

The Elements of Science Fiction

The masters of science fiction predict the future. Ray Bradbury is a master of science fiction.

Once you get over the fact that e-readers and iPhones have made the premise of book-burning in *Fahrenheit 451* irrelevant, you'll be burning down the classroom.

Students will bring up the whole, "I'd like to see these fools burn my Kindle (no pun intended)!" anachronistic issue. Admit that Bradbury's inability to foresee the inevitable elimination of traditional books makes the novel less relevant—then spring this assignment on them.

Procedures

1. Instruct students to make a two-column chart or make copies of the one I provided and hand it out.
2. On the left-side of the chart, readers should write down a Bradbury prediction. On the right side of the chart, readers will write how that prediction has come true.
3. Discuss. Explain how many of the things we think have been around forever, such as ATMs did not even enter the thoughts of the average reader when the book was written in 1953.

ELA Standards

- RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Things Invented Since 1953

Many of these inventions did not become public until years or decades after their invention.

- 1954 Zipper Storage Bag
- 1954 Automatic Sliding Door
- 1955 Nuclear Submarine
- 1956 Lint Roller
- 1956 Videotape
- 1957 Sugar Packet
- 1957 Bubble Wrap
- 1958 Zip Tie
- 1959 Spandex
- 1960 Child Safety Seat
- 1961 Electronic Spread Sheet
- 1963 Computer Mouse
- 1964 Buffalo Wings
- 1964 8-Track Tapes
- 1965 Snow Boarding
- 1965 Cordless Telephone
- 1967 Handheld Calculator
- 1969 Mousepad
- 1970 Surf Leash
- 1971 UNO
- 1971 Personal Computer
- 1972 Video Game System
- 1972 GPS
- 1973 Personal Watercraft
- 1973 Mobile Phone
- 1973 Email
- 1974 Heimlich Maneuver
- 1974 Sticky Notes
- 1978 Microwave Popcorn
- 1981 Control-Alt-Delete
- 1981 Space Shuttle
- 1981 Paintball
- 1983 Internet
- 1984 LCD Projector
- 1988 Tilt and Roll Luggage
- 1988 Nicotine Patch
- 1994 Segway
- 1995 JavaScript
- 1996 Adobe Flash
- 1997 AOL Instant Messenger
- 1999 YAHOO Messenger
- 2003 Skype
- 2004 Facebook
- 2004 Flickr
- 2005 YouTube
- 2006 Twitter
- 2010 Pinterest
- 2011 SnapChat
- 2012 Tinder
- 2013 Vine
- 2015 Periscope

Other Things That Didn't Exist in 1953

- ATMs
- The Super Bowl
- Push Button Phones
- The Cleveland Cavaliers
- Live Streaming
- Instant Replay
- Desegregation
- Cable Television
- Smart Phones
- VCRs
- DVDs
- MicroSoft
- Apple
- Fast Food Restaurants
- World Wide Web
- Rock-n-Roll

Predictions in Fahrenheit 451

The masters of science fiction predict the future. Ray Bradbury is a master of science fiction. As you read *Fahrenheit 451*, note predictions Bradbury made that came true. In the left column, write down a specific example from the novel. In the right column, explain how that prediction has come true.

Specific Example	Explanation
Mildred and her friends interact with TV shows.	The concept that individuals could affect what happens on TV programs was absurd in 1953...unless of course you were a master science fiction. Now, individuals participate via Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms, often determining winners and losers. And we haven't even talked about YouTube, Facebook Live, or Periscope.

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Mildred and others always wear "insects" and "seashells" in their ears	Walk down any street or through any school and you'll see a large number of people with earphones or Bluetooth speakers in their ears
Mildred wants the "fourth wall" installed.	Large TVs and in-home theaters did not exist in 1953. They exist now.
"An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball, baseball, or running..."	Students just want an A. It doesn't matter to them (or their parents) whether they learn anything. And don't get me started on the proliferation of standardized testing. And let's admit sports often take priority over academics.
People talk to their digital friends through their walls.	That sounds an awful lot like social media and how it's integrated now with popular TV shows and radio programs.

Social Isolation	People spend a lot of time in isolation in the novel—watching TV, listening to their sea shells, interacting with their “family” which are characters on TV or digital friends. Sound familiar?
Short Attention Spans	I got distracted and didn’t feel like writing this.
All Night Robotic Bank Tellers	We call these ATMs. They didn’t exist until the 80s.
“Nobody listens anymore. I can’t talk to the walls because they’re yelling at me, I can’t talk to my wife; she listens to the walls. I just want someone to hear what I have to say.”	It’s impossible to go anywhere without being bombarded by some type of media intrusion.
Increased Surveillance	In <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> , viewers were treated to coverage of the mechanical hound hunting Montag. Increased surveillance makes privacy difficult to get.
An Obsession with Media	Bradbury portrays a world with individuals addicted to media. Sound familiar?

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