

What is The Meaning of All This?

A Unit on Existential Thought in Literature

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Rationale

All great deeds and all great thoughts have a ridiculous beginning.
-Albert Camus

No matter what one's social, ethnic, or religious status may be, we must all agree that adolescence is one of the more confusing times in life. Between a newly developing sense of personal identity and the inevitable, indecipherable hormonal changes taking place, students of high school age undergo transformations unlike any others they will ever experience. Because they occur as students enter the beginnings of adulthood, these changes may well inform, if not dictate, the rest of students' lives. It is incumbent on the teachers of adolescents to stimulate young brains and transmit useful material that students may later use, but it is imperative that we help guide students through a time in their lives when they are just discovering their identities. The goal of this unit is not to assign everyone a new, more mature identity; rather, it is to provide students with an appropriate framework through which they may begin forming their own identities and continue to do so long after they graduate. In Bob Fecho's words, I aim to provide students with "ample opportunities for students to use writing to explore who they are becoming and how they relate to the larger culture around them" (2011).

Existentialism is a philosophical movement with many sub-movements, but the main question it asks is "Who am I in relation to the universe?" On existentialism, Raymond C. Emery (1971) states:

A basic premise is that existence precedes essence—the fact that an individual's existing is antecedent to any other understanding he may have of the world. Man first is, and then he asks what he is. The background for human reflection is human subjectivity: all

pronouncements about the meaning of life originate from within the individual and all are unique with the individual.

By introducing students to this basic premise, teachers can facilitate personal connections to all sorts of texts. These connections are far from limited to academic literary works—film, music, newspaper articles and editorials, blogs, political speeches and debates, etc.—opinions and evaluations of the human condition now inundate society like never before. When students learn to reflect on themselves in relation to other texts and the world around them, they gain perspectives that assist in critical thinking. If we want students to think for themselves, as I was so often told to do in school, we must give them a place from which to start. As Emery puts it, “The more a student knows about the world in which he lives, the more likely he will be to make wise choices.” I would add that a student must be familiar with his or herself to not merely know about, but also understand the world.

In a unit on existential thought designed for tenth-graders, several considerations must be taken into account: students’ presumed lack of previous formal education on the topic, their abilities to grasp philosophical concepts with which some of the most eminent minds of our time have grappled, and the possibility that religious or other dogmatic beliefs students hold will clash with existentialist thinking. Through fiction and nonfiction, this unit focuses on opinions about existence as they relate to living in the real world. These ideas may challenge students’ beliefs or tease out beliefs they already hold, but the point is to get students thinking about themselves for themselves. While some texts may be difficult for students to fully grasp, this unit is intended to be taught early in the course. Why? In addition to helping

students grow on a personal level, a bit of knowledge about existential thinking will give students a scaffold for interpreting other works of literature as the course progresses; the existential quandary is central to most art. We are essentially making our own meanings, after all, when we create works of art. Given the existential quandaries many young people face combined with the existential nature of many great questions raised in literature, high school students, whether they realize or not, would benefit immensely from an introduction to existentialist thought.

Some may assert that sophisticated philosophical thought has no place in a freshman or sophomore classroom or that they are not ready to tackle ideas like existentialism. I take issue with this assertion for many reasons. Firstly, it is a bit insulting to the intelligence of a fifteen-year-old to say, "You aren't old enough to understand this stuff." With the proper scaffolding and support, students of this age can certainly begin to grasp deeper concepts than we give them credit for. Secondly, even if sophomores are not ready to study existentialism as a philosophy, they can at least be introduced to the existential ideas that pervade much of literature and art. Most importantly, if students are not exploring deep philosophical questions in a literature class, what are they doing? Once students learn to read and write, the aim should not be for them to merely become better readers and writers as they progress through school. At the secondary level, the principle aim should be for students to become better thinkers, and I believe that we can achieve this aim most effectively by helping them understand themselves.

To address the issue of students' lack of education on the topic of existentialism, we will begin the unit with a reading of the myth of Sisyphus

alongside selected quotations from Albert Camus's (1942) essay "The Myth of Sisyphus." As we discuss, I will introduce new media—poems like Stephen Crane's "A Man Said to The Universe" and T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men," as well as songs like Tom T. Hall's "Ballad of Forty Dollars," Common and Cee-Lo's "GOD (Gaining One's Definition), and Bad Religion's "Supersonic"—to reinforce the ideas we cover and lead students into our main text, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Through deliberate analysis, close reading and meaningful discussion, the students will begin to grasp existential ideas.

For many students, school feels like an exercise in futility. I certainly felt "condemned... to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight" (1955) for a large portion of my secondary education. I do not want my classroom to engender any thoughts like this, but for the sake of honesty, I would ask students if they see school as a Sisyphean task. By gaining some insight into other existentialist thinkers' ideas, students may make meaningful connections to their own lives, lives that largely consist of school. Forming a productive viewpoint on the focal point of students' lives (school) is of immense importance, as they will have to do so as those focal points and environments change throughout their lives. In "The Myth of Sisyphus," Camus states:

I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions.

Here, Camus illustrates an essential question of life: its meaning. We have all asked, “Why are we here?” The answers may be infinite or amount to nothing at all, but as far as I can see, no one will ever definitively attain them. As students enter into new ways of thinking about the meaning of life, they become more aware of themselves and others; they begin to form new ideas, to question what they hear or read through a new lens. Moreover, life, death, the world and the self are unavoidable topics in literature. Therefore, an early introduction to philosophy is immeasurably important if we expect students to make sense out of the texts we assign them, let alone the meaning of life—that “most urgent of questions.”

While discussing existential thought through various activities, the class will also be made to come up with questions. Students will be encouraged to challenge existentialism and expected to learn the difference between factual and general questions. As we go through the unit, students will be preparing for a final activity in which they come up with questions and generate their own discussion about *Fahrenheit 451*. My aim is to teach students how to ask questions and understand the importance of doing so. Much of this unit is malleable—it would be quite different depending on the group of students being taught. I believe this to be one of this unit’s greatest strengths.

