PRO/CON: Cars that drive themselves could soon become the norm

A self-driving Ford Fusion hybrid car is test driven in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on August 18, 2016. Photo: AP Photo/Jared Wickerham

PRO: Driverless cars could allow people to stay in the suburbs, and save them money.

More than at any time in world history, technological advances are having a major effect on the way people live their lives. Just 30 years ago, few would have imagined it would be possible for every person to own their very own pocket-sized supercomputer that would allow them to do virtually anything, from finding a date to buying a house. Yet today's smartphone is a marvel. Now, the driverless car is another society-shifting invention that has the potential to become an everyday reality in the not-so-distant future.

Driverless Cars Could Be Here By 2019
In April, Volkswagen’s Johann Jungwirth predicted the first self-driving cars could appear on the market as early 2019. In May, General Motors’ Richard Holman said driverless cars could become a reality in 2020. State governments have already started preparing for the new technology’s arrival. California, Florida, Michigan and Nevada have recently passed laws governing their use. More than a dozen other states are currently considering similar legislation.

Private Car Ownership Will Decline
Traditionally, new technological developments put more products in the hands of consumers. However, many industry experts predict driverless cars will actually limit private car ownership. The tech-savvy consumer of the future will no longer spend thousands of dollars on a new car. Instead, they will open an app on a computer or smartphone and call for their very own driverless chauffeur. Driverless cars have the potential to radically change the way people spend time with their families and commute to and from work. Most likely they will also alter where and how people live.

Suburbs Versus Cities
Recent data show that more and more people are moving to big cities. However, surveys suggest that people of all ages still prefer to live in affordable, convenient and spacious suburbs. One 2015 poll showed that as many as two-thirds of young people would choose suburban living over life in the city.
If Americans still prefer the suburbs over city centers, why are so many choosing to live in cities? A number of factors are responsible for the shift from suburbs to cities that has occurred over the past two decades. One of the most important is the increasingly globalized economy, which is drawing people looking for work to major centers of technology and commerce. International centers of tech-commerce have developed in regions such as California’s Silicon Valley, the Research Triangle in North Carolina and in major cities such as Chicago and New York. Professionals who want to work in these growing tech fields or in related industries often need to be close to the action.

Suburbs Offer A Better Quality Of Life
This does not mean, however, that cities typically offer a better quality of life — indeed, in most cases, they do not. Sales taxes and income taxes are highest in some of the country’s major cities, such as Chicago, New York, San Francisco and Seattle. Crime and pollution remain significantly worse in cities as well. In addition, regulations that limit businesses, especially small businesses, are worse in states with large cities, including California, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Illinois, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Driverless cars have the potential to completely change the way Americans think about where they live. The commute from suburb to city center will become much less strenuous, so people will feel less need to live in the city itself. People will no longer need to pay the high rents, taxes and fees common in big cities in order to work comfortably in those places. With driverless cars, driving to work will feel more like sitting at home on the couch watching a favorite television show. If that is what the future looks like, most of us will not mind the extra commuting time.

Justin Haskins is the executive editor of Heartland Institute, a conservative and libertarian public policy think tank.

CON: Driverless cars pose major safety issues, and relying on them is unrealistic.

A nationwide network of millions of self-driving cars whisking suburban commuters to work is a pleasant utopian vision. However, getting to that point would be far from simple. Self-driving cars have been in development for years, and their backers claim the vehicles will be ready to dominate the car market in the near future.

Having a nation of commuters use these vehicles, they claim, will reduce traffic congestion and improve highway safety. They say they will make even the far suburbs more convenient places to live. Fully automated cars could make up 10 percent of global vehicle sales a year by 2035, some have predicted. However, before those suburban dwellers can order such cars, some gargantuan problems must be overcome.
Safety Issues Abound
First, the technology used in those cars creates serious safety problems, and huge improvements must be made before they can safely handle streets. Developing fail-safe software for completely driverless cars would require rethinking how software is designed. The software in phones, laptops and other devices is not designed to operate for extended periods without crashing or freezing — and those errors would be deadly in a car.

Also, driverless cars rely primarily on pre-programmed route data, so they do not obey things such as temporary traffic lights. They also have problems figuring out when objects such as bits of paper garbage are harmless, so they may swerve for no reason.

