

### Why Read Fahrenheit 451?

"Mr. Thompson, this book sucks hardcore!"

"This is a wussy book!"

"I hate this book! Why do we have to read it every day?"

I've heard these and other negative statements over the course of the last two weeks while we've been reading Fahrenheit 451. It is a book about the importance of reading, and I wouldn't be a proper English teacher if I didn't try to shove this theme down your throats. But while I've been trying to get you to answer the question "Why should we read?", many of you have been asking, "Why should we read this book?"

OK, I'll tell you.

You should read Fahrenheit 451 not because it will teach you anything about English (but it will), not because it will make you smarter (but it will), and not because it's required by the district (because it's most certainly not). You should read it because if television habits (and lack of reading habits) in our society don't change, we'll be a world just like the one in the book. And look what happened to those folks.

Reading makes you do one important thing that viewing does not; it makes you ACTIVE in the processing of information. When you read (regardless of what you read) your mind must recognize and interpret the letters, which are symbols that represent words, which are symbols that represent thoughts. In other words, when you read, you are doing something! To sit and stare at a TV set doesn't require your brain to process any information; you become inactive. And since activity is a sign of life, to mindlessly watch TV is a form of suicide. You are letting something outside

of yourself control your attention and your time. What's the point of being blessed with life if you don't live it?

Consider this: if a doctor informed you that you only had one week to live, would you spend that week watching TV? I hope not. I hope that all of you have something more important to do with your lives. No one knows how much life he/she has left. Auto wrecks and other freak accidents claim lives every day, so don't fall for the misconception that just because you're young you can afford to waste time. We never know when our time is up; therefore, we should spend as much of it as possible trying to accomplish our life goals, not playing dead in front of a television set.

In Fahrenheit 451, Mildred and her friends represent what our own world is turning into. They spend their lives in the "parlor" watching the TV walls. They ignore the problems in the world, so the problems get worse. The focus of all of their talk is whatever was on TV the night before. They are mindless zombies, no good to anyone including themselves. And how many times have you heard someone begin a conversation, "Did you see that show last night where the guy...?"

See? It's happening to us! Fahrenheit 451 is a warning. You should read it (and other books like it) to remind yourself that you've got a purpose in life, you've got goals, and you need to start working toward them. Fahrenheit 451 is full of themes like this: Don't waste your life! Make the world better! Leave your mark! Make your time matter! Be true to yourself!

Fahrenheit 451 is about living your life, not letting other

people (like those on TV) do it for you. This is the challenge that Montag faces throughout the novel. He's always asking himself, "What's wrong with me? Why am I not happy when everyone keeps telling me that I should be?" The lesson he finally learns is that he's ultimately responsible for his own happiness, and he's got to live with the consequences of the choices he makes. In short, Montag realizes: "I am alive! I'd better start living!" That's why you should read it. In the end of things, we've all got to take responsibility for what we did (or did not) do with our lives. Because I want you to do something important, I make you read this book.

So, for those of you who have complained: Stop being Mildreds! If you missed the point of the book, you either weren't in class or didn't listen enough to get it. I'm doing you a favor by making you read Fahrenheit 451, and you ought to be thanking me. And maybe, years from now when your adult life is affected by the decisions you made in the ninth grade, some of you will.