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Biblioclasm: The Organized Destruction of Books

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Introduction

"You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them." ---Ray Bradbury ("Quotes by Subject" website)

Student Demographics

This unit is designed for my 9th grade Language Arts classes. First Coast High School is located in the northeastern quadrant of Jacksonville, Florida. Although the area is experiencing rapid growth in new suburban housing developments, 85% of our students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The student population is over 2000 and is almost exactly split 50%-50% rural white and urban black students. Only 24% of our 9th graders read at or above grade level. Over 50% of our 9th graders fail the 9th grade. My student's Lexile reading scores are at the 4th-6th grade level. Most have been retained in an earlier grade at least once. My students expect to fail, have resigned themselves to failure and have neither the energy nor interest in altering that outcome. (Duval County Public Schools)

Unit Mission

This unit is designed to lead students on a path of self discovery that will ultimately ***intrinsically motivate*** them to read. All of the reading material subject matter was chosen with that mission in mind. The 2005 National Initiative Seminar I attended, "War and Civil Liberties," immediately attracted me because I believe that our civil liberties will only remain intact if we have an educated populace. Thomas Jefferson said, "The one thing needed for a democracy to flourish is an educated population" ("Why Go to College?" website). I wanted to study American civil liberties and real attempts to curtail them in order to make them real for students. I knew I wanted to start with Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* but I also knew that in giving my students that book to read without any preparation to make it relevant to them, most would dismiss the book as wild science fiction that "could never happen in this country."

Through an exploration of fire, myth and symbolism, the history of organized book burning, and an in-depth study of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, I intend to illustrate that refusing to read is exactly the same thing as voluntarily *choosing* indentured servitude; *choosing* ignorance. It is important to note that the tapestry being

woven in this lesson will only be revealed through the study of *Fahrenheit 451*. The student will have already discovered all of the literary elements, symbolism and social issues that are represented in the novel. The mission will be completed when the student recognizes those elements and is able to internalize their meaning. Therefore it is a much longer unit than most that I teach. If done completely, it should take six to nine weeks.

All of the reading strategies employed adhere to the Florida Sunshine State Standards (SSS) and the Duval County Public Schools curriculum and are clearly delineated in the Strategies and Lesson Plan sections that follow.

Overview

"I hate to read," said the young teen just before he let out a sigh then, with folded arms, he flopped his head on the desk, never to move again until the bell relieved his torture. I am convinced that young people hate to read for two very simple reasons. First, young people do not see, believe, internalize, or embrace the *value* inherent in reading and therefore do not see, believe, internalize, or embrace the *need*. Second, they are not good readers.

Well, that seems easy enough. There are plenty of methods to improve a student's ability to read. I maintain that all of those methods, regardless of how great the teacher is, are useless unless reason number one is addressed first. What makes this unit unique for the student who is **notintrinsically motivated** to learn is that at its heart is the mission to illustrate the inherent value and need of reading and not reading comprehension alone.

So, why aren't students motivated to learn? It cannot be because they are not exposed to successful citizens of the planet. It cannot be that they are unaware of the material riches money can buy. It cannot be because they do not know 'the American way,' starting from nothing and pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps. Horatio Alger is firmly implanted in our social DNA. Well-meaning educators have consistently plastered the classrooms with posters of great thinkers, poets and presidents. By the sixth grade students can recite Martin Luther King's "I have a dream." However, they remain uninspired. The prospect of earning a failing grade or being retained in a grade does not motivate them; it is, in fact, their expectation. And it most certainly is *not* because they are stupid.

That all sounds rather hopeless to me. Now we are getting somewhere. How do we deal with the hopelessness of a 14 year old? Can you think about the times in your life when you have felt hopeless? A time when even whatever spiritual belief you may have held made no difference? What was the one thing that you did not have on that occasion? Might it have been the *power* to change the outcome? That is the cancer. My students feel hopeless and it is because they are powerless.

I hope to lead students on a path of self discovery; a path that will help them internalize the fact that embracing *reading* will *empower*. It is my intent to illustrate to them that voluntarily and arrogantly rejecting the treasures of reading means that they have forever forfeited any control they may have over their lives to those in power. It means a life of perpetual subservience.

Content

Fire

Wikipedia gives a nice definition of fire.

Fire is a form of combustion. Most typically fire refers to the combination of the brilliant glow and large amount of heat released during a rapid, self-sustaining exothermic oxidation process of combustible gasses ejected from a fuel. The flames are a body of gas that releases heat and light. Fire starts when a fuel is subjected to heat or another energy source, e.g. a match or a lighter, and is sustained by a further release of heat energy until all the combustible fuel is consumed ("Fire" website).

I want to start by showing students what fire *is*. I am not a science teacher but I can take them through a simple recipe. Fire needs three things; fuel, oxygen and heat. We really have no idea exactly how early man discovered fire. Several theories exist; theories that attribute the discovery to nature, either lightning or volcanic activity. Others postulate flint stones or rubbing two sticks together. It is unlikely we will ever know; however we do have the evidence that man has had use of fire for a million years ("Cradle of Humankind" website).

What is it about the flame that it is so captivating? What does the flame *mean*? Let's look further. What do we know about fire right now? The first thing that may come to mind is that you don't play with it. Most people's first experience fire with has been an either violent or gentle, "Don't touch that, it will hurt you." And what does that statement immediately make a young mischievous child do? Run right up to Daddy's room and sneak a pack of matches. I know I did it. A few friends of mine and I set little pine needle fires in the woods near our elementary school. I never knew someone put a fancy name to it but Gaston Bachelard in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* calls that "clever disobedience" A child wants to be better than her father; know more than her teacher. I hope to inspire my students to 'clever disobedience' with books (Bachelard, 1964).

