

Unit of Study

Rationale:

Every year, technology advances and increases. By the time I am teaching, I can only imagine how prevalent technology will be for my students. Keeping that in mind, I want my students to question whether or not technology can be beneficial in giving them a voice, while analyzing whether or not they are happy with their voices today.

For my unit of study, I will be focusing on Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit: 451*. *Fahrenheit: 451* follows the journey of Guy Montag, a fireman in a dystopian society who instead of putting out fires, burns illegal books and the homes of those who secretly harbor them. It isn't until he meets his new neighbor, Clarisse McClellan, that he begins to question everything around him, including his own happiness. After experiencing bizarre moments (wife overdosing, the old woman who sets herself on fire, Clarisse dying, and his mechanical dog behaving hostile) Montag is trapped in his head, causing him to embark on a journey that will challenge his beliefs, as well as fill the emptiness he has always had.

Although many believe that the main theme of this book is censorship through the burning of books, I believe that Bradbury's real message is the creation of mass culture in the world. In the book, as technology increases, minority voices get louder. When Captain Beatty visits Montag he sums up Bradbury's thoughts saying, "The bigger your market, Montag, the less you handle controversy, remember that! All the minor minorities with their navels to be kept clean" (Bradbury 86). Clearly, individualism is challenged and conformity is encouraged within Montag's society. To prevent people from complaining or questioning their government, the government inflicts a politically correct culture to keep those who know the truth quiet. They do

this by burning books and homes of people who own books. The government also begins brainwashing at an early age, discovered when Captain Beatty tells Montag that the age for kindergarten gets lower every year. But, Bradbury does not stop there. His book also serves as a social commentary that criticizes Americans who despite the ugly world they live in, choose to pretend to be content or happy, despite it all being a facade. This is seen through the strange behavior characters express when they are challenged with uncomfortable situations—as seen with Mildred’s behavior the day after she almost overdoses.

Most believe that with the increase of technology, society will be better connected. However, the truth is, just because technology gets more advanced, does not mean that the advancement of technology will actually bring us together. In *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury elaborates on the reality that technology does not mean togetherness. This can be summarized by Montag’s quote, “Nobody knows anyone. Strangers come and violate you” (Bradbury 34). He says this after Mildred almost overdoses and the operators connect her to two machines and then make a joke out of the expense of her worried husband.

One of the main questions I would like my students to focus on is whether or not their individualism is taken away through the advancement of technology. We all know that adolescence is a difficult age to maneuver through, and with the excessive use of social media, many youth can be victimized in losing their sense of self. I want my students to go beyond the text in hopes that they will discover who they are and stick to it, without being influenced by the people around them. I want my students to embody Montag’s quote when he says, “I don’t want to change sides and just be told what to do. There’s no reason to change if I do that” (Bradbury 127). I want my students to question those around them and be able to determine how valuable they really are.

Fahrenheit: 451 taps into chapters four, six, and seven in *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*. The book can be tied to chapter four because Guy Montag has to make a life choice when he visits his old friend and professor, Faber. Montag has no one supporting his dangerous decision to search for meaning. He confides in one person, his wife Mildred, but instead of supporting him the way any wife would, she begins crying to him, asking him why he would risk so much to find fulfillment. He tries to explain his reasoning to her, but she turns her back on him telling Montag that she is not going to risk herself to help him. Montag's courageous decision to devise a plan with Faber is a choice he makes for the betterment of himself and his community. This courage is also why Montag's journey touches chapter seven because without his courage, he wouldn't embark on an endeavour. He also exemplifies courage when he seeks Faber in the first place. Montag knows the risks he is running, but chooses to seek Faber even after Faber rejects him. This book touches chapter six because Montag is unhappy with who he is. His search of identity is what propels him to seek Faber. After being asked if he is happy, Montag cannot shake off his existence so he begins to question everything around him, including his profession, in order to find his true identity—one that will grant him the happiness he desperately yearns for.

With the Text:

To introduce this book to my class, I will ask students to take out their writing into the day journals, and hand out an essay. The essay will be none other than the famous "The Thing" by Martin Heidegger. Each student will receive a copy of the first page where Heidegger writes, "All distances in time and space are shrinking...yet the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness; for nearness does not consist in shortness of distance" and I would give students 5

minutes to write about what they think this quote means. When students finish, they will be given the opportunity to share their answers to the class.

After students share their writing, I will have students break into four groups. Assuming my class has 20 students, I will have four students per group and give each group a piece of poster paper with a set of sticky notes. I will ask students to draw a T chart where they will list the pros and cons of technology on sticky notes. After giving students ten minutes to fill out their posters, I will give the class ten minutes to walk around and compare their answers to their peers. This activity will bring new perspectives as well as allow students to prepare for their oncoming essay that they will write at the end of the book.

My next activity will be assigning the book to be read itself. The book does not have chapters, instead it is divided into three parts, so I would assign reading for homework to ensure that students are able to contribute to the class next time. Assuming I am teaching in high school would mean that I wouldn't have my students every day, so I would assign approximately 40 pages worth of reading every other day to accommodate their schedules. To hold accountability, I would have a quiz every morning with basic context questions where students wouldn't have to have an in depth understanding, but would at least have to have read the book. When students finish the quiz, they will trade quizzes with the person behind them and we will grade them as a class. After the quiz, I will pull out my favorite, most powerful quote from the assigned reading, write it on the board, and ask students to explain what the quote means as well as provide context for the quote. This would also be a great time to dive deeper into the reading, looking for themes, motifs, and symbolism. To look for these thematic elements, I will prepare kahoot games for each class and then reward three winners with extra credit points.

Once students are finished with the book, I will then have students participate in a book pass where they will divide into groups, be handed different books, and be told to create a venn diagram. Students will be able to use their cell phones for research, as well as have the physical copies of the books (where they can read the summaries on the back), to compare and contrast *Fahrenheit: 451* to the books I give them. Students will be given 20 minutes to complete this activity in groups and then will present their books and diagrams to the class. Every group will have a different book, so I am hopeful that students will be able to note multiple similarities of theme, plot, character analysis, etc between *Fahrenheit: 451* and the books they are given.

The books will be:

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

The Giver by Lois Lowry

1984 by George Orwell

Atlantia by Ally Condie

The final section of the book is called, "Burning Bright," so my next activity will be giving students a poem. I will give students a copy of "Tyger Tyger" by William Blake where Blake uses the image of fire as something beautiful and destructive. I will ask students to read outloud and then, as a class, analyze the poem. One of the greatest motifs in the book is fire. At the beginning of the book, fire destroys. However, when Montag burns his colleagues and his boss, fire takes on a new meaning, representing hope for a greater society. Like Blake's poem, fire can be harmful and wonderful, just like Montag destroys and creates. In German, Montag

means Monday, so I'm hoping that after reading this poem and sharing this fun fact, students will be able to conclude how powerful the symbolism of fire is in this book. This poem will serve as a tool to further understand this book.

To conclude this book, I will assign students an essay. I will ask them to write 5 paragraphs where they answer and explain the question that was given to them from the beginning stages of the book: Is technology beneficial for society? I will allow students to use any sources we have used thus far to understand the book.

Works Cited

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