1. Compare/contrast the treatment of religion in “The Man” and “The Fire Balloons”

Both “The Man” and “The Fire Balloons”, short stories written by Ray Bradbury, are captivating, overflowing with thematic ideas and drowning in new inspired takes on common arguments. Religion is a hugely debated topic. You hear new, differing opinions on this popularly disputed subject around every corner you turn, and Bradbury is stepping up to give his own opinions on religion as well. These two stories’ plots are both driven by religion and sprinkle in new ideas on this topic often. Although when broken down, the two stories spotlight slightly differing aspects of religion, they both revolve around the same, general idea: people with open minds are able to live with faith and with God. Bradbury’s treatment of religion in both stories highlights this idea with many inspiring quotes and examples such as, “I’ve gone through the city and seen their faces, and they’ve got something you’ll never have- a little simple faith, and they’ll move mountains with it,” (The Man pg 69). The Captain in this story was unable to believe what anyone told him about this “man” coming to their planet, therefore holding himself back from a more peaceful and relaxing life that God offers. In the end, he even explains that this would be his wish from God. Bradbury treats religion as a doorway to a more serene lifestyle, if only you are able to believe and have faith in what you cannot see. The general idea about having faith and an open mind in order to live with God also appears in “The Fire Balloons”. “The blue fires lifted us!’ ‘We ran, that was it!’ ‘No, the globes saved us,’ ‘They couldn’t!’ ‘They did,’” (The Fire Balloons pg 121). Father Stone refused to believe what seemed impossible, even though in the end it was revealed to be true. This supports the general idea by claiming that yet again, having faith in what you cannot know for sure is true, leads you straight to God. These stories do have differing touches added to make them unique. In “The Man”, God is never really mentioned directly, just bluntly implied to the reader. Bradbury treated God as a figure, not a person, making him seemingly more out of our reach, as the Captain felt. This treatment makes the reader want to strive to believe like the people in the town do, we want to be able to believe in what we cannot see. In “The Fire Balloons”, Bradbury directly mentions God, as the main characters are missionaries. God, in this story, is something that is unquestionably real. This story proves that God is different for everyone. Whether his skin color changes for people in different countries, or he is not resembled by a cross, but a sphere for the Martians, he is still God, he will always be here, and that will never change. This idea is what separates the two stories. Ray Bradbury treats religion slightly different in each story, however a general idea holds true for both. Each story gets its idea across in a different way that adds a certain kick to its overall impact on the reader. Both kicks hit you right in the gut.

2. Compare/ contrast the treatment of technology in “The Veldt” and “The City”

“The Veldt” and “The City” are two stories in which technology is used. Though they are both very high and complex levels of technology, they are treated incredibly different in the two stories. Ray Bradbury treats technology as a tool in “The Veldt”. Technology is primarily used to satisfy human needs in “The Veldt”. The family in “The Veldt” uses technology as a substitute for actually doing work. For example, when the Hadleys are ready to eat dinner, the author writes, “[they] sat watching the dining-room table produce warm dishes of food from its mechanical interior” (13). Technology is acting as a replacement for daily chores and work for the Hadleys. Technology is seen as just a device used to do people’s work and can even be seen as an assistant that tends to all the many needs of humans. This is not just happening to Mr and Mrs Hadley, but also their children, Wendy and Peter. For example, the high level technology in the nursery is mainly for the children’s interest and is there to allow them to simply pass time and play. The readers can see how much the children use the technology in the nursery when the book says that “the nursery caught the telepathic
emanations of the children’s minds” and “created life to fill their any desire” (14). Here, technology is treated as a tool made to just make people happy, in this case, the children. When the book says that the nursery “created life to fill their every desire”, the author is not only showing how much humans use technology for their own benefits, but also how much they rely on it for their own happiness and how essential it is to their daily lives. This aspect of technology majorly contrasts with the technology shown in “The City”. In “The City”, technology seems to have a completely different mind of its own. In this short story, technology is treated as a completely separate being of its own. Ray Bradbury does this by giving human-like traits to technology in this story. The entire city that is discovered on some new planet in the story is treated as one whole being. For example, when the man-made rocket was about to land on the new planet, the “city opened its secret nostril... [and] drew storms of air back through channels” (245). This line compares the technology to a human breathing. It shows the human-like traits that the city has and shows the reader that the technology in this story can be seen as one creature that can function on its own. This is also shown when the captain is abducted and killed by the technology in the city. The reader sees the intelligence and human-like qualities of the technology when Bradbury writes, “hands shifted...like a quick and curious player of chess” (249). Here, the robots that make up the city are described as “hands”, which makes the reader visualize them even more like man. The author makes a reference to a chess player, which can make the technology seem immensely intuitive. This again treats technology as its own creature which can think for its own. This fully contrasts with the technology shown in “The Veldt”, because it is treated as a tool simply used by humans for their own comfort. It becomes a device that humans use to do their work, whereas in “The City”, technology has a mind of its own and is treated as a completely separate being of its own that can think for itself is treated almost as a human.

