

Literature

Textbook (BEEHIVE)

Prose

The Fun They Had

Introduction

This story is written by Isaac Asimov. It takes us to the future when computers will play a major role. Books and schools as we now know them now, will perhaps not exist then. The children will perhaps be taught by computers and robots in a virtual classroom.

Summary

The story begins with a diary entry dated 17 May, 2157 by Margie, an eleven-year-old girl. She wrote, 'Today Tommy found a real book!'

Tommy was a thirteen year old boy who has found an old book in his attic. When they turned the yellow and crinkly pages of the book, they were surprised to read words which were static instead of moving words which they were habitual of seeing on the screens of their computers.

The book was about a school. Margie is skeptical, as according to her nothing can be written about schools. For her school was the room next to her bedroom where a robotic teacher taught her. She hated going in that room. Recently, her mechanical teacher had been giving her test after test in geography and she had been doing worse and worse. The reason was that it was geared a little too high for an eleven year old. This made her hate the school more than ever. The County Inspector was sent for. He came and set the teacher at an average ten-year level.

But, Tommy tells her that this was the school that they had centuries ago, where children went and were taught through written books by humans.

As they were having this discussion, Margie's mother called, "Margie! School!" Tommy went home with the book and Margie went into the school room. The mechanical teacher was on and waiting for her.

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. However, she was thinking about the old schools. All the kids from the whole neighbourhood came, laughing and shouting in the schoolyard, sitting together in the schoolroom and going home together at the end of the day. They learned the same things, so they could help one another with the homework.

And the teachers were humans.

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

Message

The author wants to convey the message that human interaction has its own importance and technology cannot replace old world charm.

Extract Based Questions ↘

1. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

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 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."

(a) It was awfully funny to read words that:

- (i) were printed in books
- (ii) stood still
- (iii) moved one by one on a screen
- (iv) were stored in a television screen

(b) The pages in the old book were

(c) State whether the given statement is True or False. Margie found a real book.

(d) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract. funny : comical :: wrinkled :

Answers

- (a) (ii) stood still
- (b) yellow and crinkly
- (c) False
- (d) crinkly

2. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

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

- (a) 'The mechanical teacher' here refers to:
 - (i) a machine
 - (ii) a mobile
 - (iii) a school teacher
 - (iv) a person
- (b) Margie was performing badly in the test of
- (c) State whether the given statement is True or False. The country Inspector was a rude person.
- (d) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract. sorrowfully : joyfully :: better :

Answers

- (a) (i) a machine
- (b) Geography
- (c) False
- (d) worse

3. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

The Inspector had smiled after he was finished and patted Margie's head. He said to her mother, "It's not the little girl's fault, Mrs Jones. I think the geography sector 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.

- (a) State whether the given statement is True or False. The Inspector accelerated the machine up to an average ten-year level.
- (b) 'Those things happen sometimes' refer to
- (c) Tommy's mechanical teacher was taken away for repair for almost one month because:
 - (i) it wasn't working properly
 - (ii) the history portion had been wiped out
 - (iii) the mechanical teacher didn't have any memory
 - (iv) Tommy wanted to enjoy his time
- (d) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract. blanked : emptied :: disheartened :

Answers

- (a) False
- (b) malfunctioning of machines
- (c) (ii) the history portion had been wiped out
- (d) disappointed

4. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

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, 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."

- (a) Margie was silly because she did not know about:
 - (i) the kind of school many years ago
 - (ii) what was taught in the schools
 - (iii) the mechanical teacher
 - (iv) the benefits of mechanical teacher
- (b) Margie was curious and imagined a group of children being taught by a
- (c) State whether the given statement is True or False. Margie was hurt because of Tommy's attitude.
- (d) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract. stupid : dumb :: arrogantly :

Answers

- (a) (i) the kind of school many years ago.
- (b) human teacher
- (c) True
- (d) loftily

5. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

"I wouldn't want a strange man in my house to teach me." 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 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."

- (a) A special building that Tommy said about to Margie is:
 - (i) a school
 - (ii) a hotel
 - (iii) a library
 - (iv) a special room
- (b) State whether the given statement is True or False. A strange man here refers to a human teacher.
- (c) Give a word that can correctly substitute 'screamed' in the extract.
- (d) According to Margie's mother, each child had to be taught differently depending on



Answers

- (a) (i) a school
- (b) True
- (c) shrieked
- (d) their level

6. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

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 when her grandfather's grandfather was a little boy. All the kids from the whole neighbourhood 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 with the homework and talk about it.

