The 2016 Common Reading Experience at Lynchburg College

About the Common Reading Program

For more than a decade, all entering freshmen at Lynchburg College have participated in a common reading experience as part of their orientation program. Previous selections have included: *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest Gaines; *Hope in the Unseen* by Ron Suskind; *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* by Janisse Ray, *Iron and Silk* by Mark Salzman and *The Color of Water* by James McBride. These readings have been incorporated into class assignments during the fall semester so that students begin preparing for classes before the semester begins. Our selection this year is *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury.
Benefits to Students

The goals of the common reading program are to increase the sense of community students experience as they begin their undergraduate life at Lynchburg College and to introduce students to a typical activity they will engage in often in this new environment. New students benefit from this experience in a number of ways. The reading and discussions actively engage students in the first intellectual activity of their college careers. Sharing this common experience with all freshmen creates a bond and sense of community that reinforce shared values at Lynchburg College. Discussing ideas with other first-year students, advisors and Connection Leaders (peer mentors) allows new students to express themselves and realize their informed opinions can contribute to enriching discussion for the benefit of all. The common reading program helps students develop communication skills and reinforces the commitment Lynchburg College has to the academic and intellectual growth of its students. We also hope that students will gain valuable insight into issues that they will face as they begin to navigate this new college environment and that these insights will contribute to personal growth and development.

How It Works

When students attend one of the Student Orientation and Registration (SOAR) programs, they can purchase the book, Fahrenheit 451, at the LC Campus Store. During Hornet Days, advisors and Connection Leaders will facilitate discussions about the reading during one of the planned activities. These discussions will simulate what a college level classroom discussion is like. Discussion of the reading will continue as a central part of GS 100, the Freshman Success Seminar, which this year focuses on citizen leadership.

Praise for Fahrenheit 451

“Brilliant... Startling and ingenious... Mr. Bradbury’s account of this insane world, which bears many alarming resemblances to our own, is fascinating.”
— Orville Prescott, The New York Times

“A masterpiece... A glorious American classic everyone should read: It’s life-changing if you read it as a teen, and still stunning when you reread it as an adult.”
— Alice Hoffman, The Boston Globe

“One of this country’s most beloved writers... A great storyteller, sometimes even a mythmaker, a true American classic.”
— Michael Dirda, The Washington Post

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

As you read Fahrenheit 451, consider the following questions and themes:

1. The novel’s protagonist, Montag, learns that “the public itself stopped reading of its own accord.” Bradbury wrote his novel in 1953: To what extent has his prophecy come true today?

2. Those who enforce the ban on books in this future society are described as “custodians of peace of mind” who stand against “those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought.” Is a society where everyone agrees about everything preferable to a society where citizens engage in discussion and even angry debate about core ideas and values? Why or why not?

3. Are there any circumstances where censorship might play a beneficial role in society? Are there some books that should be banned?

4. If you had to memorize a single book or risk its extinction, which book would you choose?

5. The Italian journalist and critic, Italo Calvino defined a classic book as “a book that has never finished saying what it has to say.” Fahrenheit 451 was published 63 years ago. Do you feel that the themes, concepts and conflicts it presents are still applicable to 21st century American society? Does it still speak to us today?

If you have any question, please contact the Office of First-Year Programs
E-mail: orientation@lynchburg.edu
Phone: (434) 544-8339