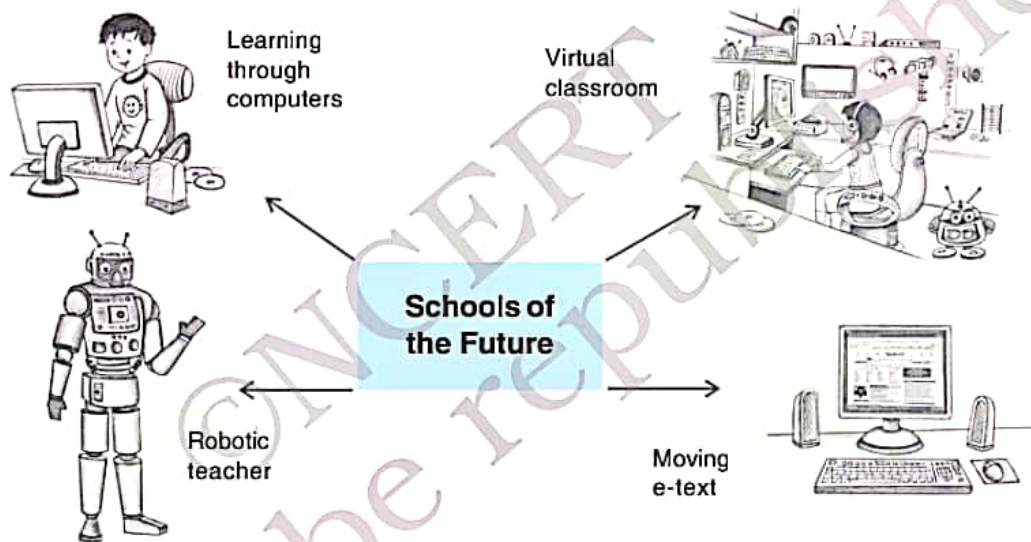


❁❁❁ 1. The Fun They Had

BEFORE YOU READ

- *The story we shall read is set in the future, when books and schools as we now know them will perhaps not exist. How will children study then? The diagram below may give you some ideas.*



- *In pairs, discuss three things that you like best about your school and three things about your school that you would like to change. Write them down.*
- *Have you ever read words on a television (or computer) screen? Can you imagine a time when all books will be on computers, and there will be no books printed on paper? Would you like such books better?*

1. MARGIE even wrote about it that night in her diary. On the page headed 17 May 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 had when they read it the first time.

crinkly: with many folds or lines

2. “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 telebooks 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.”

attic: a space just below the roof, used as a storeroom

3. Margie was scornful. “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 and worse until her mother had shaken her head sorrowfully and sent for the County Inspector.

scornful: contemptuous; showing you think something is worthless

4. 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, large and black 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 Margie 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 marks in no time.

slot: a given space, time or position

5. 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.

geared (to): adjusted to a particular standard or level

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?"

6. 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."

loftily: in a superior way

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."



They had a teacher... It was a man.

“Sure they had a teacher, but it wasn’t a regular teacher. It was a man.”

regular: here, normal; of the usual kind

“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.”

7. “A man isn’t smart enough.”

“Sure he is. My father knows as much as my teacher.”

“He knows almost as much, I betcha.”

betcha (informal): (I) bet you (in fast speech): I’m sure

Margie wasn’t prepared to dispute that. She said, “I wouldn’t want a strange man in my house to teach me.”

dispute: disagree with

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.”

8. “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.”

“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.”