These two forms of technology are also in a small way similar to one another. Both types of are an extremely advanced level of technology that are both developed in the future. They both have very futuristic qualities and are highly modern types of technology. Both versions of technology also involve man in some way. In “The Veldt”, humans use technology as a substitute for work, and in “The City” the technology that makes up the actual city is planning a revenge against humans. Humans are a big part of both stories; technology’s “role” in both of the short stories revolve around humans’ actions. For example, the humans in “The Veldt” treat technology as a tool, and therefore take technology for granted. Technology is overseen in “The Veldt”, which lowers its importance in the story. For example, when George Hadley says "the fool rooms out of order” he talks about technology as if it were a silly, simple thing that doesn’t matter. This is similar to the technology in “The City” because humans have made both types of technology what they are in both stories. Humans have defined the importance of technology in both stories. In “The Veldt”, humans have lowered technology to a simple tool. In “The City”, humans are the main reason that technology is treated as a completely independent creature. Humans are the main reason that the technology in the city has such human-like features; its goal is to get revenge, and is made like that due to people’s actions.

3. Analyze Bradbury’s opinions on human nature in “The Visitor”

Humans have many different aspects of living. Especially in foreign places, the whole environment changes, making it harder for humans to adapt. In “The Visitor”, such humans have suffered with not only the environmental changes on Mars, but with the struggle of staying alive, as well as the nostalgic
memories of their original home, Earth. Until one day, a “magical” man from Earth brings a piece of home to the homesick and struggling Martian man. Unfortunately, Ray Bradbury emphasizes the need to point out how humans are filled with only want, and when they want, they do anything to get it. Even kill. Bradbury indirectly implies that the human’s nature is too greedy and possessive of the things it needs or wants. Man will only accept sacrificing themselves when there is nothing to live for in the world. These opinions are revealed when the Martian man named Saul Williams is ready to die because there is nothing live for anymore, until a sudden turn. “I want Earth, thought Saul. I want it so bad it hurts. I want something I can never have again...” At first, Saul is thinking of suicidal actions and thoughts because as a human, he knows that nothing will happen if he lives. He accepts the fact that he will die. “Saul reached into his pocket and drew forth his last bar of chocolate. ‘This is for you.’... ‘Nonsense, I’m not doing this for pay. I’m doing it because it makes you happy’” When Leonard Mark (the man with mind powers) says this, Saul immediately assumes that he now “owns” Mark, and that Mark is under his control. “‘Oh, but I don’t belong to anybody,’ said Leonard Mark. He looked at Saul. ‘No. Not even you.’... Saul felt an ugliness in himself. ‘You heard what I said.’” During this moment, Saul acts like he owns Mark, as if he is a slave and orders him to obey Saul. When Mark doesn’t listen to him, Saul acts stubborn and he events acts in violence to emphasize his want (not need) for Mark to do what he says, knocking Mark unconscious. Bradbury indirectly highlights a part of human nature through Saul’s act of panic when Saul says, “‘Come on. Don’t you realize what’ll happen once they discover your talent? They’ll fight over you. They’ll kill each other-kill you-for the right to own you.’” Another unfortunate thing about human nature is that humans feel that life is a competition, and all people have a certain status. In the end, there is always a class system, and everyone is struggling to get to the top. They will take advantage of anything just to win. Humans don’t actually care about what they receive. Humans care about the satisfaction of being right. Saul is saying that these other sick men will even die for having the satisfaction of owning another human. Eventually, that is what happens in the end for such greedy men. “You wanted me all to yourself. You were afraid the others would take me away from you. Oh, how mistaken you were. I have enough power to keep them all happy. You could’ve shared me, like a community kitchen.” Mark even explains another part of human nature that is very obvious in the way the Martians act. Once again, Bradbury unveils another part of human nature that is pretty easy to understand: humans have difficulty sharing, no matter what it is. It’s only because humans have that possessive feeling over things they want to keep to themselves. Bradbury concludes the story with one of the most important aspects of human nature. “‘For that matter,’ observed Mark, ‘none of you can trust the others. The minute your back is turned one of the other men will murder you. I dare say, at the week’s end, you’ll all be dead or dying.’” This is technically true for any human that is living or has lived. Mark acts as the person where Bradbury reveal his opinions on human nature. He finally concludes in saying that anyone can betray anyone, even if they could be your “closest friend”.