Computers Cannot Replace Humans
The vehicles simply cannot deal with the unexpected adventures that fill everyday life. Until the cars can self-drive at all times, humans are going to have to be ready to resume control. Meanwhile, Google’s self-driving car has already run into another perplexing safety problem — human drivers. Recently, one of Google’s self-driving cars came to a crosswalk and did what it was supposed to do — it slowed down to allow a pedestrian to cross. However, despite the slowing down, the human “safety driver” hit the brakes. The pedestrian emerged unhurt, but Google’s car was hit from behind.

Maps For Millions Of Miles
For driverless cars to work properly, detailed maps of streets and highways need to be loaded into the computers that guide them. Currently the maps for Google’s self-driving cars have only been designed to handle a few thousand miles of road. Developing a nationwide self-driving car system would require countless amounts of effort and money. To make a national system work, a company would have to maintain and update data on millions of miles of roads.

The development of these vehicles would also inevitably mean more state and federal regulation covering how, when and where driverless cars can be used. Regulators are notoriously cautious and whatever regulation they come up with is likely to hamper the rapid spread of driverless cars.

Legal And Privacy Issues
The use of driverless cars would also raise issues of legal responsibility, such as who should be held responsible in the event of a crash — the passenger, the carmaker or the designer of the computer system. Such complicated legal issues could take years and many lawyers to sort out.

There is also a potential privacy problem: Each car’s computer would store massive amounts of highly personal data that federal intelligence agencies, with their fondness for spying on us, might well grab to use against drivers.
**No Love For Driverless Cars**

Totally self-driving cars will likely not be cheap, either. One report says the ability to drive anywhere with no human input would add some $10,000 to a car's sticker price, at least during the first decade the technology is on the market.

There is also the problem of getting people to accept them. Cars are not just transportation—they reflect our personalities and tastes. Imagine someone who loves zooming down the highway behind the wheel of a sleek and speedy sports car. It will be hard to get them to accept riding as a passenger in a not-very-exciting computer-controlled vehicle.

*Whitt Flora is an independent journalist who covered the White House for the Columbus Dispatch and was chief congressional correspondent for Aviation Week & Space Technology magazine.*

**Multiple Choice**

1. Which of the following paragraphs from the two articles BEST emphasizes that driverless cars are likely to become a part of everyday life even though this seems unlikely to many Americans?
   (A) Just 30 years ago, few would have imagined it would be possible for every person to own their very own pocket-sized supercomputer that would allow them to do virtually anything, from finding a date to buying a house. Yet today's smartphone is a marvel.
   (B) In April, Volkswagen's Johann Jungwirth predicted the first self-driving cars could appear on the market as early 2019. In May, General Motors' Richard Holman said driverless cars could become a reality in 2020.
   (C) Self-driving cars have been in development for years, and their backers claim the vehicles will be ready to dominate the car market in the near future.
   (D) The development of these vehicles would also inevitably mean more state and federal regulation covering how, when and where driverless cars can be used.

2. Read the following statement: *Those who say that driverless cars will soon be everywhere are overly optimistic.*

Would the author of the CON article be likely to agree with the statement above? Which sentence from the CON article BEST supports your answer?

   (A) No; a nationwide network of millions of self-driving cars whisking suburban commuters to work is a pleasant utopian vision.
   (B) Yes; they also have problems figuring out when objects such as bits of paper garbage are harmless, so they may swerve for no reason.
   (C) No; until the cars can self-drive at all times, humans are going to have to be ready to resume control.
   (D) Yes; regulators are notoriously cautious and whatever regulation they come up with is likely to hamper the rapid spread of driverless cars.

3. On which of the following do the two authors agree?
   (A) Driverless cars will allow riders to passively enjoy their commuting time.
   (B) It will take people a lot of time to adjust to thinking of driverless cars as normal.
   (C) People's overall well-being will improve with the availability of driverless cars.
(D) Driverless cars would likely increase the appeal of living in suburbs.

4. How does the author of the PRO article emphasize the potential benefits of driverless cars?
(A) by explaining how driverless cars will help some improve their lifestyle
(B) by presenting the economic advantages of driverless cars
(C) by demonstrating the importance of new technology to advancing society
(D) by explaining how driverless cars will be safer than traditional cars

Grade 10 NTI Assignment
PRO/CON: Will self-driving cars be good for America?

Writing Portion--ARGUMENT

Write a half page where you state your opinion on whether or not self-driving cars will be good for America. Be sure to include clear reasons for your opinion.
A modern-day dilemma: At what age should phones be allowed in school?

