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2014

Bradbury's Message in *Fahrenheit 451*

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Recommended Citation

Toth, Michelle, "Bradbury's Message in *Fahrenheit 451*" (2014). *Student Publications*. 11.
https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/student_publications/11

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“Bradbury’s Message in *Fahrenheit 451*,” by Michelle Toth

Instructor’s Note

For this essay, Michelle Toth needed to write an example of textual analysis. Students had the option to analyze and evaluate any text, whether that be a song, a film, a website, or an advertisement. Michelle chose to analyze a classic dystopian novel that provides insight into our own contemporary culture. By narrowing in on two specific symbols in the novel, Michelle focuses her analysis and makes a commentary on how the author “sends an unfortunately truthful message.” As such, Michelle also sends a truthful message to her audience about the potential consequences of not thinking deeply. What do you think of Bradbury’s, and thus, Michelle’s warning about entertainment and technology? How does Michelle advocate for reading and thinking through her essay? How does she structure her essay so that she can both analyze and evaluate her text rather than just summarizing or describing it?

Writer’s Biography

Michelle Toth is a freshman Early Childhood Education major from Lafayette, Indiana. She began to appreciate writing and develop her talent under Mrs. Lana Smith and Mrs. Sheryl Bereman, her junior and senior high English teachers. When she is not studying, Michelle enjoys reading and spending time with family and friends.

*Bradbury’s Message in *Fahrenheit 451**

But, Mom, why do I have to do my stupid English homework before I watch TV? I already know how to read, how to speak, and how to write. I’m never going to use anything I learn in this class for the rest of my life. I don’t even learn anything new in that class! I hate that class, my teacher is stupid, and I don’t care about it at all! All my

teacher does is make me read boring books that don't mean anything. Complaints like these are typical in homes of a junior high or a high schooler, who is indifferent toward learning, thinking deeply, analyzing, and evaluating. Yet the apathy many teens exhibit should not come as a surprise because of the manifest ways in which parents and society as a whole constantly expose them to the latest shallow entertainment. The culture increasingly grows apathetic to thinking deeply, impulsively reaching out to be entertained with their eyes glued to the TV or computer screen. In his excellently written novel *Fahrenheit 451*, esteemed author Ray Bradbury astutely warns of the impending destruction and emptiness of a culture with an intellect numbed by technological entertainment, specifically TV, through his scholarly use of symbolism.

One of the first notable symbols is the Mechanical Hound, which the firemen used to find books and to scare people into obeying them. The Mechanical Hound represents the enemy that technology could become if the desire to learn did not temper it. Because their desire to become more efficient in all that they do was applied to learning, as well, they rested on and eventually crossed the borderline between heavily relying on technology and only relying on technology in their culture as a whole. With this, they also numbed their senses and came to a stage of apathy in their learning, which is represented by the needle that the hound sticks people with. Technology becomes their enemy as they keep trying to develop things more quickly and keep more entertained. In doing so, they create this monster that eventually will turn on them if they start investigating books, reading, and thinking deeply. Thus, the hound becomes their worst nightmare, desiring to control them, to stop them from participating in any of these activities.

Another excellently used symbol is the character Mildred Montag, who is Guy Montag's wife. Mildred represents the apathy that comes with overloading your senses with TV. She is incessantly hooked up to some form of technology, ranging from her earphones that help her sleep to her TV that encloses her into the realm of what

she might call her happy place. What Mildred does not realize, though, is that she is destroying her mind, and, if she did realize it, the idea would just bother her and push her more towards losing herself in technology once more. Bradbury uses her self-imposed enslavement to drive home the point that if people are not careful of how much they expose themselves to electronic entertainment, they have the potential to harm not only themselves but the entire nation or society. In so doing, society would be saying that they want to trade in the ability to think and reason rationally with shallow, non-stop entertainment, creating a world of fake happiness and contentment.

Bradbury does an outstanding job of defending the truth of his position through this book with his excellent use of symbolism involving both objects and characters. The validity of his message can be seen in the American culture, even the world at large. His repetitive use of symbolism further enhances the portrayal of the truth in a dramatic, futuristic setting. The setting allows the reader to focus in on one point and the symbols make that point.

In his excellently written novel *Fahrenheit 451*, esteemed author Ray Bradbury astutely warns of the impending destruction and emptiness of a culture with an intellect numbed by technological entertainment, specifically TV, through his scholarly use of symbolism. While technology is not inherently evil or sinful, man does have the ability to manipulate it in the wrong way, which is exactly Bradbury's point. He wants us to be wise, intellectual analyzers and evaluators of all that we take in through any source, including technology. He desires that we refuse to let our minds go blank, jacked up by an overdose of entertainment. Interestingly enough, society already is wrestling with this issue and should continue to do so, fighting for its amazing freedom to exercise the mind in various outlets of thinking deeply.