

## The History of Book Burning

- The first known incident of book burning occurred in China during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Book burning has continued in many societies up until the present day.
- Today, book burning is usually ceremonial
  - Book burners normally aren't trying to destroy *every* copy of a book, as in *Fahrenheit 451*. Rather, they are expressing their objections to the material in a ritualized manner.
  - **However**, there have been instances throughout history in which irreplaceable material has been destroyed
    - Destruction of the Library of Alexandria
    - Burning of books and burying scholars under China's Qin Dynasty
    - Book burnings by the Nazi regime.

## Censorship and Book Burning

- (1) Why do you think certain populations have allowed book burning in the past (and today)?
  - (2) We tend to equate book burning with oppression. But is there ever any justification for banning certain books (or movies, or art)? If so, what would your criteria be?
  - (3) Do you think that certain members of society deserve to be sheltered from 'offensive' or 'inappropriate' ideas? Explain.
  - (4) Examine your 'Book Burning Through the Ages' handout. Generally, who tends to burn books, and what kinds of books are burned?
  - (5) Were you surprised by any of the burned books that appeared on the handout? If so, why?
  - (6) What is the symbolic significance of **fire** as a tool for the destruction of books?
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## Book Burning Through the Ages

Approximate Date	Book(s) Burned	Book burner(s)
213 BCE	Chinese Philosophy books	Emperor Qin Shi Huang
?	Sorcery scrolls	Early converts to Christianity (at Ephesus)
292	Egyptian alchemical books	Emperor Diocletian
408	The Sibylline Books	Flavius Stilicho
392 and 640	The Alexandria libraries	Theodosius I (392) Unknown (640)
650	Qur'anic texts (competing versions)	The 3 <sup>rd</sup> Caliph, Uthman
1085	Competing prayer books (at Toledo)	Followers of the King of Castile
13 <sup>th</sup> century	'Heretical' Cathar texts	The Catholic church
1233	Maimonides philosophy	Unknown-- Burnt at Montpellier, Southern France
1410	John Wycliffe's books (Jan Hus' teaching)	Illiterate Prague archbishop Zbyněk Zajic z Házmburka
1480s	Non-Catholic books, especially Jewish and Arabic texts.	Tomas Torquemada
1497	Decameron, Ovid, and other 'lewd' books (in Florence)	Girolamo Savonarola
1499 or 1500	Over a million Arabic and Hebrew books (at Andalusia)	Cisneros, Archbishop of Granada
1525 & 1526	William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament	British authorities
1624	Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible	Ordered by the Pope
1760	Anti-Wilhelm Tell tract (arguing that Wilhelm Tell was a myth)	Simon Uriel Freudenberger
1842	Religious libraries and royalist books (during the French revolution)	Robespierre
1842	Early Braille books (at Paris)	Armand Dufau, director of Paris's School for the Blind
1918	Anti-Communist books, religious works and books in favour of Czarist history	The Bolsheviks
1930-1940	Jewish, anti-Nazi and 'degenerate' books	The Nazi regime
1948	2000 comic books (at Binghamton, New York)	Burned by children, overseen by their priests, teachers and parents
1953	Communist and 'fellow traveler' books	Senator McCarthy
1965	Library of writer Pramoedya Anata Toer (Indonesia)	Suharto Regime
1981	Jaffna library	Sinhalese police officers
1988	<i>The Satanic Verses</i> by Salman Rushdie	Certain Muslims, who considered it blasphemous.
1990s	Books 'contrary to the teachings of God' at Grade Cache, Alberta	The Full Gospel Assembly
000s	Harry Potter books (at various American cities)	Churches

## Post-WW II America

### Ray Bradbury- Background and Trivia

- American, born in Waukegan, Illinois (August 22, 1920—June 5, 2012)
- He was influenced by science fiction heroes such as Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers.
- He attributes his lifelong daily writing habit to the day in 1932 when a carnival entertainer, Mr. Electrico, touched him with an electrified sword, made his hair stand on end, and shouted, "Live forever!" The following day, Mr. Electrico brought Bradbury behind the scenes of the carnival and discussed philosophy with him
- Bradbury once said in an interview that he does not like using computers when writing a book.
- Bradbury claims that the entirety of his novel was written in the basement of the UCLA library on a pay typewriter. His original intention in writing *Fahrenheit 451* was to show his great love for books and libraries. He has often referred to Montag as an allusion to himself.