By The Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff

It's certainly not unusual to see high school students talking and texting on their cellphones between classes or at lunch. But what about elementary school students, too?

Students in Montgomery County, Maryland's public elementary schools could soon be allowed to bring cellphones and other electronic devices to campus under newly proposed rules.

Students would not be able to use the devices during the school day in elementary schools unless a teacher permits them as part of classroom instruction. But students could use phones and tablets after dismissal or on school buses if the rules pass.

"The reality is, they are in our elementaries now," said Patricia O'Neill, a county school board member who noted that cellphones are commonplace in middle schools and high schools. She said the proposed change would largely focus on "keeping up with the times."

Using Cellphones For Safety Or Planning Reasons

The idea is part of a broader update to the district's regulations on personal mobile devices. The change could take effect as soon as the next school year. School board members discussed the change at a recent committee meeting. It requires approval from the superintendent, who oversees the schools in a district.

Parents often want districts to allow elementary school students to carry cellphones, said Ann Flynn, director of education technology at the National School Boards Association. Many parents want to stay in touch with their children for safety or planning reasons.

Schools around the country have their own rules for mobile devices. For example, elementary school students in Loudoun County, Virginia, are allowed to bring cellphones but can use them only in emergencies. In Arlington, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., cellphone policies are up to individual schools.

Too Much Responsibility For 7-Year-Olds?

Some in Montgomery aren't so sure about a rule change.

Lisa Cline, a PTA leader in Gaithersburg, Maryland, said current practices are sufficient. Families are allowed to get special permission if a child needs to bring a cellphone to school. She worries about the effect cellphones could have on elementary school culture.
"To expect a child to turn it off – and not touch it when it's in his backpack – is a lot to ask for a 7-year-old," Cline said.

Paul Geller, president of the countywide council of PTAs, said he has heard parents voice concerns that cellphones could be a distraction in the classroom or a burden for teachers. Some also worry that allowing cellphones could intensify the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

**Cellphones Could Help Meet Districts' Technology Needs**

Geller said some parents might appreciate their children having cellphones when they walk home alone or take buses long distances. Others say cellphones, when used as part of a teacher's lesson plan, might help meet the district's technology needs, he said.

Catherine Carpela, who has taught first-grade and third-grade classes in Silver Spring, Maryland, said she doesn't support the idea. She believes it could add to the many responsibilities teachers already bear.

"I don’t want to spend my time monitoring inappropriate cellphone usage when I could be using that time for instruction," she said.

Carpela also questioned how devices would be secured. Most young students stow their belongings in cubbies or backpacks, not lockers.

**Rules About Appropriate Use**

School district administrators have proposed revisions to the district's regulation on personal mobile devices, which include phones, tablets and laptops.

The new regulation would include a number of rules about appropriate use. It would also have a requirement that students using their own devices at school access the Internet through the district's network. This would limit exposure to potentially harmful sites.

It would continue to allow high school students to use mobile devices during lunch. School board member Rebecca Smordrowski suggested extending lunchtime use to middle-schoolers, as well.

Smordrowski said the regulatory change does not aim to promote cellphones in elementary schools but recognizes their presence and provides guidance for their use. There also could be benefits for instruction at some point, she said.

**We Are Living In A Digital World**

"More and more, as we’re moving into a digital time and digital instruction is a becoming greater and greater, this allows teachers to take advantage of resources when possible," she said.
Sherwin Collette, the district's chief technology officer, said the update would mesh with a broader goal of allowing students to use their own devices to add to the other technology used for classroom instruction. "There is a benefit to the district as well," he said.

Collette said district staff compared Montgomery with other school systems as they considered amending the regulation and underscored that cellphones already are coming into elementary schools.

"Schools work with their students and families around the ground rules about that, and they deal with issues of discipline that arise when one is stolen or comes out of the backpack when it shouldn't," he said. "Parents understand that the school system's not responsible for any damage to them."

Amanda Lenhart, a researcher who studies teenagers and technology, found that, on average, U.S. children get their first cellphones when they are about 10, an age when many children are in elementary school.

"I think parents wrestle with this a lot: What is the right age to give a child a cellphone?" she said.

**Multiple Choice**

1. According to the article, changing the rule to allow cellphones would help students learn to use devices safely while in school. Which of the following options BEST supports this idea?

(A) The new regulation would include a number of rules about appropriate use. It would also have a requirement that students using their own devices at school access the Internet through the district's network. This would limit exposure to potentially harmful sites.

