A Guide to Aquila Theatre’s Production of *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury
Synopsis

ACT 1:

Scene 1: The Firehouse. Montag and his fellow firemen, Black, Holden, and Beatty receive an alarm to go out and start a fire.

Scene 2: Outside the house. Montag meets Clarisse. She questions whether or not he has read any of the books he’s required to burn.

Scene 3: Montag’s House. Montag comes home and sees his wife, Mildred, sleeping. Suddenly he realizing that she has overdosed on drugs, he calls the paramedics to come pump her stomach.

Scene 4: A Field. Montag finds Clarisse. They discuss why he is a fireman.

Scene 5: The Firehouse. Montag and Beatty are putting the finishing touches on the Hound, a mechanical dog designed to track down suspected readers. When Black enters, they have fun with him by setting the Hound on his trail.

Scene 6: Mrs. Hudson’s House. The firemen come to Mrs. Hudson’s house to burn her home and the books inside. Mrs. Hudson refuses to leave as the house goes up in flames.

Scene 7: Outside. Clarisse finds Montag outside. He tells her about having set fire to Mrs. Hudson’s house and her refusal to leave her home while it burned.

Scene 8: Montag’s House. Distraught about Mrs. Hudson, Montag begs Mildred to call into work to say he is sick. Beatty shows up to lecture Montag about his being sick and offers him a get well gift.

Scene 9: Beatty’s House. Beatty takes Montag to his house and reveals his enormous collection of books.

Scene 10: Montag’s House. Montag starts to read a book for the first time.

BANNED BOOKS WEEK
ACT II:

Scene 1: Montag’s House. Mildred enters and becomes upset when she finds Montag reading. The Hound senses Montag reading, and comes for him.

Scene 2: Faber’s House. Montag meets Faber who promises to teach Montag how to understand the books he reads.

Scene 3: The Firehouse. Holden, Black, and Beatty watch the Hound in action on TV for the first time as Montag lingers unnoticed in the background.

Scene 4: Montag’s House. Mildred and her girlfriends are gathered together to watch The Mildred Show. Montag gets upset by the insipid entertainment and ends up reading a passage from a book.

Scene 5: The Firehouse. Black, Beatty, and Montag are about to start a card game when Beatty begins to question if Montag has been reading. Faber tries to advise Montag through a two-way radio, but Montag and Beatty erupt in an argument as Faber listens in on the other end.

Scene 6: A Forest. Montag runs from the Hound and ends up in the forest where he meets Clarisse.

A Sampling of the last two years most Banned Books, as compiled by the American Library Association.

- Captain Underpant (series), by Dav Pilkey
- Looking for Alaska, by John Green
- The Hunger Games trilogy, by Suzanne Collins
- Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, by Sherman Alexie
- The Kite Runner, by Khaled Hosseini
- My Mom’s Having a Baby! A Kid’s Month-by-Month Guide to Pregnancy, by Dori Hillestad Butler
- Thirteen Reasons Why, by Jay Asher
- To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee

Ray Bradbury
(August 22, 1920 – June 12, 2012)

Ray Bradbury was an American Science-Fiction and Fantasy writer most well known for his novel, Fahrenheit 451 and his collection of short stories found in The Martian Chronicles and The Illustrated Man. He is one the most celebrated 20th century writers, and many of his novels and short stories have been made into comic books, movies and television shows.
Cast of Characters

Montag: The fireman who suddenly realizes the emptiness of his life. He begins to search for meaning in the books he's been burning.

Black: A fireman who works with Montag. He is jaded by his job and goes about unquestioningly.

Holden: A fireman who works with Montag.

Beatty: The Captain of Montag’s firehouse.

Clarisse: A young social misfit who shows Montag the world’s potential beauty. Clarisse and her family seem to have no objection to their marginalization.

Mildred: Montag’s wife, who is obsessed with television, despondent in their marriage and struggling with addiction.

Mrs. Hudson: An elderly woman who secretly hoards books inside her house.

