

FAHRENHEIT 451: CENSORSHIP AND THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Activity Overview

Speech issues are particularly relevant to students' lives because the courts have carved out a separate standard of First Amendment law for public school students and officials. Also, both historically and today, public discussion about speech rights have focused on the suitability for young people of new genres and media—from comic books to rock music to Internet content—and the effects of exposure to such materials on youth development. Books have always been at the forefront of the legal debate about censorship.

Students will examine their ideas about censorship by looking at its practice in the dystopian society depicted in Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), make connections and distinctions between the novel's society and their own, and apply newly acquired knowledge of First Amendment law to public concerns about suitability of particular books for young people and public policies designed to address those concerns.

Objectives

During this activity, students will

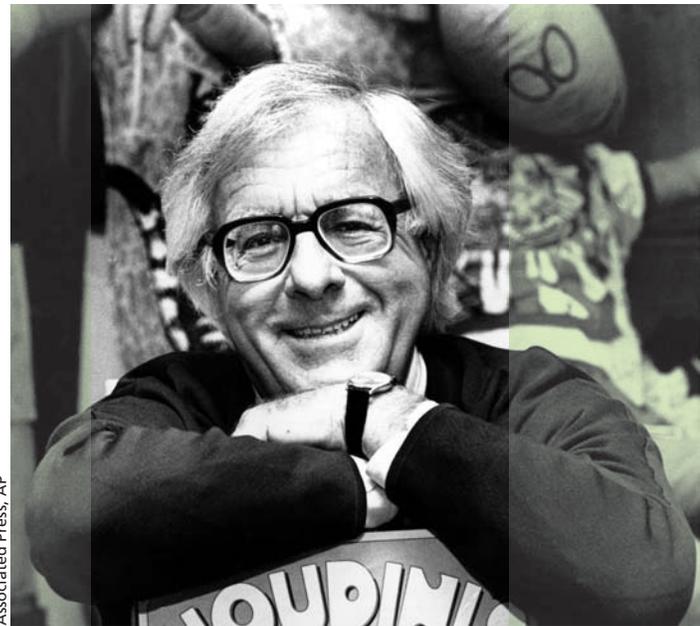
- Create a class reading list from a list of books that have been challenged.
- Define *censorship*, *banning*, and *challenge*.
- Identify criteria to evaluate whether particular books are appropriate reading for young people of different ages and create strategies for keeping books in circulation or for monitoring their use by particular readers.
- Analyze the main conflicts and themes in a reading from *Fahrenheit 451*.
- Compare the social conditions described in the novel excerpt to contemporary society.
- Apply knowledge to plans for determining when and through what means speech should be limited.

Estimated Time

- **Reading:** Two class periods or two nights as homework
- **Class Discussion:** Four class periods
- **Writing:** Two class periods or two nights as homework

Materials and Preparation

- Obtain copies of *Fahrenheit 451* for students. Page numbers to the novel cited in the activity refer to the Ballantine Books paperback edition, originally published in 1973.
- Make copies of the handouts for the activity, pages 15–19. They include Handout 1, Synopsis of *Fahrenheit 451*; Handout 2, Young Adults Books and Authors; Handout 3, *Fahrenheit 451*: Terms and Vocabulary; and Handout 4, U.S. Supreme Court Cases.



Associated Press, AP

Ray Bradbury, author of *Fahrenheit 451*.

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Background and Introduction to *Fahrenheit 451*

Many people, students included, believe that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects speech, publications, or expression of any kind. Generally, however, the First Amendment is interpreted to mean that Congress can only limit speech when the need for a particular restriction is extremely compelling or when there is a type of speech (such as pornography or certain threats of imminent violence) that infringes on another right or freedom. When speech is restricted by the government, a “narrowly tailored” law must be passed to address just the specific need identified. Thus, under certain circumstances, speech in its many forms is subject to regulation. In determining what degree is permissible, the courts balance the interests of the state with the interests of some greater public good. Throughout history, the limits of permissible expression have been defined and influenced by the cultural concerns and social standards of the time. At different stages in our country’s development, different concerns and social standards become prominent and shape interpretations of the law.

