

**Rights and Freedoms in Society—A Look at Our World Compared to the Fictional World  
of Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451  
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**Abstract:** Although the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights play a huge role in the ways we live our lives, students often take for granted the rights and freedoms they provide for us. We live in a country that allows us to do many things that citizens of other countries cannot do. Our founding fathers certainly envisioned this type of nation as they penned these documents. As students read Ray Bradbury’s novel Fahrenheit 451, they see a society very different from ours—one in which most freedoms are taken away. In this lesson, students will look at the Declaration of Independence and The Bill of Rights to compare our society to the fictional one of Bradbury’s world. They will place themselves in the roles of the characters to imagine a Bill of Rights that might exist for them. In doing so, they will also consider how a society or nation is formed.

**Enduring Understandings/Essential Questions:**

- What does it mean to have rights and freedoms?
- How much governmental control is good and necessary for a society to function well?
- What makes citizens happy and content members of a society?

**Assessment:** After examining the Declaration of Independence and The Bill of Rights and reading Fahrenheit 451, students will write a RAFT in which they assume the role of the government leaders in 451 and draft a bill of rights for the citizens of their society.

**Setting the Purpose:** Prior to reading the novel Fahrenheit 451, students will examine both the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights to understand more fully the documents that set in place the rights Americans have today. Afterwards, they will begin to read the novel and discover a very different world—one in which citizens live with few rights and freedoms. They will ultimately be able to compare and contrast the two worlds in order to fully realize the opportunities they have in America today.

**Duration:** Four to five nonconsecutive days.

**Procedure:**

- In pairs, students will begin by examining the opening two paragraphs (by transcript) of the Declaration of Independence. They will fill out a written document analysis worksheet as they work through it. Afterwards, the class will discuss their observations.
- If students had not brought this up already, I will focus on the line “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” I would ask them to define the pursuit of happiness. In other words, what does it mean to be happy? What does one need to do to “pursue” happiness? After discussion of the definitions, students will put these away, knowing they will be asked to look at them again at a later date.
- Next, they will look at Bill of Rights. Instruct students to take out a piece of paper and divide it into thirds (three equal sections). After reading through the twelve articles,

students should choose the three that they feel are the most important to them. On each of the three sections of paper, they will write out their choices (articles) in their own words, not as they are written in the document. Writing them in their own words will help me to know their comprehension levels.

- A large group class discussion will continue afterwards in which students are able to ask questions, discuss their choices, and argue for why their choices are the right ones. Ultimately, they will need to discuss and answer the questions, “Why are the Bill of Rights important?” and “How does the Bill of Rights make our society unique?”
- I will ask the students to keep in mind throughout the novel these two documents (Declaration and Bill of Rights), as we will return to them both during and after the reading of Fahrenheit 451.
- Some time will elapse as students take time to read the novel. We will most likely refer to each document as they read.
- Upon finishing the novel, I will ask students to go back to their definitions of happiness. They will refer to specific pages of 451 in which characters discuss happiness as defined by that society. (Pages they will refer to are 10, 12, 54-61 in the DelRey Ballantine Books edition; they may certainly refer to other places in the text that they remember as well. Students will think –pair- share this activity as they determine the differences in definitions of what happiness is.
- The final written assessment will be for students to write a RAFT. The RAFT will be written as follows: Role is Captain Beatty and other high ranking government officials, Audience is the citizens of the society in Fahrenheit 451, Format will be a legal document called The Bill of Rights, and Topic will be to clarify the rights that they have. This would be written as a similar document to the one they studied at the start of this unit. This should be a challenge, as students will probably not think that these citizens have any rights. What they write should be in line with what they read in the novel.
- As a final discussion, I would go back to the essential questions and discuss as a whole class: What does it mean to have rights and freedoms?  
How much governmental control is good and necessary for a society to function well?  
What makes citizens happy and content members of a society?

### **List of Materials and Resources:**

Written Document Analysis Worksheet. <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/>

Declaration of Independence

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=2>

The Bill of Rights

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=13>

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury