MATERIAL 1: OPINION PIECES (STUDENT READING TEXTS)

OPINION PIECE 1 – "AUTONOMOUS CARS WILL MAKE ROADS SAFER" (PRO-TECHNOLOGY VIEWPOINT)

For decades, human error has been the leading cause of road accidents. Distracted driving, fatigue, and poor decision-making contribute to millions of injuries every year. Supporters of autonomous vehicles argue that self-driving technology can dramatically reduce these preventable crashes. Unlike humans, automated systems do not get tired, text while driving, or make emotional choices behind the wheel. Their sensors are able to detect obstacles more quickly and accurately than most drivers, allowing them to respond within milliseconds.

Proponents also point out that autonomous cars can improve traffic flow. When vehicles communicate with one another, traffic can move smoothly without sudden braking or lane-changing, reducing congestion and pollution. For elderly or disabled individuals who cannot operate traditional vehicles, self-driving cars offer newfound independence. Instead of relying on family members or public transportation, they could travel safely on their own.

While critics raise concerns about software errors or hacking, supporters argue that the overall risk is still far lower than that posed by distracted human drivers. The goal of autonomous technology is not perfection, but improvement—and even a small reduction in accidents could save thousands of lives. From this viewpoint, the ethical argument is clear: if we have the technology to reduce harm and prevent deaths, delaying its implementation is irresponsible.

Tone: Optimistic, pro-technology
Main Claim: Autonomous cars will significantly improve safety and reduce preventable harm.

OPINION PIECE 2 – "SELF-DRIVING CARS CREATE NEW ETHICAL PROBLEMS WE'RE NOT READY FOR" (CRITICAL VIEWPOINT)

Although companies promote autonomous vehicles as the future of transportation, many ethical issues remain unresolved. One of the biggest concerns is job displacement. Millions of workers—including truck drivers, delivery drivers, and taxi operators—could lose their jobs if automation becomes the norm. Entire industries could be reshaped, leaving families without stable sources of income.

Another concern involves moral decision-making in crash scenarios. Autonomous vehicles must be programmed to make choices during unavoidable accidents. Should a car prioritize the safety of its passengers, or pedestrians? Should it value the life of a child over an adult? These "trolley problem" situations highlight the uncomfortable reality that engineers—not drivers—will decide how vehicles react in life-or-death situations.

Data privacy is yet another unresolved issue. Self-driving cars collect enormous amounts of information: location patterns, camera footage, sensor readings, even audio data. Without strong regulations, companies could misuse or sell this information. Hackers could also access the software controlling the vehicle, leading to dangerous outcomes.

While autonomous cars may reduce certain types of accidents, critics argue that we should not rush to adopt them without addressing their ethical consequences. Technology cannot replace thoughtful human oversight, and society must consider who benefits—and who suffers—when machines take control of the road.

Tone: Concerned, cautionary

Main Claim: Autonomous vehicles introduce serious ethical, social, and privacy risks that society is not prepared to handle.