Now I was not an adolescent pyromaniac. Why on earth did I set little pine needle fires? We knew that the 'fire' could get out of control. But it wasn't only the exhilaration of doing something forbidden, although it certainly was exhilarating. If such 'violent delights' (Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet) intoxicated me so, I am sure I would have done much much more than set little pine needle fires. It must have been the fire itself. 'Clever disobedience' may rationalize the latent miscreant tendencies in me but it certainly doesn't explain my 10-year-old brain's fascination with the flame. Bachelard does, however, explain that rather succinctly:

- Fire is thus a privileged phenomenon which can explain anything. If all that changes slowly may be explained by life, all that changes quickly is explained by fire. Fire is the ultra-living element. It is intimate and it is universal. It lives in our heart. It lives in the sky. It rises from the depths of the substance and offers itself with the warmth of love. Or it can go back down into the substance and hide there, latent and pent-up, like hate and vengeance. Among all phenomena, it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil.
- (Bachelard, 1964).

"Among all phenomena, it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil." This is a difficult concept for young minds to grasp but what an important one! It is a

theme that is inherent in great literature as in Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* (Friar Laurence, Act II Scene III),

Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied; And vice sometimes by action dignified. Within the infant rind of this small flower Poison hath residence and medicine power: For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part; Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart. Two such opposed kings encamp them still In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will;

It also exists in the everyday human condition. This mix of compelling, opposed moral elements is in fire.

If you refer to the basic formula of fire, there is no inclusion of emotion or subjectivity; just fuel, oxygen and heat. It is what it is. Our science tells us that there is no more or no less to it. Yet the flames entrance us either at the hearth or at the pyre. What do you think of when you see these images in your mind's eye: Gently burning logs in a hearth casting an almost golden light on a mother rocking a swaddled baby? Can you feel the emotion rising in your throat as you gaze on the dark sight of an angry mob, mouths silently frozen in shouts of hate as the burning cross reflects in their dark eyes? In order to appreciate the power of fire, we have to figure out from whence that power came.

The Myths of the Origins of Fire

I will start with the myths. For several reasons, not the least of which is that for many students, even adults for that matter, a myth is often confused with fact; but also myths illustrate human nature that continuously tries to explain the unexplainable.

Of the myths of the origins of fire I studied, I discovered several commonalities. First and foremost is that the 'fire' was in the possession of someone or something that would not allow anyone else to have it. Second, those who do not possess the fire will scheme, consort or otherwise plan to steal the fire. The theft is violent, carefully planned or cleverly tricked. Third, the entity that is successful in obtaining the fire is punished, transformed, or deified, and everyone lives happily ever after. This is a short example from *The Myths of the Origins of Fire*. It is the myth of the Buriats, of Mongolian descent, the largest ethnic group in Siberia ("[Buryat website](#)"),

They say that formerly men knew not fire. They could not cook their victuals and went about hungry and cold. A swallow took pity on them and stole fire for them from Tengri, who is the Sky. But Tengri was angry at the bird and shot at it with his bow. The arrow missed the body of the bird but pierced its tail; and that is why the tail of the swallow is still cleft in two. It was the swallow that brought fire to men, who ever since have been happy and would not hurt any swallow. For the same reason people are glad when a swallow builds its nest in their hut (Frazer, 1930).

Let's look at the first theme. The fire is in the control of one person, animal, thing or god. In this case it is the Sky. Obviously, Sky did not want to share the fire or it would have not been angry at the little swallow for taking it. The swallow is punished via the arrow that clefts its tale, but the humans are forever grateful to the swallow.

The characters of these myths vary widely but birds, snakes, frogs and lizards are common. The long-tailed lizard, or Salamander, is an interesting character that is popular in ancient fire myths. In fact the Greek term "fire-lizard" is the origin of the word 'salamander' (Griffiths, 1996). For many years it was believed that salamanders had the ability to survive fires. In fact, some of the myths say that salamanders can actually

extinguish fires. According to Richard A. Griffiths, Aristotle was one of the first to suggest this salamander ability. As it turns out, the little lizards were most likely hiding in cords of wood and would scurry out of the flames. If the wood was damp and consequently the fire went out, the salamander was blamed. The salamander is important symbolism in Bradbury's *451*.

The Phoenix also plays an important role in *451* and its symbolism. Like the myths of the origin of fire spanning the globe, the story of the Phoenix exists in similar form over several different cultures. The most commonly known is the Classical Arabian Tale ("Rise of the Phoenix" website). "The Phoenix was a bird as large as an eagle with scarlet and gold plumage and a melodious cry." It had an incredibly long lifespan ranging from 500 years to 12,994 years depending upon the account. When it was time for the bird to die, it would build "a pyre nest of aromatic branches and spices such as myrrh" and set it on fire, consuming itself in flames. Three days later the Phoenix arose from the ashes, symbolizing the death and re-birth of the sun.

While the myths themselves are simple tales without much elaboration, it is clear that the fire is valuable. But not valuable as in wealth or anything we would consider monetary; rather the fire is valuable for sustaining the life-force. It is valued for the things man can create with it, for the power the fire gives humankind. This may explain why the sublime tales make the reader feel that the thief is perfectly justified in the theft. And further the thief is not ultimately referred to as a thief. In the end the protagonist is beloved or referred to as the 'fire-bringer,' not the 'fire-felon.'