I will also help students to understand themes with various activities, beginning with general themes and narrowing it down to themes that involve existential thought. Specifically, I hope to guide the students toward understanding how to identify and analyze themes about making meaning out of life, a major theme in *Fahrenheit 451*. Putting the theme into context will help students identify and write about themes in works they read later on.

The most probable objection to teaching this material might come from students' parents and possibly the students themselves. Some religious people might be uncomfortable with the idea that life may have no inherent meaning, and I intend to address that by making it clear that existentialism is by no means a scientific theory. In fact, there are subsets of existentialism that believe in God. As mentioned before, students will be encouraged to debate the ideas we bring up in class. I anticipate that parents may read their children's homework and think that I am indoctrinating their kids to think like Camus, Kafka, or even worse, me. The driving idea behind this unit, however, is quite the opposite; I want students to know about existentialism precisely so that they can form their own views as they grow and learn more about philosophy and philosophical literature. As Derrick Jensen (2005) writes, "No matter the subject matter ostensibly being taught, the real point is to help students find themselves, and to find their own passion. Anything else is to lead them astray, to do actual damage." Leading students in any direction other than their own is the last thing I want to do as a educator.

Almost everything in this unit is graded on a participation basis. Because there is no formal writing assignment in the unit (I played around with an interesting one, but it did not wind up matching up with my goals), I feel that assessment grades are not necessary. The entire purpose of this unit is to get kids questioning and thinking, and making it about anything other than participation, in my view, would muddy that goal. Everyone can make 100% during this unit, as long as they do the assignments.

The idea to do a philosophical unit first began to incubate when an eleventh grader asked me, "What is philosophy?" Caught off guard, I said five

or six disparate things and concluded with "...asking questions like that." The importance of philosophy in literature is immense, and the various roles that the writings of Plato, Gandhi, Camus, Sartre, Kant, Kundera and several other philosophical writers have played in my life are uncountable. This thematic unit on existential thought will explore ideas that underlie much of education and life. The intent is to help students understand that they are not alone in wondering about the nature of life, that there are myriad great thinkers who have done this throughout human history, and that the students themselves can form their own thoughts on the issues we face, both internal and external. "The teacher's function," writes Emery (1971), "is to assist each student personally in his search for authentic self-realization. He urges his students to question everything they read or hear; to commit themselves to their studies only because the subjects have become meaningful; to question and reflect upon all knowledge and to give it personal importance and environmental relevance." If we merely teach students to read, we are doing them a disservice by neglecting the even more important task of teaching students to analyze and criticize. Having students learn about a particular philosophy and articulate their positions on it through discussion will serve as an important step in helping them understand themselves in relation to the universe they inhabit.

References

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Goals

- 1) Students will become acquainted with existential thought in literature through a series of activities about this concept in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. To help students grasp this difficult concept, they will keep reading journals and respond to prompts on most days of class. The journals will be turned in at the end of each class, and I will grade them on a participation basis. Students who complete the assignments will get checkmarks, and the totals will be tallied up at the end of the unit. There is a total of ten entries, and each entry will count 10 percentage points. Students will be allowed to make up the entries only if they are absent from class.
- 2) Students will learn about themes (focusing slightly on existential ones) through an anthology project (Smagorinsky, 2008). Students will work in groups and be required to present their projects to the class. We will then use the presentations as springboards for discussion. The students will be graded on a participation basis.
- 3) Students will learn to ask questions by learning about two different question types: factual and general. Throughout the unit, students will be required to come up with questions about different issues, culminating in a final activity in which they put on mock talk shows (Smagorinsky, 2008). Again, students will be graded on a participation basis.

Materials Used

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

“The Myth of Sisyphus” by Albert Camus

“A Man Said to The Universe” by Stephen Crane

“The Hollow Men,” by T.S. Eliot

“Ballad of Forty Dollars” by Tom T. Hall

“GOD (Gaining One’s Definition)” by Common featuring Cee-Lo

“Supersonic” by Bad Religion

“My Philosophy” by KRS-One

Interview with Ray Bradbury by Dana Gioia

Mythweb Encyclopedia entry on Sisyphus

“The Metamorphosis” adapted by Charlie Ramos

“Vladimir Nabokov – The Metamorphosis” performed by Christopher Plummer

Day 1: Introductory Activity

Part I: What is philosophy?

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Reading and Discussion (10 minutes)

Students and I will go over the following handout, accompanied by a Powerpoint type visual, and discuss any questions that come up.

Philosophy

Merriam-Webster:

1 : the study of the basic ideas about knowledge, truth, right and wrong, religion, and the nature and meaning of life

2 : the philosophical teachings or principles of a person or group <Greek *philosophy*>

3 : the general principles of a field of study or activity <the *philosophy* of history> <the *philosophy* of cooking>

4 : someone's basic beliefs about the way people should live

It seems like we can apply philosophy to almost anything. Whether or not you've ever taken the opportunity to think about it, you have formed different philosophies on various topics throughout your life.

Perhaps your opinion on movies is that they should be action-packed, with tons of explosions and computer-generated graphics. Maybe your opinion on film is that it should be romantic and beautiful. Maybe you think movies should build tension and anxiety for the viewer. Maybe you think that movies should just be fun. Perhaps your opinion on film is more complex—you think that movies should include several of these and other elements. Maybe your opinion is that film is a waste of time that doesn't even count as art. All of these opinions are legitimate, and none of them is wrong. We all know that people's tastes differ greatly from person to person.

You begin to form your philosophy on any given subject when you begin to ask and discuss **why**. Why is a certain type of movie boring? Why might it be interesting? Why do you like or dislike certain things?

My opinion is that books, film and art should be interesting. That's a no-brainer, right? However, I've now introduced a subjective word—a word that can mean something different to everyone: **interesting**. What does "interesting" mean to you?

Brainstorming Assignment (30 minutes)

I will tell students that they will be receiving a notebook to use as their reading journals throughout the course. They will do most of their written assignments in this journal, and they are to turn it in at the end of class. I will emphasize that they have to write, as it is for a participation grade.

Assignment:

1. Choose a movie, book, character, idea, musician, musical genre, athlete, artist, historical figure or anything/one else you find interesting.