Overall, Ray Bradbury only points out the flaws of human nature and puts them into play in “The Visitor”, as a way of showing people how they act in the modern world, just with more violence and less secretiveness.

4. Analyze Bradbury’s opinions on human nature in “Kaleidoscope”

In Ray Bradbury’s short story “The Kaleidoscope” he portrays his opinions on human nature and how complex humans really are. He shows this by changing his character's views throughout the short story. One of the characters, Hollis is most complex in the way he handles dying. He is grieving his own death. The
grieving process in itself is hard and complicated enough, but Hollis has to grieve for himself, knowing full well that he is going to die. This fact makes his character even more complex. Hollis in the beginning is completely objective to his own death, he cares little about his life or rather the end of it. His objectivity towards dying and his isolation from his body and his other crew members covers the first stage of grief-isolation and denial. The fact that he can be so subject to dying, so unfazed in the beginning shows not only this stage of grief but the complexity of the human mind, the human nature and the way humans react to things they cannot control. As the story progresses Hollis is pushed to the second stage of grief- anger. He yells at his other crew members and wishes that he could do something to one who has always caused his trouble, Applegate. This stage of his grieving comes back when Applegate is mentioned throughout the story to show how complicated the human can be. It shows that although Hollis always let Applegate terrorize him and ruin things for him, he never did anything back but also shows the uglier side of human nature, how Hollis wishes he could do something to Applegate. The complexity of the situation between the good decision and bad is one of the many things Bradbury is portraying to his reader in this short story. The third stage of grief is bargaining and Hollis only makes one request, although not a bargain. He asks to keep on living. This desire of his to keep on going completely contradicts his previous thoughts in stage one, his objectivity to the idea. His mind shuts off in stage four of his grieving. He hits depression hard, telling himself that nothing he nor anyone else accomplished or had in their lives mattered, because they were all going to die. The fifth stage of his grieving comes at the very end of the story when he accepts he is going to die and makes the best of it. “I’ll be put to use. Just a little bit, but ashes are ashes and they’ll add to the land.” The constant change in thinking from complete neutrality of dying, to his bottled up anger, then to his desire to stay alive, to his shut down thoughts, his subject feelings about his accomplishments as well as others, his acceptance and making the best of his death, convey Bradbury’s thoughts on human nature perfectly. The intricacy of this character is very much so representative of human nature, from the ups to the downs and through all the small changes in character in a short amount of time shows that humans do the same things. As humans go through challenges in their lives, they are going to have to deal with anger, saddened thoughts and the question of how to be. Should one be honest and angry? Or should one hide it all with a smile? Hollis portrays very well the feelings every complex human being has to deal with in life, and the fact that Hollis’s life as shown to the reader is short, just like that of humans. Bradbury intended to show his reader that complexity is what makes up human nature, there is no one word or feeling to express such an abstract idea, so he chose to make a character so relatable to readers that they would feel no other option but to question human nature and the nature of themselves. Ray Bradbury created one character, with a twelve page lifespan who goes through the five stages of grief to portray to his readers that the nature of humans is complex and forever changing.