For example, concerns over political speech as an incitement to rebellion or “revolution” in the wake of the memories of the horrors of the Civil War (1861–1865) eventually resulted in the articulation during World War I (1914–1918) of the “clear and present danger” test and the idea that the right to free speech depended on the circumstance. During World War I, the government was concerned that dissent and political opposition to U.S. involvement would hinder the U.S. war effort, for example, by hindering recruitment to the armed forces, insubordination, refusal of duties, or mutiny. Writing for the U.S. Supreme Court in *Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919), Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who served in the Union army during the Civil War said the question is whether the words used in a particular circumstance “are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent.”

Fahrenheit 451—the temperature at which paper will burn—is a social satire or a book depicting a “negative utopia” or “dystopian” society in which book reading is an illegal, treasonous act. The government, supported by the people, has banned books because they contain controversial and contradictory ideas. Book readers are considered to be dangerous criminals who can stir people up with their ideas. Firefighters no longer put out fires but instead burn books and the homes of people who keep them. (See Handout 1 for a detailed synopsis on p. 15).



Ray Bradbury, the book’s author, has noted that at the time he wrote the novel, “Joseph McCarthy was threatening libraries and investigating backgrounds of screenwriters trying to find out if they were communists.” McCarthy, a senator from Wisconsin, led a campaign against supposed “communist subversives” that initially targeted individuals whom he claimed had infiltrated the government, and the State Department in particular. Historians generally agree that both the United States and the Soviet Union actively planted spies in the government of the other; however, McCarthy expanded his investigation to include congressional hearings that probed the political beliefs and associations of ordinary citizens

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in a wide range of professions, from the motion picture industry to church and civil rights organizations to academia, in an effort to rid the country of “communists.” Initially conceived as part of his reelection strategy, McCarthy’s Senate hearings resulted in allegations of communist subversion and espionage in the U.S. government in the Department of State, Voice of America, U.S. Information Libraries, Government Printing Office, and the U.S. military. One of McCarthy’s other targets was public libraries. His investigation of the Overseas Library Program led to the publication of a list of 30,000 books that had been authored by alleged communists and communist sympathizers. After the list was published, the books were removed from many library shelves.

Procedures

Prereading Exercise

Part One

Distribute copies of Handout 2. Have students place an “X” next to the authors or titles of books that they have read or heard of. Make sure they sign their handouts. Collect the sheets. You will want to refer to them when you create small groups for Part Three.

Create a “class reading list” of books and authors that students have collectively read that appear on the handout. Ask students,

- What is censorship? (A review of books, movies, or other forms of expression to prohibit publication, viewing, or distribution)
- What section of the U.S. Constitution is called into question when censorship issues arise? (The First Amendment) Read the text aloud or write it on the board.
- Does the First Amendment mean we can say or express ourselves however we want whenever we want? (No. The First Amendment is interpreted to mean that government will make no laws limiting speech, except when the need is so great that a “narrowly tailored” law must be passed to address just that specific need or when a certain form of speech infringes on

another right or freedom. Under certain circumstances, speech in its many forms is subject to regulation.)

- What is book banning? (Banning is removing a book from circulation or inhibiting access to it.)
- What is a challenge to a book? (A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict use of a book from a library, public circulation, or a teaching curriculum, based on objections by an individual or group.)
- Who do students think challenges books the most? Why? (Books are most often challenged by parents.)

Part Two

Tell students that all the books and authors on their handout have been challenged.

The following books listed on Handout 2 are among the ten most frequently challenged books in 2005, according to the American Library Association:

- *It’s Perfectly Normal* by Robie Harris
- *Forever* by Judy Blume
- *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger
- *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier
- *Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher
- *Detour for Emmy* by Marilyn Reynolds
- *What My Mother Doesn’t Know* by Sonya Sones
- *Captain Underpants* series by Dav Pilkey
- *Crazy Lady* by Jane Leslie Conly

The following books listed on Handout 1 are among the ten most frequently challenged books in 2004 (American Library Association):

- *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers
- *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* by Michael A. Bellesiles
- *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
- *In the Night Kitchen* by Maurice Sendak
- *King & King* by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland
- *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck

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These authors listed on Handout 1 were among the ten most frequently challenged *authors* for the following years (American Library Association):

- 2005: Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, Toni Morrison, Lois Lowry
- 2004: Gary Paulsen
- 2003: Stephen King, J. K. Rowling
- 2002: S. E. Hinton, Maya Angelou, Roald Dahl

Brainstorm reasons that books in general might be challenged. (Answers may vary but may include sexual content, religious viewpoint, racism, violence, modeling bad behavior, homosexuality, profanity, unsuited to age group reading the book.)

