

Honors English I



May 2024

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The Ninth Grade Center English Department would like to inform you about our Honors English Summer Reading Program. Our goal is to provide students with an opportunity to read a variety of genres to prepare them for the expectations and themes of this course. In addition, studies have demonstrated the importance of consistent reading when it comes to skill and vocabulary development.

We will begin the year by introducing high school honors level literary and rhetorical analysis. Therefore, we've included a variety of texts below. After each text set, students will complete a series of short writing and analytical tasks. Please feel free to email either of us with any questions.

Grading: The purpose of these assignments is to assess students' existing knowledge. While this will be taken for a grade, it is crucial that students produce their best, original work. They may need to Google unknown words or allusions in texts, but should otherwise not use the Internet to look up the meanings of texts. Their grade will be based on thoroughness and basic grammar more than on accuracy. **Students, please pay careful attention to capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.**

Google Classroom: Students can find a copy of the assignment at the following Google Classroom link:

<https://classroom.google.com/c/NjgzNTE4MjAyMTlw?cjc=gsozi3o>

Students must join Google Classroom to show that they have received the assignment.

See the next page for a table of contents.

We look forward to the upcoming year with your student.

Thank you,

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INSTRUCTIONS:

Make a copy of this document so you can edit it in order to annotate.

When asked to annotate for a particular device, use the comment feature to record your thoughts. Consider asking questions or making observations about what you see the author doing.

Make a copy of the student answer document, so that you can record your responses: [W Summer Reading 2024_Student Answer Document.docx](#)

You will submit the answer document in Google Classroom no later than your first day of class. Points will be deducted for each day your summer reading project is late.

Text Set for Activity #1

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge by Ambrose Bierce

Instructions: The first 2 short stories have been paired because of their similar themes. As you read, pay attention to and annotate for places where the authors use plot or characterization to convey a message about war, violence, time, or illusion.

A man stood on a railroad bridge in Alabama looking down into the swift waters of the Owl Creek River below. The man's hands were tied behind his back. There was a rope around his neck. The rope was tied to part of the bridge above him. Three soldiers of the northern army stood near the prisoner, waiting for their captain's orders to hang him.

Everybody was ready. The prisoner stood quietly. His eyes were not covered. He looked down and saw the water under the bridge. Now, he closed his eyes.

He wanted his last thoughts to be of his wife and children. But, as he tried to think of them, he heard sounds -- again and again. The sounds were soft. But they got louder and louder and started to hurt his ears. The pain was strong. He wanted to shout. But the sounds he heard were just those of the river running swiftly under the bridge.

The prisoner quickly opened his eyes and looked at the water. "If I could only free my hands," he thought. "Then I could get the rope off my neck and jump into the river. I could swim under the water and escape the fire of their guns. I could reach the other side of the river and get home through the forest. My house is outside of their military area, and my wife and children are safe there. I would be, too..."

While these thoughts raced through the prisoner's mind, the captain gave the soldiers the order to hang him. A soldier quickly obeyed. He made the rope firm around the prisoner's neck. Then he dropped him through a hole in the bridge.

As the prisoner fell, everything seemed black and empty. But then he felt a sharp pain in his neck and could not breathe. There were terrible pains running from his neck down through his body, his arms and his legs. He could not think. He could only feel, a feeling of living in a world of pain.

Then, suddenly, he heard a noise...something falling into the water. There was a big sound in his ears. Everything around him was cold and dark. Now he could think. He believed the rope had broken and that he was in the river.

But the rope was still around his neck, and his hands were tied. He thought: "How funny. How funny to die of hanging at the bottom of a river!" Then he felt his body moving up to the top of the water.

The prisoner did not know what he was doing. But his hands reached the rope on his neck and tore it off.

Now he felt the most violent pain he had ever known. He wanted to put the rope back on his neck. He tried but could not. His hands beat the water and pushed him up to the top. His head came out of the water. The light of the sun hurt his eyes. His mouth opened, and he swallowed air. It was too much for his lungs. He blew out the air with a scream.