The last common theme varies more widely than the previous themes. It is that the savior or trickster is punished or transformed in some way. Much in the same way knowledge can transform a human. It is that transformation that I will emphasize in the myths.

Prometheus

We have connected fire, the thing to fire, the myth, in an attempt to explain why fire is such a powerful symbol. I want to study the Greek Titan Prometheus to weave these myths together to illustrate the power that fire actually represents. And it is this power that is hoarded by those who wish to control others.

For this student discovery I want to focus on Aeschylus's Prometheus around the third century B.C.E. There is a trilogy of Promethean works attributed to Aeschylus; *Prometheus the Fire-Bringer*, *Prometheus Bound* and *Prometheus Unbound*. Prometheus is regarded as a culture hero; the defiant savior who stands up to the Gods to obtain this powerful tool for all of mankind (Frazer, 1930). I focus on this version because it most clearly illustrates the symbolism of 'fire.' Humans were childlike before he brought fire. "Seeing, they saw not, and hearing they understood not." Prometheus says that he gave the gift of fire by which mankind would learn the many crafts of building and carpentry, the science of astronomy, the skills of counting and writing, sailing, mining, healing and sacrifice through his gift. Hence it is beautifully clear that fire symbolizes knowledge and the power that knowledge brings the humans, something that heretofore had been possessed only by the gods. The gods were so angered with Prometheus for allowing the humans this knowledge that he was sentenced to be chained to a rock for 30,000 years with an eagle eating his liver.

Prometheus is eventually freed, ironically, for giving Zeus the knowledge that only Prometheus had; the name of the woman who would bear the son that would oust Zeus. While I will not dwell on that aspect of the story, it is interesting to note how knowledge is shown to empower the one who has it.

Fire Worship/Ceremony

But the fascination with fire doesn't end there. It keeps going through time. When human science discovered the physical elements of fire, it should follow that the fascination with fire would cease. Once our logical brain accepts a logical explanation, our illogical beliefs may leave us. I will argue that the strength of the myth embedded in our psyche combined with the known elements of fire can allow us to continue this obsession through mystic and religious ceremony and further for political purposes. And it is here fire has comfortably rested for thousands of years. It seems the flame is truly sacred.

Cultures throughout the world have and still are utilizing the flame for warmth, to purify, for protection, specifically from evil spirits, to communicate with the dead, and to honor. Hinduism's fire represents transcendental light and knowledge. The fire around Shiva represents destruction and regeneration, the cycle of birth and death (Weightman, 1996). Northern India fears the birth spirit said to visit a new born child on the fifth day after birth. A lamp may be lit in the room with the mother and child, but it is advised that a fire is best. The flame must not go out. Otherwise the evil spirit may enter and put the mark on the child's forehead (Blackman, 1916). In the old days of France farmers lit small bonfires in pastures and prompted the cattle to pass through the smoke to protect the herd from witchcraft or disease. In central France as well as other countries, jumping over flames is believed to bring good luck.

Fire as a purifier is not so unusual to modern society. Heat sterilizes or kills bacteria that can harm. However, in the years before modern medicine and specifically in areas in which modern medicine is sparse, there are astounding ceremonies in which fire is used to purify. On the coast of West Africa one particular six-month-long ceremony requires a widow to be shut in the same room in which her dead husband. Then a fire is lit in which red peppers are thrown. Apparently this makes for quite a stench and when the woman has almost succumbed, she is released and deemed ready to reintegrate with society, having been purged or purified of death's contamination (Blackman, 1916).

Judaism and Christianity rejected such earlier fire-focused religions but nonetheless maintained their worship filled with fire and light. Throughout Western Europe in the 1500's and certainly in the New World in the 1600's fire played a more significant role; to instill and reinforce fear of purgatory and hell through public burning of witches and heretics. The Hugh Latimer account is important to mention here as it is an integral part of *451*. Hugh Latimer (born in 1477) was a zealous Roman Catholic. Educated at Cambridge, his views changed in favor of Protestantism. Queen Mary I of England returned the country to Catholicism and thus Latimer, as well as many of his compatriots, were imprisoned and subsequently executed. Latimer was burned for his beliefs outside of Balliol College, Oxford on October 16, 1555. Nicholas Ridley, another Protestant Reformer, was burned alongside him. Latimer said to Ridley as the fire was ignited "Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out" ("Hugh Latimer" website). One of the most powerful scenes in *451* involves this quote as the firemen attempt to get a woman out of her house in which piles and piles of books have been discovered. Defiantly, she quotes Hugh Latimer's infamous words as she stands upon the stacks then ignites the flame that consumes her books, her home and herself.

If I am comfortable with Bachelard's description of what fire *means* and I am insisting that the myths of the origins of fire and thus fire itself symbolizes knowledge, then knowledge, too, can be dangerous. "For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Ecclesiastes 1:18). And we come full circle of the fire=power=knowledge analogy. For indeed fire can heal and harm. The knowledge of fire and

the use of it can also bring complete destruction, and I love this image. It is one that our students *must* embrace before they can even begin down the path of critical thinking and discovery. Rarely is anything all good or all evil.

At this point we should have a pretty interesting grasp of fire in all of its glory. Here I hope that students are not experiencing an "Ah Ha" moment but rather a pensive "hmmmm." I don't think they will ever look at fire the same again. So let's keep going.

