

The Merit of English Division
Junior Division

Name of Winner: Ko Cheuk Yan

Name of School: Ying Wa Girls' School

Book Title: Fahrenheit 451

Author: Ray Bradbury

Publisher: Ballantine Books

“Forget them. Burn them all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean.”

Imagine living in a world where firemen start fires, people own televisions instead of walls, and books are forbidden and illegal to own.

Can you imagine?

This story takes place in a dystopian world, where we follow this young man named Guy Montag.

Guy Montag is a fireman. Contrary to what we know, firemen don't put out fires. They start them. His job is to destroy the most illicit commodities, like printed books, and the houses in which they're found.

Montag has never really questioned what he does and the destruction it causes. He just does it because it's his duty and it's what he's been ordered to do. He simply returns to his monotonous existence each day, accompanied by his wife Mildred, who watches their television-walls, and keeps up to date with her

“family” in which they are simply just TV shows.

His life started to turn around when he met an unconventional and peculiar neighbour, Clarisse McClellan. When they first met, Clarisse bombarded him with many uncomfortable and seemingly strange questions. Yet soon,

he was introduced to a past where people lived without fear and were able to express their ideas freely from books that shape one's perception of the world, where he starts to question everything he has ever known.

Captain Beatty (the head of the firefighters) told Montag that they decided to ban books because they were a part of what made humans unhappy. They have this belief that the goal for humans is to be happy and nothing else, and as a result, they try to get rid of anything and everything that has ever made them feel sad. “That’s all we live for, isn’t it? For pleasure, for titillation?”

Clarisse had asked him one day whether he was happy. He should be happy. There was nothing for it to be his source of sadness. But the answer was very obvious.

He was not happy.

By the end of the book, there was something I ought to mention that has sat with me ever since I have finished this book. A phoenix, which was a symbol that the firemen wore, was briefly mentioned, and I was shocked by the comparisons and relations I was able to make out myself. We as humans are just like phoenixes. They die in flames and reborn again from the ashes, just like how humanity constantly repeats its mistakes and never learns from them.

Throughout history, we see examples of people and societies making the same mistakes over and over again, even though they should have learned from past experiences. It's as if we have a natural tendency to ignore the lessons of the past and keep repeating the same errors. And sometimes, our optimism and hope for a better future overshadow the need

to reflect on our past failures. We're so eager to believe that things will get better that we don't take the time to analyze what went wrong and how we can avoid making the same mistakes again.

Some may think that this book is unrealistic and we as humans would never degenerate and become such unintelligent beings, to a point where we have to burn books.

It sounds ridiculous when we look at it from our current point. Books are still widely loved nowadays and it just seems as if banning and burning them is absolutely absurd and barbaric.

Yet that's what I love most about this book. Dystopian authors often write about worlds' where future generations might have a chance in dealing with. But Bradbury writes about this setup that sounds so ridiculously impossible and

it would get me up and ponder, “What if this actually happened?”

What if humans were to ban books and burn them because they contributed a part to human beings’ “unhappiness”?

What would our world become if that happened?

Overall, "Fahrenheit 451" by Ray Bradbury masterfully portrays a haunting dystopia where the suppression of books reflects a society's fear of knowledge and independent thought. It makes us think and be careful about how we handle knowledge. Therefore, we should value our ability to think for ourselves and remember the lessons of history.

By doing so, we can create a brighter tomorrow.