AS2.1WRITTEN TEXT STUDY

SAMPLE AS2.1 EXTERNAL EXAM ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Analyse how the setting of a text (or texts) you have studied influenced your understanding of the ideas in the text (or texts). (Note: Setting may include reference to time, place, historical or social context, or atmosphere.)
2. Analyse how an idea is developed in a text (or texts) you have studied.
3. Analyse how the writer(s) has created impact in a section of studied text (or texts).
4. Analyse how symbols are used to develop an idea in a text (or texts) you have studied.

August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains
A short story by Ray Bradbury

Ray Douglas Bradbury (born August 22, 1920) is an American fantasy, horror, science fiction, and mystery writer. Best known for his dystopian novel Fahrenheit 451 (1953) and for the science fiction stories gathered together as The Martian Chronicles (1950) and The Illustrated Man (1951), Bradbury is one of the most celebrated among 20th and 21st century American writers of speculative fiction. Many of Bradbury's works have been adapted into television shows or films.

There Will Come Soft Rains was first published in the May 6, 1950 issue of Collier's. Later that same year the story was included in Bradbury's famous short story collection The Martian Chronicles (1950).
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 shrivelled and the toast was like stone. An aluminium 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 moustached 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 odour 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 parlour for an hour.

*Two o'clock*, sang a voice.
Delicately sensing decay at last, the regiments of mice hummed out as softly as blown grey 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.*
But the tables were silent and the cards untouched.
At four o'clock the tables folded like great butterflies back through the panelled 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 colour 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 aluminium 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 grey ash on it, smoking, waiting.

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

*Nine-fifty.* 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 favourite…."

"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 falling 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 colours 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 colour, 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 parlour. The parlour 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..."
LEARNING SUPPORT:

Useful links:
Listen to the story on the science fiction blog z0mbieastronaut (link from the tags list on the RH side of the page) - (mp3 audio – 17m45sec) from the 1962 LP Burgess Meredith Reads Ray Bradbury. http://z0mbieastronaut.livejournal.com/

Biography and works:
• http://www.raybradbury.com/
• http://www.bradburymedia.co.uk/
• http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray_Bradbury#cite_note-21

Bradbury’s comments on books and his writing:

Personal response blog:
http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2011/03/16/there-will-come-soft-rains/

Two analysis essays:
• http://bmfweller.edublogs.org/2011/03/03/august-2026-there-will-come-soft-rains/
• http://voices.yahoo.com/article/120645/ray-bradburys-august-2026-there-will-come-soft-rains-164760.html

Study Tasks for There Will Come Soft Rains

Write all answers on your own paper.

A. VOCABULARY: write definitions for these key words from the story.
   a. silhouette  
e. capillaries
   b. paranoia  
f. oblivious
   c. regiment  
g. sublime
   d. incinerator  
h. psychopathic

B. QUESTIONS: Answer the following recall questions.
1. What unusual qualities and appliances does the house have?
2. What were the five spots of paint of?
3. What happened to the people?
4. What are some things the house has been protecting itself from?
5. Why is the dog very thin and covered in sores?
6. What happens to the dog’s remains?
7. What can you infer the family usually does at 2:35?
8. What did the children usually do at 4:30?
9. What is the name of the family that lived in the house?
10. What are some things the house does to try to save itself?
11. What was the last voice to die saying?
12. What warning is Bradbury trying to deliver in his story?
13. Read the note below and explain how the concept of a ‘post-apocalyptic setting’ relates to the story.

NOTE: In the original Collier’s story, a series of events take place in a deserted house in the city of Allendale, California, on April 28, 1985 (a year changed to 2026 in later printings). The story details the daily tasks of the robotic smart house after its inhabitants have died in a nuclear war. The house is undamaged and continues as programmed. It goes about doing its usual daily tasks for the family, unaware that they are no longer alive. The house then burns to the ground, while continuing to repeat the time and the date.