2. In your reading journal, brainstorm ideas on what exactly makes that thing interesting to you. Don't worry about grammar or complete sentences. Forget what critics or your peers say. Why is competitive ketchup packet stomping (for example) interesting **to you**?
3. Choose some examples and silently write some key words or phrases about your interests on the board whenever you feel ready. Make a big mess up there, and like philosophers, we'll try to make sense of it together.

Part II: Your philosophy on life (37 minutes)

Students will read along as they listen to KRS-One's "My Philosophy" to get one example of art that is about philosophy.

My Philosophy by KRS-One

Let's begin, what, where, why, or when
 Will all be explained like instructions to a game
 See I'm not insane, in fact, I'm kind of rational
 When I be asking you, "Who is more dramatical?"
 This one or that one, the white one or the black one
 Pick the punk, and I'll jump up to attack one
 KRS-One is just the guy to lead a crew
 Right up to your face and ditched you

Everyone saw me on the last album cover
 Holding a pistol something far from a lover
 Beside my brother, S C O T T
 I just laughed, 'cause no one can defeat me
 This is lecture number two, 'My Philosophy'
 Number one, was 'Poetry' you know it's me
 This is my philosophy, many artists got to learn
 I'm not flammable, I don't burn

So please stop burnin', and learn to earn respect
 'Cause that's just what KR collects
 See, what do you expect when you rhyme like a soft punk
 You walk down the street and get jumped
 You got to have style, and learn to be original
 And everybody's gonna wanna diss you
 Like me, we stood up for the South Bronx
 And every sucka mc had a response

You think we care? I know that they are on the tip
 My posse from the Bronx is thick and we're real live, we walk correctly
 A lot of suckas would like to forget me but they can't
 'Cause like a champ, I have got a record of knocking out
 The frauds in a second on the mic, I believe that you should get loose
 I haven't come to tell you I got juice
 I just produce, create, innovate on a higher level
 I'll be back, but for now just seckle

I'll play the nine and you play the target
You all know my name so I guess I'll just start it
Or should I say, start this, I am an artist
Of new concepts at their hardest
Yo, 'cause I'm a teacher, the Scott is a scholar
It ain't about money 'cause we all make dollars
That's why I walk with my head up
When I hear wack rhymes I get fed up

Rap is like a set-up, a lot of games
A lot of suckas with colorful names
I'm so-and-so, I'm this, I'm that
Huh, but they all just wick-wick-wack
I'm not white or red or black
I'm brown from the Boogie Down
Productions, of course our music be thumpin'
Others say they're bad, but they're buggin'

Let me tell you somethin' now about hip hop
About D-Nice, Melodie, and Scott La Rock
I'll get a pen, a pencil, a marker
Mainly what I write is for the average New Yorker
Some mc's be talkin' and talkin'
Tryin' to show how black people are walkin'
But I don't walk this way to portray
Or reinforce stereotypes of today

Like all my brothas eat chicken and watermelon
Talk broken English and drug sellin'
See I'm tellin', and teaching real facts
The way some act in rap is kind of wack
And it lacks creativity and intelligence
But they don't care 'cause the company is sellin' it
It's my philosophy, on the industry
Don't bother dissin' me, or even wish that we'd

Soften, dilute, or commercialize all the lyrics
'Cause it's about time one of y'all hear it
And hear it first-hand from the intelligent brown man
A vegetarian, no goat or ham
Or chicken or Turkey or hamburger
'Cause to me that's suicide self-murder
Let us get back to what we call hip hop
And what it meant to DJ Scott La Rock

How many mc's must get dissed
Before somebody says, don't with Kris
This is just one style, out of many
Like a piggy bank, this is one penny

My brother's name is Kenny, that's, Kenny Parker
My other brother I.C.U. is much darker
Boogie Down Productions is made up of teachers
The lecture is conducted from the mic into the speaker

Who gets weaker? The king or the teacher
It's not about a salary it's all about reality
Teachers teach and do the world good
Kings just rule and most are never understood
If you were to rule or govern a certain industry
All inside this room right now would be in misery
No one would get along nor sing a song
'Cause everyone'd be singing for the king, am I wrong?

So yo, what's up, it's me again
Scott La Rock, KRS, BDP again
Many people had the nerve
To think that we would end the trend
We're criminal minded, an album which is only ten
Funky, funky, funky, funky, funky hit records
No more than four minutes and some seconds

The competition checks and checks and keeps checkin'
They take the album, take it home, and start sweatin'
Why? well it's simple, to them it's kind of vital
To take KRS-One's title
To them I'm like an idol, some type of entity
In everybody's rhyme they wanna mention me?
Or rather mention us, me or Scott La Rock
But they can get bust get robbed, get dropped

I don't play around nor do I f around
And you can tell by the bodies that are left around
When some clown jumps up to get beat down
Broken down to his very last compound
See how it sounds? A little unrational
A lot of mc's like to use the word dramatical
Fresh for '88, you suckas

Philosophers have debated the question of the meaning of life for thousands of years. Why stop now?

We've discussed your philosophies on everyday subjects, all of which are valuable and meaningful to you as individuals. However, there is one issue that is universal—one that applies to everyone. This is the question of the meaning and nature of existence.

To begin exploring this nagging question, we will think about what makes our lives meaningful right now.

Assignment:

Ask yourself the following question and answer it with as much detail as possible. Remember to continue explaining *why*. **Please write at least one full handwritten page in full sentences.**

What gives your life meaning? Your friends? Your family? Your individuality? Your faith? Your academic or athletic achievements? Helping others? Pleasure? Something else?

What, if anything, do you think could make your life more meaningful or fulfilling?

Part III: What to think about for tomorrow (5 minutes)

We are going to begin reading about different philosophies tomorrow, mainly focusing on one called Existentialism. We will keep coming back to the phrase “Existence precedes [or comes before] essence.”

Let’s take some of the time we have left to discuss what this phrase might mean so that we can delve into it and some readings more deeply tomorrow.

Other questions and cleanup (5 minutes)

Day 2

Part I: What is existentialism?