Faber: A retired English Professor, whom Montag met a year prior to the story opening. He is in possession of a few books but longs for more. He believes that the state of society is due to cowardice and readily admits to his own inability to speak up.

Alice: The Montag’s neighbor

Helen: Mildred’s friend.

Oscar Werner and Julie Christie in François Truffaut’s 1966 film adaptation of Fahrenheit 451.
To get a better understanding of Fahrenheit 451, consider some of the following quotes:

Censorship

“You don’t have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.”

“There is more than one way to burn a books. And the world is full of people running around with lit matches.

Knowledge

“With school turning out more runners, jumpers, racers, tinkerers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative creators, the word 'intellectual,' of course, became the swear word it deserved to be.”

During the era known as McCarthyism, dozens of academic institutions were targeted by The American Legion magazine for hiring pro-communist faculty.

“That's the wonderful thing about man; he never gets so discouraged or disgusted that he gives up doing it all over again, because he knows very well it is important and WORTH the doing.”
A Brief Look at Book Burnings Through Time

Book burnings are the ceremonious practice of setting fire to books and other printed material. In current times this includes other forms of media, like records, photographs, and CD's. Book burnings take place publicly and are generally motivated by moral, political and/or religious objections. They are often tied to an oppressive regime, whose objective is to quiet an aspect of a nation’s culture. One of the largest book burning incidents in history took place in Berlin on May 10, 1933, when Nazi Youth groups burned 25,000 volumes in a single day. During the following week, copycat student groups in 34 different towns throughout Germany, continued the burnings.

When discussing the topic of Book Burnings, it is important to keep in mind that the Nazis are not alone in burning books. Book burnings have taken place since the beginning of the written word, all over the world and still happen today.

Think About It: In Ancient times, entire libraries have been destroyed. Some of the more common books burned in modern times are Harry Potter and the Qu’ran. Why do you think books like Harry Potter and the Qu’ran are targeted by certain groups?

FAHRENHEIT 451 AND ITS PLACE IN HISTORY

Ray Bradbury originally wrote Fahrenheit 451 in the wake of World War II as a novella entitled “The Fireman.” The Nazis’ use of book burnings to repress a culture directly tied to the central theme of his novella. The Red Scare that closely followed in the United States inspired Bradbury to expand his original text into a full length novel, and later a play. Montag’s story directly reflects Bradbury’s concerns about censorship and conformity during a period in history when the free expression of ideas could lead to social and economic ostracization.
Where in our world is censorship at its worst?

Censorship often takes the form of restricting the news. In some countries, the government controls every aspect of news and citizens’ access to information. This means that every piece of news they receive, whether it is about their own economy, or their government’s activities, or even about life in the U.S., is carefully crafted and controlled. These restrictions also prevent us from getting information about them. These same countries refuse to allow international journalists or media within their borders. Such vast restrictions on information impact a government’s ability to control its own people and stay in power. This kind of censorship also creates risk for the world at large, especially when it comes to issues such as nuclear stability and/or chemical weapons.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Eritrea, North Korea, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Cuba are six out of the ten most censored countries currently in the world. Ministry of Information officials direct every detail of coverage: “Every time [a journalist] had to write a story, they arrange for interview subjects and tell you specific angles you have to write on,” an exiled Eritrean journalist told CPJ speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. North Korea, despite current photographs of Kim-Jong-un and former NBA star Dennis Rodman, remains incredibly secretive. Additionally, Syria has recently imposed a total blackout on news coverage of the bloody struggles currently ongoing within its borders.

Think for a moment about how much information we get through the news media. What would the world be like if the news could not report on the outbreak of disease, or episodes of brutality perpetrated by people in power or even the honesty of our government officials?