The title comes from Sara Teasdale's poem, "There Will Come Soft Rains", which had a post-apocalyptic setting inspired by World War I.

C. LITERARY TERMS: Be able to define each term and explain and give an example of the importance of each technique in the story. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. simile: a comparison to indicate similarities between two things; using the words ‘like’ or ‘as’.
   Example from the story: “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.”
   Significance: Creates a persona of the house as a human being – in fact it seems more alive than any of its missing human occupants. The image also conveys the harsh and brutal effects of a fiery bomb blast on living tissue so we think about what happened to the occupants. Death awaits – the tone darkens and the imagery focusses on physical senses so the reader cringes at the mental picture.
2. personification
3. setting
4. symbolism
5. repetition
6. irony
7. protagonist (Who or what is the protagonist of this story?)
8. imagery
9. suspense/ foreshadowing
10. theme (What is a main theme of the story?)
11. simple and minor sentences
12. allusion: Explain the significance of this Biblical allusion: "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." Baal is the same as Beelzebub, who is an old pagan god that appears in the Old Testament of the Bible. His name translates into Lord of the Flies. (There is a famous novel Lord of the Flies by William Golding, about a group of schoolboys marooned on an island who turn into savages and do terrible things.) Baal is also Satan's best friend in Milton's Paradise Lost (Book 1: line 75).

Adapted from: http://www.dukeofdefinition.com/Short_stories10.htm#softrains

D. STYLE: deconstruct each of these significant quotations from the story.

1. The opening line: “In the living room the voice-clock sang, Tick-tick, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock! as if it were afraid that nobody would.”
2. “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.”
3. “The nursery floor was woven to resemble a crisp, cereal meadow. Over this ran aluminium roaches and iron crickets, and in the hot still air butterflies of delicate red tissue wavered among the sharp aroma of animal spoors!”
4. “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.”

5. The concluding line: “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…”

E. Towards Excellence:

**FIVE WAYS OF GOING BEYOND THE TEXT TO SHOW PERCEPTION**

1. Our modern world

**Intelligent ‘smart’ houses: did Bradbury predict reality?**

a. Check out the virtual tour of Bill Gates’ house at:
http://www.usnews.com/usnews/tech/billgate/gates.htm

b. Comment on the similarities and differences to the house in the story – you could use a Venn diagram to do this comparison.

**AD2026 – where is technology leading us?**

c. Check out the latest technology trends at:
e.g. As per many reports, Google is expected to start selling eyeglasses that will project information, entertainment and, this being a Google product, advertisements onto the lenses. These glasses will have the combined features of virtual reality and augmented reality.

d. Comment on Ray Bradbury’s prescience and on how technology is influencing the way we live – for better and/or for worse.

2. Nuclear warfare – where are we at?

a. How close is the world to nuclear annihilation? Find out the latest – try:


iv. How New Zealand could be affected in a global nuclear war:

b. Explain the relevance of the story to the real world nuclear scenario.
3. The writer’s view: Ray Bradbury

Although he is often described as a science fiction writer, Bradbury does not box himself into a particular narrative categorization. Here are five comments he has made on his writing:

i “First of all, I don't write science fiction. I've only done one science fiction book and that's Fahrenheit 451, based on reality. Science fiction is a depiction of the real. Fantasy is a depiction of the unreal. So Martian Chronicles is not science fiction, it's fantasy. It couldn't happen, you see? That's the reason it's going to be around a long time—because it's a Greek myth, and myths have staying power.”

ii “People are afraid of fantasy. A lot of intellectuals think science fiction is trivial. And it's pivotal! People are walking around the streets with phones to their heads talking to someone ten feet away. We've killed two million people with automobiles. We're surrounded by technology and the problems created by technology, and science fiction isn't important?”

iii “I have to write these books and help change the future.”

iv “I was born a collector of metaphors. Metaphors are the center of life. I'm deeply influenced by Greek mythology, Roman mythology. The colourful stuff, anything magical. I've had all this stuff in my head from the age of three on.”

v “I've never set out to predict. I just write what later seems to evolve and be true.”