Housekeeping and Attendance (3 minutes)

Discussion (15 minutes)

I will write the following quotation from Jean-Paul Sartre on the board:

Existence precedes and rules essence. I will then ask if anyone has any idea what that phrase means. Whether some students get the gist or not, we will break down the sentence together like so:

Existence – what does that mean? Is it just being alive? When a person dies, does that person still exist? Did you exist before you were born?

Precedes – comes before. So first, we exist.

And **Rules** – is this just another way of saying “comes before?” What does a ruler (like a king) do? A ruler makes ultimate decisions, right?

Essence – what does that mean? Remember yesterday. We all came up with different things that give our lives meaning. Essence is whatever makes our lives meaningful.

Slight Transition (30 minutes)

Once that discussion has been exhausted, I will project the following poem and ask students to each write down at least one question about the poem or our “Existence precedes and rules essence” discussion, giving them 3-5 minutes to do so. To come up with questions, I will tell the students to think about the meaning of the poem, why it’s written a certain way, and how it might be connected to our previous discussion.

If we approach 5 minutes and some students still haven't come up with a question, I'll tell them it can be as simple as, "Why are we doing this?"—a question that could be interpreted as existential in and of itself.

A Man Said to the Universe

By Stephen Crane

A man said to the universe:
"Sir I exist!"
"However," replied the universe,
"The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation."

The students will then get into 5 groups of 4 and discuss their questions about the poem for 10 minutes, knowing that each group will present its most salient question or questions to the class and myself. We will attempt to approach answers to their questions together.

Part II: Reading and Questions (40 minutes)

I will leave the poem on the board, then I will ask the class what they think the differences might be between factual and general questions. I will briefly explain that factual questions typically have definite answers, and general questions can have several different interpretations of what the answer might be.

Students will then read the Mythweb Online Encyclopedia Entry (from <http://www.mythweb.com/encyc/entries/sisyphus.html>) along with some quotations from Camus.

When students are done reading the myth, I will ask that they write down one factual question about the myth. Then, we will go over the story and read the Camus quotations as a class. Then, I will ask the students to write down a general question about anything we've read so far. Students will be asked to share their questions, then we will discuss possible answers again.

Time permitting, we will discuss questions like, "Do you sometimes feel like Sisyphus?" and "Can you think of any types of jobs that might feel this way?" I will explain that when people talk about a "dead-end job," they are essentially saying that they are engaging in a Sisyphean task.

This is the handout:

Mythweb Online Encyclopedia Entry on Sisyphus

Sisyphus (SIS-i-fus) - Sinner condemned in Tartarus to an eternity of rolling a boulder uphill then watching it roll back down again. Sisyphus was founder and king of Corinth, or Ephyra as it was called in those days. He was notorious as the most cunning knave on earth. His greatest triumph came at the end of his life, when the god Hades came to claim him personally for the kingdom of the dead. Hades had brought along a pair of handcuffs, a

comparative novelty, and Sisyphus expressed such an interest that Hades was persuaded to demonstrate their use - on himself.

And so it came about that the high lord of the Underworld was kept locked up in a closet at Sisyphus's house for many a day, a circumstance which put the great chain of being seriously out of whack. Nobody could die. A soldier might be chopped to bits in battle and still show up at camp for dinner. Finally Hades was released and Sisyphus was ordered summarily to report to the Underworld for his eternal assignment. But the wily one had another trick up his sleeve.

He simply told his wife not to bury him and then complained to Persephone, Queen of the Dead, that he had not been accorded the proper funeral honors. What's more, as an unburied corpse he had no business on the far side of the river Styx at all - his wife hadn't placed a coin under his tongue to secure passage with Charon the ferryman. Surely her highness could see that Sisyphus must be given leave to journey back topside and put things right.

Kindly Persephone assented, and Sisyphus made his way back to the sunshine, where he promptly forgot all about funerals and such drab affairs and lived on in dissipation for another good stretch of time. But even this paramount trickster could only postpone the inevitable. Eventually he was hauled down to Hades, where his indiscretions caught up with him. For a crime against the gods - the specifics of which are variously reported - he was condemned to an eternity at hard labor. And frustrating labor at that. For his assignment was to roll a great boulder to the top of a hill. Only every time Sisyphus, by the greatest of exertion and toil, attained the summit, the darn thing rolled back down again.

Excerpts from “The Myth of Sisyphus” By Existentialist Philosopher Albert Camus

Existentialism: a chiefly 20th century philosophical movement embracing diverse doctrines but centering on analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong or good or bad

“At the final stage you teach me that this wondrous and multicolored universe can be reduced to the atom and that the atom itself can be reduced to the electron. All this is good and I wait for you to continue. But you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry. I shall never know.”

“The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor... Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.”

“I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”

Part III: Wrapping it up (5 Minutes)

Finally, students will have the last few minutes of class to come up with a general question about what Camus seems to think about the myth. Students who cannot complete this in class will be allowed to do it for homework, but everyone will be expected to have one general question ready for the next day.

Day 3

Part I: Questions

Housekeeping and Attendance (3 minutes)

General questions chalk talk (30 minutes)

I will write “Why does Camus think Sisyphus is happy?” and tell the students that we’re trying something new today. I will tell them all to remain completely silent for the next 5-7 minutes and write their questions on the board if they are comfortable doing so. While silent, they will write their questions on the board Quaker style. As they write, I will draw lines and add notes to help introduce them to the concept of a chalk talk. Afterwards, I will go into some detail about what a chalk talk is and tell the students that we will begin discussions this way often, should they come to like it. We’ll go through each student’s question and discuss possible answers.

Part II: Introducing Franz Kafka (40 minutes)

I will prepare a brief slideshow and tell the students a little bit about Franz Kafka, explaining a few of his stances on social issues and his beliefs about the deleterious effects of monotonous work. I will show an 8 minute clip of Charlie Ramos’ short, animated adaptation of “The Metamorphosis” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DfrBcjisVo>).

I will then ask students what they thought of the video—how they would feel if they woke up as a giant cockroach one day.

Then, I will show a clip of Christopher Plummer (portraying Vladimir Nabokov) discussing the themes of the story (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boSFjzWJXcU>). Each student will be required to come up with one factual question and one general question for his or her journal.