Part Three

Review responses recorded by students on Handout 2 to create small groups for discussion of book plots. Make sure that each group includes one or more students who have read books on the *class list* of books created during Part One.

Send students to their groups. Ask them to talk about the plots of up to three of the books that individuals in their group have read. Ask them to discuss and determine (and be prepared to report on)

- Two reasons why they think these books are good reading choices for people of their age or two reasons why they think parents might challenge these books as being inappropriate for people students' age to read.
- Whether these books may or may not be suitable for all school-aged children, and the age range for which they believe the books would be appropriate or inappropriate, and why.
- If students believe the books are inappropriate for students of any age, a strategy that would keep the books in circulation in a public library, which would also address potential parental concerns and keep the books out of the hands of those for whom it may be inappropriate.

Bring the class together to share group reports soliciting input from the class at large about books individual students may be familiar with that were not necessarily discussed in their small groups, and noting whether groups may have come to different conclusions about the same books. Compare circulation plan strategies. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each.

You will want students to come away from the discussion with an understanding that different people will believe that different choices are appropriate or inappropriate and that different communities will have different standards for reading material. Summarize and retain on the board: *different communities and groups of individuals will have different standards and criteria.*

Reading Exercise

Assign the reading. This activity focuses on particular sections of the novel. If you choose to have students read only the selections noted below, we recommend that you distribute the "Synopsis" (Handout 1) and take one to two class periods to show a film version of the book.

These are the pages from the novel that the exercise focuses on in the Ballantine Books paperback edition, published in 1973:

- Page 32 (3rd paragraph)–page 40 in Part One, "The Hearth and the Salamander,"



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from “The flutter of cards ...” to “You’ve gone right by the corner where we turn for the firehouse.”

- Page 52 (4th paragraph)–page 63 in Part One, “The Hearth and the Salamander,” from “Captain Beatty sat down ...” to “He turned and went out the door.”
- Page 80 (at the break)–page 86 in Part Two, “The Sieve and the Sand,” from “Who is it?” to “... at least die knowing you were headed for shore.”

Go over the terms and vocabulary before students begin their reading by posing questions and providing some background about the political climate in the United States in the 1950s when the book was published. (See Handout 3, “Terms and Vocabulary” on p. 18.)

Appropriateness of Reading Selection: Read the materials carefully before assigning this activity. While we believe that this material is appropriate for most high school students, you must use your judgment and exercise it. Ask students to read the assignment, totaling 25 pages. Ask them to take notes on any parts of the reading they do not understand.

Discuss the reading, posing the following questions:

- How did you feel when the old woman refused to leave her porch? Why?
- Why do you think she refused to leave?
- Do you believe that someone would behave in real life the way the old woman behaved? Why?



- What three things, according to Captain Beatty, account for how the society depicted in the novel came to burn books and why? (p. 58: technology, mass exploitation, minority pressure) Do you think his explanation is logical? Why?
- What one thing, according to Captain Beatty, makes a man happy? (p. 58: “We must all be alike.”)
- What are the problems that books supposedly caused in this society?
- What alternatives to burning books and censorship do you believe might solve the problems identified in the novel?
- According to the character, Faber, why are books important? Do you agree? Why?
- What conditions must be met, according to Faber, for books to be helpful to society? (They must contain quality information; people must have the leisure to digest them; and they must have the right to act based on what they learn from these books.) Do you agree? Why?
- What conditions lead to book burning? (Answers may vary, but you will want students to understand that a key condition in the novel is that reading and owning books had been made illegal. In other words, in *Fahrenheit 451*, there was no First Amendment to prevent the government from banning and eradicating books or to protect an individual’s right to read.)