The Book as a Symbol

The act of communicating through writing has existed at least as long if not longer than the human discovery of fire. As mentioned previously, prehistoric cave drawings hold our evidence of man's use of fire. The author's pallet morphed from walls into stone into papyrus scrolls into leather into paper, culminating into an object that could hold secrets, recipes, history, instructions, maps, clues, verse; an entire culture that could last long after the death of those who created it.

Let's try a simple exercise. Imagine you are in your bedroom and a fire has broken out in your house or apartment. All of your family and family pets have gotten out of the house safely. A firefighter who has come to whisk you to safety has given you 60 seconds to take what you can out of your room with you. What do you take? It is likely that some of the choices may very well be some sort of book, a Bible for instance; photographs, things that cannot be replaced or things the value of which is only appreciated by the owner. It will be important to include a writing/reflection exercise here so that the students may try to answer that question. We will refer back to this writing exercise in the beginning of *451* as the woman chooses to plant herself firmly on the stack of books and ignite the fire rather than allow the firemen of *451* to ignite it.

The 'chapters' of the Bible, Christian and Hebrew, are referred to as 'books.' The gospels, the letters written by Paul, and Revelations are all commonly referred to as books. But there is additional meaning ascribed to books not just from the 'books' of the Bible. The metaphors that are pervasive in the Bible itself, Old and New Testaments, relate to writing, as scrolls, "written with the finger of God," and "the writing on the wall" as the story is told in Daniel 5 of the Old Testament. Exodus, as pointed out by Curtius, contains the "Book of Life" written by God (Curtius and Trask, 1973). It is not difficult to hold a religious text, of any faith, as sacred, and my students will easily grasp that.

The 'written word' can be synonymous with a written text bound in a book, with a handwritten page, or a scroll. For many centuries the act of writing itself was not only an art form and a religious obligation of monks, but the letters themselves took on an almost mystical meaning. "...we are told everything of importance on the subject of the letters of the alphabet. They are 'signs' of things and 'have such power that they bring the speech of the one absent to our ears without voice" (Curtius and Trask, 1973). These powerful metaphors, I believe, imbed the book as a symbol into our psyche. "The Book of Life," "The Book of Reason," "The Book of Nature," "The Book of Prayer," the concept of the world or nature as a 'book' may have religious origins but it seems to have taken up secular residence in our usage. "Ending a chapter' of your life, starting a new chapter in life. We still today refer to *life* itself as a book.

However it is important that we continue the illustration so that the connection is made that not only knowledge in sacred texts but knowledge in any text is in some way valuable. So valuable, in fact, that those in power will do atrocious things in order to keep that knowledge from those that they would control. In *451*, the citizens of the society have been without books for so many generations that most do not know any differently and willingly accept all that is given them. Why, then, are there so many suicides during the night

in this society?

It is at this point that I want students actually to produce their own books. When we begin to discuss the destruction of books, we will be able to refer back to their own creations. Right now I want the students to feel ownership of their book; it is a part of them. Now hold that thought.

Biblioclasm

Students will now begin reading 451.

I will start this section with a powerful lesson with the aid of my Science department. I'd like to start by burning some books in the confines and safety of the science lab. I hope to stir up frenzy by digging out old math text books, a Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test study booklet, and a science book and tossing them into the fire. I want to evoke the emotion from the students to burn, burn, burn! Then I want to hold up a few of their own books that they created in class several days ago. How about one of their spiral notebooks they use to write notes to their girlfriend? How about a Bible, the American flag, the Confederate flag, a cross? I want the students to feel their emotion at the thought of burning these 'things.'

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that as a young man in Frankfurt Germany, he had to be a "witness to various executions." But he continues with a rather poignant comment: "it is worth mentioning that I was also present at a book burning. There was really something terrible about seeing punishment exercised on a lifeless being"(Lowenthal and Hamilton, 1987-1988).

The Destruction of Books

Christians will be happy to know that it was not just religious conflicts in the Western World that sparked the burning of masses and masses of books. Confucius, who lived in about 500 BC in China, was a beloved philosopher (Confucius). His teachings, although he did have disciples, are not considered a religion as much as a philosophy. His teachings do not address any sort of god or spiritual nature, just *ethics*. What is important for us to know about Confucius is his view of the government: "the strength of government is ultimately based on the support of the people and the virtuous conduct of the leader" ("Shih Huang Ti" website).

In the third century B.C.E., the founder of the Chin dynasty ordered the burning of Confucius' writings (Lowenthal and Hamilton, 1987-1988). Anyone caught hiding forbidden texts were either buried alive or condemned to work on the Great Wall of China until death. This emperor, Shih Huang Ti, had a feudal system in which he appointed governors over specific parcels of land. The emperor required the governors to change locations every year so that no real power or loyalty could be accumulated and possibly pose threats to the emperor's rule.

It would appear that the 'teachings' of Confucius could threaten Shih Huang Ti's reign. Confucius's belief that 'the strength of the government is ultimately based on the support of the people and the virtuous conduct of the leader' was in direct conflict with the emperor and certainly could threaten his rule.

"The first target of the tyrant is always the public library." (MacIntyre, 2003)

The library at Alexandria was founded between 300-290 B.C.E. The library became the largest collection of ancient learning and letters the world had known, with an inventory of 490,000 papyrus. While there are conflicting accounts of the exact course of events as well as the number of libraries involved, the who, when, why and how of the library's burning, what apparently seems indisputable is that the Alexandrian library, the

center of Hellenistic culture, burned more than once (Thiem, 1979).

In 641 A.D. the Muslims under the leadership of Caliph Omar conquered the city. When asked what to do with the books, he said, "If what is written in them agrees with the Book of God, they are not required; if it disagrees, they are not desired. Destroy them therefore." Ben MacIntyre calls book burning 'intellectual terrorism' and quotes George Orwell: "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past."