Part III: What if? (18 minutes)

I will tell the class that we are going to spend the next few weeks exploring strange things, with the goal of writing a fictional narrative about encountering something bizarre, absurd, and/or upsetting.

I will ask the class to spend the last few minutes starting a story in their journals about waking up as a giant cockroach—brainstorming how they would feel, what they would do, or how they think other people would treat them.

[Additional “Metamorphosis” activity to use in day 4, 5 or possibly later in the unit to jog students’ memories of the story, if there’s any extra time]

What Are The Effects of The Pressures of Our Society?

Activity: Do you ever feel like a bug? (25 minutes)

In groups of 3-4, students will be asked to address the following questions and turn in one handwritten sheet (of notes, not necessarily a whole page) per group:

Does school and/or work ever make you feel insignificant? Why or why not?

What would make school or class more meaningful for you?

What would you change about school or class to make you feel more in control?

We will then discuss different students’ stories, answers and thoughts as a class.

Day 5

Movie Day!

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

The class will watch the PG film *Groundhog Day* and answer the following questions in their journals by the end of class on day 6:

Many people wonder about how long Phil was trapped in the time loop after seeing this film. For how long do you think Phil was reliving the same day over and over?

What changed about Phil’s character from the first day to the last?

Would you do any of the same things Phil does in the movie if this situation befell you? What might you do differently?

For now, these are just questions to consider. Each student will write a half-page in which they recount the plot so far, details, or descriptions of characters in the film during the last 15 minutes of class. I’ll spend 3-5 minutes introducing the film, discussing my personal connection to it and its philosophical implications.

The class will watch approximately 70 minutes of the movie on day 5.

Day 6

Part I: Groundhog Day Part II (70 minutes)

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Students will watch the rest of *Groundhog Day* (31 minutes), have 15 minutes to individually brainstorm answers to the aforementioned general questions about the film, then get into 5 groups of 4 and discuss their answers with one another for another 15 minutes. I will float around and discuss ideas with the groups, then we will bring it to a whole group discussion. Each group will present the most interesting questions they thought of.

Part II: Over and Over (20 minutes)

I will hand out the following 4 quotations and ask students to think about them. The “ticket out the door” assignment will be for students to come up with one factual question and one general question about the movie, what we’ve been talking about, or the quotations.

“I began to realize how simple life could be if one had a regular routine to follow with fixed hours, a fixed salary, and very little original thinking to do.”
-Roald Dahl

“My mind rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram, or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation.”
-Arthur Conan Doyle

“I hate going to the gym and doing it the old-fashioned way. I hate anything that’s too straightforward, too routine, too familiar. I get bored really, really quickly.”
-Rihanna

“I had a longing for ritual, something I could cling to, a routine to make me feel well and contented. I hoped that reading Bible commentaries and theological critiques would nudge me closer to some kind of absolute that I could hold up as a torch to light my way.”
-Jack Dee

Day 7

Part I: Poetry/Songs (45 minutes)

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

I will pass out the lyrics of “The Ballad of Forty Dollars” by Tom T. Hall, “Supersonic” by Bad Religion, and “Float On” by Modest Mouse. We will listen to the songs and read along as we do (12 minutes).

Then, we will read T.S. Eliot’s “The Hollow Men” and discuss it (15 minutes).

Students will break into 4 groups of 5 and talk about the songs and poem.

Then, we will discuss the existential thoughts in each song and poem.

We’re talking about existence. Does “Existence precedes essence” mean something different to you now?

G.O.D (Gaining One’s Definition) by Common, featuring Cee-Lo (

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bWQT_vjRKI)

After bein’ 25 you know just trying to survive in the world

Bout to have a little boy or baby girl. Who knows?

Anyway just when you start gettin that little age and experience to you
You start thinkin about stuff...tryin to make the right moves
So bust it out this is what I was thinkin check it

Yo the education of the Lon chicka Lonnie Lynn
Began, began with time
Bein my bloodline is one with the divine
In time brotha, you will discover the light
Some say that God is Black and the Devil's White
Well, the Devil is wrong and God is what's right
I fight, with myself in the ring of doubt and fear
The rain ain't gone, but I can still see clear
As a child, given religion with no answer to why
Just told believe in Jesus cuz for me he did die
Curiosity killed the catechism
Understanding and wisdom became the rhythm that I played to
And became a slave to master self
A rich man is one with knowledge, happiness and his health
My mind had dealt with the books of Zen, Tao the lessons
Koran and the Bible, to me they all vital
And got truth within 'em, gotta read them boys
You just can't skim 'em, different branches of belief
But one root that stem 'em, but people of the venom try to trim 'em
And use religion as an emblem
When it should be a natural way of life
Who am I or they to say to whom you pray ain't right
That's who got you doin right and got you this far
Whether you say "in Jesus name" or Hum do Allah
Long as you know it's a bein' that's supreme to you
You let that show towards others in the things you do
Cuz when the trumpets blowin, 24 elders surround the throne
Only 144,000 gon get home
Only 144,000 gon get home
Only 144,000 gon get it baby

Chorus Cee-Lo:

I've lived and I've learned
I have taken and I've earned
I have laughed, I've cried
I have failed and I have tried
Sunshine, pouring rain
found joy through all my pain
I just wanna be happy with being me

Let me voice my concern
So many of my fellow brothers have given themselves a title
That their actions didn't earn
Our ignorance is in the same breath as our innocence
Subconsciously, seeking to find an impressionable mind to convince
I've finally come to the realization why Black people in the worse place

