

Culminating Writing Task Exemplar Student Response

In *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, there is a society that has eliminated books because the ideas and knowledge in the books cause conflict. Throughout the text, Bradbury develops many themes, including the idea that books are an important and controversial part of a society. To effectively develop this theme, Bradbury uses irony.

The society in the text is based on the idea that books cause conflict and firemen are responsible for finding books and burning them. In the text, Clarisse says to Montag, “You know, I’m not afraid of you at all ... So many people are. Afraid of firemen, I mean. But you’re just a man, after all ...” (5). This shows that the role of the fireman in the society is different than what we expect based on the traditional role of firemen in our society. Clarisse also asks Montag, “Do you ever *read* any of the books you burn?” (5) and Montag responds in the following way: “He laughed. “That’s against the law!” (5) This shows how the people in the society view books as illegal, which contrasts with the common way of thinking of books as things that provide information and knowledge. This irony causes the reader to think about the role of books in a society and why the people in the society of *Fahrenheit 451* have banned them.

The theme that books are an important and controversial part of society is also revealed through Bradbury’s use of irony in the conflict between Beatty and Montag. For example, when Montag stays home sick, Beatty comes to visit him. Montag asks Beatty what happens when a fireman takes a book. Beatty says, “‘A natural error. Curiosity alone,’ said Beatty. ‘We don’t get overanxious or mad. We let the fireman keep the book twenty-four hours. If he hasn’t burned it by then, we simply come burn it for him.’” (59) This is ironic because it shows how Beatty knows that Montag has taken a book and is struggling with an inner conflict, but Beatty still acts as if he doesn’t know. This is important because it emphasizes what a big deal it is that Montag is beginning to view books in a different way. Later, the theme is revealed in the irony in Beatty’s character. When Beatty and Montag have their final interaction, Beatty taunts Montag by saying, “Why don’t you belch Shakespeare at me, you fumbling snob? ‘There is no terror, Cassius, in your threats, for I am arm’d so strong in honesty that they pass by me as an idle wind, which I respect not!’ How’s that? Go ahead now, you second-hand literateur, pull the trigger.” (113) This shows how Beatty has a lot of knowledge of literature, even though he is supposed to believe it is worthless, as the fire captain. This irony causes the reader to think about the purpose of books and see how even the person who is supposed to be most against them, is actually a supporter of them.

Although irony clearly helps to develop the theme that books are an important and controversial part of society, one could argue that characterization is more effective in developing this theme because many of the main characters, including Montag, Faber, Granger, and even Beatty, recognize the importance of books to the society. For example in the text, Faber describes books by saying, “‘The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us.’” (79) This shows how Faber is a supporter of books and the power they have in society. However, without the element of irony, the reader may not see the contrasts that Bradbury uses to emphasize how important and controversial books are. After the alarm when the woman burns, Montag asks Beatty about what the woman was saying and Beatty says, “‘We shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England as I trust shall never be put out,’ said Beatty. Stoneman glanced over at the Captain, as did Montag, startled.” (37) This shows how Beatty is familiar with the reference the woman at the alarm made. This is significant because it reveals that Beatty has knowledge of literature, so much so that he can quote lines from memory. This is an unexpected development for the reader because Beatty is the chief firemen and should be the person who most believes in eliminating books. This irony causes the reader to pause and think about books and what makes them important and controversial. Without this irony, the reader would not understand this theme.

Bradbury’s use of irony throughout the text is critical to developing the theme that books are an important and controversial part of society. Bradbury uses irony to develop the society and to emphasize the differences between Montag and Beatty. This supports the reader in understanding how Bradbury views books as a critical part of a society.