Richard de Bury said in the 1300's of the Alexandria carnage:

Who would not shudder at such a hapless holocaust, where ink is offered up instead of blood, where the glowing ashes of cracking parchment were incarnadined with blood, where the devouring flames consumed so many thousands of innocents in whose mouth was no guile, where the unsparing fire turned into stinking ashes so many shrines of eternal truths?

(Thiem, 1979).

Here again we see the common themes; rulers destroying knowledge that they wish to keep from those they wish to control, and the book as a symbol and a metaphor for life itself.

The Romans called it 'damnatio memoriae', the eradication of all records of existence—the ultimate sanction. The Mongols conquered Baghdad in 1258 and used the city's library to build a bridge across the Tigris River. Legend says the waters ran black with ink for days. Chinese troops destroyed the Tibetan libraries; Sinhalese nationalists destroyed the Tamil Library in Sri Lanka; the Khmer Rouge burned most of Cambodia's ancient manuscripts. An eyeglass mark on the bridge of the nose signaled illicit reading and merited a death sentence from the Khmer Rouge. The libraries in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq were all destroyed by one invader or another in order to control the present hence control the past (MacIntyre, 2003). The pattern of conquest and book burning goes all through history.

Mayan text

Let's change continents and centuries to the late 1500's and the Mayans. Diego de Landau (1524-1579) was the Bishop of Yucatan after the Spanish conquered the region. De Landau was in charge of bringing the Roman Catholic faith to the Maya people. (Clendinnen, 1987). He is most remembered for his study of the Mayan writing system and for the events of July 12, 1562, in the village of Mani.

Having information that several of the Mayans were continuing to worship their idols, he ordered an Inquisition that ended in a ceremony called auto de fe ("Auto de fe" website). "Auto de fe" refers to the ritual of public penance or humiliation of condemned heretics and apostates that took place when the Spanish Inquisition decided their fate. The punishments could be wearing the penitential symbol (like a scarlet letter), imprisonment, or for those unfortunate repeat offenders, the executioners would burn them alive. There was some degree of mercy offered these heretics. If they came back to the Roman Catholic faith, then the executioners would strangle them first and then burn them.

De Landau himself offers his account of the Mani auto de fe:

"These people also make use of certain characters or letters, with which they wrote in their books their ancient matters and their sciences, and by these and by drawings and by certain signs in these drawings they understood their affairs and made others understand and taught them. We

found a large number of these books in these characters and, as they contained nothing in which there was not to be seen superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all, which they regretted to an amazing degree and which caused them great affliction"(Clendinnen,1987).

According to De Landau, he burned 27 of these books. There are accounts that disagree significantly from that number to estimates of at least "99 times that many." (Clendinnen, 1987). Clearly this is one of the main reasons there exists very little about the Mayan civilization. Eduardo Galeano (1940-), a Uruguayan author, has written three volumes called "The Memory of Fire." The link to part of his writing is included in the student reading section and is a beautiful account of the Mayan text carnage so much so that it seems Galeano was indeed a witness to the event (From Eduardo Galeano's *Memory of Fire*).

The Spanish, who had conquered this nation of people in an attempt to assimilate them into their faith, not only burned those who refused the faith but burned the books that held the history of their culture. To keep that knowledge from future generations, destroy it completely through fire; for the current generation rendered the Mayans powerless and their original thought lost forever.

1933

"There where one burns books, one in the end burns men" (Brauer and Thiruvairayu, 1999). This prophetic line from Heinrich Heine's play in 1823 is not only important because of its profound prophecy of the Holocaust of WWII, but because it succinctly illustrates the connection I want the students to make: that books and life are one. Rejection of the written word is the rejection of life itself. Leonidas E. Hill states "The Nazis viewed the ideological and racial enemies and their books as ineluctably one, the living and printed embodiment of the 'un-German spirit' and the contemporary civilization they despised" (Rose, 2001).

May 10, 1933, the "Action against the Un-German Spirit" saw the destruction of literally millions of texts. But it was university students, not the government of the Third Reich, who planned and staged these events. Later, of course, the government did centralize its censorship and propaganda machine into an effective "final solution" on the freedom of information. In this year the Nazis declared that any book, "which acts subversively on our future or strikes at the root of German thought, the German home and the driving forces of our people..." was to be burnt (Brauer and Thiruvairayu,1999).

Hills' essay:

Led by marching bands, faculty in robes, student corporations in their colored sashes and distinctive caps, uniformed and beflagged Hitler Youth, SA men (many of them students), SS troopers, NSBO members (NS-Betriebszellen-Organisation, or Nazi union cells), and Stahlhelm troops paraded through the streets to the site of the bonfire, where speeches by student, municipal, and university representatives were punctuated with songs. In Frankfurt students collected the books and carried them in rented Mistwage (manure wagons) pulled by beribboned oxen. The volumes in such a wagon symbolically became offal (Rose, 2001).

I quote that entire passage because it conveys the almost frenzied type atmosphere at these burnings; but also because of the wagons. Photo after photo from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum depicts the dead victims of Nazi concentration camps heaped on wagons like cords of wood. Film footage of the liberation also from the Discovery Channel video *The Holocaust: In Memory of Millions* shows the liberating armies forcing what were left of the Nazi guards in the camps to heave the thousands of emaciated, skeleton corpses onto wagons for burial; a gruesome yet powerful image.