5. Discuss a thematic idea that appears in “The Rocket.”

In “The Rocket”, Bradbury express a thematic idea that sometimes, dreams get in the way of reality. The story starts out with an ambitious man named Bodoni, who dreams of visiting the amazing space. He saves all his money just for a rocket ship, but his mad illusion is distracted by the effects of reality. For example, when the other man watching the rockets says, “‘Fool!’ cried Bramante. ‘You’ll never go. This is a rich man’s world.’” Bodoni gets irritated by the fact that money and wealth is a factor in order to fulfill a lifelong ambition. “Bramante was right. Better to invest the money. Why save it when only one of the family could
ride the rocket, while the others remained to melt in frustration?" Bodoni realizes how far off he is from his
ambition, and finally gives in to Bramante endless reasons for why a rocket ship is a bad idea. Bodoni left out the fact that only the wealthy and affordable could ride a rocket ship, this is an example of how dreams can get in the way of reality. Another example would be when Bodoni unassumingly buys his rocket, but only out of pure madness. ‘‘You are all mine,’ he said. ‘ Even if you never move or spit fire, and just sit there and rust for fifty years, you are mine.’’ The man is clearly blinded by the illusion of visiting other planets and stars, so much he doesn't even care about the consequences of wasting money on a flaky piece of metal. Bodoni wants to visit space so badly, he’s gone insane. His dream of touching the moon has totally filled his mind, to the point where he can’t do anything but think about his goal. ‘‘What have you done?’ she said. ‘Taken our money for this? It will never fly.’ ‘It will fly,’ he said, looking at it. ‘Rocket ships cost millions. Have you millions?’ ‘It will fly,’ he repeated steadily... ‘You have ruined us,’ she said. ‘Our money used for this-this thing. When it should have been spent on equipment.’ ‘You will see,’ he said.” Bodoni’s wife Maria repeatedly tries to bring back her husband to sanity and the real world. She points out the cons of his dreams and how it will greatly affect them. Bodoni, though hearing these things, still is determined to fulfill his dream and doesn’t back down from his self-confidence. In the end, Bodoni realizes he can never actually make his dream come true unless it is an illusion of some sort. After knowing what he’s done, he feels he should at least make his dream happen through the senses of his mind, as well as his children. ‘‘Listen. This rocket is very old and will fly only one more journey...Listen, keep your ears clean. Smell the smells of a rocket. Feel. Remember. So when you return you will talk of it all the rest of your lives.” Bodoni gives them and himself the experience of a lifetime, but only in their dreams, because he knows that the real world isn’t as exciting as we want to be. Although, he could not do what he wanted, Bodoni let the illusion sink into his mind, even though it wasn’t what he hoped for. “Oh, let nothing happen to the illusion in the next six days. Let all of space come and go, and red Mars come up under our ship...and let there be no flaws in the color film...; let nothing go wrong with the hidden mirrors and screens that mold the fine illusion. Let time pass without crisis.” Bodoni makes it clear that although he didn’t expect little, he made dreams come true in the most memorable ways. It wasn’t just him though, but for his children to experience the world outside of reality. Bradbury conveys the theme that dreams can get in the way of reality sometimes, and the only thing we can do sometimes is dream. The story of “The Rocket” expresses this theme as a lifelong moral for the reader.

6. **Discuss a thematic idea that appears in “The Rocket Man.”**

In “The Rocket Man” Ray Bradbury uses the actions and dialogue of the characters in his story to portray the theme, a man cannot love his family if his heart is focused on something else. In “The Rocket Man”, the thing the father is focused on is space.

One way Bradbury uses his characters to show his theme is through the actions of the mother. “She wouldn’t let me do anything else either, like repairing the electrical breakfast maker or the mechanical book reader. She saved everything up, as if for Christmas. And then I would see Dad hammering or tinkering, always smiling at his work, and Mother smiling over him, happy.”(103) Bradbury uses this action to show that Mother knew he was too preoccupied with space to love. She would save tasks for him to keep him busy and try to protect Doug. By showing this, Bradbury tells the reader that Dad is too focused on being a Rocket Man to love his family. He subtly shows that, even though the dad always came back, he wasn’t really there. He was still off in space and needed these little tasks as distractions to bring him down to Earth.
Another way Bradbury shows this is through the mother’s dialogue. “When he went off to space ten years ago, I said to myself, ‘He’s dead.’ Or as good as dead. So think of him dead. And when he comes back three or four times a year, it’s not him at all, it’s only a pleasant little memory or a dream. And if a memory stops of a dream stops, it can’t hurt as much. So most of the time I think him dead—” (110) Bradbury uses this to show the reader that, a man too distracted to love his own family is as good as dead. It shows that, even though Doug’s father acts like he cares, he really is too focused on space to love his family. For a man like that, it’s almost better to consider him dead. As the mother puts so well, a man like this is better to think of as a dream or a mere memory. This shows Bradbury’s theme, the father is too focused on space to love his family.

Finally, Bradbury uses the death of the father and, the mother’s response as a final attempt to show the reader his theme. “She didn’t cry. Well it wasn’t Mars, and it wasn’t Venus, and it wasn’t Jupiter or Saturn that killed him. We wouldn’t have to think of him every time Jupiter or Saturn or Mars lit up the evening sky. This was different. His ship had fallen into the sun… So for a long time after my father died my mother slept through the days and wouldn’t go out. We had breakfast at midnight and lunch at three in the morning, and dinner at the cold dim hour of 6 A.M. We went to all-night shows and went to bed at sunrise.” (111) Bradbury wraps up his story this way to show the reader that, this father who was too focused on space to love his family only ended up hurting them in the end. He uses the actions of the family, becoming nocturnal, not crying, and only taking walks in the rain to show that the very thing that distracted the man from his family ended up killing him in the end. And hurt the family he couldn’t love more than his actual existence. The mother, however, did not cry. She had imagined him as a dream or a memory this whole time. So, while it still hurt, she was not surprised. For she knew the truth, that he never loved them because he didn’t have any room in his heart. Bradbury uses her knowledge to show the reader his theme once again.

Ray Bradbury used his character’s actions and dialogue to portray his theme, a man cannot love his family if his heart is focused on something else, in his short story “The Rocket Man”.