

## Fahrenheit 451 Lesson Plan

### Goals and Objectives:

The main goal is to use drama in education to study the themes from the novel *Fahrenheit 451*. The students will be guided through various exercises leading up to participating in a process drama originated by Cecily O'Neill. The goal is to assist the student in creating the setting and character from the time period of the book so that when the improvisation begins the students have a firm foundation in which to participate.

Theater/acting exercises will be used to create the setting and character. While this is not the standard norm in a process drama it helps students who have never participated a process drama.

A secondary goal is to help the students connect personally with the issues surrounding the story and the characters of the novel. By using drama in education the students will have an opportunity to connect with a story on a much deeper level than they would if they only discussed the circumstances of the story. By investing the circumstances physically and emotionally the hope is that the students will take more away than mere information.

### Topic:

This lesson plan is for teaching around the themes of censorship, ignorance and technology presented in *Fahrenheit 451*. Guy Montag is a fireman who lives in a society in which books are illegal. His job is not to extinguish fires, but to light them. He burns books, and all the firemen wear the number "451" on their uniforms because that is the temperature at which books burn.

But the role reversal of the firemen is not the only difference between present-day society and the world in which Montag lives. People of Montag's world take no interest in politics or world issues. The only point of life is pleasure. Montag's wife, Mildred, spends her time watching the televisions that take up three of the four walls in their parlor, or listening to the seashell radios that fit snugly in the ear. It isn't until Montag meets a young girl named Clarisse that he realizes that there might be more to life than the electronic entertainment that absorbs everyone. Clarisse makes him think about the world beyond the wall television and seashell radios; she makes him wonder about life.

This newfound curiosity gets Montag into trouble when he takes an interest in reading the books that he's supposed to burn. When Captain

Beatty, the fire chief, realizes that Montag has traded sides, he forces Montag to burn his own home. To save himself, Montag kills the fire chief and escapes the city. A manhunt ensues on live television, but when Montag eludes the authorities, an innocent man is killed in his place to appease the audience.

Montag finds a group of educated, vagrant men who remember great novels so that when the world returns to an appreciation of literature, they will be ready to help out. He joins them. As they are walking away from the city, a bomb destroys the place that was once Montag's home. Knowing they will be needed, the men turn back to the shattered city to help rebuild a society that has destroyed itself.

**Target Audience:**

This lesson plan would be great in Drama, English and History class. It is written for students in grades eight to twelve.

**Timeframe:**

The outlined course material would happen in five 50-minute class sessions. Ideally the classes would be consecutive.

**Activities:**

**Day One:**

1. Ice breaker theater game (15 min)
2. Discuss themes from the book. What moments or situations stuck out to the students? Use some of the below questions in the "Discussion Questions" section to get the kids talking and thinking about the themes. (20 min)
3. Have the students think about these ideas in relation to a time before the events written in the book. What if they were the citizens when the book burning just started? Or they were professors like Faber who came to class and no students were there. Have them go home and list three reasons if they had power over people why their literacy could threaten their power. (15 min)

**Day Two:**

1. Ensemble/Conflict style theater game (10 min)
2. Begin to discuss what the students wrote about in how knowledge of books could threaten people in power. Ask they

students to begin to think that there were more people within the city that had knowledge of books and history. What would it be like for these people? (25 min)

3. Begin to use aspects of Cecily O'Neill's segmenting for focus to find out what aspects of this life can be used for a process drama. Have the students begin to list the different aspects of the style of living that was talked about earlier. Some examples of ideas could be people losing jobs, protests, and arrests. (15 min)

### Day Three:

The goal to this point was to begin to build a sense of place and now the students will begin to build a sense of character.

1. Create a list of the **type of work** that people do in this time and place that was discussed earlier. (5 min)
2. Have the students choose one of the occupations listed to assign to a character and create a list of facts and questions they would need to know in order to **understand who this person is**, ask questions that get to know everything from the mundane to the deep spiritual yearnings of this character...here are a few examples: (10 min)
  - a. The basics – name, age, family, living situation, pets, etc
  - b. What is your greatest passion?
  - c. What are you afraid of?
  - d. What do you want out of life?
  - e. Who do you respect? why?
  - f. What is your favorite food?
  - g. How do you hope to be perceived?
  - h. What is your favorite music?
  - i. Describe an important turning point in your life. How did it change you?
3. Working independently: (15 min)
  - a. From the list on the board choose one of the occupations. Do not agonize, work spontaneously, and go with your first impulse.
  - b. The teacher asks everyone to close their eyes and begin to see a character. The teacher leads the students through a visualization of their character by asking a selection of questions from the board – how old is your character, what are they wearing, what is on their mind...etc.
  - c. FREEWRITE – after a good five minutes or so the teacher