The German students used the previous history of book burning, particularly during the Inquisition, as a confirmation or affirmation of their efforts to unite all Germans in the new discipline of "Gemeinschaft; to purify society through eugenic policies, the sterilization of 'colored' and 'mentally deficient' people, and the extrusion of Jews and Slavs who on racial grounds were non-Germans." In fact Sigmund Freud (banned by the Third Reich) is quoted as saying, "Only our books? In earlier times they would have burned us with them"(Brauer and Thiruvairayu, 1999).

In 1933 the 'lists' began to be made of condemned ideas and authors. Lists of booksellers were made, lists of lending library contents, lists and lists and lists categorizing books, authors, ideas, beliefs, science, history into German and non-German. At first, unofficial lists, then ultimately official lists. Unannounced searches of homes upon the tip of a frightened or evil-spirited neighbor led to arrests, concentration camps and more piles of books on the fire pit. According to Hill, the mayor of Bonn reportedly said that as the flames devoured the books "the Jewish soul flew into the sky" (Rose, 2001). This image is important and reappears in *451* as the burned books, their curling pages and floating ash, is repeatedly referred to as a metaphor for a bird in flight. The metaphor emphasizes that though the books burn, the ideas in them fly away to light in another place or in another human spirit.

Here I am going to quote an entire paragraph from Hill's essay to describe the event.

The event was colorful, illuminated bright as day by film company searchlights but soon obscured by smoke and drifting ash, noisy also with the enthusiastic attendance in some cities of more than 15,000 non-university people controlled by police, sometimes on horseback and the SA (what's the SA? German Storm troopers, Thugs basically that wore brown shirts instead of black like the SS). Construction of the pyre, symbolism, and the weather vary greatly. Books usually topped a heap of flammable material resting on wooden scaffolding, but volumes of left-wing daily newspapers were the foundation for one...At 11:30 p.m. firemen nourished the flames with kerosene and as they rose, students chanted the nine Nazi cultural canons of the *Feuerspruche* naming twenty four authors exemplifying them (including a witness Krich Kastner), while throwing their books on the fire (Rose, 2001)

An example of the slogans chanted at these rallies is "Against class warfare and materialism; For the community of the Volk and an idealistic way of life" ("When Books Burn" website).

"At 11:30 pm firemen nourished the flames with kerosene." As in *451* here we have historical evidence of the inherent contradiction of a fireman 'nourishing' a flame rather than killing it. "It was a pleasure to burn. It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and *changed*. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world..."(Bradbury, 1993).

From these student-organized rallies, the Third Reich efficiently organized censorship and propaganda. By 1938 the Nazi's had 'Aryanized' almost all publishing houses, bookstores and began to create the pure German library purified of all texts that was in anyway contradictory to the "German Spirit." Bradbury's illusive and mysterious Clarisse says to Montag, "Is it true that long ago firemen put fires *out* instead of going to start them?" The fire station in which *451*'s Montag works stands a plaque that reads "Established, 1790, to burn English-influenced books in the Colonies. First Fireman: Benjamin Franklin." We are reminded here of Orwell's comment: "...who controls the present controls the past."

Many artists and authors in the early 1930's shipped their books and works out of Germany and Austria and exiled themselves. It was so organized that between 1933 and 1936, authors and artists were burning their own books in an effort to save themselves or their families, or worse, were committing suicide. "A few authors

and publishers chose suicide, others exile. Some committed suicide in exile: Kurt Tucholsky in Sweden, 1935; Ernst Toller in New York City, 1935; Stefan Zweig, with his second wife, in Petropolis near Rio de Janeiro, 1942" (Curtius and Trask, 1973). Again we can connect to the suicidal scene in *451*. This offers an enormous opportunity for reflection on the part of the student. What would you do? What would make a person choose death rather than a life without free thought, expression or the freedom to read whatever one chooses? How does Montag's wife Mildred deal with the blissful ignorance in which she exists? *451* illustrates beautifully that a life without the knowledge that held within the pages of a book is an empty, meaningless, subservient and numb existence.

The Nazis are probably the best example in all of recorded history of those who knew exactly that the knowledge held between the pages of books will render people impossible to control. In order to control their own culture as well as destroy all others, the Nazis burned and banned all printed material and artistic expression that was 'non-German'(Brauer and Thiruvairayu, 1999). They silenced dissenters through public denunciation and threats. The number of books destroyed by the Nazis is only surpassed by the number of humans killed during the Holocaust. For within the pages of those books and within the souls of those people rested all the knowledge that would prove the Nazi philosophy irreconcilably flawed and an inevitable failure; an important bit of information that needed to be kept from Nazi followers.

The Cold War

Nazis 'classified, identified and segregated the race and groups that embodied the 'un-German spirit.'" Similar lists were compiled in the United States at the beginning of the Cold War.

Book burning and censorship are closely tied together. The first is a physical incarnation of the second. At this point it is important to note briefly the political climate regarding civil liberties at the beginning of the Cold War. After WWII, 1945-46 marked an unusual optimistic time for civil liberties, however that changed in 1947 (Goldstein, 1977). America became obsessed with Communism and its spread. Whether rightly or wrongly, that obsession, along with other factors, signaled some of the most severe civil liberty violations as have been seen in the country's history.

