

Ghosts in the Machine

Echoes of the Atomic Age in Ray Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains"

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Grade Level	9th Grade	**Time Frame**	90-115 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	2-3 periods

Essential Question

In what ways can literature reflect the values, fears, and perspectives of its time?

Summary

In this lesson, students will explore how historical and cultural contexts influence an author's style. Students will examine several media pieces related to the 1950s in America and analyze how those cultural perspectives influenced Ray Bradbury's short story "There Will Come Soft Rains."

Snapshot

Engage

Students listen to a song about events from the 1950s and complete a Stand Up, Sit Down activity about similar events from their lifetimes.

Explore

Students watch two different short videos from the 1950s and make inferences to identify historical and cultural perspectives of the time period.

Explain

Students define different components of author style and practice identifying them in a poem.

Extend

Students read "There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury and Categorically Highlight the author's style elements within the text.

Evaluate

Students use the Categorical Highlighting strategy to analyze how Bradbury's writing is affected by historical and cultural perspectives of the time period.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)

WME401: Analyze how the choice of a specific word or phrase shapes meaning or tone in somewhat challenging passages

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 9)

9.3.R.1: Analyze the extent to which historical, cultural, and/or global perspectives affect authors' stylistic choices in grade-level literary and informational texts.

Attachments

- Historical and Cultural Perspectives—Ghosts in the Machine.docx
- Historical and Cultural Perspectives—Ghosts in the Machine.pdf
- Honeycomb Harvest Cards—Ghosts in the Machine.docx
- Honeycomb Harvest Cards—Ghosts in the Machine.pdf
- Lesson Slides—Ghosts In The Machine.pptx
- Style Elements and Poem—Ghosts in the Machine.docx
- Style Elements and Poem—Ghosts in the Machine.pdf
- Teacher Guide—Ghosts In The Machine.docx
- Teacher Guide—Ghosts In The Machine.pdf
- Text Analysis—Ghosts In The Machine.docx
- Text Analysis—Ghosts In The Machine.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Historical and Cultural Perspectives (attached; one per student)
- Teacher Guide (attached; one per teacher)
- Honeycomb Harvest Cards (attached; one per pair or small group)
- Style Elements and Poem (attached; one per student)
- Highlighters (three different colors per student)
- Ray Bradbury's short story "There Will Come Soft Rains" (linked; one printed copy per student)
- Text Analysis (attached; one per student)

20 minutes

Engage

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to facilitate the lesson. As students come into the classroom, display **slide 2**, which features the question, "Which world events and people have had the biggest impact on how you see the world?"

As class starts, ask students to think about the question without answering it. Invite them to look at other impactful events from an earlier time period.

Move to **slide 3** and introduce the song "We Didn't Start the Fire" by Billy Joel. Tell students that they likely won't recognize many of the names and events mentioned in the song, but they should think about the names and events that have had big impacts on the world that they have grown up in.

Teacher's Note: We Didn't Start the Fire

Note that the video embedded in slide 3 features song lyrics instead of the music video. If you choose to find a different video for students to watch, a clean version of the song without the music video is advised. The original song and music video feature visuals and words that may be inappropriate for your classroom.

Have students watch the first two minutes of the song: *We Didn't Start the Fire - Billy Joel (clean)*.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=BgwVgGpk1Ks

If desired, provide more context: Billy Joel wrote this song in response to someone telling him that he was lucky to grow up during the 1950s because nothing really happened during that decade. This song was his way of showing how much really took place during that time period.

After the song plays, ask students to get out a piece of notebook paper and something to write with. Have them write down the top three events or people they feel have had the biggest impact on the world during their lifetime.

Move to **slide 4** and introduce the Stand Up, Sit Down strategy. Have all students stand up. One at a time, have students read one item from their list. As students listen, if they hear someone share an item them have listed on their own paper, they should silently mark that item off their own list. As students share, write down their responses on chart paper, the board, or a similar shared space to create a comprehensive list of the class's shared understanding. Once a student has either shared or marked off all three items on their list, they should sit down. Continue until all students are sitting.

Move through **slides 5–7** to introduce the lesson title, essential question, and objectives.

Then move to **slide 8** and reintroduce the question from the beginning of class: "Which world events and people have had the biggest impact on how you see the world?" Given the list the class has created together, ask students to think about what actual impact these events and people have had on their perspective. Ask a few students to share their thoughts before continuing.

25 minutes

Explore

Move to **slide 9** and pass out a copy of the attached **Historical and Cultural Perspectives** handout to each student.

Tell students that, now that they have a rough sense of what significant events impacted the 1950s, they can move toward understanding the historical and cultural perspectives of the 1950s. Explain to students that the 1950s were an interesting time in America with many conflicting perspectives. The economy was booming after America's victory in World War II, and many Americans were prospering more than they ever had. On the other hand, the Cold War had begun, and the looming threat of nuclear war with the Soviet Union overshadowed much of the excitement.

Invite students to understand the effects of these competing ideas by watching another two videos from the same time period.