Cuz it's hard to correct yourself when you don't know
 Who you are in the first place
 So I try to find the clue in you
 But evidently, White folks know more Black history than we do
 Why're we bein' lied to? I ain't know our history was purposely hidden
 Damn, somethin' in me wanna know who I am
 So I began my search, my journey started in church
 It gave my heartache relief when I started to understand belief
 Hustlin was like a gift spent my share of time in the streets
 Taught me survival from this evil I'm just gonna have to deal with
 And I felt like a fool when I tried to learn it in school
 It almost seemed like a rehearsal when the only
 Science and math are universal
 Takin elder advice, read the Bible, the Koran
 Searched scrolls from the Hebrew Israelites
 Hold on, this ain't right, Jesus wasn't White
 Some leads were granted with insight
 and it's all in the plan, but it took me some time to overstand
 He still created with the imperfection of man
 So, with followin' I disagree
 By no means have I forgotten or forgiven what's been done to me but
 I do know the Devil ain't no White man, the Devil's a spiritual mind
 That's color blind, there's evil White folk and evil n*ggas
 You gon surely find there's no positivity without negativity
 But one side you gonna have to choose
 Any chance to speak I refuse to misuse
 So how can you call yourself God when you let a worldly possession
 become an obsession and the way you write your rhymes and
 Can't follow your lesson
 If a seed's sown, you make sure it's known, you make sure it's grown
 If you God, then save your own, don't mentally enslave your own
 If you God, then save your own, don't mentally enslave your own
 If you God, then save your own, don't mentally enslave your own

Well, I've lived and I've learned
 I've taken and I've earned
 I have laughed, I have cried
 I failed and I have tried
 Sunshine, pourin rain
 I found joy through my pain
 Just wanna be happy...bein me
 Bein me

Supersonic by Bad Religion (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oljetElq8Pc>)
 Well am I making haste or could it be haste is making me
 What's time but a thing to kill or keep or buy or lose or live in
 I gotta go faster
 Keep up the pace
 Just to stay in the human race

I could go supersonic
the problem's chronic
Tell me does life exist beyond it
When I need to sate
I just accelerate
Into oblivion
Into oblivi yah yah yah yah yah yan

Now here I go again
everything is alien
How does it feel to be outstripped by the pace of cultural change
My deeds are senseless
and rendered meaningless
When measured in that vein

I could go supersonic
the problem's chronic
Tell me does life exist beyond it
When I need to sate
I just accelerate into oblivion
Into oblivion

I won't lie
it's exciting
When I try
to decide things
I just want to live
decently
meaningfully
I'm in misery

I could I go supersonic
the problem's chronic
Tell me does life exist beyond it
When I need to sate
I just accelerate into oblivion
Into oblivi yah yah yah yah yah yan

The Ballad of Forty Dollars by Tom T. Hall (
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sx5te3VkTtQ>)

The man who preached the funeral
Said it really was a simple way to die ...
He laid down to rest one afternoon
And never opened up his eyes ...
They hired me and Fred and Joe
To dig the grave and carry up some chairs ...
It took us seven hours
And I guess we must have drunk a case of beer. ...

I guess I ought to go and watch them put 'im down

But I don't own a suit
 And anyway when they start talkin' about
 The fire in Hell, well, I get spooked
 So, I'll just sit here in my truck
 And act like I don't know 'im when they pass
 Anyway, when they're all through
 I've got to go to work and mow the grass.

Well, here they come and who's that
 Ridin' in that big ol' shiny limousine
 Mmh! look at all that chrome, I do believe
 That that's the sharpest thing I've seen
 That must belong to his great uncle
 Someone said he owned a big ol' farm
 When they get parked I'll mosey down
 and look it over, that won't do no harm.

Well, that must be the widow in the car
 And would you take a look at that
 That sure is a pretty dress
 You know some women do look good in black
 Well, he's not even in the ground
 And they say that his truck is up for sale
 They say she took it pretty hard
 But you can't tell too much behind the veil.

Well, listen ain't that pretty
 When the bugler plays the Military "TAPS"
 I think that when you's in the war
 They always have to play a song like that
 Well, here I am and there they go
 And I guess you'd just call it my bad luck
 I hope he rests in peace, the trouble is
 The fellow owes me forty bucks.

The Hollow Men by T.S. Eliot
 Mistah Kurtz—he dead.

A penny for the Old Guy

I

We are the hollow men
 We are the stuffed men
 Leaning together
 Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
 Our dried voices, when
 We whisper together
 Are quiet and meaningless
 As wind in dry grass

Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us—if at all—not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves
No nearer—

Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom

III

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

Is it like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone

At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

IV

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.

V

Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow

Life is very long

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency

And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

*This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

Part II: Text Rendering (40 minutes)

Students will remain in their groups and each will pick out “one word, one phrase, and one sentence from the texts... that the students find especially compelling, provocative, or meaningful. They [will] then sit in a circle, and for the first round, each [will read] his selected word; then, each student in turn [will read] the selected phrase; and finally, each student [will read] the selected sentence. Following this reading, the students [will pose] questions or comments on the selections in a general discussion” (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 35). We’ll end class by rearranging the desks, cleaning up, and, time permitting, discussing what the students liked and did not like about text rendering.

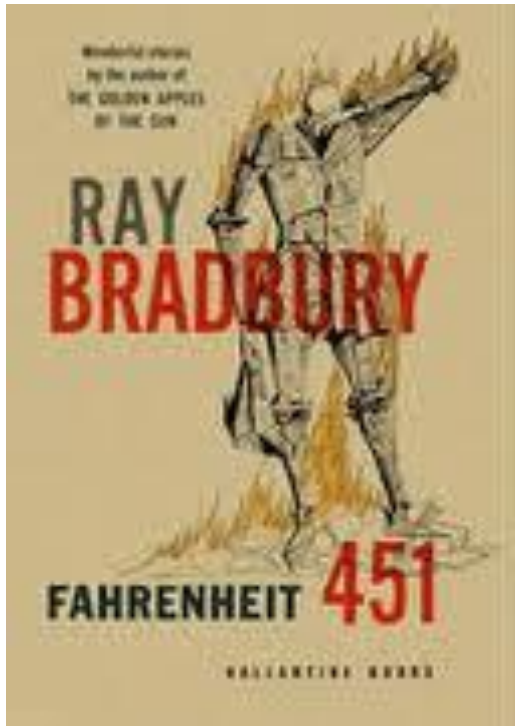
Day 8

Part I: Fahrenheit 451

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Students will begin to read Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, one of the exemplar texts from the Common Core. Before we begin, I will project the following picture, which was published as the cover of the first edition of the novel, and ask students to write what they think the book is going to be about based on the picture. Then, students will answer the following prompt with at least half a page:

How does this picture make you feel? (20 minutes)



Part II: Reading

After thinking and writing on the book cover, we will begin the book. I will distribute copies of the novel and begin to play an audiobook version (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYLlaD7PZb0> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSIH1QUUIE8> totaling 447 minutes), telling students to read along as they listen. This technique will allow students with low reading abilities to follow the story, and although it will take up a good deal of class time, I believe that this technique will make it most likely that (50 minutes).

