

MEET THE WRITER

Ray Bradbury

(1920–2012)

Space-Age Storyteller

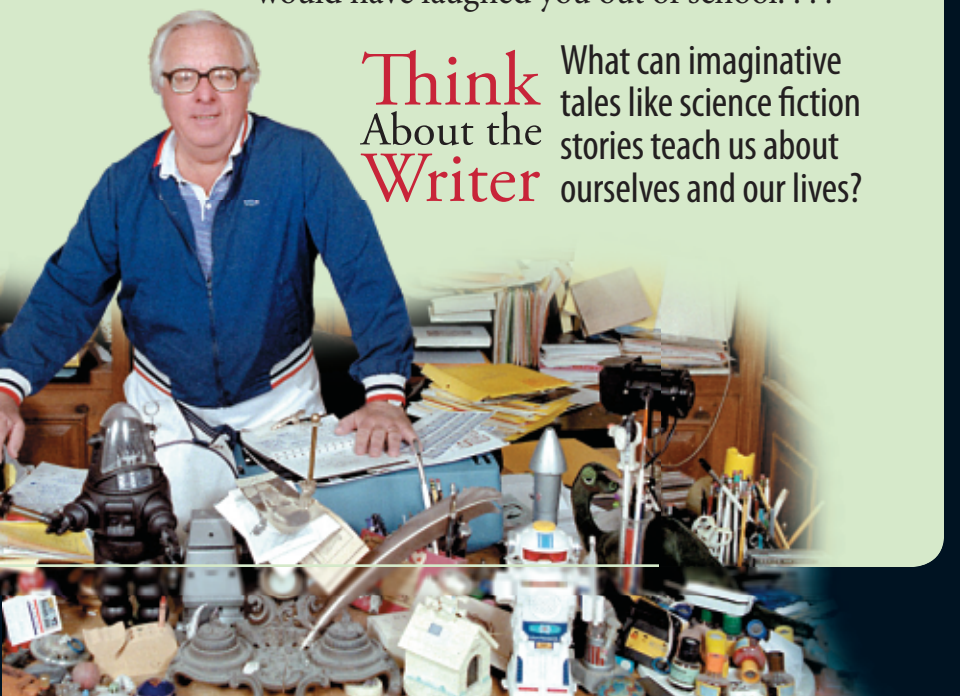
Ray Bradbury has been called the world's greatest science fiction writer. He once described himself more simply: "I am a storyteller. That's all I've ever tried to be." Although Bradbury's stories are often set in outer space, his characters and their emotions are human and down-to-earth. Through this connection of the imagined and the real, Bradbury's fiction challenges the reader to question where we might be headed and what we might learn about ourselves now.

Imagine the Future

In his fiction, Bradbury encourages his readers to try to imagine the wonders the future will hold:

"Everything confronting us in the next thirty years will be science-fictional, that is, impossible a few years ago. The things you are doing right now, if you had told anyone you'd be doing them when you were children, they would have laughed you out of school. . . ."

Think What can imaginative
About the tales like science fiction
Writer stories teach us about
ourselves and our lives?



Build Background

"All Summer in a Day" takes place on the planet Venus in a future world where "rocket men and women," as Bradbury calls them, have come to live and set up a colony. Bradbury's description of Venus and its weather patterns is entirely fictional. As the second planet from the sun in our solar system, Venus is actually very hot and dry—and has no water.

Bradbury wrote his story in 1959, during a period (roughly 1957–1975) when the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union was in full swing. The two countries were in competition to see who would reach the moon first and who would go the farthest to make space travel a reality. Nine years after this story was written, the United States made the first moon landing, and many people thought it would not be long before spaceships made it to Mars and other planets.

Preview the Selection

On the planet Venus—as imagined by Bradbury—the sun appears for only two hours every seven years. A class of nine-year-olds eagerly awaits a brief glimpse of the sun, especially one student named **Margot**.

All Summer in a Day

by Ray Bradbury

“Ready.”

“Ready.”

“Now?”

“Soon.”

“Do the scientists really know? Will it happen today, will it?”

“Look, look; see for yourself!”

The children pressed to each other like so many roses, so many weeds, intermixed, peering out for a look at the hidden sun.

It rained.

It had been raining for seven years; thousands upon thousands of days compounded and filled from one end to the other with rain, with the drum and gush of water, with the sweet crystal fall of showers and the concussion¹ of storms so heavy they were tidal waves come over the islands. A thousand forests had been crushed under the rain and grown up a thousand times to be crushed again. And this was the way life was forever on the planet Venus, and this

was the schoolroom of the children of the rocket men and women who had come to a raining world to set up civilization and live out their lives.

“It’s stopping, it’s stopping!”

“Yes, yes!”