Writing Exercise

Part One

After you conclude your discussion, ask students to write at least two paragraphs focused on one of the following:

1. How is the society depicted in the novel similar to and different from the society we live in today? Are its problems unique? Identify three points in the story to support your position. Cite evidence from the story using at least three quotations as examples to support your position. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence.

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2. What do you think the author was trying to say about books and censorship by writing a scene in which the old woman refused to leave her burning house and chose to die with her books? Cite evidence from the story using at least three quotations to support your position. Do you agree or disagree with the point the author was making? Why? Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence.

Part Two

After students complete their writing, discuss their responses. Introduce information about U.S. Supreme Court cases and youth First Amendment rights. (See Handout 4, U.S. Supreme Court Cases.) Discuss the *Pico* decision in particular. Students may be familiar with *Slaughterhouse Five*, which was one of the “banned” books in the *Pico* case. If so, discuss their impressions of the book and whether they think the book fits the characterization made by the school board (anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and “just plain filthy”).

Part Three

Ask students to reflect back on their Prereading Exercise, during which they discussed possible reasons why some books on their class list of commonly read books may have been inappropriate for children. Brainstorm other possible reasons besides those cited in the *Pico* case explaining why community members, school board members, or parents challenge library books. (The most common reasons are because they contain profanity, violence, sex, sex education, homosexuality, witchcraft, new age philosophies, rebellious characters, and racist or sexist language.) Are any of their brainstormed rationales reflected or explored in *Fahrenheit 451*?

Mention that *Fahrenheit 451* itself has been challenged and banned in the United States, and give these two examples:

- Foxworth, Mississippi (1999): A parent objected to the use of the words “God damn” and the book was removed from the required reading list of several English classes.

- Irvine, California (1992): A school crossed out “offensive” words and “obscenities” such as hell and damn. Parents demanded that unexpurgated copies be distributed and they were.

Ask students for their input on the charges against *Fahrenheit 451*. Cite recent examples of challenges to books:

- January 2006: *The Well*, by Mildred Taylor. The book is about an African American family in early 20th century Mississippi, in which a racial epithet appears. School officials in Absecon, N.J., removed it from an elementary school Black History month reading list because of the racial epithet.
- April 2005: *The Buffalo Tree*, by Adam Rapp. The Muhlenberg School Board (Reading, Pa.), voted to remove it from the curriculum because of explicit sexual references and vulgar language. When reached by phone for an Associated Press article, the author admitted that yes, the book deals with difficult subjects but that “students can often hear about the same matters on television or the Internet.”
- February 2005: *Anastasia Again*, by Lois Lowry. Spook Hill Elementary media committee voted to remove the book from the school library because it refers to *Playboy* magazine, and the main character, Anastasia, mentions wanting to kill herself.

Again, raise the issue with students about whether all books or stories are appropriate for students of all ages, referring specifically to the elementary school examples. Point out that those who wish to remove materials from school curricula generally have good intentions—the best interests of children—and refer back to your quote on the board from the Prereading Exercise: *Different communities and groups of individuals will have different standards and criteria.*

Point out that different people will believe that different choices are appropriate or inappropriate and that different communities will have different standards for reading material—and that these standards also change over time.

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You might mention, for example, that until the 1920s, James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* was banned in the United States.

Raise these concerns:

- Given that
 1. genuine and legitimate differences of opinions may exist about what is appropriate reading material for young people,
 2. when considering speech issues, the law balances the interests and rights of individuals with the government's interest in a greater public good,
 3. the U.S. Supreme Court has determined that "First Amendment rights are available to teachers and students, subject to application in light of the special characteristics of the school environment"—meaning that students have First Amendment rights, but they are not absolute, *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969)—and the Court has determined that some materials may be harmful to minors, and as such may be regulated.

Conclude by asking,

- Given these concerns, how should we decide what speech is appropriate and how it should be regulated?
- Do you think that censorship could ever occur on such a large scale in the United States? In other words, do you think that a book or particular books might ever be banned universally across the entire United States? Why? Give your rationale.