10 Ray Bradbury Predictions that have come true...

1. The characters in Fahrenheit 451 wear something called “thimbles,” or “seashells.” They look a lot like ear buds.
2. People are obsessed with their oversized flat screen televisions.
3. People talk to each other through a digital wall – The same terminology Facebook users have for streamed digital communication.
4. The characters experience feelings of isolation due to overwhelming amounts of technology.
6. The idea of electronic surveillance popped up in Bradbury’s writing way before closed-circuit television became a feature in many cities around the world.
7. Bradbury envisioned the idea of automatic banking systems. The machine he described looked a lot like the modern ATM.
8. In “I Sing the Body Electric,” Bradbury explored the idea of Artificial Intelligence and the implication that, one day, society could see modern A.I. that can think and feel independently of humans.
9. In Bradbury’s short story, “Sound of Thunder,” a time traveler steps off a designated path and crushes a butterfly, ultimately changing the course of future events. After the story’s publication, the world was given the new idea of what would become commonly known as the “Butterfly Effect.”
10. Bradbury loved physical books. Luckily, book burnings are not prevalent, across the U.S, but physical books are disappearing since the emergence of the E-Book. Fahrenheit 451 was not published digitally until November 2012.
**Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think books are banned in Montag’s society?

2. Are there books (or even ideas) that you think should be banned? Are there instances where books or ideas are being banned in today’s society?

3. Who benefits most when books or ideas or banned?

4. Are there groups who get to decide what information and knowledge is learned in American classrooms? In our society as whole? How about in other countries or cultures?

5. What is the purpose of the Hound? Bradbury wrote his book in the past. With our modern technology, what other forms could the Hound have taken? Would Bradbury be surprised by this part of our modern world?

6. What role does technology play in assisting and/or inhibiting progress? Does technology do more to spread knowledge or to keep knowledge from people? Is this different in different countries?

7. Why do you think Montag’s wife was depressed? How would you feel if you were growing up in the world of Fahrenheit 451?

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**Activity**

*Try searching the internet for book burnings. How many instances can you find, in how many countries and in how many centuries? What popular books from your reading experience have been burned?*

*Research how email and other internet activities may be monitored and when in the US and in other countries.*
The Aquila Theatre Company was founded in London in 1991 by Peter Meineck and has been based in New York City since 1999. Aquila presents a regular season of plays in New York, at international festivals and tours to approximately seventy American towns and cities a year. The name “Aquila” means “eagle” in Latin.

Aquila has a very particular mission to make classical theatre accessible and relevant to everyone. Peter Meineck manages to modernize plays while keeping true to the spirit of the original text.

Encounters with works of art can change people, causing them to view the artwork and the world in a new way. In addition, artworks do not immediately reveal all that is there to be seen. Perception of artworks can be compared to peeling the layers of an onion – they can be seen on many levels and from many perspectives.

**Macbeth**
1996

**Coriolanus**
1994-1995

**King Lear**
1999-2000

**The Tempest**
2001-2002

**A Midsummer Night’s Dream**
2003

**The Man Who Would Be King**
2003-2004

**The Invisible Man**
2005

**Hamlet**
2005-2006

**Much Ado About Nothing**
2006

**Romeo & Juliet**
2006-2007

**Catch-22**
2007-2008

**Iliad: Book I**
2008-2009

**As You Like It**
2009-2010

**A Midsummer Night’s Dream**
2010-2011

**Macbeth / The Importance of Being Earnest**
2011-2012

**Taming of the Shrew / Cyrano de Bergerac**
2012-2013

Aquila has performed in over 47 states, including off-Broadway in New York City and at international festivals.

**The White House**
**The Supreme Court**
**Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC**
**La Jolla Playhouse**
**Shakespeare Festival/LA**
**Brooklyn Academy of Music**
**NYU Skirball Center**
**Lucille Lortel Theatre**
**Baruch Performing Arts Center**
**New Victory Theater**
**East 13th Street Theatre**
**Clurman Theatre, Theatre Row**
**45 Bleecker**
**Manhattan Ensemble Theatre**
**Clark Studio Theatre at Lincoln Center**
**Shakespeare Festival in Globe Neuss, Germany**
**Edinburgh Festival, UK**
**Festival of the Aegean, Greece**
**The Bermuda Festival**
**Shakespeare Festival, Gyula, Hungary**
**Shakespeare Festival in Gdansk, Poland**

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