Now the prisoner could think more clearly. All his senses had returned. They were even sharper than before. He heard sounds he never heard before -- that no man's ears ever heard -- the flying wings of small insects, the movement of a fish. His eyes saw more than just the trees along the river. They saw every leaf on the trees. And they saw the thin lines in the leaves.

And he saw the bridge, with the wall at one end. He saw the soldiers and the captain on the bridge. They shouted, and they pointed at him. They looked like giant monsters. As he looked, he heard gunfire. Something hit the water near his head. Now there was a second shot. He saw one soldier shooting at him.

He knew he had to get to the forest and escape. He heard an officer call to the other soldiers to shoot.

The prisoner went down into the river, deep, as far as he could. The water made a great noise in his ears, but he heard the shots.

As he came up to the top again, he saw the bullets hit the water. Some of them touched his face and hands.

One even fell into the top of his shirt. He felt the heat of the bullet on his back.

When his head came out of the water for air, he saw that he was farther away from the soldiers. And he began swimming strongly.

As he swam, the soldiers fired their rifles. Then they fired their cannon at him. But nothing hit him. Then, suddenly, he could not swim. He was caught in a whirlpool which

kept turning him around and around. This was the end, he thought. Then, just as suddenly as it had caught him, the whirlpool lifted him and threw him out of the river. He was on land!

He kissed the ground. He looked around him. There was a pink light in the air. The wind seemed to make music as it blew through the trees. He wanted to stay there. But the cannon fired again, and he heard the bullets above his head. He got up and ran into the forest. At last, he found a road toward his house. It was a wide, straight road. Yet it looked like a road that never had any travelers on it. No farms. No houses on its sides, only tall black trees.

In the tall black trees, the prisoner heard strange voices. Some of them spoke in words that he could not understand.

His neck began to hurt. When he touched it, it felt very large. His eyes hurt so much that he could not close them. His feet moved, but he could not feel the road.

As he walked, he was in a kind of sleep. Now, half-awake, half asleep, he found himself at the door of his house. His lovely wife ran to him. Ah, at last.

He put his arms about his beautiful wife. And just then, he felt a terrible pain in the back of his neck. All around him there was a great white light and the sound of a cannon. And then...then...darkness and silence.

The prisoner was dead. His neck was broken. His body hung at the end of a rope. It kept swinging from side to side. Swinging gently under a hole in Owl Creek Bridge.

The Sniper

by Liam O'Flaherty (1897-1984)

Note - This story is set during the Battle of Dublin in 1922 - a week of battle in the streets which marked the beginning of the Irish Civil War.

The long June twilight faded into night. Dublin lay enveloped in darkness but for the dim light of the moon that shone through fleecy clouds, casting a pale light as of approaching dawn over the streets and the dark waters of the Liffey. Around the beleaguered Four Courts the heavy guns roared. Here and there through the city, machine guns and rifles broke the silence of the night, spasmodically, like dogs barking on lone farms. Republicans and Free Staters were waging civil war.

On a rooftop near O'Connell Bridge, a Republican sniper lay watching. Beside him lay his rifle and over his shoulders was slung a pair of field glasses. His face was the face of a student, thin and ascetic, but his eyes had the cold gleam of the fanatic. They were deep and thoughtful, the eyes of a man who is used to looking at death.

He was eating a sandwich hungrily. He had eaten nothing since morning. He had been too excited to eat. He finished the sandwich, and, taking a flask of whiskey from his pocket, he took a short drought. Then he returned the flask to his pocket. He paused for a moment, considering whether he should risk a smoke. It was dangerous. The flash might be seen in the darkness, and there were enemies watching. He decided to take the risk.

