

# CliffsNotes.com® About the Author for **FAHRENHEIT 451**

## Ray Bradbury

### Personal Background

American novelist, short-story writer, essayist, playwright, screenwriter, and poet — Ray Bradbury was born in Waukegan, Illinois on August 22, 1920, the third son of Leonard Spaulding Bradbury and Esther Marie Moberg Bradbury. Often said to be America's best science fiction writer, Bradbury has also earned acclaim in the fields of poetry, drama, and screenwriting. As a young boy, Bradbury's life revolved around magic, magicians, circuses, and other such fantasies. Whenever traveling circuses pitched their tents in Waukegan, Bradbury and his brother were always on hand. Blackstone the Magician came to town when Bradbury was eleven, and he attended every performance. Mr. Electrico, another magician of sorts, particularly impressed Bradbury with his death-defying electric chair act. In fact, this magician once gave young Bradbury such a convincing talk that Bradbury decided to become a magician — the best in the world!

Bradbury's love of fantasy was encouraged by his family. Their favorite time of the year was Halloween, which they celebrated with even more enthusiasm than they celebrated Christmas. When Bradbury was eight, his Aunt Neva helped him devise the grandest Halloween party imaginable. The Bradbury home was transformed into a haunted house with grinning pumpkins, ghost-like sheets hanging in the cellar, and raw chicken meat representing parts of a dead witch. In years to come, these details furnished material for Bradbury's stories.

In addition to Bradbury's magician heroes, Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, and Tarzan ranked high on his list of favorites. Bradbury read the series of books about the Emerald City of Oz, and his Aunt Neva read him the terror-filled tales of Poe. All these stories with their fantastic characters and settings were dramatic influences on Bradbury's later life.

### Literary Career

Bradbury began his writing career in 1931 at age eleven, using butcher paper that he had to unroll as his story progressed. The following year, he and his family moved from Illinois to Arizona, and that same year, Bradbury received a toy typewriter on which he wrote his first stories.

In 1934, when he was fourteen, his family moved from Arizona to Los Angeles, where his writing career began to solidify. In 1937, he became a member of the Los Angeles Science Fiction League, whose help enabled him to publish four issues of his own science-fiction fan magazine, or "fanzine," *Futura Fantasia*. Bradbury's graduation from a Los Angeles high school in 1938 ended his formal education, but he furthered it himself — at night in the library and by day at his typewriter. His first professional sale was for a short story entitled "Pendulum," co-authored with Henry Hasse; it appeared in *Super Science Stories*, August 1941, on Bradbury's twenty-first birthday. In 1942, Bradbury wrote "The Lake," the story in which he discovered his distinctive writing style. By 1943, he had given up his job selling newspapers and began writing full time, contributing numerous short stories to periodicals. His short story "The Big Black and White Game" was selected for Best American Short Stories in 1945.

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Bradbury married Marguerite McClure in 1947, and the same year, he gathered much of his best materials and published them as *Dark Carnival*, his first short story collection. From then on, Bradbury's fantasy works were published in numerous magazines throughout the country.

Bradbury says that he learned to write by recalling his own experiences. Many of his early stories are based, unsurprisingly, on his childhood experiences in Illinois. For example, "The Jar" (*Weird Tales*, 1944) is based on the first time that Bradbury saw a pickled embryo, which was displayed in a sideshow at one of the carnivals visiting his hometown. "Homecoming" (*Mademoiselle*, 1946) was inspired by his relatives' marvelous Halloween parties, and "Uncle Einar" (*Dark Carnival*, 1947), a story about a man with green wings, is based loosely on one of Bradbury's uncles.

In 1947, after *Dark Carnival* (a collection of weird and macabre stories) was published, Bradbury turned to another kind of writing — philosophical science fiction. One work in particular, *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), grew out of Bradbury's own personal philosophy and his concern for the future of humankind. *The Martian Chronicles* reflects some of the prevailing anxieties of America in the early atomic age of the 1950's: the fear of nuclear war, the longing for a simpler life, reactions against racism and censorship, and the fear of foreign political powers.