### Context: Introduction

- *Fahrenheit 451* was originally published in 1951 (within an anthology, under a different title--*The Fireman*)
- The late 1940's and early 1950's
  - Post WW II
  - Beginning of the Cold War
  - The Red Scare (hysteria over the perceived threat posed by Communists)
  - Television

### The Invention of Television

- Regular network broadcasting began in the United States in 1946, and television became common in American homes by the mid 1950s.
- The 1950's is considered by some to be the 'golden age' of television.
  - T.V. at that time became the dominant mass media
  - In the early 50's in America, young people often watched T.V. for more hours than they went to school. (*Has this changed?*)
  - What was portrayed on T.V. was accepted as 'normal.' (*Has this changed?*)
  - Birth of the sitcom

## The Cold War

- A period of conflict, tension, and competition between the United States and the Soviet Union (and their allies) from the mid 1940s until the early 1990s.
- **U.S., Japan, Western Europe, and Canada vs. Eastern Europe and China**
  - Rivalry between superpowers led to...
    - Military coalitions
    - Conflicts in ideology
    - Espionage
    - Military, industrial, and technological developments
    - Immense spending on defense
    - A massive conventional and nuclear arms race
    - Proxy wars (i.e. Korean war)

## The Fifties

As much as *Fahrenheit 451* is about a time in the not-too-distant future, Ray Bradbury's novel is anchored in the 1950s. Mildred Montag sits like a zombie in front of a telescreen. The sound of jet fighters crosses the sky in preparation for war. A neighborhood sits full of cookie-cutter houses and the complacent souls who live in them. All of these would have been familiar scenes to a writer at work in 1953.

The era following World War II in the United States was known for its productivity, its affluence, and its social conformity. The economy was strong. The technology of television, air travel, and the transistor brought the future to the front stoop. The neighborhood Montag lives in probably looks a lot like Levittown, the famous low-cost housing development of the age that ushered in the rise of suburbia. But always, in the background, were rumors of war.

Although the 1950s are remembered as a decade of peace and prosperity, they were anything but. The Korean War, which ended in the year that *Fahrenheit 451* was published, saw tens of thousands of American deaths. The larger Cold War that lingered was a source of constant anxiety. In the new atomic age, everyone was learning that the world could be destroyed with the push of a button, a fate Bradbury more than hints at in his novel.

Not only were governments endowed with nuclear weapons, they exercised the power to persecute suspected enemies closer to home. The Congressional House Committee on Un-American Activities began investigating suspected espionage in 1946, and within a few years Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin was charging, without evidence, that dozens of government officials were Communist party

members. Meanwhile, memories of Nazi book burnings and soviet censorship was still fresh in people's minds.

As a result, censorship was alive and well in the media. Communists were assailed in the press. Comic books were condemned as subversive by parents and educators. Images of the "organization man" and the "lonely crowd" reflected changes in the American spirit. For all their prosperity and rising expectations, the 1950s were a decade of atomic tests and regional wars; racial segregation; government censorship and persecution; subtly enforced social orthodoxy; and building angst. The social and psychological problems of the era moved to the forefront in *Fahrenheit 451*, a book in which a society that seems oddly un-American in its intolerance of books also seems to reflect a double-edged prosperity that had overtaken the West.

16• THE BIG READ National Endowment for the Art

# Controversial Statements: Agree or Disagree

Please note the extent to which you Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree with the following statements, you must pick one! (be ready to explain your position).

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Happiness is the absence of conflict and suffering.				
Television makes people dumb.				
Ignorance is bliss.				
People who read books are better than everybody else.				
Offensive or upsetting material should not be published.				
Bradbury's predictions in <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> were generally accurate.				
In today's society, people are disposable.				
The written word has more value than other media.				
In general, our society acts without thinking.				
It would be ok today if all of the books burned because we have the internet.				

Notes: (This might be where you write down some reasons why picked certain categories. Feel free to use the back of the page).

## Definition of Science Fiction

- Science fiction is a genre of fiction in which the stories often tell about science and technology of the future. It is important to note that science fiction has a relationship with the principles of science—these stories involve partially true-partially fictitious laws or theories of science.
- It should not be completely unbelievable, because it then ventures into the genre fantasy.
- The plot creates situations different from those of both the present day and the known past.
- Science fiction texts also include a human element, explaining what effect new discoveries, happenings and scientific developments will have on us in the future.
- Science fiction texts are often set in the future, in space, on a different world, or in a different universe or dimension.

## Definition of Fantasy

- Contains elements that are not realistic
  - talking animals
  - magical powers
  - often set in a medieval universe
  - possibly involving mythical beings

## Utopias: Definition and Characteristics

**Utopia:** A place, state, or condition that is ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions.

- An ideal place that doesn't exist.
- An imaginary world where social justice is achieved, as well as the principles that could guarantee it.
- Society based on equality, along with economic and political prosperity. Poverty and misery are eradicated.
- Usually set in an isolated place and people live there according to the principles of that place.
- Often set in the future and features elements of technology and science.
- Symbolizes people's hopes and dreams.
- Synonymous with "impossible" because an ideal life in an ideal society appears to be out of reach.
- The authors of utopias depict the societies similar to theirs but better organized. They also offer a detailed plan of how we can create such a society and how it might be run.

## Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics

**Dystopia:** A futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control. Dystopias, through an exaggerated worst-case scenario, make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system.

### **Characteristics of a Dystopian Society**

- Propaganda is used to control the citizens of society.
- Information, independent thought, and freedom are restricted.
- A figurehead or concept is worshipped by the citizens of the society.
- Citizens are perceived to be under constant surveillance.
- Citizens have a fear of the outside world.
- Citizens live in a dehumanized state.
- The natural world is banished and distrusted.
- Citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality and dissent are bad.
- The society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world.

### **Types of Dystopian Controls**

Most dystopian works present a world in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through one or more of the following types of controls:

- Corporate control: One or more large corporations control society through products, advertising, and/or the media. Examples include *Minority Report* and *Running Man*.
- Bureaucratic control: Society is controlled by a mindless bureaucracy through a tangle of red tape, relentless regulations, and incompetent government officials. Examples in film include *Brazil*.
- Technological control: Society is controlled by technology—through computers, robots, and/or scientific means. Examples include *The Matrix*, *The Terminator*, and *I, Robot*.
- Philosophical/religious control: Society is controlled by philosophical or religious ideology often enforced through a dictatorship or theocratic government.

### **The Dystopian Protagonist**

- often feels trapped and is struggling to escape.
- questions the existing social and political systems.
- believes or feels that something is terribly wrong with the society in which he or she lives.
- helps the audience recognize the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective.

**Part I: The Hearth and the Salamander (Pages 1-65)**

1. Carefully read the first few paragraphs of the novel, and identify at least three examples of imagery and/or figurative language. Label each example that you find, and explain what you believe Bradbury's intended purpose was for including each example.
2. What makes Montag an unusual fireman?
3. In the beginning of the novel, what does Montag think of his job?
4. Which character does Montag meet on the way home from work at the very beginning of the novel?
5. What effect does this meeting have on him?
6. During his conversation, Montag says, "You never wash it off completely," referring to the kerosene. What could this mean symbolically?
7. Why do you think that Bradbury would introduce Clarisse before Montag's wife, Mildred?
8. What does Montag find when he gets home that night?
9. Describe the people that help Mildred, and also describe the type of help that she receives.
10. Based on the fact that these people (referring back to question 8) are so busy, what can we infer about the members society in *Fahrenheit 451*?
11. How is life in Montag's house very different from that of Clarisse's house?
12. How does Mildred react after she wakes up from her previous night's experience?

13. What does Mildred do all day?

14. How does Bradbury treat television in the novel?

15. Consider what TV was like in the 1940's and the 1950's. How did Bradbury envision the 'future' of television? In what ways was he correct?

16. During Montag's second encounter with Clarisse, she rubs a dandelion under his chin and exclaims, "What a shame. You're not in love with anyone."

Why do you think Montag becomes so upset when he hears Clarisse say this?

17. How is Clarisse different than Mildred?

18. What is the Mechanical Hound, and what is its purpose?

19. Identify the paradoxical phrases that Bradbury uses to describe the hound. What point is Bradbury trying to make in using these phrases?

20. What is the hound's reaction to Montag? Make a prediction based on this reaction.

21. Explain the irony surrounding the fact that Montag's society has objects named the Snake and the Hound.

22. Why does society consider Clarisse "anti-social?"

23. What happens at the next fire that Montag goes to in the novel?

24. What risky thing does Montag do at this fire?
25. In this section, Beatty reveals something very important about himself and his knowledge. What is it?
26. Why is it significant that Montag can't remember when he met his wife?
27. What has happened to Clarisse? How did it happen?
28. What is unusual about the way Mildred told Montag about Clarisse?
29. How does Montag feel about the death of the old woman? What does it make him think about books?
30. Read pages 52-58 very carefully. They contain great truths about our world. List three things Beatty talks about in his speech to Montag that are true about our world.
31. What does Beatty hint at before leaving?
32. What do we find out that Montag has hidden in his house after Beatty leaves?
33. Why is this section of the novel titled "The Hearth and the Salamander?" What symbolic significance does each of these words/ideas have?