Placing a cigarette between his lips, he struck a match, inhaled the smoke hurriedly and put out the light. Almost immediately, a bullet flattened itself against the parapet of the roof. The sniper took another whiff and put out the cigarette. Then he swore softly and crawled away to the left.

Cautiously he raised himself and peered over the parapet. There was a flash and a bullet whizzed over his head. He dropped immediately. He had seen the flash. It came from the opposite side of the street.

He rolled over the roof to a chimney stack in the rear, and slowly drew himself up behind it, until his eyes were level with the top of the parapet. There was nothing to be seen--just the dim outline of the opposite housetop against the blue sky. His enemy was under cover.

Just then an armored car came across the bridge and advanced slowly up the street. It stopped on the opposite side of the street, fifty yards ahead. The sniper could hear the dull panting of the motor. His heart beat faster. It was an enemy car. He wanted to fire, but he knew it was useless. His bullets would never pierce the steel that covered the gray monster.

Then round the corner of a side street came an old woman, her head covered by a tattered shawl. She began to talk to the man in the turret of the car. She was pointing to the roof where the sniper lay. An informer.

The turret opened. A man's head and shoulders appeared, looking toward the sniper. The sniper raised his rifle and fired. The head fell heavily on the turret wall. The woman darted toward the side street. The sniper fired again. The woman whirled round and fell with a shriek into the gutter.

Suddenly from the opposite roof a shot rang out and the sniper dropped his rifle with a curse. The rifle clattered to the roof. The sniper thought the noise would wake the dead. He stooped to pick the rifle up. He couldn't lift it. His forearm was dead. "I'm hit," he muttered.

Dropping flat onto the roof, he crawled back to the parapet. With his left hand he felt the injured right forearm. The blood was oozing through the sleeve of his coat. There was no pain--just a deadened sensation, as if the arm had been cut off.

Quickly he drew his knife from his pocket, opened it on the breastwork of the parapet, and ripped open the sleeve. There was a small hole where the bullet had entered. On the other side there was no hole. The bullet had lodged in the bone. It must have fractured it. He bent the arm below the wound. the arm bent back easily. He ground his teeth to overcome the pain.

Then taking out his field dressing, he ripped open the packet with his knife. He broke the neck of the iodine bottle and let the bitter fluid drip into the wound. A paroxysm of pain swept through him. He placed the cotton wadding over the wound and wrapped the dressing over it. He tied the ends with his teeth.

Then he lay still against the parapet, and, closing his eyes, he made an effort of will to overcome the pain.

In the street beneath all was still. The armored car had retired speedily over the bridge, with the machine gunner's head hanging lifeless over the turret. The woman's corpse lay still in the gutter.

The sniper lay still for a long time nursing his wounded arm and planning escape. Morning must not find him wounded on the roof. The enemy on the opposite roof covered his escape. He must kill that enemy and he could not use his rifle. He had only a revolver to do it. Then he thought of a plan.

Taking off his cap, he placed it over the muzzle of his rifle. Then he pushed the rifle slowly upward over the parapet, until the cap was visible from the opposite side of the street. Almost immediately there was a report, and a bullet pierced the center of the cap. The sniper slanted the rifle forward. The cap clipped down into the street. Then catching the rifle in the middle, the sniper dropped his left hand over the roof and let it hang, lifelessly. After a few moments he let the rifle drop to the street. Then he sank to the roof, dragging his hand with him.

Crawling quickly to his feet, he peered up at the corner of the roof. His ruse had succeeded. The other sniper, seeing the cap and rifle fall, thought that he had killed his

man. He was now standing before a row of chimney pots, looking across, with his head clearly silhouetted against the western sky.

The Republican sniper smiled and lifted his revolver above the edge of the parapet. The distance was about fifty yards--a hard shot in the dim light, and his right arm was paining him like a thousand devils. He took a steady aim. His hand trembled with eagerness. Pressing his lips together, he took a deep breath through his nostrils and fired. He was almost deafened with the report and his arm shook with the recoil.