After reading the first part of the novel, students will have 14 minutes to write roughly half a page in their journals about what they have read. I will ask them to recall any details, describe any characters, or summarize what has happened so far.

Cleanup and questions (3 minutes)

Exeunt

Day 9:

Part I: Informal Writing (34 minutes)

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

We will begin class by discussing what students think about the novel so far through informal writing (Smagorinsky, 2008). I will ask each of them to come up with a factual or general question they have about the text and write them on the board as they volunteer answers. I will then pose my own questions such as *Are you interested in this world? Does it seem frightening to you? Do you think this could really happen?* and instruct the students to each write a half-page in their reading journals that attempts to answer one or more of the questions posed. Then, we will form a circle and each student will be asked to

share any piece of their writing that like, and I will moderate a discussion based on the ideas they seem to be most interested in or confused about.

Part II: Reading

Students will read along with the audiobook of *Fahrenheit 451* (50 minutes).
Cleanup (3 minutes)

Day 10:

Part I: Reading

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)
Students will read along with the audiobook of *Fahrenheit 451* (50 minutes).

Part II: Anthology Built Around a Central Theme Introduction

Mini-lesson: What is a theme? (10 minutes)

Merriam-Webster says this, as the word applies to literature:

a : a subject or topic of discourse or of artistic representation <guilt and punishment is the theme of the story>

In other words, it's one of a story's main topics *that involves ideas*. I will ask the class to think of other possible themes—ideas like “guilt and punishment” or “identity” or “love.” I will then ask about possible themes of *Fahrenheit 451*, telling them that it's perfectly fine to start with a general question about the text, that such a question may well lead to a theme.

Students will be asked to get into 5 groups of 4 and told that we are embarking on a 3 day endeavor in which they will be creating anthologies around central themes (Smagorinsky, 2008). Each group will be tasked with coming up with and agreeing on a central theme that *they think is related to or contained in the novel* for them to build their anthologies around. Once each group has a theme, I will ask each student to bring in at least 2 personal artifacts for homework so that they can discuss them with their groups the next day (24 minutes).

The students will be allowed to use “songs, films clips or reviews, art, literature, magazine articles, video games, photographs, and other personal belongings or collected items” (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 35).

Day 11:

Part I: Anthology Project

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Students will be asked to get into their groups from day 10 and discuss their artifacts, why they are important to the students, and how they connect to their chosen theme (15 minutes).

I will then allow students to begin work on presentations for their anthology projects. I will provide them with the following rubric:

A grade of A will be given to a group whose project:

1. shows that significant thought went into the presentation
2. demonstrates how the theme relates to *Fahrenheit 541*

3. ties their chosen theme in with their artifacts
4. chooses and presents at least 5 artifacts

Include all 4 elements, and you will get an A. For each of the items on this list you do not complete, your group's grade will go down one letter. Although you will not be graded on length, I expect every presentation to last roughly 10 minutes.

You present [insert whatever the day after the day after tomorrow will be].

I will then give the groups time to discuss and plan their projects, decide whether they want to change their themes or artifacts, etc. (19 minutes)

Part II: Reading

Students will read along with the audiobook of *Fahrenheit 451* (50 minutes).
Cleanup and questions (3 minutes)

Day 12

Part I: Anthology Project

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Students will be given time to work on their projects, and I will mostly float around, make sure they are working, answer questions, etc. (34 minutes).

Part II: Reading

Students will read along with the audiobook of *Fahrenheit 451* (50 minutes).
Cleanup and questions (3 minutes)

Day 13:

Part I: Anthology Projects

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Students will be given time to finish their anthology projects, and things will go much like the day before (34 minutes)

Part II: Reading

Students will read along with the audiobook of *Fahrenheit 451* (50 minutes).

Day 14:

Part I: Anthology Presentations

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

3 of the 4 groups will present their anthology projects, and we will use any leftover time to have an open-ended discussion about what we saw, learned and how it might relate to existential thought (34 minutes).

Part II: Reading

Students will read along with the audiobook of *Fahrenheit 451* (50 minutes).

Cleanup and questions (3 minutes)

Day 15:

Part I: Finishing Presentations and Making Connections

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

The remaining group will present, then I will ask the class if they think any of the four themes we just talked about are existential. If the themes are all tied into the book, they're bound to be existential in some way. However, if none of the students' themes turn out to be existential, I will come up with my own—something like “making meaning.” I will give a brief recap of what existential thought entails and write a theme like “making meaning” (although hopefully the theme will be provided by a student) on the board (20 minutes).

We will have a chalk talk based around the written phrase in which students will be asked to write any themes, ideas, details from the novel, or observations about life on the board (14 minutes).

Part II: Reading

Students will read along with the audiobook of *Fahrenheit 451* (50 minutes).

Cleanup and questions (3 minutes)

Day 16:

Part I: Reading

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Students will read along with the audiobook of *Fahrenheit 451* (50 minutes).

Part II: Informal Writing

Students will be asked to write at least half a page in their journals about how the world in *Fahrenheit 451* is different from the one we live in, and another half page about how it is similar. Then, we will form a circle, and I will moderate a discussion based on their thoughts.

Day 17:

Part I: Reading

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Students will read along with and finish the audiobook of *Fahrenheit 451* (47 minutes).

Part II: Four Square Activity

Students will be split into 5 groups of 4. Then, each group will be provided with a blank sheet of printer paper and instructed to fold their sheets into four squares. In the top left panel, they will draw a picture of something from

Fahrenheit 451—a character, a scene, or object related to one of the themes of the book (When I say themes, I mean the ones that the students and I came up with through the anthology project).

In the bottom left panel, students will write a description of what they have drawn, including details they wish they could have included in the picture.

