Exploring Power and Constitutional Rights Using Ray Bradbury's "The Pedestrian"[1]

CORE TEXT	"The Pedestrian" by Ray Bradbury
POSSIBILITIES TO TEACH FOR CHANGE	This dystopian short story addresses issues related to technology's impact on humans, including how humans can become so distracted by the media they consume that they do not notice the erosion of their rights. It also explores abuses of power under an authoritarian government, especially the ways in which state authority becomes unquestionable and unchallengeable. As students study this short story, they can ask what injustices occur in the text and what similar injustices occur in the United States today.
LEARNING OBJECTIVE(S)	Students will explore the themes of the short story by comparing events in "The Pedestrian," set in the year 2053, to current events in the United States and by analyzing how the authoritarian government's violation of the protagonist's constitutional rights mirrors contemporary violations.
ASSESSMENT	Students will participate in group inquiry and discuss their views in a Socratic Seminar: Working in groups, students will review the amendments to the U.S. Constitution and identify at least five violations of constitutional rights present in "The Pedestrian." They will then research current events to identify similar contemporary violations. Students will share their group's consensus during a class discussion, after which they will turn in the notes they prepared in advance. Their participation in the discussion and pre-discussion notes can be evaluated for a grade.
LEARNING ACTIVITIES & STRATEGIES	1. To introduce the short story, ask students to freewrite for 5–10 minutes describing what they think society will be like in the year 2053. Ask students to share their predictions, and record common themes for the class to revisit. 2. After reading the short story with the whole class, compare similarities and differences from

[1] Any teacher may use this lesson plan. Feel free to adjust it as needed. This is an example lesson based on the Teaching ELA for CHANGE Lesson Plan Template.

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students' freewriting to Bradbury's depiction. Facilitate a short discussion.

3. Assign students to groups (the same groups they'll work with to prepare for the class discussion) and have them reread the dialogue between Leonard Mead and the police car. As they reread this section of the story, ask them to work together to answer these questions:
    a. Why does Leonard Mead somewhat agree with the police car when they say that Mead has "no profession"? What does this imply about how the arts are viewed in this society?
    b. What is the *real* reason Leonard Mead was apprehended by the police car and taken to "The Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies"? (hint: it is not because he was walking)
    c. What is Bradbury trying to say with this short story? What is his message for readers?
    d. What does Bradbury's story warn contemporary readers about, especially regarding citizens' rights and responsibilities and the role of government?
4. Bring the class back together and ask for volunteers to share their answers. Clarify misunderstandings and record students' responses for the class to see. Use their responses to guide students toward determining a theme of the short story. Focus on messages related to technology and authoritarian governments.
5. Explain the Socratic Discussion requirements and their group assignment to prepare for the discussion–described in the "Assessment" section above.
    a. Provide students with devices to access the internet.
    b. Students can review the amendments to the U.S. Constitution using The National Constitution Center's (n.d.) website. The website includes the original text as well as interpretations of and debates about each amendment.
    c. Be prepared to help students brainstorm similar constitutional violations (e.g., the fatal shooting of Renee Nicole Good by ICE on January 7, 2026).
6. Facilitate the class discussion–this will likely continue to the next class period.
    a. Establish/remind students of class norms for discussions and your expectations for their participation.
    b. Provide students with sentence starters to help facilitate an academic discussion[2]:
        i. To make a claim and cite evidence: "The author suggests [blank.] Notice what they wrote on page [blank]."

[2] I present these sentence starters in my book *Teaching for CHANGE in the ELA Classroom: Integrating Social Justice and Critical Literacy for Grades 9-12* published by Routledge (Stockwell, 2025).

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	ii. To disagree respectfully: "That is one perspective, but I have a different one. What if we view it this way: [blank]?" iii. To keep the discussion going: "What other perspectives are there, or who has something to say but has not been able to yet?" c. For class discussion ideas, visit this Cult of Pedagogy webpage (Gonzalez, 2015).
LESSON CONCLUSION	Have students complete an exit ticket in which they answer the following questions: 1. What rights afforded by the Constitution do you have a better understanding of or deeper appreciation for after reading this short story and participating in the class discussion? 2. What contemporary violation of constitutional rights are you most concerned about? Why? To continue to reinforce the critical emphasis of this lesson, when you teach a writing unit that requires research and argumentative or expository writing, suggest that students revisit the violation that concerned them most.

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Resources

- Ray Bradbury's "The Pedestrian" is included in the first edition of *The Golden Apples of the Sun*, a collection of Bradbury's short stories published by Doubleday & Company in 1953, but it can also be found online using a Google Search. Based on the table of contents previews available online, more recent copies of this book sold by Amazon and Barnes & Noble do not seem to include "The Pedestrian."
- Gonzalez, J. (2015, October 15). *The big list of class discussion strategies*. Cult of Pedagogy. https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/speaking-listening-techniques/
- The National Constitution Center. (n.d.). *The United States Constitution*. https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution

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