar into sub-cellar. Deep freeze, armchair, film tapes, circuits, beds, and all like skeletons thrown in a cluttered mound deep under.

Smoke and silence. A great quantity of smoke.

Dawn showed faintly in the east. Among the ruins, one wall stood alone.

Within the wall, a last voice said, over and over again and again, even as the sun rose to shine upon the heaped rubble and steam:

"Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is . . ."

DRAW CONCLUSIONS

What idea about technology does Bradbury convey in the burning of the house?

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oblivious (ə-blīˈvē-əs) adj. paying no attention, completely unaware

sublime (sə-blīm′) adj. supreme, splendid
Comprehension

1. **Recall** When and where does the story take place?

2. **Recall** List three functions the house performs.

3. **Summarize** Describe the changes the house undergoes during the story.

Text Analysis

4. **Draw Conclusions** Review the chart you filled in as you read. What has happened to the McClellan family and the town? Use details to support your conclusion.

5. **Interpret Theme** What do you think is the theme, or main message, of the story? Cite evidence from the story to support your answer.

6. **Examine Point of View** In the third-person point of view, a narrator outside the action describes events and characters. How does the third-person narrator of “There Will Come Soft Rains” maintain the reader’s interest in a story where there are no human characters? Explain.

7. **Analyze Chronological Order** Consider how the story would have been different if it had included numerous flashbacks, or scenes that recall earlier experiences. Why might Bradbury have chosen to follow chronological order? Cite evidence from the story to support your opinion.

8. **Compare Literary Works** Review Stephen Vincent Benét’s “By the Waters of Babylon,” pages 310–321. Use a chart to compare the characters, events, and setting of the Benét story with those in Bradbury’s “There Will Come Soft Rains.” Which author presents the most disturbing view of society and its technology?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>“By the Waters of Babylon”</th>
<th>“There Will Come Soft Rains”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
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Text Criticism

9. **Author’s Style** Many critics admire Bradbury for his use of imagery, or words and phrases that appeal to the five senses. Find three examples of imagery in “There Will Come Soft Rains,” and discuss how they contribute to your experience of the story.

**Is TECHNOLOGY taking over?**

Are people becoming too dependent on technology?
Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

1. Leon has overcome his ________ and now enjoys friendships and social activities.
2. The cellist knows how to skillfully ________ his instrument to make beautiful music.
3. In her old age, my great aunt walks in a ________ manner.
4. Jenna enjoys all kinds of winter activities and is ________ to the cold.
5. Critics agree that the artist’s recent painting is her most ________ work yet.
6. The young girl left a chalky ________ of her hand on the sidewalk.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• consequent • crucial • initial • shift • survive

Imagine a future time when technology fails and causes widespread trouble. Write a paragraph describing the initial crisis and the consequent problems. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE LATIN ROOT man

The vocabulary word manipulate stems from the Latin root man, which means “hand.” To understand the meaning of words with man, use context clues as well as your knowledge of the root.

PRACTICE Write the word from the word web that best completes each sentence. Use context clues to help you, or, if necessary, consult a dictionary.

1. They ________ these clothes in another country.
2. Before typewriters and printers, a book ________ was written only by hand.
3. I am not sure how to ________ this complicated-looking tool.