Then when the smoke cleared, he peered across and uttered a cry of joy. His enemy had been hit. He was reeling over the parapet in his death agony. He struggled to keep his feet, but he was slowly falling forward as if in a dream. The rifle fell from his grasp, hit the parapet, fell over, bounded off the pole of a barber's shop beneath and then clattered on the pavement.

Then the dying man on the roof crumpled up and fell forward. The body turned over and over in space and hit the ground with a dull thud. Then it lay still.

The sniper looked at his enemy falling and he shuddered. The lust of battle died in him. He became bitten by remorse. The sweat stood out in beads on his forehead. Weakened by his wound and the long summer day of fasting and watching on the roof, he revolted from the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy. His teeth chattered, he began to gibber to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody.

He looked at the smoking revolver in his hand, and with an oath he hurled it to the roof at his feet. The revolver went off with a concussion and the bullet whizzed past the sniper's head. He was frightened back to his senses by the shock. His nerves steadied. The cloud of fear scattered from his mind and he laughed.

Taking the whiskey flask from his pocket, he emptied it a drought. He felt reckless under the influence of the spirit. He decided to leave the roof now and look for his company commander, to report. Everywhere around was quiet. There was not much danger in going through the streets. He picked up his revolver and put it in his pocket. Then he crawled down through the skylight to the house underneath.

When the sniper reached the laneway on the street level, he felt a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy sniper whom he had killed. He decided that he was a good shot, whoever he was. He wondered did he know him. Perhaps he had been in his own company before the split in the army. He decided to risk going over to have a look at him. He peered around the corner into O'Connell Street. In the upper part of the street there was heavy firing, but around here all was quiet.

The sniper darted across the street. A machine gun tore up the ground around him with a hail of bullets, but he escaped. He threw himself face downward beside the corpse. The machine gun stopped.

Then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother's face.

Text Set for Activity #2

"August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950)

Ray Bradbury

Instructions: The following short story and informational text are paired. Read the story, annotating for details that you feel connect to a possible theme. Pay attention to Bradbury's message about how technology can both help and hurt humanity.

In the living room the voice-clock sang, *Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock!* as if it were afraid that nobody would. The morning house lay empty. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the emptiness. *Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!*

In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunnyside up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

"Today is August 4, 2026," said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling, "in the city of Allendale, California." It repeated the date three times for memory's sake. "Today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita's marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills."

Somewhere in the walls, relays clicked, memory tapes glided under electric eyes.

Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one! But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: "Rain, rain, go away; rubbers, raincoats for today..." And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing.

Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the waiting car. After a long wait the door swung down again.

At eight-thirty the eggs were shriveled and the toast was like stone. An aluminum wedge scraped them into the sink, where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea. The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry.

Nine-fifteen, sang the clock, *time to clean.*

Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The rooms were acrawl with the small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling their mustached runners, kneading the rug nap, sucking gently at hidden dust. Then, like mysterious invaders, they popped into their burrows. Their pink electric eyes faded. The house was clean.

Ten o'clock. The sun came out from behind the rain. The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles.

Ten-fifteen. The garden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted windowpanes, running down the charred west side where the house had been burned evenly free of its white paint. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to

pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.

The five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer.

The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden with falling light.

Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, "Who goes there? What's the password?" and, getting no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats, it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical paranoia.

It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird, startled, flew off! No, not even a bird must touch the house!

The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs. But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly.

Twelve noon.

A dog whined, shivering, on the front porch.

The front door recognized the dog voice and opened. The dog, once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered with sores, moved in and through the house, tracking mud. Behind it whirred angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience.

For not a leaf fragment blew under the door but what the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper, seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows. There, down tubes which fed into the cellar, it was dropped into the sighing vent of an incinerator which sat like evil Baal in a dark corner.

The dog ran upstairs, hysterically yelping to each door, at last realizing, as the house realized, that only silence was here.