(a) State whether the given statement is True or False.

Margie was thinking about her Father's school.

(b) Margie followed the instructions

(c) In this extract, the writer wants us to realise the importance of in our life.

- (i) machines
- (ii) schools
- (iii) computers
- (iv) grandparents

(d) Complete the analogy with a word from the extract.

proper : correct :: similar :

Answers

- (a) False
- (b) with a sigh.
- (c) (ii) schools
- (d) same



Short Answer Type Questions

Q 1. What was the condition of the book that Tommy had found? What did children find funny about it?

Ans. The condition of the book was pretty bad. It was a very old book. Its pages were yellow and crinkly. According to the children, it was funny that the words in the book stood still. They did not move as they did on computer screen.

Q 2. What do you think a telebook is?

Ans. A telebook is one that moves on the screen of the television or computer.

Q 3. How old are Margie and Tommy?

Ans. Margie is eleven and Tommy is thirteen years old.

Q 4. What kind of teachers did Margie and Tommy have?

Ans. Margie and Tommy had mechanical teachers. They lived in the age of computers. Computers had replaced human teachers.

Q 5. Why was Margie not doing well in geography?

Ans. Margie was not doing well in geography because the geography sector in Margie's mechanical teacher was geared up a little too high.

Q 6. Why did Margie hate school?

Ans. The mechanical teacher of Margie was giving her test after test in geography and her performance was getting worse and worse. This made her hate school.

Q 7. What did the County Inspector do to help Margie?

Ans. The County Inspector slowed the mechanical teacher of Margie up to an average ten-year level.

Q 8. Why was Margie disappointed?

Ans. Margie was disappointed because she had hoped that County Inspector would not be able to reassemble her mechanical teacher and she would not be required to study. But when the Inspector successfully assembled it in about an hour, she was disappointed.

Q 9. What had once happened to Tommy's teacher?

Ans. Once the history sector of Tommy's teacher had blanked out completely. It was taken away for nearly a month to be repaired.

Q 10. What subjects did Margie and Tommy learn?

Ans. Margie and Tommy learned geography, history, arithmetic, etc.

Q 11. Explain how Margie and Tommy were assessed in their subjects.

Ans. Margie and Tommy were given tests. They used to write their answers in a punch code and they would insert their special answer sheets in the slot made in the mechanical teacher. Then, their marks were calculated and conveyed to them. This helped to assess their performance.

Q 12. Where was Margie's school?

Ans. Margie's school was the room next to her bedroom.

Q 13. Did Margie have regular days and hours for school? If so, why?

Ans. Yes, Margie had regular days and hours for school. It was because her mother thought that little girls learned better if they studied at regular hours.

Q 14. How does Tommy describe the old kind of school?

Ans. Tommy says that the old kind of school was a special building where kids went to study. The kids from the whole neighbourhood came to school to study.



Long Answer Type Questions

Q 1. What are the main features of the mechanical teachers and the school rooms that Margie and Tommy have in the story?

Ans. The mechanical teachers are the computers with screen. They are set according to the mental level of each student. The mechanical teacher taught almost all the subjects like history, geography, arithmetic, etc. The lessons were typed on screen. They also gave homework and tests to assess the progress made by students.

The school rooms had computers fixed in them. They were right next to the bedrooms of the kids. They had chairs for the kids to sit on.



Q 2. Why did Margie hate school? Why did she think that the old kind of school must have been fun?

Ans. Margie is an eleven-year-old girl. Her school is right next to her bedroom. She sits alone before the mechanical teacher in her school for fixed hours. She hates the school. Geography sector adds to her hatred. It has been set too high and she has not been able to cope with it. So, she hates school very much. When she hears the description of the schools of older times from Tommy, she becomes more aware to her school. She envies the life of the kids of those schools. She thought it would had been fun to study with children of same age in a separate building. She also thought that then learning would have been easy.

Q 3. Do you agree with Margie that schools today are more fun than the school in the story? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans. Yes, we agree with Margie that schools today are more fun than the future schools in the story. Today schools are separately housed. Kids from the whole neighbourhood come there to study. Their teachers teach them class-wise. In a class, the kids are of the same age. They learn the same thing. Teachers assign them homework and ask questions. The kids and their teacher interact with one another. The kids laugh and shout. They sit together and at the end of the day they go home together. They don't feel alone and do not get bored. The school in the story is a room in the house of a kid. Mechanical teachers are fixed there. The kids have to sit before them alone at the fixed hours. Kids cannot interact with the teacher. They feel bored and alone.

