

CHAPTER 1

The Fun They Had

CBSE Class 9 · English (Language & Literature)
· Prose Ch 1

CBSE · English · Class 9

WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES

A

Retell the plot of 'The Fun They Had' accurately, with the locked facts (date, ages, mechanical teacher).

B

State the theme and the central irony in your own words, with textual evidence.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

TODAY'S MISSION

Today's mission

- 1 Retell the plot of 'The Fun They Had' accurately, with the locked facts (date, ages, mechanical teacher).
- 2 State the theme and the central irony in your own words, with textual evidence.
- 3 Write a structured long answer on the future of education and human connection.
- 4 Revise the paired poem 'The Road Not Taken' and its real central idea — avoiding the cliché reading.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Why this chapter matters

- 1 Opening chapter of Beehive — 6-8 marks across literature and reading sections in Class 9 papers.
- 2 Teaches you to move from RETELLING a story to ARGUING a theme with evidence — the core Class 9 skill.
- 3 A science-fiction story that is really about something human: why learning together matters in an age of screens.

TOPIC

A

The author and the world of the story

TOPIC

Asimov and the setting of 2157

ISAAC ASIMOV

Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) was a Russian-born American writer and biochemistry professor, one of the most prolific authors of the twentieth century and a giant of science fiction. He is famous for imagining futures shaped by technology — robots, computers, space travel — while keeping a sharp

THE FUTURISTIC SETTING

The story unfolds on 17 May 2157, recorded in eleven-year-old Margie's diary. In this future, there are no school buildings and no human teachers. Each child studies alone at home, taught by a 'mechanical teacher' — a large machine with a screen that delivers lessons, sets tests and marks homework fed

TELEBOOKS VS THE REAL BOOK

Tommy finds a real, printed paper book in the attic of his house — an object so unfamiliar that both children marvel at it. Its pages are yellow and crinkly, and the most astonishing thing is that the printed words stand still: they do not move the way text moves on a telebook screen. The

THE MECHANICAL TEACHER

Margie's mechanical teacher is a machine that teaches geography, arithmetic and other subjects on a screen, asks questions, and accepts homework written in a special 'punch code' through a slot. Margie hates it — especially the geography sector, which had been

TOPIC

B

**Plot — what
actually
happens**

TOPIC

The story, step by step

THE DISCOVERY

The story opens with Margie writing in her diary that Tommy found a 'real book' today. The two neighbours pore over it together. They are astonished that it is printed on paper, that the pages are yellow and crinkly, and that the words do not move. When they realise the book is about school, the

MARGIE'S FRUSTRATION

Margie hates school. Her geography sector had been geared too fast, so she was scoring badly, and her mother shook her head sorrowfully and sent for the County Inspector. Margie had hoped they would take the whole teacher away — once, a boy's history teacher had been removed for a month

THE OLD SCHOOL REVEALED

Reading the book, Tommy explains, a little loftily, that in the old days there were human teachers — real men and women — and a special building where all the children of the neighbourhood went together. They learnt the same things if they were the same age, could

THE WISTFUL ENDING

Called away by her mechanical teacher for an arithmetic lesson, Margie returns to her solitary screen. But her mind keeps drifting to the old schools. She imagines the children of the whole neighbourhood walking home together, sitting together in a single room, helping each other, sharing the same

TOPIC

C

Characters

TOPIC

Margie and Tommy

MARGIE — CURIOUS

Margie Jones, eleven years old, is the story's protagonist and the diary-writer through whose eyes we see everything. Her defining trait is curiosity: she is fascinated by the real printed book, eager to know what the old schools were like, and quick to imagine herself among children learning

MARGIE — DISCONTENTED & LONELY

Margie is also deeply discontented with her schooling and, beneath that, lonely. She hates the mechanical teacher, dreads the geography tests, and secretly hopes the inspector will take the whole machine away. Her loneliness is the quiet undertow of the story: she has never known the

TOMMY — OLDER, SUPERIOR

Tommy is Margie's thirteen-year-old neighbour, two years older and inclined to show it. He speaks 'loftily' and 'nonchalantly', enjoying his role as the one who found the book and who knows a little more about the old schools. He explains that the old teachers were

THE MECHANICAL TEACHER

Though not a person, the mechanical teacher functions almost as a character — the cold antagonist of the human warmth the children crave. It teaches on a screen, sets relentless tests, marks homework dropped into a slot, and calls Margie back to her arithmetic 'in the same

TOPIC

D

Themes and the meaning of the story

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

Central theme — technology cannot replace human connection

Asimov's deepest point is that education is not merely the transfer of information; the warmth of human teachers and the company of fellow learners are irreplaceable. A perfectly efficient machine can teach facts but cannot give a child friends, laughter and a shared classroom.