It sniffed the air and scratched the kitchen door. Behind the door, the stove was making pancakes which filled the house with a rich baked odor and the scent of maple syrup.

The dog frothed at the mouth, lying at the door, sniffing, its eyes turned to fire. It ran wildly in circles, biting at its tail, spun in a frenzy, and died. It lay in the parlor for an hour.

Two o'clock, sang a voice.

Delicately sensing decay at last, the regiments of mice hummed out as softly as blown gray leaves in an electrical wind.

Two-fifteen.

The dog was gone.

In the cellar, the incinerator glowed suddenly and a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney.

Two thirty-five.

Bridge tables sprouted from patio walls. Playing cards fluttered onto pads in a shower of pips. Martinis manifested on an oaken bench with egg-salad sandwiches. Music played.

But the tables were silent and the cards untouched.

At four o'clock the tables folded like great butterflies back through the paneled walls.

Four-thirty.

The nursery walls glowed.

Animals took shape: yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers cavorting in crystal substance. The walls were glass. They looked out upon color and fantasy. Hidden films docked through well-oiled sprockets, and the walls lived. The nursery floor was woven to resemble a crisp, cereal meadow. Over this ran aluminum roaches and iron crickets, and in the hot still air butterflies of delicate red tissue wavered among the sharp aroma of animal spoors! There was the sound like a great matted yellow hive of bees within a dark bellows, the lazy bumble of a purring lion. And there was the patter of okapi feet and the murmur of a fresh jungle rain, like other hoofs, falling upon the summer-starched grass. Now the walls dissolved into distances of parched weed, mile on mile, and warm endless sky. The animals drew away into thorn brakes and water holes.

It was the children's hour.

Five o'clock. The bath filled with clear hot water.

Six, seven, eight o'clock. The dinner dishes manipulated like magic tricks, and in the study a click. In the metal stand opposite the hearth where a fire now blazed up warmly, a cigar popped out, half an inch of soft gray ash on it, smoking, waiting.

Nine o'clock. The beds warmed their hidden circuits, for nights were cool here.

Nine-five. A voice spoke from the study ceiling:

"Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?" The house was silent.

The voice said at last, "Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random." Quiet music rose to back the voice. "Sara Teasdale. As I recall, your favorite....

"There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;
And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white;
Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims on a low
fence-wire; And not one will know
of the war, not one Will care at last
when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird
nor tree, if mankind perished
utterly;
And Spring herself, when she woke at
dawn Would scarcely know that we
were gone."

The fire burned on the stone hearth and the cigar fell away into a mound of quiet ash on its tray. The empty chairs faced each other between the silent walls, and the music played.

At ten o'clock the house began to die.

The wind blew. A failing tree bough crashed through the kitchen window. Cleaning solvent, bottled, shattered over the stove. The room was ablaze in an instant!

"Fire!" screamed a voice. The house lights flashed, water pumps shot water from the ceilings. But the solvent spread on the linoleum, licking, eating, under the kitchen door, while the voices took it up in chorus: "Fire, fire, fire!"

The house tried to save itself. Doors sprang tightly shut, but the windows were broken by the heat and the wind blew and sucked upon the fire.

The house gave ground as the fire in ten billion angry sparks moved with flaming ease from room to room and then up the stairs. While scurrying water rats squeaked from the walls, pistoled their water, and ran for more. And the wall sprays let down showers of mechanical rain.

But too late. Somewhere, sighing, a pump shrugged to a stop. The quenching rain ceased.

The reserve water supply which had filled baths and washed dishes for many quiet days was gone.

The fire crackled up the stairs. It fed upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings.

Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, changed the colors of drapes!

And then, reinforcements.

From attic trapdoors, blind robot faces peered down with faucet mouths gushing green chemical.

The fire backed off, as even an elephant must at the sight of a dead snake. Now there were twenty snakes whipping over the floor, killing the fire with a clear cold venom of green froth.

