

The Veldt by Ray Bradbury

Suggested Lesson Procedure:

DAY ONE: 1. View the Home of the Future two-minute news clip found here on my last product update:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdL8Kjzn_Zo

2. After viewing the news clip, have students gather in groups of three and discuss whether they would want to live in such a home. Have them brainstorm additions they would like to see made to such a home to make it even more desirable on the Home of the Future handout (page 2). As groups brainstorm and jot down their ideas, I like to circulate in the room, encouraging students to let their imaginations run free. Carpets that vacuum themselves? Great. Food generators and self-washing dishes? I say, "Heck, yeah!" Once the teams have completed the brainstorming handout, I pull the class back together for a full-class discussion, moving team-by-team around the room as each group contributes at least one idea to our futuristic dream house.

3. Once the list of housing amenities is thick, I pose the question, "What if something goes wrong? Can you reboot a whole house?" Then, I tell them these were the sorts of questions writer Ray Bradbury was wondering about in 1951 when he published his famous short story, "The Veldt." Everyone and his neighbor seemed to be getting one of those newfangled television sets or remodeling his kitchen with modern appliances; all of this technological advancement set Bradbury's imagination in motion.

4. Read the story together as a class. The story is protected under copyright law, so I am not able to include a full-text version for you here. On my last product update, these websites were hosting copies of the story:

<https://repositorio.ufsc.br/bitstream/handle/123456789/163728/The%20Veldt%20-%20Ray%20Bradbury.pdf?sequence=1>

https://mbusd.instructure.com/files/5216/download?download_frd=1

<http://www.veddma.com/veddma/Veldt.htm>

<http://tinyurl.com/qyxoree>

Also, many textbooks include Bradbury's story, so you may want to check with your department's offerings/book room.

5. Give a copy of the questions on page 3 to each student. Sometimes, I have students work independently to answer the questions; other times, I allow them to work in teams of two or three. Some students may need to finish the questions as homework.

DAY TWO: 6. Collect students' answers to the questions. Then, launch a class discussion as you go over the answers to all of the questions. See pages 4 and 5 for answers/discussion starters. This is an important step, as it will help solidify students' understanding of the deeper themes and techniques used by Bradbury. The discussion is always rich and serves as a good model for students who might struggle with literary analysis.

I hope you and your students enjoy these materials!

Laura Randazzo

Blog: <https://laurarandazzo.com>

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YouTube: <https://tinyurl.com/yy7cp8b5>

Home of the Future

Directions: Brainstorm and describe below at least three specific improvements that you would make to a Home of the Future. Your changes can include alterations to traditional floor plans or brand-new technology that you've dreamed up and hasn't yet been invented. Let your imagination run free as you design the perfect home for modern living. Feel free to continue writing on the back of this sheet if you need more room to finish your ideas.



1.

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1.

2.

3.

The Veldt - Questions

On a separate sheet of paper, completely and thoughtfully answer the following questions.

1. In "The Veldt," author Ray Bradbury repeatedly uses personification to give human traits to the Happylife Home operating system. Find and write down two lines (yes, I want you to write the full sentences) where personification is used.

2. We're told that the Happylife Home system cost "thirty thousand dollars installed." Bradbury published this story in 1951 and, due to inflation, it turns out that \$1 in 1951 is worth about \$9 today. Given this, how much would the Happylife Home system cost in today's dollars? Would there be a market today for such a system? Why or why not?

3. Early in the story, what evidence are we given that the Happylife Home system has not made either of the adults particularly happy? What message might Bradbury be trying to deliver here?

4. Early in the story, Bradbury skillfully raises two important points about modern life in a single sentence. Look closely at this sentence and then explain the two points Bradbury is attempting to plant in the reader's mind: "At dinner they ate alone, for Wendy and Peter were at a special plastic carnival across town and had televised home to say they'd be late, to go ahead eating."

5. Bradbury calls the children's virtual reality room their "nursery" rather than their "play room" or "game room." What's interesting about his use of the word "nursery" in this story?

6. Bradbury uses two interesting similes when he described the children, Peter and Wendy. First, write down the two similes he uses to describe the children's physical traits. Then, explain what's ironic about these simile choices.