STATEMENT

In a world of mechanical teachers and telebooks, the children of 2157 still ENVY the old kind of school — a building full of children learning together. The story argues that technological

WHY THIS MATTERS

- This is the theme almost every long/value-based question probes
- Stating it clearly — and linking it to our own screen-filled present — is what separates a top answer from a plot summary.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Do not reduce the theme to 'computers are bad'. Asimov is not anti-technology; he is warning against losing human connection. Frame it as a balance, not a ban.

TOPIC

Three themes to write about

THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

The story is a thought-experiment about where education might go: fully personalised, home-based, machine-delivered, with no school building and no human teacher. Asimov, writing in 1951, anticipates online and adaptive learning with uncanny accuracy — the

HUMAN CONNECTION & COMPANIONSHIP

The beating heart of the story is companionship. The old school's value, as Margie imagines it, lies in children of the same neighbourhood gathering in one room, learning the same things, helping one another with homework, and laughing together in the yard. Margie's mechanical teacher gives

VALUE OF SCHOOL & NOSTALGIA

Through Margie's longing, the story celebrates the very thing real children often grumble about — going to school. Seen from a future that has lost it, the ordinary school building becomes something precious: a place of friends, shared lessons and play. The mood is

SITUATIONAL IRONY

The story's power rests on situational irony — the gap between what we expect and what happens. We expect children of an advanced future to pity the primitive past; instead, they ENVY it. We expect a 'real book' to be obsolete and dull; instead it is a marvel that exposes how cold their

WORKED EXAMPLE

Q: What does the story suggest about the future of education and human connection? (6 marks, ~10 words)

- 1** **FRAME** (1 mk): 'Set in 2157, Asimov imagines a world with no school buildings and no human teachers — Margie and Tommy are each taught alone at home by a mechanical teacher, reading from telebooks.'
- 2** **IRONY + EVIDENCE** (2 mk): 'Yet, surrounded by this advanced technology, the children ENVY the old kind of school. When Tommy's real book reveals that children once gathered in one building, learnt the same lessons, helped one another and laughed in the schoolyard, Margie finds the idea wonderful.'
- 3** **VALUE** (2 mk): 'Asimov's point is that education is not just the transfer of information; the warmth of human teachers and the company of classmates are irreplaceable. Efficiency has been bought at the price of fellowship.'
- 4** **LINK + TITLE** (1 mk): 'In our own age of screens and apps, the story warns us not to lose the social joy of learning together — which is exactly the lost treasure Margie longs for when she thinks about "the fun they had".'

TOPIC

E

Literary devices and style

TOPIC

How Asimov builds the effect

SCIENCE-FICTION SETTING

Asimov uses the conventions of science fiction — a precisely dated future (2157), invented technology (mechanical teachers, telebooks, homework slots) — not to dazzle but to defamiliarise. By placing ordinary schooling in a strange future, he makes us see our own classrooms

SITUATIONAL IRONY

The dominant device is situational irony — the reversal between expectation and reality. The advanced future children long for the primitive past; the obsolete paper book becomes a treasure; the forward-looking title points wistfully backward. Asimov never states his message

CONTRAST

The story is built on a series of contrasts: telebook vs printed book, mechanical teacher vs human teacher, learning alone vs learning together, cold efficiency vs warm companionship. Each contrast sharpens the theme. The crinkly yellow pages of the old book sit against the moving words of the

NOSTALGIC, WISTFUL TONE

The tone, especially at the close, is nostalgic and gently melancholy. Through Margie's daydream and the past-tense title, Asimov colours the whole story with longing for something lost. The mood is never preachy — it is tender, a child quietly sensing a vanished

TOPIC

F

Paired poem — The Road Not Taken (Robert Frost)

TOPIC

The Road Not Taken — the real central idea

THE SITUATION

In Robert Frost's poem, a traveller walking through a 'yellow wood' (autumn) comes to a fork where two roads diverge. He is sorry he cannot travel both and be one traveller; he studies one road as far as he can see, then takes the other. The poem's surface is this simple woodland choice, but Frost uses the

THE CENTRAL METAPHOR

The two diverging roads are a metaphor for the decisions every person must make in life — and crucially, for the fact that choosing one path means giving up the other. The 'yellow wood' suggests a moment of maturity or autumn, a time of deciding. The speaker keeps the first road 'for another day' yet doubts

THE MISREAD VS THE REAL POINT

The famous closing lines — 'I took the one less travelled by, / And that has made all the difference' — are usually read as a triumphant 'always be different'. But Frost is subtler. Earlier he admits both roads were 'really about the same', 'just as fair', and equally untrodden that morning.

WHY IT PAIRS WITH THE STORY

Both texts sit in the same opening Beehive unit because both meditate on roads not taken and lives not led. 'The Fun They Had' mourns a path of learning — the warm, shared school — that the future has abandoned; 'The Road Not Taken' weighs the path the speaker did not choose.

TRY IT · SOLVE BEFORE YOU PEEK

Quick check: (a) What is the date of Margie's diary entry? (b) Who preferred the old kind of school? (c) In 'The Road Not Taken', were the two roads really very different?

SOLUTION

ANSWER (a) 17 May 2157. (b) BOTH children are drawn to it — Margie especially envies it; she dislikes her mechanical teacher. (c) No — the speaker admits both roads were 'really about the same'; he simply had to choose one and cannot return.

TOPIC

Setting / date of the story

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** The story is set in the year 2155 or 2057, or in the present day.

✓ **CORRECT** Margie's diary entry is dated 17 May 2157. Tommy finds the real book and reads that it is 'centuries old' — i.e. about a school that existed long before 2157. Pinning the exact year matters because reference-to-context questions test it directly.

TOPIC

Who preferred which kind of school

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Margie loved her mechanical-teacher school and Tommy hated reading the real book.
- ✓ **CORRECT** It is the OPPOSITE. Margie HATES her mechanical teacher (especially the geography sector that geared too fast) and is fascinated by the old book and the idea of a real school. Tommy, though slightly superior in tone, is equally curious about the old school where children learnt together.

TOPIC

The central irony

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The children are happy with their advanced future school and pity the old-fashioned past.
- ✓ **CORRECT** The irony is reversed — children of 2157, surrounded by superior technology, ENVY the 'old kind of school': a special building, human teachers, children learning and laughing together. Asimov's point is that progress in technology can cost us human warmth and companionship.

TOPIC

The mechanical teacher's fault

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The mechanical teacher was broken and had to be replaced by a new one.
- ✓ **CORRECT** It was NOT replaced. The County Inspector took it apart, found the geography sector geared a little too quick, slowed it to the average ten-year level, and reassembled it. He even tells Margie's mother that the overall pattern of her progress is satisfactory — so Margie's hope of having the teacher taken away is dashed.

TOPIC

Telebooks vs the real book

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Both Margie and Tommy read regularly from paper books at home.

✓ **CORRECT** They normally read from 'telebooks' — books on a screen where a million books can be stored. The PAPER book Tommy finds in the attic is a marvel to them precisely because the printed words stand still and do not move like a screen — they have never handled one before.

TOPIC

Theme of the poem 'The Road Not Taken'

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** The poem says the 'less travelled' road is always the better choice and guarantees success.

✓ **CORRECT** Frost is subtler. The speaker admits BOTH roads were 'really about the same' that morning; he simply had to choose one, knows he cannot come back, and imagines telling the story later 'with a sigh' — the poem is about the irreversibility of choice and how we narrate our decisions afterwards, not a simple 'be different' slogan.

TOPIC

Title meaning

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** 'The Fun They Had' refers to the fun Margie and Tommy have with the mechanical teacher.
- ✓ **CORRECT** The title is wistful and ironic — it refers to the fun the children of the OLD school 'had' (past tense) learning together, which Margie longingly imagines on the last page. The story ends on her thinking about 'the fun they had', highlighting what her isolated future schooling lacks.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-6 mark long/value-based: 'What does The Fun They Had suggest about the future of education'

1 **FRAME THE FUTURISTIC SETTING BRIEFLY**

1 m

Open by anchoring the answer in the story: 'Set in 2157, Asimov imagines a world where Margie and Tommy are taught at home by individual mechanical teachers, with telebooks instead of printed books and no school building.' One or two sentences only — do not retell the whole plot.

2 **STATE THE CENTRAL IRONY WITH TEXTUAL EVIDENCE**

2 m

Make the key point: despite superior technology, the children ENVY the old kind of school. Quote/paraphrase Margie imagining children of the whole neighbourhood coming together, learning the same things, helping one another and laughing in the schoolyard. The future has efficiency but no companionship.

3 **DRAW THE VALUE/ MESSAGE AND CONNECT TO TODAY**

2 m

Conclude with the author's message: education is not only information delivery; the warmth of human teachers and the company of fellow learners are irreplaceable. Link to the present — as screens and apps grow in our own classrooms, Asimov warns us not to lose the human, social joy of learning together. End on the ironic title — Margie wistfully thinks of 'the fun they had'.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-mark character sketch of Margie (with textual evidence).

- 1 IDENTIFY + ONE-LINE PLACEMENT**
1 m
Begin: 'Margie Jones is the eleven-year-old protagonist of the story, whose diary entry of 17 May 2157 frames the narrative.' Establish age and role immediately.
- 2 TWO OR THREE TRAITS, EACH WITH PROOF**
2 m
Pick traits and support each: (i) CURIOUS and imaginative — she is fascinated by the real book and longs to know about old schools; (ii) DISCONTENTED with her schooling — she hates the mechanical teacher, especially the geography sector, and hopes the inspector will take it away; (iii) LONELY — she envies the togetherness of the old school. Each trait must carry a textual reason, not a bare adjective.
- 3 CONCLUDE WITH HER EMOTIONAL ARC**
2 m
Close on her final mood: by the end she sits thinking wistfully about 'the fun they had' in the old schools — a child quietly aware that something valuable has been lost to progress. This emotional close lifts the sketch beyond a list of traits.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

3-4 mark reference-to-context: an extract is given with sub-questions (who/where, meaning,

**1 NAME SPEAKER/
CONTEXT PRECISELY**

1 m

Answer the 'who said this / where does it occur' part exactly: e.g. 'These are Margie's thoughts (or Tommy's words) when they discover/discuss the real printed book Tommy found in his attic.' Pin it to the moment in the story.

**2 EXPLAIN THE MEANING
IN OWN WORDS**

1 m

Paraphrase the extract's sense — do NOT copy the lines back. Show you understand what the words mean in context (e.g. why the children find the still, printed words strange compared with their moving telebook screens).

**3 ADD THE INFERENCE /
SIGNIFICANCE**

1 m

Give the deeper point the examiner is probing: what the extract reveals about the characters or the theme (e.g. it shows how alien printed books have become, underlining the gap between the future and the past).

PYQ PATTERNS






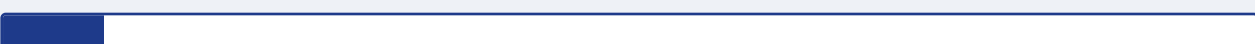
Top PYQ patterns to drill

#1	Short-answer: 'Why did Margie hate school? / What did Tommy say about the old kind of school?' (3 marks (3 x 1 or 1 x 3) marks)	Almost every periodic test + SQP
#2	Reference-to-context: an extract from Margie's reaction to the real book or the mechanical teacher, with 3 sub-questions (who/where, meaning, literary inference). (3-4 marks)	Recurr across SQP and annual papers
#3	Long/value-based: 'The story is set in 2157, yet the children envy the OLD kind of school. What does Asimov suggest about education and human connection?' (5-6 marks)	Annual exam favourite
#4	Character sketch of Margie OR Tommy with textual evidence. (5 marks)	Annual + revision tests
#5	Poem: 'Which road did the speaker take and why? Identify the central metaphor of The Road Not Taken.' (3-4 marks)	Paired-poem section, recurring

MARKS DISTRIBUTION

10-year marks distribution

10-YEAR PYQ MARKS DISTRIBUTION

Short-answer comprehension (30-40 words)		14%
Reference-to-context extract questions		12%
Long-answer / value-based (100-120 words)		18%
Extract-based MCQ cluster (literature)		10%
Grammar / vocabulary from the lesson		6%
Poem 'The Road Not Taken' — theme + figure of speech		8%

RECAP · MEMORISE THESE

5-line revision

1 Plot — 2157: Tommy finds a real paper book about old schools; Margie, taught alone by a mechanical teacher, ends up longing for the togetherness of the old kind of school.

2 Theme & irony — Technology cannot replace human connection. The irony: advanced future children ENVY the primitive past. Title points wistfully backward to 'the fun they had'.

3 Poem — The Road Not Taken = the irreversibility of choices and how we narrate them; roads = life's decisions. Avoid the simple 'be different' reading.

WHAT'S NEXT

What's next

- Beehive Prose Ch 2 — 'The Sound of Music' (builds your character-and-theme answer skills further).
- Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill (companion PDF) — under 20 minutes, target $\geq 12/15$.
- Then the full school-pattern Literature & Reading paper — 30 marks, 60 minutes, CBSE SQP pattern.

You've met Margie, Tommy — and a warning from 2157.

Now prove it. Take the drill, sit the paper, master the chapter.

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