I think that it is safe to believe that knowledge of Communism is obviously essential to any American who wants to be able to combat it effectively (Bolte, 1955). But the United States was making policy that contradicted that basic premise. First, the Truman administration began an assault on Americans' freedom to read. To keep communist propaganda coming into the United States via free trade, initially many magazines and newspapers to which any American might have held paid subscriptions were banned from entering the United States. Some publications seized by the Truman and Eisenhower administrations were such titles as *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, *the London Economist*, *Lenin's Selected Works* and a book entitled *The Happy Life, Children in the Rumanian People's Republic*. In fact works by Lenin that were ordered by Brown University for a class were seized. The government eventually allowed Brown to have the texts but only after university officials promised to place restrictions on its accessibility (Goldstein, 1977).

The Voice of America came under assault by Senator Joseph McCarthy, who suggested that "a massive anti-American conspiracy..." was involved in the location of radio transmitters. While no evidence emerged that such a conspiracy existed, more restrictions on the freedom to access information ensued. The resulting policy banned the books, music and paintings of any communists, and fellow travelers (Goldstein, 1977). Librarians began pulling works off the shelves of Bert Andrews, head of the Washington Bureau of the New York Herald Tribune; Joseph Davies, former ambassador to Moscow; Vera Micheles, Dean of the Foreign Policy Association; Walter White, head of the NAACP; and Foster Rhea Dulles, a cousin of the then secretary of state." Goldstein

writes that it was later revealed that books had been also been burned in this US government ordered purification of reading material.

While it appears that the United States did not participate in such frenzied book burning as the Nazis during WWII, it did indeed participate in not only an extensive propaganda campaign to make labels and lists of people deemed un-American, it also seriously restricted reading material.

Where are we today?

As luck would have it, JK Rowling's 6th sequel to the Harry Potter stories has just come out at this writing. Many evangelical Christians and other faiths see these stories as glorifying sorcery or witchcraft, the ideas of which are apparently diabolically opposed to their spiritual beliefs. These books get burnt frequently. In researching this topic I was amazed at the number of incidents in this country of church groups, parent groups and even student groups who have organized book burnings in an attempt to purge their communities of these novels. However, I still did not have to look much further to find contemporary incidents of book burning in this country that included not only Harry Potter, but several other works of literature.

Our reading of *Fahrenheit 451* will end as our unit ends. It is my hope that with the background, symbolism and the historical evidence of biblioclasm, the students will see *451* not just as fantastical science fiction-type book, but one with profound meaning, symbolism and not so far-fetched after all.

The American Library Association's website has extensive information on banned and challenged books in the US today as well as information on the history of the destruction of books. I am passionate about drawing the non-motivated student in to see that their choice of refusing to read is the exact same thing as saying, "Here is my life. Would you control me, please?"

"Books—all kinds of books, expressing all kinds of views—are not a luxury but a necessity. They contribute to the strength of America. The best of them challenge our convictions and our settled ways of thought and make us learn not only what we believe but *why* we believe it" (Bolte, 1955). That is quite a treasure and it's a *free* treasure. Robin William's character, Mr. Keating, in the movie "Dead Poet's Society," said it best when he said that poetry, literature, and art are not *how* we live; they are *why* we live.

Nevertheless, vigilance will be the key, as efforts by the government to curtail civil liberties in the name of national security have forever plagued our country's history. The Patriot Act which passed quickly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks included 15 provisions that had expiration dates (Taylor, 2005). One of those provisions gave the FBI freedom to investigate people's reading habits at public libraries as well as book stores. This summer Congress upheld the 'sunset' limits on that provision; therefore the law will expire unless it receives a presidential veto. President Bush has stated that he wants to make permanent all of the provisions of the Patriot Act (Taylor, 2005).

Strategies

It is important for my students to connect actively with any text they are reading. Graphic Organizers are a readily available resource. I rarely use a generic organizer. I am not philosophically opposed to them; I just think that using MS Publisher makes the interaction more personal to my class and the specific text which will

make the organizer more memorable.

I am fortunate to have an administration that, like me, believes that students must be able to mark all over a text. Therefore, I get an enormous amount of consumable material. Every thing we read will have some sort of graphic organizer to help make the connections and the students will respond to most texts in writing, either formal or informal. Although tempted and sometimes pressured, I do not teach our state assessment test skills in isolation. I begin simply with pre-viewing a text. Then the students mark those texts up, beginning with 'the who and the what' of each paragraph.

Chris Tovani's *I Read it but I Don't Get It* (2000) is a great source for reading strategies for the lower level reader. Technically, these readers do not 'listen' to their voice in their heads as they are reading. Their eyes are going over the words; they are *reading* the words but sadly are unable to tell you what they just read. These students believe that when the voice in their head says, "What the...?" and worse, they should just skip over a word with which they are unfamiliar. They are quite comfortable at this point professing loudly that they did read it but just don't get it. When asked what specifically he/she did not get, the reply inevitably is 'all of it.' It is important to train my students to listen to the questions they have in their heads as they are reading and honor them. These thoughts do not mean they are stupid; they mean they are thinking. Students will not have to use a Reader Response sheet for the rest of their lives. With practice it will come naturally.

Lesson Plans w/Standards

*Note to teachers: The FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) is the test by which all students are measured. Students must achieve a level three (1-5) on the 10th grade test in order to receive a regular high school diploma. 2005 saw the implementation of the retention policy that states any student that scores a level 1 will be retained in that grade regardless of any other factors. 75% of our students score below level 3.

Lesson Plan #1: Previewing and Marking Texts (3-4) 53 minute class periods

Objective: The student will utilize appropriate pre-reading strategies as well as marking techniques to understand the text and demonstrate comprehension by correctly identifying the main idea and correctly determining the author's purpose and point of view.

