

Name: _____

Miss Crossley

__ LA Period: _____

Date: _____

The Great Imagination Heist and F451

Directions: You are going to compare and contrast Captain Beatty's speech in *Fahrenheit 451* to Reynold Price's essay, "The Great Imagination Heist".

1. Read Price's essay and review Beatty's speech on pages 51 – 60.
2. Complete the Venn Diagram to compare the two. **You need to have at least 10 differences for each speech and at least 5 similarities** (that is 5 entries in each section).
3. Use the speeches to answer the questions. Answer in complete sentences.

*All work must be finished and turned in by the end of class.

The Great Imagination Heist

by Reynolds Price ©1999

The statistics are famous and unnerving. Most high-school graduates have spent more time watching television than they've spent in school. That blight has been overtaking us for fifty years, but it's only in the past two decades that I've begun to notice its greatest damage to us—the death of personal imagination.

In all the millennia before humans began to read, our imaginations were formed from first-hand experiences of the wide external world and especially from the endless flow of stories passed down in cultures founded on face-to-face narrative conversation. Most of those cultures were succeeded by widespread literacy; and the ensuing torrent of printed information, recordings, and films grew large in making our individual imaginations.

Among the blessings of my past, I'm especially grateful for that fact that I was twenty years old before my parents brought television into our home. Till then, I'd only glimpsed it in store windows and had never missed its brand of time-killing. Like millions in my generation, I was hardly unique in having spent hundreds of childhood hours reading a mountain of books and seeing one or two movies in a public theatre each week. Like our ancient ancestors, too, I had the big gift of a family who were steady sources of gripping and delightful stories told at every encounter.

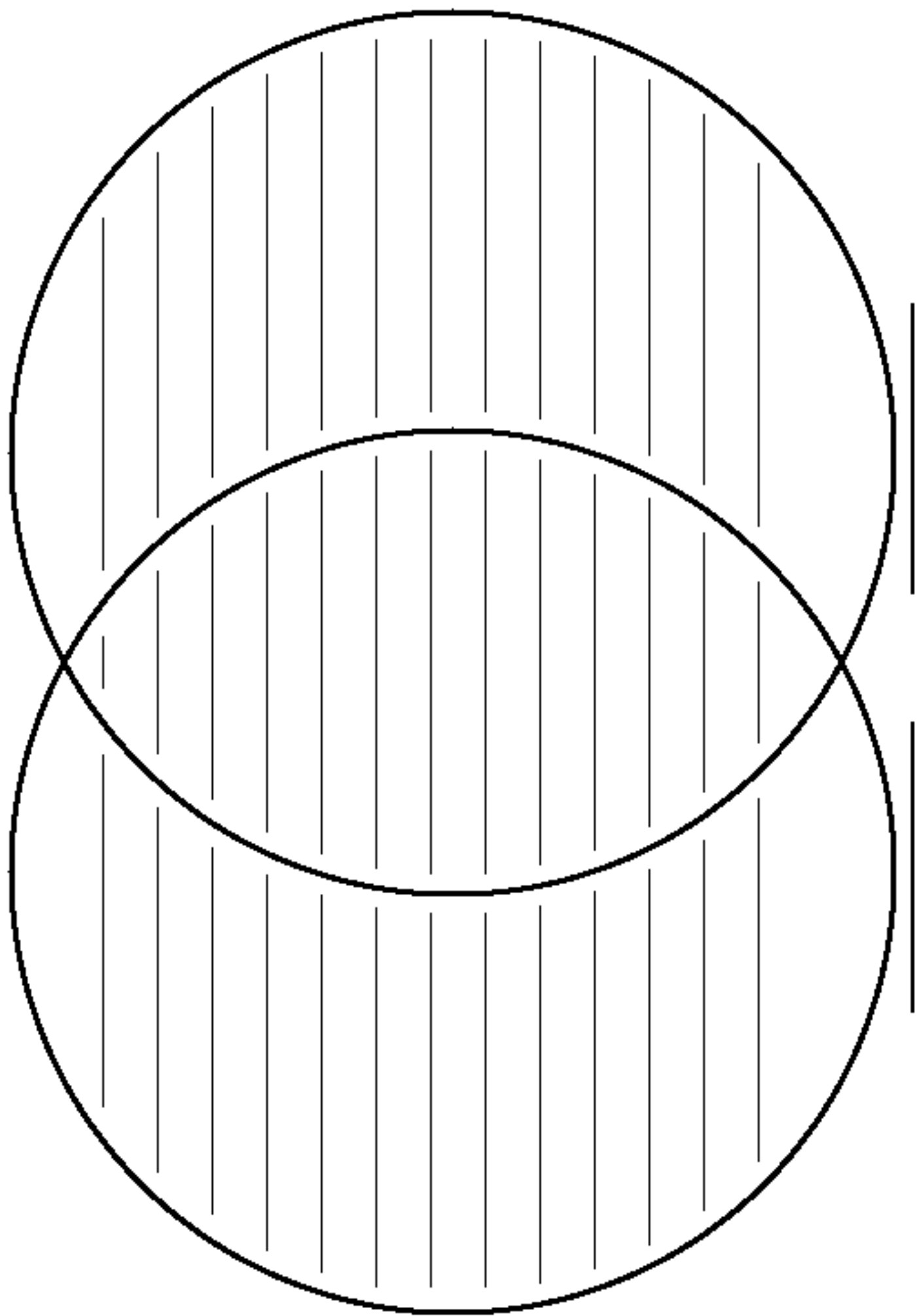
I, and my lucky contemporaries then, had our imaginations fed by an external world, yet a world of nuance and suggestion that was intimately related to our early backgrounds of family and friends. That feeding left us free to remake those stories in accordance with our growing secret needs and natures. Only the movies offered us images and plots that tried to hypnotize us—to channel our fantasies in one direction only—but two to four hours of movies per week were hardly tyrannical.