TASK: Choose at least ONE comment and discuss a connection to the story. Memorise the comment to use in your exam essay.

4. Sources of inspiration

a. Sara Teasdale’s 1920 poem

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There Will Come Soft Rains is a 12-line poem by Sara Teasdale in her collection Flame and Shadow, published in 1920. The subject of the poem imagines nature reclaiming the earth after humanity has been wiped out by a war (line 7). The poem has six stanzas, each made up of a rhyming couplet.

Sara Teasdale was born on August 8, 1884. She had poor health for most of her life, and it was only at age 14 that she was well enough to begin school. In 1933, she committed suicide.

i. Which war did she have in mind when she wrote the poem?

ii. Explain the links between the poem and Bradbury’s story.
b. Historic events and technology

Comment on the relationship between the following historical and political context and Bradbury’s story.

Aftermath of World War II
Bradbury wrote *There Will Come Soft Rains* in the early 1950s. The memory of World War II was fresh in peoples’ minds, particularly the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in August, 1945, which brought the war to an end. Though the Allies had won, an increasing tension arose between the United States and the U.S.S.R., and soon a nuclear buildup known as the Cold War began. President Dwight Eisenhower, a war hero, warned of the rising military-industrial complex it took to support the Cold War.

The story portrays a scene of obliteration, in which the human race has been destroyed by a nuclear bomb. The fear of the devastating effects of nuclear force was very applicable to the time period of the 1950s. The world was still recovering from the effects of World War II and events, such as the dropping of atomic bombs in Japan still seemed recent. In 1945, the United States released a nuclear bomb over the city of Hiroshima that destroyed nearly everything in the city. Three days later, Nagasaki was also bombed. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed in these bombings, either from direct impact or the deadly effects of radiation that killed them within a few years of the incident. Even though the war ended shortly after these events, the fear of retaliation and the increasing focus on the development of nuclear weapons by many military powers world-wide, produced fear in the minds of people. After the war, tension increased between the two major military powers of the time, the U.S.S.R. and the United States, culminating in the Cold War. This era was also a time of uncertainty, and the idea of being bombed with a nuclear weapon was a daily fear.

1951: The first thermonuclear device is detonated by the United States in the mid-Pacific. The island atoll of Eniwetok is obliterated by the blast. Few precautions are taken to protect nearby inhabitants from radiation poisoning.

1997: A significant percentage of the United States’ electricity is generated by nuclear power plants, despite several near meltdowns in the last few decades, including mishaps at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, and Monroe, Michigan.

1951: The world's first commercial computer, the Univac, is produced by Remington Rand.

5. Another book or film or text with a similar theme or setting: compare and contrast

TASK: Choose a text and explain the connection/s.

a. WALL-E

b. In 2008, in the post-apocalyptic Fallout 3, an action role-playing open world video game which takes place in the irradiated remnants of Washington, DC, there is a robot in a house in Georgetown that, upon entering a command in a terminal in the house, will hover into the bedroom of the occupants' children and recite the poem for which this story is named. The robot reciting the poem is a reference to the story, as well as the content of the poem itself.

c. ?? Your own idea.

Suggestions for further reading:

*The Pedestrian*, also by Ray Bradbury, about the last creative human in a television and Artificial Intelligence-dominated city.  
*The Veldt*, a story included in Bradbury's collection *The Illustrated Man*, tells of a brother and sister who have the power to go anywhere in the world through their nursery's electronic screen. Like in "Soft Rains," the results of this technology can be deadly.  
*I, Robot* (1950) by Isaac Asimov is one of the author's earliest collections of science fiction stories written according to his "Three Laws of Robotics," which state that a robot may not harm humans, must obey orders, and must protect its own existence. The story was made into a film in 2004, starring Will Smith. 
*The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe – classic horror story.
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