Materials: Overhead projector, The Parts of a Candle

Use assorted colored construction paper, glue sticks, markers or crayons, Popsicle sticks, hole-puncher and string (Fire).

Articles: "Fires Ignited by Matches and Lighters" and "The Dangers of Fireworks." See U.S.F.A articles in bibliography.

Part I: Using the candle illustration, we will begin to discuss fire. Based on that illustration the students will make their own 3-D candle out of construction paper. Using an 8 ½" x 11" size colored paper, the students will be able to decorate their paper as they wish and then secure the popsicle stick on the paper with about 1 ½" sticking out. They next roll the paper into a tube shape and secure. The students should design their flame and secure it to the stick, then use the hole-puncher to make a hole in the top of the flame. Students

then will use the string to hang the flames up in the classroom.

Part II: The teacher will next introduce pre-reading strategies using the matches and lighters article. It is important that arrangements are made for all students to have their own copy. Using the overhead projector model, the teacher will show how to mark an informational text for comprehension. See appendix for comprehension questions we will answer as a class as well short response writing prompts for this article.

Part III: Students will demonstrate understanding with the fireworks article using pre-reading strategies, marking techniques, and comprehension questions, as well as one short and one extended response. See appendix.

Methods of Evaluation: Informal teacher assessment completing the GO's and marking the texts. Formal assessment FCAT-type multiple choice questions. Short and Extended writing responses.

Standards (Florida Sunshine State Standards)

LA.A.1.4.1 The student selects and uses pre-reading strategies that are appropriate to the text such as discussion, making predictions, brainstorming, generating questions and previewing to anticipate content, purpose and organization of a reading selection.

LA.A.1.4.2 The student selects and uses strategies to understand words and texts, and to make and confirm inferences from what is read, including interpreting diagrams, graphs and statistical illustrations.

LA.A.1.4.4 The student applies a variety of response strategies, including rereading, note taking, summarizing, outlining, writing a formal report and relating what is read to his or her own experiences and feelings.

LA.S.2.4.1 The student determines the main idea and identifies relevant details, methods of development and their effectiveness in a variety of types of written material.

LA.A.2.4.2 The student determines the author's purpose and point of view and their effects on the text.

Lesson Plan #2: Writing and Reflecting Short and Extended Responses* (2) 53 minute class periods

Objective: The student will utilize pre-writing strategies and synthesize information from multiple sources included personal experience to respond to images.

Materials: Slide projector or LCD projector, images of several different types of fire. Images that are in the free domain are easy to find via Google.com Image search. Be sure to include burning crosses and forest fires, not just warming fires.

Part I

Project each image on the screen one at a time. Give sufficient time for students to reflect upon the image and free-write feelings, thoughts and observations on the image.

It is important to show the images from good to bad for the proper effect.

Part II

Students will complete the short and extended writing response that will require the student to synthesize information all sources thus far to produce a completed response.

Method of Evaluation: Assessment of the responses based on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test short and extended response rubric.

*There are no writing responses on the 9th grade FCAT. There are on the 10th grade. Based on our 10th grade writing scores it is clear we must do a better job in 9th grade to prepare them for this assessment. Therefore, our writing evaluations are all based on the FCAT writing rubric that the students will have in their notebooks at all times.

Standards

LA.A.2.4.8 The student synthesizes information from multiple sources to draw conclusions.

LA.B.1.4.1 The student selects and uses appropriate prewriting strategies, such as brainstorming, graphic organizers and outlining.

LA.B.1.4.2 The student drafts and revises.

LA.B.1.4.3 The student produces final documents that have been edited.

LA.B.2.4.2 The student organizes information using appropriate systems.

Lesson Plan #3: Poetry—The Myth of the Phoenix

Objective: Students will utilize pre-reading and marking strategies for poetry. The students will identify symbolism and metaphor.

Materials: "The Phoenix Bird" by Hans Christen Andersen and the Rise of the Phoenix poem. See bibliography for link. An LCD projector with computer and internet access is needed.

Part I

Students will identify the meaning of each stanza, symbolism and metaphors. I will do the first paragraph with the students.

Part II

Students will complete the analysis of each paragraph. Following a class discussion of the poem I will show the students the drawings on the MythicalRealm website (Rise of the Phoenix). Then students will create their own version of a Phoenix that will be connected via string to the candle that they made on the first day. All of their creative endeavors for this lesson will be linked together and hang in the classroom for a visual representation of fire-to-myth-ceremony-symbol-book-burning-control-empower. It will also visualize that synthesizing information from multiple sources, standard as well as a host of others.

Method of Evaluation: Students will briefly present their interpretation of the Phoenix to class.

Standards

LA.S.2.4.1 The student determines the main idea and identifies relevant details, methods of development and their effectiveness in a variety of types of written material.

LA.A.2.4.3 The student describes and evaluates personal preferences regarding fiction and nonfiction.

LA.A.2.4.8 The student synthesizes information from multiple sources to draw conclusions.

LA.C.1.4.1 The student selects and uses appropriate listening strategies according to the intended purpose.

LA.C.1.4.3 The student uses effective strategies for informal and formal discussions.

LA.D.1.4.1 The student applies and understands that language and literature are primary means by which culture is transmitted.

LA.D.2.4.1 The student understands specific ways in which language has shaped the reactions, perceptions and beliefs of the local, national and global communities.

LA.D.2.4.2 The student understands the subtleties of literary devices and techniques in the comprehension and creation of communication.

LA.D.1.4.3 The student identifies universal themes prevalent in the literature of all cultures.

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<https://teachers.yale.edu>

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