

THE FUN THEY HAD

BY – ISSAC ASIMOV

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Isaac Asimov was an American writer and professor of biochemistry at Boston University. He was known for his works of science fiction and popular science. Asimov was a prolific writer who wrote or edited more than 500 books and an estimated 90,000 letters and postcards. Asimov wrote hard science fiction.





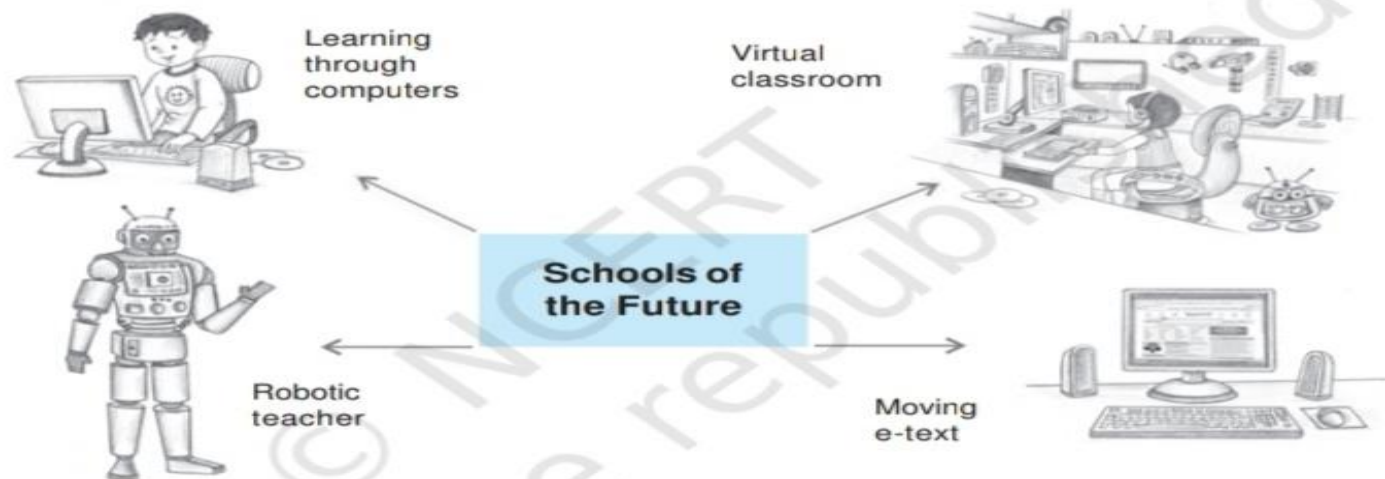
I. The Fun They Had



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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?*

- 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.

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."

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.

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.

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.

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."

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."

"Sure they had a teacher, but it wasn't a regular teacher. It was a man."

"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."

Margie wasn't prepared to dispute that. She said, "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."

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.

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 $\frac{1}{4}$..."

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

WORD MEANINGS:-

crinkly: with many folds or lines, something that is crushed.

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

scornful: contemptuous; showing you think something is worthless, show your dislike for something