7. Look at the passage that includes this line: "...I'm beginning to be sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are neurotic at all, a room like that--"

First, based solely on the context of the line, write down your guess about the meaning of the word, "neurotic." It's okay if you're wrong; I just want you to take a guess. Then, look up the word, "neurotic," in a dictionary and write down the actual definition. How close were you to correctly guessing the word's true meaning?

8. Of all the worlds, both real and imaginary, that would appeal to children, why do you suppose Wendy and Peter chose to focus their attention on the African veldt? What's the appeal?

9. In the story, George muses that "children are carpets; they should be stepped on occasionally." What does this mean? Do you agree with this idea or not? Give a real-life example to support your stance.

10. George and Lydia Hadley think they're good parents, but it's clear that they are both flawed. For each parent, describe a moment or cite a line that shows a time when each failed as a parent. Paraphrasing is fine, but be sure to

include enough detail about the specific incident so it is clear to me that you spotted specific moments when each parent failed to do the right thing.

11. The ending of the story is intentionally vague. Explain what you think happened to Mr. and Mrs.

Hadley. What do you think will happen to Mr. McClean? To Wendy and Peter?

12. Thinking back over the story, what do you suppose is Bradbury's opinion of children? Of humanity? Provide at least one line of text that supports your stance.



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The Veldt – Answer Key

1. In “The Veldt,” author Ray Bradbury repeatedly uses personification to give human traits to the Happylife Home operating system. Find and write down two lines (yes, I want you to write the full sentences) where personification is used. There are several examples that students will find, including: “His wife paused in the middle of the kitchen and watched **the stove busy humming to itself**, making supper for four.” Here’s another example from later in the story: “And although **their beds tried very hard**, the two adults couldn’t be rocked to sleep for another hour.”

2. We’re told that the Happylife Home system cost “thirty thousand dollars installed.” Bradbury published this story in 1951 and, due to inflation, it turns out that \$1 in 1951 is worth about \$9 today. Given this, how much would the Happylife Home system cost in today’s dollars? Would there be a market today for such a system? Why or why not? The Happylife Home system would cost \$270,000 in today’s dollars. This is expensive, but it’s easy to imagine that upper-middle class and wealthy families would choose to buy such a system. Today, “smart” houses already can be controlled remotely from our phones and virtual reality technology continues to evolve. Bradbury’s 1951 imaginings are close to becoming reality.

3. Early in the story, what evidence are we given that the Happylife Home system has not made either of the adults particularly happy? What message might Bradbury be trying to deliver here? Lydia Hadley is anxious and fretful. She says that she has “time to think too much” and feels useless. George Hadley is smoking more, drinking more, and needs to take sedatives to sleep each night. The modern conveniences of their home were supposed to improve their lives, but the opposite effect has happened. Oh, the irony of the “Happylife Home” name! Bradbury seems to be telling us that we need to work in order to feel fulfilled. An idle life doesn’t lead to contentment. It could be argued that the beginning portion of the story teaches us that we need to work and create things in order to feel useful in our lives. For example, Peter complains that his father took away the picture painting machine in the previous month. George says he wanted his son to learn how to paint, not to rely on a machine to paint pictures for him. Then, Peter says, “I don’t want to do anything but look and listen and smell; what else is there to do?” Clearly, Bradbury is indicting our modern consumer culture in this passage as he argues that it’s better to be a creator than a consumer.

4. Early in the story, Bradbury skillfully raises two important points about modern life in a single sentence. Look closely at this sentence and then explain the two points Bradbury is attempting to plant in the reader’s mind: “At dinner they ate alone, for Wendy and Peter were at a special plastic carnival across town and had televised home to say they’d be late, to go ahead eating.” From this sentence, we should pause and wonder what happened to the real, human carnival performers. Would a “special plastic carnival” really be interesting? Isn’t this just another example of technology taking the place of human labor/jobs? Also, we should pause and be concerned that the children are telling their parents that they won’t be home for dinner instead of asking permission. It’s clear (and alarming) that the children hold too much power in this family. Also, students will notice that the family doesn’t eat dinner together, yet another example of their disconnectedness.

