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English III – American Literature

To Junior's taking American Literature:

This is, ~~perhaps~~, one of my most favorite subjects to teach. American Literature covers many genres over a relatively short time period of time, yet is full and rich. During this year, we will sample some the best that America has to offer in terms of poetry, dramatic plays, fiction, and non-fiction literary text. During this year, we will closely examine what it means to be American...or "American," and to address the, sometimes elusive, ideal of "The American Dream."

SUMMER READING:

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

A Work of Artifice by Marge Piercy (**uploaded, please print**)

SUMMER WRITING:

Please answer the following questions about *Fahrenheit 451* (released by the publisher). All answers must be written (either typed or hand-written), and must be placed in a binder (at least 1-inch) under a section entitled "Discussion Questions." Summer writing will be discussed and collected during the first week of class.

1. Why would society make "being a pedestrian" a crime? (Clarisse tells Montag that her uncle was once arrested for this.)
2. One suicide and one near-suicide occur in this book. One woman, who shuns books but loves TV and driving fast in her car, anesthetizes herself; "We get these cases nine or ten a night," says the medical technician. Another woman, who cherishes her books, sets herself on fire with them; "These fanatics always try suicide," says the fire captain. Why would two people who seem to be so different from each other try to take their own lives? Why does suicide happen so frequently in Montag's society?"
3. Captain Beatty quotes history, scripture, poetry, philosophy. He is obviously a well-read man. Why hasn't he been punished? And why does he view the books he's read with such contempt?
4. Beatty tells Montag that firemen are "custodians of peace of mind" and that they stand against "those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought." How well are the firemen accomplishing these objectives? Are conflicting ideas the only source of unhappiness in their society? What other sources might there be? Can conflicting ideas exist even without books that have been destroyed and outlawed?
5. Why do you think the firemen's rulebook credited Benjamin Franklin—writer, publisher, political leader, inventor, ambassador—as being the first fireman?
6. Why does Beatty program the Hound to track Montag even before Montag stole the book? Do you believe Beatty had seen him steal books before? Or is it that Beatty had detected a change in Montag's attitude or behavior? Cite incidents in the book that support your answer.
7. Montag turns to books to rescue him; instead they help demolish his life- -he loses his wife, job and home; he kills a man and is forced to be a nomad. Does he gain any benefits from books? If so, what are they?
8. Do you believe, as Montag did, that Beatty wanted to die? If so, why do you think so?

9. Since the government is so opposed to readers, thinkers, walkers, and slow drivers, why does it allow the procession of men along the railroad tracks to exist?
10. Once Montag becomes a violent revolutionary, why does the government purposely capture an innocent man in his place instead of tracking down the real Montag? Might the government believe that Montag is no longer a threat?
11. Granger, spokesperson for the group on the railroad tracks, tells Montag, "Right now we have a horrible job; we're waiting for the war to begin and, as quickly, end...When the war's over, perhaps we can be of some use in the world." Based on what you've read of the world these men live in, do you believe that the books they carry inside themselves will make a difference? Might this difference be positive or negative? Point out episodes in *Fahrenheit* to support your response.
12. What does Granger mean when he says, "We're going to go build a mirror factory first and put out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long time to look at them?" Why would "mirrors" be important in this new society? (Note: In Part 1, Clarisse is said to be "like a mirror.")
13. Although Ray Bradbury's work is often referred to as science fiction, *Fahrenheit* has plenty to say about the world as it is, and not as it could be. As you review the book, list examples of the themes mentioned below, as well as others you notice. Discuss how you feel about the stands the author or characters take in *Fahrenheit*.

SUMMER READING:

A Work of Artifice
By Marge Percy

The bonsai tree
in the attractive pot
could have grown eighty feet tall
on the side of a mountain
till split by lightning.
But a gardener carefully pruned it.
It is nine inches high.
Every day as he
whittles back the branches the gardener croons,
It is your nature
to be small and cozy, domestic and weak; how lucky, little tree,
to have a pot to grow in.
With living creatures
one must begin very early to dwarf their growth:
the bound feet,
the crippled brain,
the hair in curlers,
the hands you love to touch.

SUMMER WRITING:

In one to two paragraphs, please tell me what this poem is about?