Two other highly personal works, *Dandelion Wine* (1957) and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962), also exemplify his belief that writing should come from a writer's own philosophy and from his or her own experiences. These novels are set in fictitious Green Town — which is, in reality, Bradbury's hometown of Waukegan, Illinois. The ravine described in both books is located on Yeoman Creek, and the library, which is an important setting in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, was once located on Waukegan's Sheridan Road.

In his later years, Bradbury lived in Los Angeles, was a Sunday painter, and collected Mexican artifacts. He was actively writing and lecturing most often on college campuses. He had four grown daughters and several grandchildren. Among Bradbury's latest works are *Death Is a Lonely Business* (1985), *The April Witch* (1987), *Death Has Lost Its Charm* (1987), *The Toynebee Convector* (1988), *Graveyard for Lunatics* (1990), *Folon's Folons* (1990), *Zen in the Art of Writing: Essays on Creativity* (1991), *A Chrestomathy of Ray Bradbury: A Dramatic Selection* (1991), *Yestermorrow: Obvious Answers to Impossible Futures* (1991), *Green Shadows, White Whale* (1992), *The Stars* (1993), *Quicker Than The Eye* (1996), *Driving Blind* (1997), *Dogs Think That Every Day Is Christmas* (1997), and *With Cat for Comforter* (1997). Ray Bradbury died on June 5, 2012. He was 91.

## **Honors and Achievements**

In addition to Bradbury's many books and his hundreds of short stories, works such as *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Illustrated Man*, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* have been made into major motion pictures. In addition, Bradbury has written for television, radio, and the theater.

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Ray Bradbury's work was included in the Best American Short Story collections (1946, 1948, and 1952). He was awarded the O. Henry Memorial Award, the Benjamin Franklin Award in 1954, the Aviation-Space Writer's Association Award for best space article in an American Magazine in 1967, the World Fantasy Award for lifetime achievement, and the Grand Master Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America. His animated film about the history of flight, *Icarus Montgolfier Wright*, was nominated for an academy award, and his teleplay of *The Halloween Tree* won an Emmy. Since 1985, he adapted forty-two of his short stories for *The Ray Bradbury Television Theater* on USA Cable.

Ray Bradbury's writing has been honored in many ways, but perhaps the most unusual way was when an Apollo astronaut named the Dandelion Crater on the Moon after Bradbury's novel, *Dandelion Wine*.

Outside of his literary achievements, Ray Bradbury was the idea consultant and wrote the basic scenario for the United States Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair. He conceived the metaphors for Spaceship Earth, EPCOT, Disney World, and he contributed to the conception of the Orbitron space ride at Euro-Disney, France. He was a creative consultant for the Jon Jerde Partnership, the architectural firm that blueprinted the Glendale Galleria, The Westside Pavilion in Los Angeles, and Horton Plaza in San Diego.

In a field that thrives on the fantastic and the marvelous, Ray Bradbury's best stories celebrate the everyday; in a field preoccupied with the future, Bradbury's vision is firmly rooted in the past. This particular style is evident from the influence of his childhood on his writing (*Dandelion Wine* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*), as well as from growing up in Illinois. Widely regarded as the most important figure in the development of science fiction as a literary genre, Ray Bradbury's work evokes the themes of racism, censorship, technology, nuclear war, humanistic values, and the importance of imagination.

Clearly, Bradbury kept his promise to Mr. Electrico. He did become a magician, using his pen as a magic wand to transport his readers into wondrous situations. Bradbury himself attests to this fact in an article appearing in the 1952 *Ray Bradbury Review*. He says that he simply transferred his "methods of magic from the stage to a sheet of Eaton's Bond paper — for there is something of the magician in every writer, flourishing his effects and making his miracles."