(B) It would continue to allow high school students to use mobile devices during lunch. School board member Rebecca Smondrowski suggested extending lunchtime use to middle-schoolers, as well.

(C) Sherwin Collette, the district’s chief technology officer, said the update would mesh with a broader goal of allowing students to use their own devices to add to the other technology used for classroom instruction.

(D) Collette said district staff compared Montgomery with other school systems as they considered amending the regulation and underscored that cellphones already are coming into elementary schools.
2. Read paragraph 4 of the article's introduction.

"The reality is, they are in our elementaries now," said Patricia O'Neill, a county school board member who noted that cellphones are commonplace in middle schools and high schools. She said the proposed change would largely focus on "keeping up with the times."

Which of the following selections from the article BEST supports this statement?

(A) The idea is part of a broader update to the district's regulations on personal mobile devices. The change could take effect as soon as the next school year.

(B) Parents often want districts to allow elementary school students to carry cellphones, said Ann Flynn, director of education technology at the National School Boards Association. Many parents want to stay in touch with their children for safety or planning reasons.

(C) Others say cellphones, when used as part of a teacher's lesson plan, might help meet the district's technology needs, he said.

(D) Collette said district staff compared Montgomery with other school systems as they considered amending the regulation and underscored that cellphones already are coming into elementary schools.

3. The central idea of the article is developed by:

(A) comparing the various rules that many elementary schools have for the use of cellphones during the school day.

(B) outlining the reasons people in one district have given for and against allowing cellphones in elementary schools.

(C) contrasting how cellphones are used by students in high school and middle school with elementary school.

(D) describing how rules regarding appropriate use of cellphones in elementary schools would be enforced by teachers.
4. Which of the following statements would be MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?

(A) The technology officer for the district makes a reasonable argument for allowing cellphones by saying parents understand they are responsible for damage.

(B) School board members have suggested extending lunchtime cellphone use to middle schoolers since it is already allowed for high schoolers.

(C) The district is appropriately responding to concerns that students should have access to their cellphones to make important plans.

(D) Some parents and teachers have raised concerns that allowing elementary students to have cellphones would be a distraction in the classroom.

Argument Writing Prompt:

Write a half page where you defend if students should or should not be allowed to use cellphones at school. Be sure to have solid reasons.
Fake news, once satirical and sketchy, is suddenly more influential than ever

By PBS NewsHour, adapted by Newsela staff

On Sunday afternoon, a 28-year-old man walked into a Washington, D.C., ping-pong bar and pizzeria carrying an AR-15 assault rifle. He fired one or more shots, as people fled Comet Ping Pong, before surrendering to police officers. No one was injured.

Edgar Maddison Welch told police he had traveled from his home in Salisbury, North Carolina, to the nation’s capital to investigate a pre-election conspiracy theory. The theory claimed Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton led a child-trafficking ring out of Comet Ping Pong.

It was a false claim started by fake news.

So Did Fake News Play A Role In Trump’s Election?

Fake news, once confined to satire or the fringes of the internet, has quickly become a contender for the most influential phrase of the year. Following Donald Trump’s surprise election victory, story after story has questioned the role fake news played in swaying voters — and for good reason. A BuzzFeed analysis found fake election news was more popular on Facebook than the most popular election stories from 19 major news outlets.

Fake news comes in many flavors. Some of it is satire, like the joke stories published by The Onion. Other examples are intentional hoaxes, designed to fool people into believing something that is not true. But computer scientist Filippo Menczer said sensational news and social media campaigns filled with mistruths — like the PizzaGate story — started to surge on the internet around 2010.

“At that time, we found several cases of websites that were publishing completely fake and fabricated news, purely for political propaganda,” said Menczer. As director of Indiana University’s Center for Complex Networks and Systems Research, he designs algorithms to track political messaging.

Fake News Took Off In 2014

Six years ago, few fake news websites featured ads for their content, Menczer said. Their main goal was political gain. By his estimation, the business for phony stories appeared to take off during the 2014 Ebola crisis. The websites for places like National Report, which self-identifies as political satire, began to resemble legitimate news sources. False stories on National Report like “Texas Town Quarantined After Family Of Five Test Positive For The Ebola Virus” feature
elements like author biographies and video shorts embedded in the page to give the feel of authenticity, Menczer said. Whether those attributes or the “satirical writing” mislead people is hard to say. Nevertheless, the Texas story was shared on Facebook more than 330,000 times.