- will ask you to go straight from your image of this character to the page – write a letter from your character's point of view. In this letter your character is introducing themselves to you – trying to give you the most vivid image possible of who they are, their lives, their world.
- d. Choose three short passages that are particularly strong from your letter and underline them.
4. Working in pairs: (10 min)
    - a. Introduce yourselves (your characters) to one another.
    - b. Without telling your partner, decide what you (by you I mean your character) want, this is called **your intention**. For example you may want to impress them, to get them to love you, ask them to leave you alone, you may want to soothe them, scold them, etc.
    - c. Decide on a **physical posture** that is in some way expressive of your character (curled up tight sitting in a corner, sprawled out on a chair, standing proud in the center of the room, fidgeting and pacing, etc.)
    - d. Working **with the text** that you underlined, keeping your intention in mind speak your text to one another. TAKE YOUR TIME! You can repeat a word or sentence several times, the words themselves are not the most important thing, focus on your intention – it is most important that you convey what you want/need through whatever words you chose.
    - e. Discuss your work with your partner – could they express their intention more clearly? How? Consider the energy of your characters are they quick, slow, light, heavy? How does this affect their voice? Their body?
  5. Sharing with the class: (10 min)
    - a. After everyone has had a chance to work together a bit, pairs volunteer to share their character work with the class. As a class, try to understand who they are, and what they want. If the class has a hard time guessing your intention share it and see if together you can understand how that character could express him or herself more clearly – or maybe challenge the performer to work with a totally different intention – still using the same text and the same vision of their character.

#### **Day Four:**

Review with the students what was discussed during the segmenting of

focus from day two. Begin asking questions to the characters they created the previous day. Through this the teacher might find out that the students may want to start a revolt. For the sake of the lesson plan we will say that is what they choose. Once the action is chosen, the students must choose what part of this aspect they want to act out. Do they want to act out the planning phase? What part of the planning phase? The first meeting? The last meeting? (10 min)

Through listening to the students determine what the buy in will be. What action will the students do to bring them into the life that has been set up? If the first meeting is the chosen moment, the buy in could be bringing a book to the meeting and sharing why they still have it. The teacher can have the students begin to live out their character in the character's everyday activities. While this is going on the teacher can remind the characters that they are attending a secret meeting tonight and how does that affect them. The meeting could be called. At the meeting the teacher can be in role and announce that their lives are at risk being here. Anyone of the students in the meeting could be a spy. How important is the information they have to share and how important is that information worth preserving? (30 min)

Take some time to debrief what was shared and how did the students felt about sharing in the drama. Were they afraid? Did the possibility of a spy make them want to share more? What ideas did they have to bring to the meeting about overthrowing the power or saving some books?

#### **Day Five:**

Share with the students that time has passed and they are now living outside the city. They have met Granger and have heard the story about mankind being like the phoenix that burns itself up and rises from the ashes. Have the students get into smaller groups and create a tableau with that image in mind. Once they have worked on it. Have each group present and have the other students walk around and speak what comes to mind. (20 min)

The students need to escape the city or risk being caught for having books. They will have to leave their family and friends behind. Have them write in character what they would want to say to them about why they have chosen to not give into the book burning and society's rules. (10 min)

Have the students sit in a circle. Tell them that as a group they are all responsible to remember a story. Each student will have his or her part to remember. If they forget their part of the story, then the story will not

be whole. The story will be made up on the spot. Have a student start telling a story. When the teacher feels that they have shared enough information, call the name of another student and so on. Anytime during the story telling the teacher can stop and have a previous student share their part of the story. Once all the students have shared, skip around to see who remembers what. (20 min)

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How is knowledge power? How do we benefit from ideas and learning different points of view?
2. Why would those in control of a society want to suppress knowledge? Why are ideas “dangerous?”
3. How do books represent us (mankind)?
4. Is there an idea you would be willing to die for?
5. If all books in the world were going to be burned tomorrow and you could only save one, which would it be and why?
6. If you were going to write a book, what would it contain? What things do you think are important for the world to know?

**Resources:**

*Fahrenheit 451* Study Guide. Contributors: Lois Atkins, Ann Boyd, Robin Chaplik, Jonathan Faris, Hallie Gordon, Cendrillon Savariau, Kimberly Senior. [www.steppenwolf.org/\\_pdf/studyguides/F451\\_studyguide.pdf](http://www.steppenwolf.org/_pdf/studyguides/F451_studyguide.pdf). 1995

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