Margot stood apart from them, from these children who could never remember a time when there wasn’t rain and rain and rain. They were all nine years old, and if there had been a day, seven years ago, when the sun came out for an hour and showed its face to the stunned world, they could not recall. Sometimes, at night, she heard them stir, in remembrance, and she knew they were dreaming and remembering gold or a yellow crayon or a coin large enough to buy the world with. She knew they thought they remembered a warmth, like a blushing in the face, in the body, in the arms and legs and trembling hands. But then they always awoke to the tating drum, the endless shaking down of clear bead necklaces upon the roof, the walk, the gardens, the forests, and their dreams were gone.

1. **concussion** (kuhn KUHSN uhn): violent shaking or shock.

All day yesterday they had read in class about the sun. About how like a lemon it was, and how hot. And they had written small stories or essays or poems about it.

*I think the sun is a flower
That blooms for just one hour.*

That was Margot's poem, read in a quiet voice in the still classroom while the rain was falling outside.

"Aw, you didn't write that!" protested one of the boys.

"I did," said Margot. "*I did.*"

"William!" said the teacher.

But that was yesterday. Now the rain was slackening,² and the children were crushed in the great thick windows.

"Where's teacher?"

"She'll be back."

"She'd better hurry; we'll miss it!"

They turned on themselves like a feverish wheel, all tumbling spokes.

Margot stood alone. She was a very **frail** girl who looked as if she had been lost in the rain for years and the rain had washed out the blue from her eyes and the red from her mouth and the yellow from her hair. She was an old photograph dusted from an album, whitened away, and if she spoke at all her voice would be a ghost. Now she stood, separate, staring at the rain and the loud wet world beyond the huge glass.

"What're *you* looking at?" said William.

Margot said nothing.

"Speak when you're spoken to." He gave her a shove. But she did not move; rather

she let herself be moved only by him and nothing else.

They edged away from her; they would not look at her. She felt them go away. And this was because she would play no games with them in the echoing tunnels of the underground city. If they tagged her and ran, she stood blinking after them and did not follow. When the class sang songs about happiness and life and games, her lips barely moved. Only when they sang about the sun and the summer did her lips move as she watched the drenched windows.

And then, of course, the biggest crime of all was that she had come here only five years ago from Earth, and she remembered the sun and the way the sun was and the sky was when she was four in Ohio. And they, they had been on Venus all their lives, and they had been only two years old when last the sun came out and had long since forgotten the color and heat of it and the way it really was. But Margot remembered.

"It's like a penny," she said once, eyes closed.

"No, it's not!" the children cried.

"It's like a fire," she said, "in the stove."

"You're lying; you don't remember!" cried the children.

But she remembered and stood quietly apart from all of them and watched the patterning windows. And once, a month ago, she had refused to shower in the school shower rooms, had clutched her hands to her ears and over her head, screaming the water mustn't touch her head. So after that, dimly, dimly, she sensed it, she was

2. **slackening** (SLAK uh nihng): lessening; slowing.



different, and they knew her difference and kept away.

There was talk that her father and mother were taking her back to Earth next year; it seemed **vital** to her that they do so, though it would mean the loss of thousands of dollars to her family. And so, the children hated her for all these reasons of big and little **consequence**. They hated her pale snow face, her waiting silence, her thinness, and her possible future.

“Get away!” The boy gave her another push. “What’re you waiting for?”

Then, for the first time, she turned and looked at him. And what she was waiting for was in her eyes.

“Well, don’t wait around here!” cried the boy savagely. “You won’t see nothing!”

Her lips moved.

“Nothing!” he cried. “It was all a joke, wasn’t it?” He turned to the other children. “Nothing’s happening today. Is it?”

They all blinked at him and then, understanding, laughed and shook their heads. “Nothing, nothing!”

“Oh, but,” Margot whispered, her eyes helpless. “But this is the day, the scientists predict, they say, they know, the sun . . .”

“All a joke!” said the boy, and seized her roughly. “Hey everyone, let’s put her in a closet before teacher comes!”

Vocabulary **vital** (VY tuhl) *adj.*: necessary for life; very important.

consequence (KAHN suh kwehns) *n.*: importance.

Life on Venus?



We don't know whether there's life on Venus. We can be pretty sure, though, that Ray Bradbury's science fiction vision of a rain-drenched Venus is more fiction than science.

Venus is the second planet from the Sun. Mercury is closer to the Sun, but Venus is hotter than Mercury because its atmosphere is full of thick clouds of sulfuric acid strong enough to etch metal and burn through your flesh. These clouds trap the sun's rays and increase the temperature to more than 800° (F).

It's too hot to rain on Venus, but scientists think its thick clouds might contain areas of lower temperatures where microscopic forms of life could exist. It's possible that small microbes are responsible for the types of gases in Venus's clouds. Could there be some form of life on Venus? Researchers will keep looking.

