

# *There Will Come Soft Rains*

A short story by Ray Bradbury, 1950



## **A/ Role of opening lines**

1. In pairs, rank these statements in order of importance.  
What should the opening of a story do?

..... Grab the reader's attention: make them want to read on.  
..... Introduce the main character.  
..... Introduce a problem or conflict.  
..... Create a sense of setting.  
..... Introduce a key theme to be explored in the story.  
..... Create a distinctive narrative voice.  
..... Create a powerful atmosphere.  
..... Shock the reader.

2. Look at your opening line and in groups discuss the following:

- a. What type of opening is it? (Refer back to 1.)
- b. What type of story do you think it is from (thriller, mystery, romance, science-fiction, etc)? Give reasons for your answer.
- c. What questions does it raise in the reader's mind?

### **TOOLBOX**

\*The writer sets out to...

\*The opening of this extract: creates a sense of / a feeling of • introduces... • brings to life... • raises many questions such as...

\*I think that the opening line is taken from a story about / from a story which deals with...

\*The opening line makes me want to read on because...

## **B/ Read the beginning of the short story**

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  
5 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 interiors eight pieces of perfectly  
browned toast, eight eggs sunny-side up, 16 slices of  
10 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  
15 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, relays clicked, memory tapes  
glided under electric eyes.  
“Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off  
20 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.  
25 Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the  
waiting car. After a long wait the door swung down again.  
At eight-thirty the eggs were shrivelled and the toast was  
like stone. An aluminium wedge scraped them into the sink,  
where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which  
30 digested and flushed them away to the distant sea. The  
dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged  
twinkling dry.  
“Nine-fifteen,” sang the clock, “time to clean”.  
35 Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The  
rooms were a-crawl with the small cleaning animals, all  
rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling  
their moustached runners, kneading the rug nap, sucking  
gently at hidden dust. Then, like mysterious invaders, they  
popped into their burrows. Their pink electric eyes faded.  
40 The house was clean.

## C/ General comprehension

1. Pick out elements from the extract related to setting.

Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Town: \_\_\_\_\_

Building: \_\_\_\_\_ Weather: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Find evidence to suggest that a family lives / lived here:

Quotation 1:

Quotation 2:

### Theme – Technology

1. Look at all the different things that the house does for its inhabitants. Put them in the order that they appear in the extract.

- ..... Prepares breakfast.
- ..... Tells them to leave for work and school.
- ..... Reminds them to pay the bills.
- ..... Wakes them up.
- ..... Tidies up the dust.
- ..... Clears away the breakfast and washes up.

2. What impression does the reader get of the house?  
Choose from the statements below and be ready to develop your idea.

- a. The house seems very modern.
- b. The house seems to control every part of the humans' lives.
- c. The house seems to make the people's lives easier.

### Atmosphere

1. Look at the following quotations:

*'Today is August 4th, 2026', said a second voice.  
Hot water whirled them down a metal throat.  
Time to get up, seven o'clock!  
As if it were afraid that nobody would.*

**Personification** = giving human attributes to something that is not human.

- a. Underline the examples of personification in each sentence.
- b. What effect does the personification of the house have on the reader?

Use: *in a way, we can't really say... – but – therefore – because...*

c. What difference would you make between "animated" and "alive"? Which word would you use to describe the house?

Explain your reasons from the suggestions below.

- *It makes the house seem to be alive.*
- *It makes it seem as if the house has thoughts and feelings.*
- *It creates an uneasy feeling in the reader.*

2. Look at the following quotations:

*The morning house lay empty.  
But no doors slammed.  
No carpets took the soft tread of  
rubber heels.  
At eight-thirty the eggs were shrivelled  
and the toast was  
like stone.  
The clock ticked on into the emptiness.*

Underline all the words that create a negative impression in the reader. Explain.

3. Read the description of the mechanical mice (last paragraph of the extract.)

*Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The rooms were a-crawl with the small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling their moustached 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.*

- Underline in blue all the verbs used to describe their actions.
- Underline in green the simile used to describe the mice.
- Underline in black the words to show they are mechanical.
- Comment: The description of the mice is a negative / positive one because...

### **First Impressions**

Using your ideas from the previous questions, write down your first impressions of the short story.

*The opening of the story is unsettling / reassuring because ...  
The technology in the story creates a strange / joyous / menacing / atmosphere since ...  
The reader begins to ask questions such as ...  
The writer creates suspense because the reader wants to know ...*

### **D/ Anticipating**

1. Exchange ideas about the family.

- Imagine if they are dead or alive; where they are...
- Imagine who they were / what they did normally, everyday...

2. Imagine what may have happened taking context into account. Knowing the short story was published in 1950 which disaster seems most likely?

→ Express probability: *we can suppose... / may have +V-EN...*

1. *A nuclear explosion due to a war*
2. *A nuclear explosion due to an accident at a nuclear station*
3. *A natural disaster: a hurricane due to global warming*
4. *Contamination because of polluted air*

3. Jot down ideas for the rest of the story imagining that everything carries on in the same way.

Twelve noon: \_\_\_\_\_

Four o'clock: \_\_\_\_\_

Six o'clock: \_\_\_\_\_

Eight o'clock: \_\_\_\_\_

Ten o'clock: \_\_\_\_\_

## **E/ Read the short story up to the end**

## **F/ Dystopian literature**

*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines a dystopia as being:

- “an imaginary place... in which everything is as bad as possible.”
- Set in a futuristic, imagined universe.
- Citizens are under constant surveillance.
- Society is controlled by technology.
- The world has become a nightmarish place.
- The natural world is banished and distrusted.

Identify the dystopian elements in the short story by Ray Bradbury.  
What is he denouncing/criticising in his short story? Prepare your ideas using the toolbox.  
Make sure you give reasons for your answers.

### **TOOLBOX: Criticizing**

\*The writer condemns • attacks • denounces...

\*Bradbury is critical of...

\*The author points out the drawbacks of...

\*The writer highlights • draws attention to the dangers of...

\*The writer sets out to make the reader aware of...

\*Bradbury presents a bleak view / a nightmare vision of the future where...

\*His short story acts as a warning about...

## **G/ Tasks**

### **1. Interview**

Student A: You are Ray Bradbury. You wrote this short story in 1950 during the Cold War and at a time when there were strong fears about the threat of nuclear war and of new technologies.

Student B: You are a journalist. You are interested in finding out why Bradbury wrote the short story.

Prepare your interview in pairs.

### **2. Writing à la manière de...Ray Bradbury**

Write the beginning of a short story as follows: *"Today is August 4th 2033", said a voice from the ceiling,*

- Write in short economical sentences.
- Do not explain anything but create a weird unpleasant atmosphere through details in the setting (time, weather, objects, inside and outside) and facts implying that a disaster has happened – more or less recently.
- So far there's no human presence anywhere. Create suspense.

150-200 words.