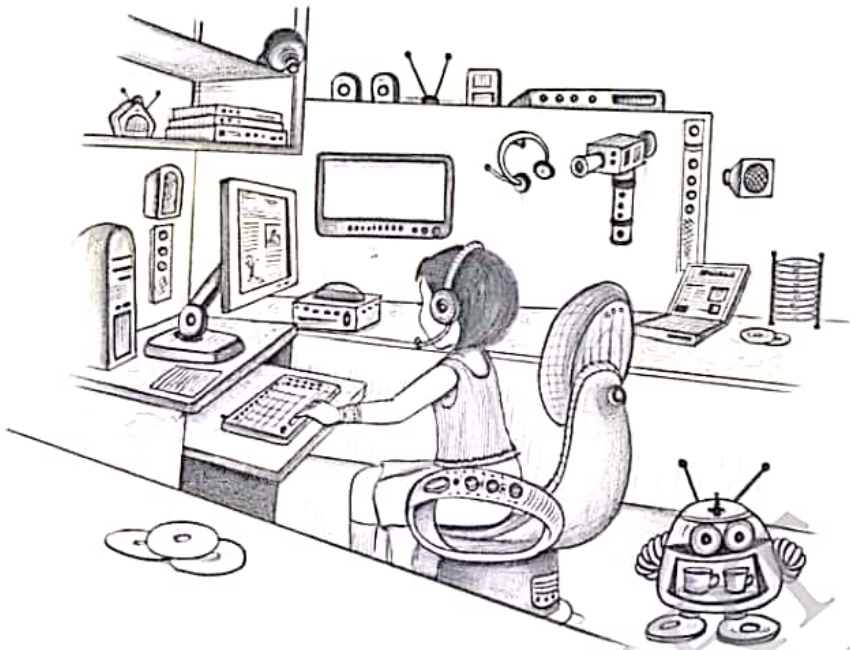
“Now!” said Mrs Jones. “And it’s probably time for Tommy, too.”

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

9. “May be,” he said nonchalantly. He walked away whistling, the dusty old book tucked beneath his arm.

nonchalantly: not showing much interest or enthusiasm; carelessly

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,



The mechanical teacher was flashing on the screen...

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."

10. 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 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 with the homework and talk about it.

And the teachers were people...

The mechanical teacher was flashing on the screen: "When we add fractions $\frac{1}{2}$ and ..."

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

ISAAC ASIMOV

The Fun They Had / 9

UNACCO SCHOOL
EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION
CLASS - IX
SUBJECT - ENGLISH

STUDY MATERIAL: BEEHIVE

CHAPTER : 1 - THE FUN THEY HAD

The present story is set in the future when children don't have traditional books and schools. The entry reveals the date, 21st May 2157, showing that the story is set much into the future.

I. Short answer questions (about 30 words).

(i). What kind of teachers did Margie and Tommy have?
Ans:- Margie and Tommy had mechanical teachers in the form of a computer. The teacher had a big black screen on which all the lessons were flashed and the questions were asked. The 'teacher' also had a slot where students had to put their homework and test papers. Saturday and Sunday were the days when the teacher didn't appear.

(ii) How does Tommy describe the old kind of teachers?
Ans:- Tommy said that the old kind of teacher was a 'man' who taught in a special building where all the kids went together. The man told the kids things, gave them homework and asked them questions. The man took frequent tests to find out how much the students have understood.

(iii) Why was Margie doing badly in geography? What did the County Inspector do to help her?

Ans:- The geography sector was geared up and it was required that the geography sector of the mechanical teacher was somehow to be adjusted to a level so that Margie could perform better. The County Inspector slowed it up to an average ten-year level to help her.

II) Long answer questions (100-150 words) :

(i) Why did Margie hate school? Why did she think the old kind of school must have been fun?

Ans:- The school of Margie was right next to her bedroom. It wasn't fun at all. She had no classmates and her teacher was mechanical. Lately, she had started to hate her school more, as her mechanical teacher had been giving her test after test in geography and she had been doing it badly. She hated it so much that she hoped that the County Inspector wouldn't be able to put her teacher back together.

She thought that the old schools must have been fun because all the kids from the whole neighbourhood came laughing and shouting in the school yard, 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 talk about it. Moreover, the teachers were humans.

A human teacher must have the sentiments and consideration for the students. He would be able to guide them as per their inclination and the choice which the mechanical teacher lacks. Hence, she had the thought that the old kind of schools must have been fun.