Ask Yourself

If life were found on Venus, how might people react?

"No," said Margot, falling back.

They **surged** about her, caught her up and bore her, protesting, and then pleading, and then crying, back into a tunnel, a room, a closet, where they slammed and locked the door. They stood looking at the door and saw it tremble from her beating and throwing herself against it. They heard her muffled cries. Then, smiling, they turned and went out and back down the tunnel, just as the teacher arrived.

"Ready, children?" She glanced at her watch.

"Yes!" said everyone.

"Are we all here?" "Yes!"

The rain slackened still more.

They crowded to the huge door.

The rain stopped.

It was as if, in the midst of a film concerning an avalanche, a tornado, a hurricane, a volcanic eruption, something had, first, gone wrong with the sound apparatus, thus muffling and finally cutting off all noise, all of the blasts and repercussions and thunders, and then, second, ripped the film from the projector and inserted in its place a peaceful tropical slide which did not move or tremor. The world ground to a standstill. The silence was so immense and unbelievable that you felt your ears had been stuffed or you had lost your hearing altogether. The children put their

Vocabulary **surged** (surjd) *v.*: moved forward, as if in a wave.

hands to their ears. They stood apart. The door slid back and the smell of the silent, waiting world came in to them.

The sun came out.

It was the color of flaming bronze and it was very large. And the sky around it was a blazing blue tile color. And the jungle burned with sunlight as the children, released from their spell, rushed out, yelling, into the springtime.

“Now, don’t go too far,” called the teacher after them. “You’ve only two hours, you know. You wouldn’t want to get caught out!”

But they were running and turning their faces up to the sky and feeling the sun on their cheeks like a warm iron; they were taking off their jackets and letting the sun burn their arms.

“Oh, it’s better than the sun lamps, isn’t it?”

“Much, much better!”

They stopped running and stood in the great jungle that covered Venus, that grew and never stopped growing, tumultuously,³ even as you watched it. It was a nest of octopuses, clustering up great arms of fleshlike weed, wavering, flowering in this brief spring. It was the color of rubber and ash, this jungle, from the many years without sun. It was the color of stones and white cheeses and ink, and it was the color of the moon.

The children lay out, laughing, on the jungle mattress and heard it sigh and squeak under them, resilient⁴ and alive. They ran among the trees, they slipped and fell, they pushed each other, they played hide-and-seek and tag, but most of all they squinted at the



3. **tumultuously** (too MUHL choo uhs lee): wildly; violently.

4. **resilient** (rih ZIHL yuhnt): springy, quick to recover.

sun until tears ran down their faces; they put their hands up to that yellowness and that amazing blueness and they breathed of the fresh, fresh air and listened and listened to the silence which suspended them in a blessed sea of no sound and no motion. They looked at everything and **savored** everything. Then, wildly, like animals escaped from their caves, they ran and ran in shouting circles. They ran for an hour and did not stop running.

And then—

In the midst of their running, one of the girls wailed.

Everyone stopped.

The girl, standing in the open, held out her hand.

“Oh, look, look,” she said, trembling.

They came slowly to look at her opened palm.

In the center of it, cupped and huge, was a single raindrop.

She began to cry, looking at it.

They glanced quietly at the sky.

“Oh. Oh.”

A few cold drops fell on their noses and their cheeks and their mouths. The sun faded behind a stir of mist. A wind blew cool around them. They turned and started to walk back toward the underground house, their hands at their sides, their smiles vanishing away.

A boom of thunder startled them, and like leaves before a new hurricane, they tumbled upon each other and ran. Lightning struck ten miles away, five miles away, a mile, a half-mile. The sky darkened into midnight in a flash.

They stood in the doorway of the underground for a moment until it was raining hard. Then they closed the door and heard the gigantic sound of the rain falling in tons and avalanches, everywhere and forever.

“Will it be seven more years?”

“Yes. Seven.”

Then one of them gave a little cry.

“Margot!”

“What?”

“She’s still in the closet where we locked her.”

“Margot.”

They stood as if someone had driven them, like so many stakes, into the floor. They looked at each other and then looked away. They glanced out at the world that was raining now and raining and raining steadily. They could not meet each other’s glances. Their faces were solemn and pale. They looked at their hands and feet, their faces down.

“Margot.”

One of the girls said, “Well . . . ?”

No one moved.

“Go on,” whispered the girl.

They walked slowly down the hall in the sound of cold rain. They turned through the doorway to the room in the sound of the storm and thunder, lightning on their faces, blue and terrible. They walked over to the closet door slowly and stood by it.

Behind the closet door was only silence.

They unlocked the door, even more slowly, and let Margot out.

Vocabulary **savored** (SAY vuhrd) v.: delighted in.