But the fire was clever. It had sent flames outside the house, up through the attic to the pumps there. An explosion! The attic brain which directed the pumps was shattered into bronze shrapnel on the beams.

The fire rushed back into every closet and felt of the clothes hung there.

The house shuddered, oak bone on bone, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat, its wire, its nerves revealed as if a surgeon had torn the skin off to let the red veins and capillaries quiver in the scalded air. Help, help! Fire! Run, run! Heat snapped

mirrors like the brittle winter ice. And the voices wailed Fire, fire, run, run, like a tragic nursery rhyme, a dozen voices, high, low, like children dying in a forest, alone, alone. And the voices fading as the wires popped their sheathings like hot chestnuts. One, two, three, four, five voices died.

In the nursery the jungle burned. Blue lions roared, purple giraffes bounded off. The panthers ran in circles, changing color, and ten million animals, running before the fire, vanished off toward a distant steaming river....

Ten more voices died. In the last instant under the fire avalanche, other choruses, oblivious, could be heard announcing the time, playing music, cutting the lawn by remote-control mower, or setting an umbrella frantically out and in the slamming and opening front door, a thousand things happening, like a clock shop when each clock strikes the hour insanely before or after the other, a scene of maniac confusion, yet unity; singing, screaming, a few last cleaning mice darting bravely out to carry the horrid ashes away! And one voice, with sublime disregard for the situation, read poetry aloud in the fiery study, until all the film spools burned, until all the wires withered and the circuits cracked.

The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down, puffing out skirts of spark and smoke.

In the kitchen, an instant before the rain of fire and timber, the stove could be seen making breakfasts at a psychopathic rate, ten dozen eggs, six loaves of toast, twenty dozen bacon strips, which, eaten by fire, started the stove working again, hysterically hissing!

The crash. The attic smashing into kitchen and parlor. The parlor into cellar, cellar into sub-cellar. Deep freeze, armchair, film tapes, circuits, beds, and all like skeletons thrown in a cluttered mound deep under.

Smoke and silence. A great quantity of smoke.

Dawn showed faintly in the east. Among the ruins, one wall stood alone. Within the wall, a last voice said, over and over again and again, even as the sun rose to shine upon the heaped rubble and steam:

"Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is..."

Dumbing down or wising up: how will generative AI change the way we think? Sarah Bentley, Claire Mason and Einat Grimberg

Instructions: Read the article, annotating for evidence and main idea. Pay attention to how the author establishes the idea that technology can both help and hurt humanity.

Information is a valuable commodity. And thanks to technology, there are millions of terabytes of it online.

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT are now managing this information on our behalf – collating it, summarizing it, and presenting it back to us.

But this “outsourcing” of information management to AI – convenient as it is – comes with consequences. It can influence not only *what* we think, but potentially also *how* we think.

What happens in a world where AI algorithms decide what information is perpetuated, and what is left by the wayside?

The rise of personalized AI

Generative AI tools are built on models trained on hundreds of gigabytes of preexisting data. From these data they learn how to autonomously create text, images, audio and video content, and can respond to user queries by patching together the “most likely” answer.

ChatGPT is used by millions of people, despite having been publicly released less than a year ago. In June, the addition of custom responses made the already-impressive chatbot even more useful. This feature lets users save customized instructions explaining what they are using the bot for and how they would like it to respond.

This is one of several examples of “personalized AI”: a category of AI tools that generate content to suit the specific needs and preferences of the user.

Another example is Meta’s recently launched virtual assistant, Meta AI. This chatbot can have conversations, generate images and perform tasks across Meta’s platforms including WhatsApp, Messenger and Instagram.

Artificial intelligence researcher and co-founder of DeepMind, Mustafa Suleyman, describes personalized AI as being more of a relationship than a technology:

It's a friend. [...] It's really going to be ever present and alongside you, living with you – basically on your team. I like to think of it as like having a great coach in your corner.