Assessment

Upon concluding, ask students to write two "facts" that they learned during the activity on a sheet of paper or note card and to write one question that they still have about something covered in class.

Resources

American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom

See www.ala.org/ala/oif/

This Web site provides a wealth of information about book challenges and banning and other intellectual freedom issues. Also useful is the section on Banned Books Week.

Joan DelFattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read: Textbook Censorship in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Paper edition, 1994.

Focusing on lawsuits involving attempts to censor or ban textbooks, the author details efforts of both liberal and conservative groups to have sections of textbooks eliminated or rewritten and presents accounts of challenges to school reading lists in the 1980s, from the first parental objection to the court hearing.

The File Roomz

See www.thefileroom.org/

This project is an ever-changing archive of the history of censorship in different contexts, countries, and civilizations. The site includes archives of cases, a bibliography, essays, and a "submit a case" section.

First Amendment Center

See www.firstamendmentcenter.org/

This Web site features research about First Amendment issues and topics and news, including coverage of book censorship and censorship of other media, a First Amendment Library, reports, and guest analyses by legal experts.

Rebecca Knuth, *Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century*. West Port, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003.

The author identifies ideologically driven destruction of books and libraries in the 20th century, partly through case studies, and examines reasons behind the patterns of destruction and its effect on preservation of common cultural heritage.

Synopsis of *Fahrenheit 451*

Author: Ray Bradbury

Original Publication Date: 1953

Characters:

Guy Montag	The protagonist and a fireman
Captain Beatty	The chief of Montag's department
Millie	Guy's wife
Professor Faber	A former literature professor
Granger	The leaders of the hobos

Written in 1953, *Fahrenheit 451*—the temperature at which paper will burn—is a social satire or a book depicting a “negative utopia” or “dystopian” society in which book reading is illegal and an act of treason. The government, supported by the people, has banned books because they contain controversial and contradictory ideas. Book readers are considered to be dangerous criminals who can stir people up with their ideas. Firemen no longer put out fires but burn books and the homes of people who keep them. People watch wall televisions referred to as “televisors” constantly. They drive cars very fast. They do not think for themselves.

In this society, violence and suicide are common. The protagonist of the novel, Guy Montag, is a fireman who lives with his wife, Millie. Three entire walls in the “parlor” of their home, and the homes of most people they know, are devoted to wall-sized televisions (televisors). Millie's life revolves around watching “The Family,” a kind of television show with no plot and nameless characters such as “The Aunt.” She wants a fourth television wall so she can completely submerge herself in the life of “The Family.” In this society, people watch T.V. so much that they are numb to their own existence.

Montag begins to question the values of his society and his part in the mindless destruction of books as he spends some time with a teenager named Clarisse who lives in his neighborhood. Clarisse thinks and talks about things differently from anyone Montag knows. Clarisse is the only person Montag has met who is curious about the world around her, is interested in other people, and enjoys conversation and nature. Through his discussions with Clarisse, Montag begins to learn about himself. He thinks that his existence is “empty” and that he is unhappy. Clarisse tells Montag that his job “just doesn't seem right for you, somehow.” One day, Clarisse doesn't show up for their walk. Montag learns that Clarisse was killed by a speeding car.

Montag begins to further question the social values of his time after answering an “alarm” at work. He and the other fireman go to the house of an old woman where they find a large library of over 1,000 books. It is the job of the firemen to burn the books. The old woman refuses to leave her house when she is ordered to do so, telling Montag she wants to stay. He is very disturbed by her decision to burn with her books rather than leave with him. Montag wonders why books are illegal? What do they say? He secretly steals one of the old woman's books and hides it with a collection that he has been keeping in his home. He tries to talk with Millie about the old woman. Millie claims the woman must have been simple-minded, but Montag insists:

“You weren't there, you didn't see,” he said. “There must be something in books, things we can't imagine, to make a woman stay in a burning house. There must be something there. You don't stay for nothing.” (page 51)

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HANDOUT #1

After meeting the old woman, he decides to stay home from work to read. Montag's wife refuses to read a book with him because she is afraid. Montag's boss, Captain Beatty, visits him and gives Montag his interpretation of how and why books became illegal to own or read.

