

ISAAC ASIMOV

The name of the American writer Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) is one of the biggest names in science fiction today. He is by far one of today's most widely read authors.

Isaac Asimov was not only a science fiction master. He was a professor of biochemistry ['baiou'kemistri] who received a lot of awards for his scientific articles covering a wide range of subjects. As a popular lecturer and scientist he was valued highly in the world of science. Isaac Asimov also wrote stories and articles on history, literature, geography and humour.

His books include such classic works as "I Robot", "Guide to Science", "Before the Golden Age", "Lucky Starr and the Pirates of the Asteroids", "The Kingdom of the Sun", "The End of Eternity"¹.

Asimov's imagination has remarkable adventures set in the not-too-distant future - adventures that could change from fiction to fact any day now.

Exercise 1. *Read the words and try to guess their meaning. Pay attention to the suffixes:*

- **ful:** sorrow — sorrowful, scorn — scornful;
- **ly:** sorrowful — sorrowfully, proud — proudly, wide — widely, careful — carefully;
- **hood:** neighbour - neighbourhood, brother - brotherhood.

Exercise 2. *Read these word combinations and translate them:*

a widely read author

a scornful look

to shake one's head sorrowfully

to pronounce the word carefully

children from the whole neighbourhood

*Read the story **The Fun They Had** and say why Margie changed her opinion about the school that the old book described.*

The Fun They Had

Margie even wrote about it that night in her diary².

On the page headed May 17, 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 crinkly³, 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 been the same words on it that it had when they read it the first time.

"Gee(4)," said Tommy, "what a waste. When you're through with the book, you just throw it away, I guess. Our television screen has 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?"

1. **eternity** — вечность

2. **diary** — дневник

3. **crinkly** — мятый
4. **Gee** — Вот так так. Вот это да.

"In my house." He pointed without looking, because he was busy reading. "In the attic⁵."

"What is it about?" "School."

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 Inspector.

He was a round little man with a red face and a whole box of tools. He smiled at Margie and gave her an apple, then took the teacher apart⁶. Margie had hoped he wouldn't know how to put it together again, but he knew all right, and, after an hour or so, there it was again, large and ugly⁷, 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 slot⁸ where she had to put homework and test papers. She always had to write them out in a code they made her learn when she was six years old, and the mechanical teacher calculated the mark in no time.

5. **attic** — чердак

6. **to take apart** — разобрать на части

7. **ugly** — уродливый

8. **slot** — щель

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 a little too quick to change the tasks. Those things happen sometimes. I've slowed it up to an average ten-year-level¹. At the present moment 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 something had gone wrong with the history sector.

So she said to Tommy, "Why would anyone write about school?"

Tommy looked at her with very superior² eyes. "Because it's not our kind of school, stupid³. This is the old kind of school they had hundreds and hundreds of years ago." He added proudly, 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, and 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."

"A man isn't good enough."

"Sure he is. My father knows as much as my teacher."

"He can't. A man can't know as much as a teacher."

"He knows almost as much, I bet you⁴." 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 things?" "Sure, if they were the same age."

"But my mother says a teacher has to be adjusted⁵ 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?" "Maybe," he said without enthusiasm.

He took the dusty old book and walked away, whistling.

Margie went into the schoolroom. It was right next to her bedroom, and the mechanical teacher was on⁶ and waiting for her. It was always on at the same time every day, except Saturday and Sunday, because her mother said little girls learned better if they learned at regular hours.

The screen lit up, and it said: "Today's arithmetic lesson is on the addition of proper fractions⁷. Please put yesterday's homework in the proper slot."

Margie did so with a sigh⁸. She was thinking about the old schools they had when her grandfather's grandfather was a little boy. All the kids from the whole neighbourhood 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 (9) on the screen:

"When we add the fractions $1/2$ and $1/4$ -" Margie was thinking about how the kids must have loved it¹⁰ in the old days. She was thinking about the fun they had.

1. **average ten-year level** — средний уровень десятилетнего ребенка

2. **superior** — полный превосходства

3. **stupid** — глупый

4. **I bet you** — *зд.* Я уверяю тебя

5. **be adjusted** — приспособиться

6. **to be on** — быть на экране

7. **proper fractions** — неправильные дроби

8. **sigh** — вздох

9. **to flash** — вспыхивать

10. **must have loved it** — должно быть, любили

Exercise 3. Translate the sentences:

1. It was awfully funny to read words that stood still instead of moving the way they were supposed to - on a screen, you know.
2. She always had to write them (test papers) out in a code they made her learn when she was six years old, and the mechanical teacher calculated the mark in no time.
3. 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.

Exercise 4. Answer the questions on the text:

1. Why was it surprising for Margie to see a book in which stories were printed on paper?
2. What kind of books did the children in Margie's time have?
3. How did Margie react when Tommy said that the book was about school?
4. How did Margie feel about school?
5. How did Margie, Tommy and all other children learn?
6. Why did it seem strange to Margie that a man was a teacher in the old days?
7. What did the girl think of the old schools?

Discussing the Theme of the Story

- 1.) Describe the book Tommy once found in his house in the attic and say why Margie was surprised at the sight of the book.
- 2.) Find and read aloud any words and phrases which show that the writer is describing a school of the future. Explain your choice.
- 3.) Say how the writer describes the way the children of 2157 study.
- 4.) Find and read aloud the lines which show Margie 's attitude towards school.
- 5.) Say what reasons Margie had to hate school.
- 6.) Say what was wrong with the mechanical teacher and why it had to be taken apart.
- 7.) Give explanations of these facts from the story:
 - a) *It was awfully funny for Margie and Tommy to read words that stood still.*
 - b) *Tommy thought that reading a book like the one he had found was a waste of time.*
 - c) *The Inspector believed it was not Margie's fault that she could not cope with her homework in geography.*
 - d) *Margie was disappointed that the mechanical teacher had not been taken away.*
 - e) *Margie was sure that a man could not be a teacher.*
 - f) *Margie began to believe that the children in the old days had loved their school.*
- 8.) Say what opinions about teachers Margie and Tommy expressed in their conversation and what type of teaching and learning they preferred.
- 9.) Discuss advantages and disadvantages of a mechanical teacher. Say what kind of teaching you prefer and why.
- 10.) Think of what made Margie say that the children of the 20th century must have had fun at their school. Speak about it.
- 11.) Express your opinion on these points:
 - a) *Each pupil has to be taught differently.*
 - b) *A man cannot know as much as a mechanical teacher.*

c) Communication with other children is not necessary when you study.

12.) Act out a conversation between Tommy and Margie in which they are discussing the school in the old days.

13.) *A good title excites interest and gives clues to what the story is about.* Do you think **The Fun They Had** is a good title? Why or why not? Explain your answer.

14.) Give your own ideas of a school of the future. Discuss them with your classmates.