Irrational fears of the Ebola virus in the U.S. arguably drove web interest in this fake news story, as it likely did for any number of legitimate articles written during the outbreak. When the dust settled, America notched four imported cases and one death during the entire course of the epidemic. In contrast, Africa experienced around 30,000 cases and 11,000 deaths.

Since the presidential election, some have said, “If people were smarter, fake news wouldn’t be a problem.”

But to communications psychologist Dannagal Young, blaming readers for spreading fake news is somewhat like blaming a baby for soiling itself. They can’t help it.

**Humor Helps Keep Memories Alive**

This takeaway comes after a decade of studying how the human mind responds to political satire. Satire is arguably the most common variety of fake news and the best studied. The mental processing of satire is unique compared to other types of information, Young said, because it requires audience participation.

“So compared to what we see in traditional communication, there is this enhanced attention, enhanced interest and enhanced processing that happens,” said Young, who works at the University of Delaware. “So things that you hear in the context of humor will be more on the top of your mind.”

These days, the trouble arises from people being unable to recognize irony in online satire, Young said. She offered the example of a recent Change.org petition — Allow Open Carry of Firearms at the Quicken Loans Arena during the RNC Convention in July. The petition was written as if real, and news outlets like USA Today assumed as much. But its gun control-supporting author was actually trying to show what he viewed as hypocrisy from Republican politicians. Young argued that spoken irony creates less confusion because it's easier to recognize the tones of intent.

Can So what happens next in the wild west of phony tales? Some are looking to robots to save the day. For example, the verbal themes of satire are so distinctive that linguists can engineer machine-learning algorithms to filter this brand of fake news from legitimate articles.

**Technology Struggles To Identify Sensational Misinformation**

These programs, however, still struggle when it comes to identifying the type of misinformation present in sensational news items. Attempts to build a deception detector yielded a 63 percent success rate, which is better than the human ability to spot lies — 54 percent on average — but not by much.

Since the election, many have tossed blame on Facebook for creating “filter bubbles” or “echo chambers” in users’ news feed. But this notion rings hollow because these platforms are
designed to satisfy people’s choices. These decisions, Young said, are driven by confirmation bias and motivated reasoning. In other words, people share articles after reading only the headline, because they want to think they’re right, she said. She votes for bringing back human gatekeepers to tailor trending news and to prevent fake stories from spreading.

Menczer recommended that social media users who want to avoid echo chambers should follow moderate news sources or organizations that don’t necessarily match their most intimate viewpoints. Or, “don’t unfollow people just because they post something you disagree with,” he said. “Unfollowing is one of the most efficient techniques to put yourself inside an echo chamber.”

**Multiple Choice**

1. Read the following selection from the article.

Fake news, once confined to satire or the fringes of the internet, has quickly become a contender for the most influential phrase of the year.

**Which of the following can be inferred from the selection above?**

(A) The number of fake news stories being reported has increased significantly.

(B) Fake news stories are only available on the internet.

(C) Many people have become interested in satire.

(D) Many people have been influenced by this year's news.

2. Read the following text.

Many Americans are following fake news more often than legitimate news.

**Which paragraph from the section “So Did Fake News Play A Role In Trump’s Election?” BEST supports the statement above?**
3. The central idea of the article is developed by:

(A) illustrating how the mind remembers phony political satire
(B) describing how many people died from the Ebola epidemic in Africa
(C) highlighting the false story about a pre-election conspiracy
(D) showing how people are seriously misled by false information

4. Which of these sentences from the article would be MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?

(A) Edgar Maddison Welch told police he had traveled from his home in Salisbury, North Carolina, to the nation’s capital to investigate a pre-election conspiracy theory.

(B) Nevertheless, the Texas story was shared on Facebook more than 330,000 times.

(C) “So compared to what we see in traditional communication, there is this enhanced attention, enhanced interest and enhanced processing that happens,” said Young, who works at the University of Delaware.

(D) Since the election, many have tossed blame on Facebook for creating “filter bubbles” or “echo chambers” in users’ news feed.

Argument Writing

Think about the impact of fake news, and then, in a half page, discuss whether producers of fake news should or should not be subject to lawsuit or if they should or should not be protected under our freedom of speech. Be sure to provide solid reasons.
Day 4 Assignment

- Read your current Independent Reading book and complete the assigned journal prompt for this week.
Day 5 Assignment

- Read your current Independent Reading book and complete the assigned journal prompt for this week.