In the top right corner, students will write about why they chose the picture, what theme it relates to, and how it relates to the theme.

Finally, in the bottom corner, students will write a found poem. I will explain to them that a found poem is a form of repurposing someone's art by using another writer's words to make one's own poem. I will ask students to find 10-15 words or phrases in the novel that they can relate back to their theme and write a new poem using those words. (37 minutes), (Smagorinsky, 2008)

I will take up each group's four square sheet at the end of class and grade it based on participation, much like the journal entries.

Cleanup and questions (3 minutes)

Day 18:

Part I: Four Square Wrap-Up

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Students will get into their groups from day 17 and I will redistribute their four square sheets. I will then ask that they discuss what they have produced in their groups. (10 minutes)

The class will then form a circle, and I will moderate a discussion about the different themes we chose. (20 minutes)

Part II: Informal Writing

Students will be asked to write a full page in their journals to answer the following prompts: *What do you think will happen to Montag next? What do you hope happens to him next? In what way is the world he lives in given meaning?* (30 minutes)

The class will once again form a circle, and I will again moderate a discussion about the different ideas students have come up with. (24 minutes)

Questions and cleanup (3 minutes)

Day 19:

Part I: Reading Bradbury for Real

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Mini grammar lesson—at this point I will have read enough of the students' writing to notice trends among them, so I will start giving brief lessons over conventions. (7 minutes)

Students will read a brief interview with Ray Bradbury and asked to come up with two more questions for the interviewer to ask Bradbury about the novel—

1 factual question and 1 general question. One student will be the interviewer and another student will be Bradbury, and they will read their respective parts aloud as the rest of the class follows along. (10 minutes)

An Interview with Ray Bradbury (

http://www.neabigread.org/books/fahrenheit451/fahrenheit451_04.php)

On January 5, 2005, Dana Gioia, former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, interviewed Ray Bradbury in Los Angeles. An excerpt from their conversation follows.

Dana Gioia: How did you come to write Fahrenheit 451?

Ray Bradbury: In 1950, our first baby was born, and in 1951, our second, so our house was getting full of children. It was very loud, it was very wonderful, but I had no money to rent an office. I was wandering around the UCLA library and discovered there was a typing room where you could rent a typewriter for ten cents a half-hour. So I went and got a bag of dimes. The novel began that day, and nine days later it was finished. But my God, what a place to write that book! I ran up and down stairs and grabbed books off the shelf to find any kind of quote and ran back down and put it in the novel. The book wrote itself in nine days, because the library told me to do it.

DG: What was the origin of the idea of books being burned in the novel?

RB: Well, Hitler of course. When I was fifteen, he burnt the books in the streets of Berlin. Then along the way I learned about the libraries in Alexandria burning five thousand years ago. That grieved my soul. Since I'm self-educated, that means my educators—the libraries—are in danger. And if it could happen in Alexandria, if it could happen in Berlin, maybe it could happen somewhere up ahead, and my heroes would be killed.

DG: Decades after Fahrenheit 451, do you feel that you predicted the world, in that sense, fairly accurately?

*RB: Oh, God. I've never believed in prediction. That's other people's business, someone like H.G. Wells with *The Shape of Things to Come*. I've said it often: I've tried not to predict, but to protect and to prevent. If I can convince people to stop doing what they're doing and go to the library and be sensible, without pontificating and without being self-conscious, that's fine. I can teach people to really know they're alive.*

DG: Did you think of this book from the beginning being about the growth, the transformation of Montag's character?

RB: Never for a moment. No. Everything just has to happen because it has to happen. The wonderful irony of the book is that Montag is educated by a teenager. She doesn't know what she is doing. She is a bit of a romantic sap, and she wanders through the world. She's really alive though, you see. That is what is attractive about her. And Montag is attracted to her romantic sappiness.

DG: What do you think the turning point is in this novel, in terms of making Montag come into his new life?

RB: Well, when Mrs. Hudson is willing to burn with her books. That's the turning point, when it's all over and she's willing to die with her loved ones, with her dogs, with her cats, with her books. She gives up her life. She'd rather die than be without them.

DG: If you joined the community that appears at the end of Fahrenheit 451 and had to commit one book to memory, what book would that be?

RB: It would be A Christmas Carol. I think that book has influenced my life more than almost any other book, because it's a book about life, it's a book about death. It's a book about triumph.

DG: Why should people read novels?

RB: Because we are trying to solve the mystery of our loves, no matter what kind you have. Quite often there's an end to it and you have to find a new love. We move from novel to novel.

Each student will come up with 1 factual question and 1 general question to add to the interview. (10 minutes)

The class will form a circle. I will then moderate a discussion based on the questions students have come up with. (20 minutes)

Part II: Tomorrow's Episode...

The class will get into 4 groups of 5 to begin their final activity: a talk show (Smagorinsky, 2008).

I will tell the class that we will be ending our discussion of *Fahrenheit 451* by putting on a few talk shows. For our shows to work, however, we will have to have questions to ask the guests. For the remainder of the period, I will ask them to discuss any questions about the book we have brought up in class and try coming up with some new ones. Also, each group will need to choose a host for its talk show. (37 minutes)

For homework, each student will be required to come up with 1 new general question about the book.

Cleanup and questions (3 minutes)

Day 20:

Part I: Talk Show

Attendance and housekeeping (3 minutes)

Students will get into their groups, discuss their questions, and try to come up with more. (20 minutes)

One after another, each group will “take the stage,” and each host will pose the questions that the students in their group have come up with, first to their groups and then to the class. With at least 20 questions at their disposal, the students will be well-equipped to generate a discussion. My aim is to almost completely fade into the background. (50 minutes)

Part II: Why Existentialism?

I will remind the class that we have been focusing on a very small part of existential thought—existential thoughts are, after all, about existence. To end the unit, I will ask that students write a paragraph in their journals about, since they have been thinking about it for 4 weeks, whether or not their thoughts on

what makes their lives or could make their lives more meaningful have changed. (14 minutes)

Cleanup and questions (3 minutes)

Reference

Smagorinsky, P. (2008). Teaching english by design: How to create and carry out instructional units. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. DOI: www.heinemann.com