But these technologies are also controversial, with concerns raised over data ownership, bias and misinformation.

Tech companies are trying to find ways to combat these issues. For instance, Google has added source links to AI-generated search summaries produced by its Search Generative Experience (SGE) tool, which came under fire earlier this year for offering up inaccurate and problematic responses.



Technology has already changed our thinking

How will generative AI tools – and especially those personalized to us – change how we think?

To understand this, let's revisit the early 1990s when the internet first came into our lives. People could suddenly access information about pretty much anything, whether that was banking, baking, teaching or traveling.

Nearly 30 years on, studies have shown how being connected to this global “hive mind” has changed our cognition, memory and creativity.

For instance, having instantaneous access to the equivalent of 305.5 billion pages of information has increased people's meta-knowledge – that is, their knowledge about knowledge. One impact of this is the “Google effect”: a phenomenon in which online

search increases our ability to find information, but reduces our memory of what that information was.

On one hand, offloading our thinking to search engines has been shown to free up our mental reserves for problem solving and creative thinking. On the other, online information retrieval has been associated with increased distractibility and dependency.

Research also shows online searching – regardless of the quantity or quality of information retrieved – increases our cognitive self-esteem. In other words, it increases our belief in our own “smarts”.

Couple this with the fact that questioning information is effortful – and that the more we trust our search engine, the less we critically engage with its results – and you can see why having access to unprecedented amounts of information is not necessarily making us wiser.

Should we be ‘outsourcing’ our thinking?

Today’s generative AI tools go a lot further than just presenting us with search results. They locate the information for us, evaluate it, synthesize it and present it back to us.

What might the implications of this be? Without pushing for human-led quality control, the outlook isn’t promising.

Generative AI’s ability to produce responses that feel familiar, objective and engaging means it leaves us more vulnerable to cognitive biases.

The automation bias, for instance, is the human tendency to overestimate the integrity of machine-sourced information. And the mere exposure effect is when we’re more likely to trust information that is presented as familiar or personal.

Research on social media can help us understand the impact of such biases. In one 2016 study, Facebook users reported feeling more “in the know” based on the quantity of news content posted online – and not how much of it they actually read.

We also know that “filter bubbles” created by social media algorithms – wherein our feeds are filtered according to our interests — limit the diversity of the content we’re exposed to.

This process of information narrowing has been shown to increase ideological polarisation by reducing people’s propensity to consider alternative perspectives. It’s also been shown to increase our likelihood of being exposed to fake news.

Using AI to wise up, and not dumb down

Generative AI is, without a doubt, a revolutionary force with the potential to do great things for society. It could reshape our education system by providing personalised content, change our work practices by expediting writing and information analysis, and push the frontiers of scientific discovery.

It even has the potential to positively alter our relationships by helping us communicate and connect with others and can, at times, function as a form of synthetic companionship.

But if our only way to judge the future is by looking to the past, maybe now is the time to reflect on how both the internet and social media have changed our cognition, and apply some precautionary measures. Developing AI literacy is a good place to start, as is designing AI tools that encourage human autonomy and critical thinking.

Ultimately, we'll need to understand both our own and AI's strengths and weaknesses to ensure these "thinking" companions help us create the future we want – and not the one that happens to be at the top of the list.

Speech for Activity #3

Florence Kelley's speech before the convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in Philadelphia on July 22, 1905

Read this speech, annotating for places where you think her writing is persuasive. Keep her original audience and context in mind.

We have, in this country, two million children under the age of sixteen years who are earning their bread. They vary in age from six and seven years (in the cotton mills of Georgia) and eight, nine and ten years (in the coal-breakers of Pennsylvania), to fourteen, fifteen and sixteen years in more enlightened states.

No other portion of the wage earning class increased so rapidly from decade to decade as the young girls from fourteen to twenty years. Men increase, women increase, youth increase, boys increase in the ranks of the breadwinners; but no contingent so doubles from census period to census period (both by percent and by count of heads), as does the contingent of girls between twelve and twenty years of age. They are in commerce, in offices, in manufacturing.