slot: a given space, time or position

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

blanked out: it has been erased

loftily: in a superior way

regular: here, normal; of the usual kind

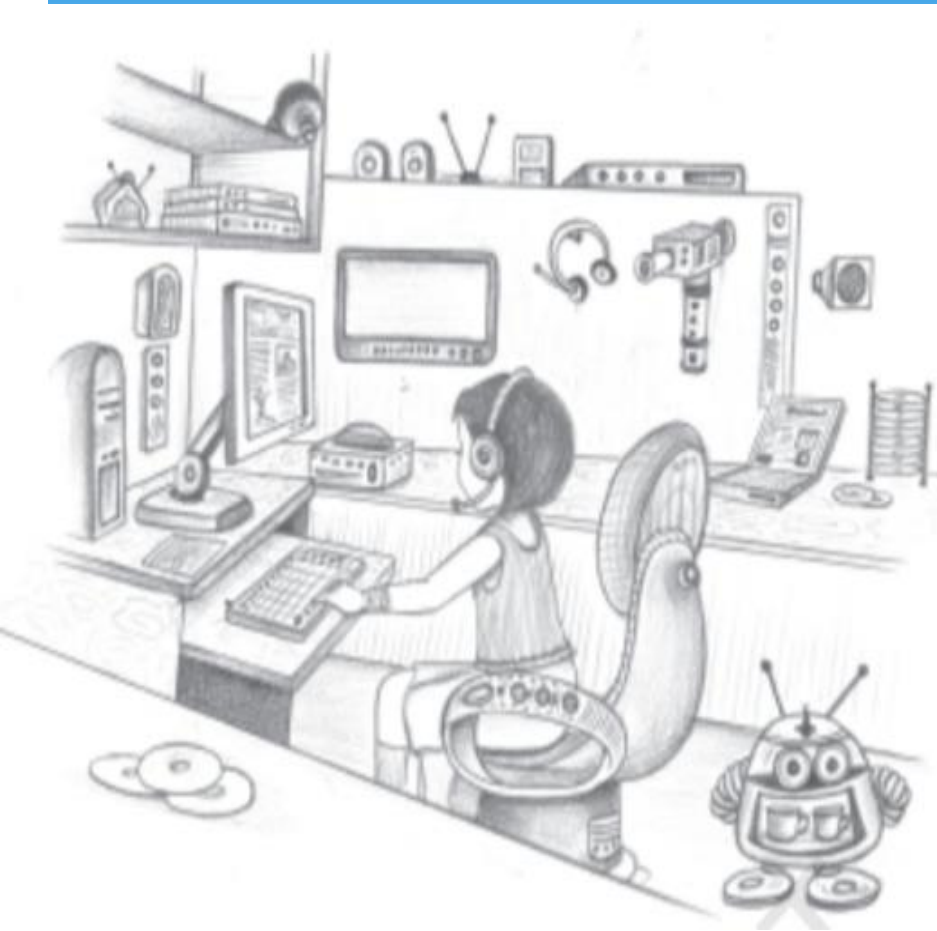
betcha(informal): (I) bet you (in fast speech): I'm sure

SUMMARY

The story opens with Margie writing in her diary about an old book that Tommy had found. Margie was reminded of her grandfather who had once talked about his grandfather who went to an actual school where the students were taught by human teachers.



However, Margie and Tommy lived in the future world, in the year 2157 where education was completely computerized. They did not go to schools. Instead, they had a special study room where a computer taught them. The computer teacher was programmed and adjusted according to the needs of each child. Now and then the computer teacher developed faults which were fixed by a County Inspector.



Both Tommy and Margie wondered at the book found by Tommy in his attic. They wondered at it as they read books on the screen of their computer teacher. Margie felt that the computer teacher was boring; she disliked the mechanical teaching and learning. She also wondered how much fun it would be studying in a school. Studying in a fun way, with other children and that too from a human teacher.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. How old are Margie and Tommy?

A. Margie and Tommy live in the future, in the year 2157. They are neighbours and spend time together. Margie is a girl of eleven years of age while Tommy is a boy of thirteen.

2. What did Margie write in her diary?

A. On 17 May 2157, Margie wrote that that day Tommy had found a real book in the attic of his house. It was an old book with yellow, crinkly pages.

3. Had Margie ever seen a book before?

A. No, Margie had not seen a book before the one found by Tommy in his house. She had only heard from her grandfather that his grandfather went to school as a boy and that they read books that were printed on paper.

THANK YOU

The image features the words "THANK YOU" in a bold, blue, serif font. The text is rendered in a 3D style, with each letter having a slight depth and a white highlight on its top edge. Below the text, a soft, light blue reflection is visible, creating a sense of the letters floating above a surface. The background consists of a solid blue upper half and a white lower half, separated by a wavy, horizontal line that gives the impression of a horizon or a stylized landscape. The overall composition is clean and modern.