After Captain Beatty leaves, Montag remembers that he met a man in the park two years earlier. The man, Professor Faber, was once a professor of literature. Montag visits Faber looking for some answers about what is so special about books. He wasn't satisfied by Captain Beatty's explanation of history. Faber is at first suspicious of Montag. Montag convinces Faber that he wants to learn how to understand the books and to think for himself. Faber tells Montag that people like himself were afraid to speak out against book burning when they still could have stopped it and therefore they share responsibility for the consequences. The two men decide they will secretly print books and plant them in the homes of firemen. Before he leaves, Faber gives Montag a radio device for his ear. The device allows Faber to talk to Montag and hear all Montag's conversations.

During this time, war is declared, but the people Montag knows seem unconcerned about the possibility that an atomic bomb might be used. To shock his wife's friends out of their stupor, Montag reads a stanza from the poem "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold. The women are upset that Montag reads to them and also because the world the poem describes is sad and imperfect. They accuse him of being crazy.

Montag returns to the firehouse just as an alarm is sounded. When they arrive at the alarm site, Montag discovers that the firemen have been sent to his own home. Montag is forced to burn down his own house because he has some books. Montag kills Captain Beatty when he fears that the Captain will hurt Faber. Montag thinks that Captain Beatty wanted to die. He runs to Faber's house to warn him of danger. A citywide search for him is underway. Faber tells Montag that there is a community of hobos who live near the river and that he will be safe in the hobo camps.

Montag narrowly escapes the city. He joins the hobos who have been expecting him. They have been watching the manhunt on a portable T.V. The hobos are former intellectuals, scorned by the current society. The people who live in the hobo camps are preserving the great books in their memories by each memorizing a chapter of a book. Montag's job will be to remember the book of Ecclesiastes from the Bible. They watch as an atomic bomb is dropped on the city and completely destroys it. Montag and his companions move on to search for survivors outside of the cities and to transmit what they know to the world and to see it through its current "Dark Age."

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HANDOUT #2

Instructions:

Put an "X" next to the title of any books that you've read for fun or in school.

- It's Perfectly Normal* by Robie Harris
- Forever* by Judy Blume
- The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger
- The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier
- Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher
- Detour for Emmy* by Marilyn Reynolds
- What My Mother Doesn't Know* by Sonya Sones
- Captain Underpants* series by Dav Pilkey
- Crazy Lady* by Jane Leslie Conly
- Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers
- Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* by Michael A. Bellesiles
- The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
- In the Night Kitchen* by Maurice Sendak
- King & King* by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland
- Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck

Put an "X" next to the name of any of the authors listed below whose books you have read.

- Phyllis Reynolds Naylor (the *Alice* series)
- Toni Morrison (*The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, and *Song of Solomon*)
- Lois Lowry (*The Giver*)
- Stephen King (*Cujo*, *The Shining*, *Different Seasons*, *Needful Things*, *Misery*, *Apt Pupil*, *Hearts in Atlantis*, and *The Green Mile*.)
- Gary Paulsen (*Nightjohn* and *The Beet Fields: Memories of a Sixteenth Summer*)
- J. K. Rowling (The Harry Potter series)
- S. E. Hinton (*Tex*, *The Outsiders*, *That Was Then This is Now*, *Rumble Fish*, and *Hawkes Harbor*)
- Maya Angelou (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*)
- Roald Dahl (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, *The Witches*, *The BFG*, and *Kiss Kiss*)

HANDOUT

#3

Fahrenheit 451: Terms and Vocabulary

Cold War: *Cold War* is a term for a historical period of economic and ideological competition between the two world “superpowers” of the time—the United States and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (also known as the “Soviet Union”). The Cold War lasted from 1945–1985, and during that time, the United States and the U.S.S.R. dominated and competed for influence over global politics and policy. The U.S.S.R. was a socialist, one party state composed of a federation of Soviet Socialist Republics that adhered to common military and economic agreements. Its political objectives were defined by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The Cold War ended when Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the U.S.S.R. (1985) and head of the CPSU and, in that role, instituted economic and political reforms. The U.S.S.R. was dissolved on December 25, 1991.