Tonight while we sleep, several thousand little girls will be working in textile mills, all the night through, in the deafening noise of the spindles and the looms spinning and weaving cotton and wool, silks and ribbons for us to buy.

In Alabama the law provides that a child under sixteen years of age shall not work in a cotton mill at night longer than eight hours, and Alabama does better in this respect than any other southern state. North and South Carolina and Georgia place no restriction upon the work of children at night; and while we sleep little white girls will be working tonight in the mills in those states, working eleven hours at night.

In Georgia there is no restriction whatever! A girl of six or seven years, just tall enough to reach the bobbins, may work eleven hours by day or by night. And they will do so tonight, while we sleep.

Nor is it only in the South that these things occur. Alabama does better than New Jersey. For Alabama limits the children's work at night to eight hours, while New Jersey permits it all night long. Last year New Jersey took a long backward step. A good law was repealed which had required women and [children] to stop work at six in the evening and at noon on Friday. Now, therefore, in New Jersey, boys and girls, after their 14th birthday, enjoy the pitiful privilege of working all night long.

In Pennsylvania, until last May it was lawful for children, 13 years of age, to work twelve hours at night. A little girl, on her thirteenth birthday, could start away from her home at half past five in the afternoon, carrying her pail of midnight luncheon as happier people carry their midday luncheon, and could work in the mill from six at night until six in the morning, without violating any law of the Commonwealth.

If the mothers and the teachers in Georgia could vote, would the Georgia Legislature have refused at every session for the last three years to stop the work in the mills of children under twelve years of age?

Would the New Jersey Legislature have passed that shameful repeal bill enabling girls of fourteen years to work all night, if the mothers in New Jersey were enfranchised? Until the mothers in the great industrial states are enfranchised, we shall none of us be able to free our consciences from participation in this great evil. No one in this room tonight can feel free from such participation. The children make our shoes in the shoe factories; they knit our stockings, our knitted underwear in the knitting factories. They spin and weave our cotton underwear in the cotton mills. Children braid straw for our hats, they spin and weave the silk and velvet wherewith we trim our hats. They stamp buckles and metal ornaments of all kinds, as well as pins and hat-pins. Under the sweating system, tiny children make artificial flowers and neckwear for us to buy. They carry bundles of garments from the factories to the tenements, little beasts of burden, robbed of school life that they may work for us.

We do not wish this. We prefer to have our work done by men and women. But we are almost powerless. Not wholly powerless, however, are citizens who enjoy the right of petition. For myself, I shall use this power in every possible way until the right to the ballot is granted, and then I shall continue to use both.

What can we do to free our consciences? There is one line of action by which we can do much. We can enlist the workingmen on behalf of our enfranchisement just in proportion as we strive with them to free the children. No labor organization in this country ever fails to respond to an appeal for help in the freeing of the children.

For the sake of the children, for the Republic in which these children will vote after we are dead, and for the sake of our cause, we should enlist the workingmen voters, with us, in this task of freeing the children from toil!

Text Set for Activity #4

Musée des Beaux Arts

W. H. Auden

Instructions: This poem is an example of ekphrasis, or a poem inspired by a work of art. Read the poem, then view the paintings that follow and complete the activity. Annotate the poem for strong imagery or word choice.

About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

Text - Painting Connections: Ekphrasis is a genre of poetry in which the poets are inspired by a work of art. Below are several of the paintings mentioned in Auden's poem. Look at each carefully.



Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

This is the painting discussed in detail in the second half of the poem. If you are not familiar with the myth of Icarus, Google it. Can you spot him?

The following 2 paintings are more loosely described in the first half of the poem:



Census at Bethlehem by Pieter Bruegel the Elder



Pieter Bruegel the Younger's The Massacre of the Innocents