5. Bradbury calls the children’s virtual reality room their “nursery” rather than their “play room” or “game room.” What’s interesting about his use of the word “nursery” in this story? According to the text, Wendy and Peter are about 10 years old, so the term “nursery” is a bit of a misnomer; however, Bradbury uses the term to emphasize the nurturing/guardianship role that the room has claimed in the children’s lives. The word “nursery” is part of dreadful irony that Bradbury is working to build in the story because the room is raising the children to be cruel, violent, and disdainful of the rules of society.

6. Bradbury uses two interesting similes when he described the children, Peter and Wendy. First, write down the two similes he uses to describe the children’s physical traits. Then, explain what’s ironic about these simile choices. The similes that Bradbury uses are when he says the children’s cheeks are “like peppermint candy,” and “eyes like bright blue agate marbles.” These are ironic choices because they emphasize the innocent sweetness of the children,

which we learn at the end of the story is actually the opposite of their true nature.

7. Look at the passage that includes this line: "...I'm beginning to be sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are neurotic at all, a room like that—" First, based solely on the context of the line, write down your guess about the meaning of the word, "neurotic." It's okay if you're wrong; I just want you to take a guess. Then, look up the word, "neurotic," in a dictionary and write down the actual definition. How close were you to correctly guessing the word's true meaning? **Students' guesses will vary, but the dictionary tells us that "neurotic" means abnormally sensitive, obsessive, or tense and anxious.**

8. Of all the worlds, both real and imaginary, that would appeal to children, why do you suppose Wendy and Peter chose to focus their attention on the African veldt? What's the appeal? **Students' answers will vary, but this is a wild, untamed place. There are no adults (in fact, there are no people at all) to boss the children around and there are no rules. It's also interesting that the children dream of a world absent of all the technology and creature comforts they so thoroughly enjoy. They're craving the opposite of what they have.**

9. In the story, George muses that "children are carpets; they should be stepped on occasionally." What does this mean? Do you agree with this idea or not? Give a real-life example to support your stance. **It means that children shouldn't always get what they want. The idea is that character is built when children realize that the world won't always bend to their will. Be prepared for students to share plenty of examples from their own lives or their dealings with spoiled younger siblings/cousins.**

10. George and Lydia Hadley think they're good parents, but it's clear that they are both flawed. For each parent, describe a moment or cite a line that shows a time when each failed as a parent. Paraphrasing is fine, but be sure to include enough detail about the specific incident so it is clear to me that you spotted specific moments when each parent failed to do the right thing. **There are several obvious moments when both George and Lydia choose to do what's easy instead of what's right. For example, when George has finally decided to do the right thing and turn off the nursery, Lydia doesn't support his decision; instead, she joins her children in pleading for George to turn the nursery back on, saying he's being "abrupt" and "cruel." Instead of being a unified front with her husband, she undercuts him in order to placate the children. For George, a clear moment of parenting failure comes when he relents to his wife and children, saying, "All right - all right, if they'll only just shut up." He knows it's wrong to turn the nursery back on, but he does so anyway just to keep the peace.**

11. The ending of the story is intentionally vague. Explain what you think happened to Mr. and Mrs. Hadley. What do you think will happen to Mr. McClean? To Wendy and Peter? **Students' answers will vary. Most agree that Mr. and Mrs. Hadley have been eaten by the lions. Some believe Mr. McClean will discover the grisly ending of the Hadleys and have the children committed, while others think he'll be the lions' next meal. Either way, it's clear that Wendy and Peter have been ruined by the technology they love. Can the same be said of us?**

12. Thinking back over the story, what do you suppose is Bradbury's opinion of children? Of humanity? Provide at least one line of text that supports your stance. **Students' answers will vary, but it could be argued that Bradbury doesn't believe in the innocence of childhood. Humanity, he tells us, can be cruel, selfish, and violent; the seeds for these dark emotions are found in our children. Evidence of this theme is found relatively early in the story, when George starts thinking about his children's preoccupation with death. As he eats, he thinks, "Death thoughts. They were awfully young, Wendy and Peter, for death thoughts. Or, no, you were never too young, really. Long before you knew what death was you were wishing it on someone else. When you were two years old, you were shooting people with cap pistols."**