To say that is not to claim that people who matured before the triumph of TV possessed imaginations that were inevitably free, rich, and healthy. It is to claim that an alarming number of younger Americans have had the early shoots of a personal fantasy life blighted by a dictatorial daylong TV exposure. And not merely blighted—many young Americans have had their native fantasy life removed and replaced by the imaginations of the producers of American television and video games.

My gauge for measuring this massive imagination heist has been my experience with college students in the composition classes I've taught through four decades. When I remove the lenses of nostalgia, I won't claim that the quality of most undergraduate narrative prose in the 1950s was brilliant, but I'm convinced that the imaginations of my present students have suffered badly. When you asked a student of the fifties to write a story, he or she was likely to give you an account that involved personal feeling—a scene from Grandmother's funeral, the death of a pet, the rupture of a marriage, and often family happiness.

Ask the same of students now, and you're likely to get a story that amounts to an airless synopsis of a made-for-TV movie—a stereotypical situation of violence or outlandish adventure that races superficially along, then resolves in emotionless triumph for the student's favorite character. Instead of a human narration, you get a commercially controlled and commercially intended product. Sit still; buy this. How bad is that? Awful—for our public and private safety as well as for most of the arts.

What can we do about it? Short of destroying all television sets, computer screens and video games, I'd suggest at least one counter-vailing therapy: good reading, vast quantities of active or passive reading—and reading which is, in part, guided by a child's caretakers. No other available resource has such a record of benign influence on maturation. Give every child you cherish good books—human stories—at every conceivable opportunity. If they fail to read them, offer bribes—or whatever other legal means—to help them grow their own imaginations in the slow solitude and silence that makes for general sanity.



Fahrenheit 451 / The Great Imagination Heist Questions

*Answer all parts of the question in complete sentences.

1. Captain Beatty believes reading books is useless, despite having read many himself. What reasons does Beatty give to try and convince Montag that books are useless?

2. Are Captain Beatty's reasons logical? Why or why not? Give an example to support your answer.

3. Is Captain Beatty trying to persuade Montag using logic, emotion, or ethics? Give an example to support your answer.

4. Reynolds Price has a very different opinion from Captain Beatty. Why do you think they have such different views? Give examples from the texts to support your answer.

5. Summarize Price's argument in your own words.

6. Are Price's reasons logical? Why or why not? Give an example to support your answer.

7. Is Price trying to persuade his audience using logic, emotion, or ethics? Give an example to support your answer.

8. Who, in your opinion presents a more persuasive argument, Beatty or Price? Why?

9. Choose one quote from either Price's essay or Beatty's speech that most closely represents your view of technology. Copy the quote and explain why you agree with it.