Move to **slide 10**. The video on the slide is an advertisement for a new type of home that a company was developing in the early 1950s that would use electricity more than ever before. Before you start the video, tell students to think about what attitudes and assumptions are being conveyed about technology, nature, and the future, and to record their thoughts on their handouts as they watch.

Play the video for students: *The Total Electric Home: The Home of the Future 1959*. It is recommended that you watch through the 4:15 mark. You might choose to stop there or, if time permits, you can have students watch the full video.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ9m3jerR5I

After the video, have a brief discussion with students to check their understanding and correct any misunderstandings they might have. Have students fill in any missing information on their handouts.

Teacher's Note: Facilitating Discussion

To help students understand the task better, try asking questions like, "In this video, what opinion do people seem to have about technology?" For example, in the first video, a student might notice how people have a very positive view of technology and believe that it will help make their lives easier. If desired, use the attached **Teacher Guide** for reference and guidance.

Move to **slide 11** and introduce the next video to students—an educational video that students their age would have seen in school during the same period as the Westinghouse advertisement. Like before, students should record the perspectives they see conveyed about technology, nature, and the future.

Play the video for students: *Bomb Drills*

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=120wGLgCTkg

Again, have a brief discussion with students to check their understanding and correct any misunderstandings they might have. Have students fill in any missing information on their handouts.

25 minutes

Explain

Move to **slide 12** and have students form pairs or small groups. Pass out one of the first set of prepared **Honeycomb Harvest Cards** to each pair or small group. Introduce students to the Honeycomb Harvest strategy, and have students use the strategy to match the terms, definitions, and examples. Once students have organized those cards, move to **slide 13**. Pass out the second set of Honeycomb Harvest cards to each pair or group and have them repeat the Honeycomb Harvest process.

Once students have finished sorting and discussing, pass out a copy of the attached **Style Elements and Poem** handout to each student.

Move through **slides 14–15** to show students the answers for the Honeycomb Harvest. Advise students to take notes about these concepts on the front of the Style Elements and Poem handout, as they will need to remember each term.

Direct their attention to the poem "There Will Come Soft Rains" by Sara Teasdale on the back of the handout. Invite students to listen as you read the poem aloud so they can listen for the different style elements.

After you read the poem, pass out highlighters of three different colors to each student. Move to **slide 16** and introduce the Categorical Highlighting strategy. Ask students to highlight each term listed on the right margin of the page (diction, figurative language, and imagery) with a different color as shown on the slide. These are the elements they should focus on for this lesson.

Invite students to read through the poem again silently, this time Categorically Highlighting examples of interesting diction, figurative language, and imagery in their respective colors. Clarify to students that they should look for instances where the author's choices seem unique or interesting. Students should highlight at least two examples of each.

When students are ready to begin, start the five-minute timer on the slide. Give students time to read and annotate the poem silently.

After the timer goes off, ask students to share examples of what they chose for each element.

Move to **slide 17** and ask students choose the one element they think has the most impact on the meaning of the poem. Have students read the questions on the slide, and then answer them in complete sentences below the poem on their handout: "What do you think the meaning of this poem is? Which author's style element helped you understand the meaning the most, and how does it contribute to the meaning?"

25 minutes

Extend

Teacher's Note: Picking Up Where You Left Off

If you are starting this E on a subsequent class period, at the beginning of class make sure that students have their Style Notes handout and the same colors of highlighters they used previously.

Print out a copy of Ray Bradbury's short story "There Will Come Soft Rains" for each student. Pass these copies out.

Move to **slide 18** and give students a brief background about Bradbury. Explain to students that this story was written in 1950, and it deals with ideas that were introduced in both the House of the Future and the Duck and Cover videos that they watched previously.

Have students prepare to use the Categorical Highlighting strategy to read the story and identify style elements just as they did with Sara Teasdale's poem. Move to **slide 19** to remind students of which colors to use for each style element.

Read the story aloud with students. Have students highlight as you read, and pause as needed to help students with the task.

20 minutes

Evaluate

Move to **slide 20** and pass out a copy of the attached **Text Analysis** handout to each student. Invite students to analyze the style elements of Bradbury's short story to show how it supports the historical and cultural perspectives of that time. Go over the example in the first row of the handout and answer any questions about how to fill out the analysis.

Use the attached **Teacher Guide** for assistance in helping students respond and in assessing their understanding.

Resources

- Bradbury, R., n.d. . There will come soft rains. https://www.btboces.org/Downloads/7_There%20Will%20Come%20Soft%20Rains%20by%20Ray%20Bradbury.pdf
- History Comes to Life. (2014). Westinghouse All Electric House Promo. [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyrTgtPTz3M
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Categorical highlighting. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/192
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Honeycomb harvest. Strategies.https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/61
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Stand up, sit down. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/1771
- Mellowdi. (2024). We Didn't Start The Fire – Billy Joel (clean) [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watchv=BgwVgGpk1Ks&list=RDBgwVgGpk1Ks&start_radio=1
- Ooms, A. (2011). Bomb Drills. [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=120wGLgCTkg