



[Fahrenheit 451](#), by Ray Bradbury

In A Nutshell

Fahrenheit 451 tells the story of a futuristic world in which books are banned and burned, TV is everyone's drug of choice, and independent thinking is basically illegal. Ray Bradbury first wrote the tale as a short story called "Bright Phoenix" in 1947. The work progressed to adolescence as a novella called *The Fireman*, and finally became a full-grown novel in 1953. This was Bradbury's first Big Important Serious Work, though he was already famous for science fiction stories like his 1950 collection *The Martian Chronicles*. These stories put Bradbury on the map, but *Fahrenheit* got his name on the literary A list.

While the novel does touch on the dangers of censorship, Bradbury was adamant that this was not his focus. The novel is about the dangers of television, he said, and his fears that such mindless entertainment would replace recreational free thinking. Remember that in the 1950s color TV was the hot new thing; it represented the burgeoning empire of leisure. Add into the mix Cold War fears of "suspect" individuals and a need for straight-laced conformity, and you've got an environment ripe for *Fahrenheit*-style fears. Critics recognized the relevance of Bradbury's work then, and still do today.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 What 's up with those chapter divisions? Does the plot seem suited to its three-part format? What do you make of those chapter titles?
- 2 Does the violence prevalent in the futuristic world of this novel comment in any way on our own society? Do we, in a way, love violence as well? Is there anything wrong with that? What 's healthy and what 's not?
- 3 Bradbury has stated that the novel is not about censorship, but since Captain Beatty cites censorship as one of the main reasons books ended up banned, we 're going to ask you this question anyway: where can we draw the line with appropriate censorship and shameless destruction of information?

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