Dark Age: *Dark Age* is a term used loosely to refer to the medieval period of European history but can only truly be applied to the early medieval times (fifth–eleventh century) as a period of slow scientific, literary, and cultural development. As a literary device, Dark Ages is often used as a term to refer to a period of intellectual darkness.

Dystopian/utopian: *Dystopian* is a term that is applied to imaginary or fictional accounts of future societies in which contemporary tendencies, beliefs, principles, or theories are carried out to unpleasant or extreme results. The books *1984* or *Animal Farm* are about “dystopian” societies. Utopian refers to a fictional and imaginary ideal world. The classic literary example is Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*; other examples include portions of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (“A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms,” for example) and the lyrics to the John Lennon song “Imagine.”

Heresy: Heresy is adherence to a belief other than an established or official doctrine. The term was originally used in religious settings. For example, individuals who dissented from the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in the years preceding the 16th century’s Protestant Reformation were often accused of heresy. Punishments against heretics could include the burning of books containing heretical ideas and the burning of the heretics themselves.

Irony: Irony is the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning.

McCarthyism: The term *McCarthyism* refers to anti-communist hysteria in the United States during the late 1940s and early 1950s. The term originates from the name of U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy, one of the most prominent persons to assert that communists had infiltrated the U.S. Government. Senator McCarthy held a series of public hearings to find communists who worked in the government and other industries and to punish them.

Oral transmission/oral tradition: These terms refer to the transmission of ideas, stories, or history from person to person and from generation to generation by word of mouth and memory. Early civilizations had few people who knew how to read or write, so early history, songs, and literature were often transmitted by word of mouth.

Paradox: A paradox is a statement that might seem contradictory or absurd but may actually be true after closer examination.

Protagonist: A protagonist is the chief character in a story, play, film, or song.

Satire: Satire is a form of literature that examines, discredits, makes fun of, and/or expresses disgust with a lack of sense or human faults or failings.

U.S. Supreme Court Cases

Butler v. Michigan, 352 U.S. 380 (1957)

This decision established a precedent that prohibits restricting adult access to materials that were deemed inappropriate for children, reiterating the legal principle that what is fit for adults may not be fit for children to read. The decision struck down as unconstitutional a Michigan law that made it a crime to sell to the general public any book containing obscene language that was inappropriate for youth.

Ginsberg v. New York, 390 U.S. 629 (1968)

The U.S. Supreme Court found that a New York law banning the distribution to minors of published materials that was harmful to them was constitutional. In this case, the Court reaffirmed the principle established in previous case law that the state has an interest in the well-being of young people and in protecting them from materials that may not be appropriate for them.

Tinker v. Des Moines, 393 U.S. 503 (1969)

The U.S. Supreme Court decided that although school environments do necessitate some limits on student free expression, school officials cannot prohibit student speech unless they can reasonably determine that the speech would substantially disrupt school activities or infringe upon the rights of others. In this case, the Court found that school officials could not prevent or punish students for wearing black armbands to school in protest against the Vietnam War.

Board of Education v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853 (1982)

In this case, the Court ruled that a school board could not remove books from a public school library unless they were educationally unsuitable or “pervasively vulgar.” Libraries retain decision-making power over book purchases, and books cannot be removed just because school officials don’t like them. School board members had removed several books from junior and senior high library circulation even after a book review committee recommended that some of the books be placed back in open circulation. The school board characterized the books as “anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy.” As a result, nine books total could not be used for school work. They included *The Fixer*, *Go Ask Alice*, *Best Short Stories by Negro Writers*, *The Naked Ape*, *Down These Mean Streets*, *Soul on Ice*, *A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ But a Sandwich*, *A Reader for Writers*, and *Slaughterhouse Five*. A book entitled *Black Boy* was made available to students only with parental approval.

Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeir, 484 U.S. 260 (1988)

This case established the “Hazelwood standard” for school-sponsored speech: “[e]ducators do not offend the First Amendment by exercising editorial control over the style and content of student speech in school-sponsored expressive activities so long as their actions are reasonably related to pedagogical concerns.” In this case, school officials removed articles from a student newspaper about teen pregnancy and the impact of divorce upon teenagers.