### Pages 32-65 Assignment

1. Write a brief summary of your section.
2. Choose one passage from your section, and explain why the passage is so significant. (Your analysis can be based on one or more of the following: mood, tone, character development, theme, diction, syntax, foreshadowing, irony, etc.). You must write a meaningful response; I am not looking for plot description here.
3. Write a sentence that demonstrates the contrasts between Montag's character on pages 1 and 2 and his character on pages 48 and 49. Use this statement as the opening sentence of your paragraph, and then describe the contrasts in detail, citing textual evidence for both parts of the novel.
4. Analyze and discuss the similarities and differences in the themes of *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Giver*. Use examples from both texts in your response.
5. Reread Beatty's rant on pages 52 and 53. What American cultural value (s) is Ray Bradbury suggesting Montag's society, and all future societies, lacks? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

**Part II: "The Sieve and the Sand" (Pages 67-106)**

34. When was the last liberal arts college shut down?
35. Professor Faber thought Montag's call was some sort of trap. (True or False)
36. Why did Faber's fear dissipate when Montag was standing outside his door?
37. What did Montag want from Faber?
38. Faber reminded Montag that people who are having fun are reluctant to become rebels. (True or False)
39. How did Montag finally get Faber to consider really helping him?
40. The Queen Bee analogy underscored Faber's cowardice. (True or False)
41. What two items were exchanged before Montag left the professor's house?
42. What is the volcano's mouth?
43. Montag pulled the plug on the living room fish bowl. (True or False)
44. Faber objected to Montag's poetry reading. (True or False)
45. Which lady was affected by the original intent of the poetry?
46. In the late hours of the night, Faber refused to console Montag for foolishly reading poetry to the poor, silly women. (True or False)
47. Listening to Captain Beatty play his harp and needle Montag had what effect upon Guy?
48. What interrupted the poker game?
49. Captain Beatty drove the Salamander to whose house?

### Discussion Questions for Pages 88-106 of the Novel

1. Again, war is looming in the background—"One million men mobilized—Faber jokes and says that it is really ten million, but one million sounds happier.
2. In this section, Mildred invites her friends Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles over to watch tv, but Montag unplugs the television, and this forces the women to actually talk. What do we learn about husband and wife relationships and parent and child relationships in this section?
3. Turn to page 93, and explain what inferences we can make about the society's government/rulers based on the women's conversation.
4. What does Montag do on pages 96-97 that really upsets the women? Which woman in particular responds by crying hysterically?
5. In your opinion, what elements and ideas found within the poem made Mrs. Phelps cry?
6. Since Mildred has secretly been burning some of Montag's books behind his back, what does he do to try to save them?
7. Summarize the conversation that Beatty has with Montag when Montag returns to the fire station and gives him a book.
8. Turn to page 102. Does anyone recognize the allusion at the top of the page?
9. A turning point occurs at the end of this section. What is it?

### Discussion Questions for Pages 107-132 of the Novel

1. Who turned in the alarm on Montag? How does Mildred respond when she sees that her house is about to be destroyed? What is she most worried about?
2. Turn to page 110. How does Montag feel when he is burning down his house?
3. What causes Montag's earpiece to fall out of his ear?
4. Turn to page 113. Find the allusion, and tell me which character from literature said it.
5. Give some different reasons why you think Montag killed Beatty (with the flamethrower)? (Even though he blames his hands again and he does feel guilty afterwards).
6. What does the Hound do before Montag sets it on fire? Why does this make things so difficult for Montag?
7. While Montag is trying to figure out what to do, he learns two things from his Seashell Radio—1) He is a wanted man, and the people are being encouraged to keep a look out. The helicopters are also searching for him. 2) War has been declared.
8. A car comes speeding at Montag at 130 miles per hour, and Montag believes at first that it is the police. Who is it really, and what happened?
9. Why do you think Montag plants a book in Mr. Black's house and calls in the alarm? It seems like such a random act.
10. We find out that Faber is headed to St. Louis. Where does he tell Montag to go for safety?
11. Turn to page 128 of the novel. How does Montag feel about the fact that his escape and possible capture are being broadcast for the world to see?
12. What does it mean on page 131 when it says, "Twenty million Montags running...twenty million silently baying Hounds"?
13. What does the television announcer tell everyone in the city to do in order to help catch Montag? Does it work—No, he ends up at the river.

**Part III: Burning Bright (Pages 107-158)**

50. How had Beatty given Montag hints that he is under suspicion?
51. Who must have brought the books back from the garden?
52. Who (3) turned in an alarm against Montag?
53. What happened to Montag's green bullet?
54. Why did Montag burn Beatty's body?
55. What is Montag's plan to escape?
56. How much money did Montag give Faber?
57. How many scents can the mechanical hound remember?
58. Why did Montag want Faber to turn on the air conditioning and sprinklers?
59. Interpret "Twenty million Montag's running, soon, if the cameras caught him."
60. Why did the search for Montag veer inland?
61. Who died in Montag's place?
62. What did Granger mean by "Welcome back from the dead."
63. When Granger and other like-minded people are stopped by authorities, why isn't any incriminating evidence found?
64. Do you have a sense that there are other "book chapters" in other towns? What proof do you have?
65. What does Granger mean by his quote, "You're not important. You're not anything."?
66. Explain the last implications of the events in the last four to five pages of the novel.