Exploring Expository Writing

Author Biography: Ray Bradbury

Don't think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can't try to do things. You simply must do things. -Ray Bradbury

Ray Bradbury is considered a great American icon whose writings continue to influence and inspire readers as they have for over sixty years. Bradbury espouses a wealth of knowledge and judgment on political and social issues, especially education. He believes that every child should learn to read and write by first grade, and adamantly proclaims that the educational system in the U.S. is a "disaster." He is a self-professed cat lover with a fear of flying, who never learned to drive, and who has a well-known aversion to computers and the Internet, yet remains one of the most prolific, well-respected, and beloved authors in history.

Bradbury was born in Waukegan, Illinois on August 22, 1920 as Rae Douglas Bradbury, the third son of Leonard Spaulding Bradbury and Esther Marie Moberg Bradbury. In the small town in Northern Illinois, he lived on the same block with three other Bradbury families—his own relatives. Growing up he often visited his grandparents' vast library to read stories like Alice in Wonderland, The Grimm Fairy Tales, and The Wizard of Oz. At an uncle's house, he had access to books about Mars and Tarzan, and to authors like H.G. Wells, Edgar Allen Poe, and Jules Verne. Although at one point Bradbury wanted to be a magician, he loved to read and write. At a young age, his mother often took him to the movies, where he was engrossed in such movies as The Hunchback of Notre Dame, The Phantom of the Opera and The Lost World and learned to recognize and develop his own creative spark.

One of the turning points in Bradbury's life occurred when he was twelve. A carnival had come to Waukegan, and a magician, Mr. Electrico, was the talk of the town. Since Bradbury wanted to be a magician, he insisted on going to the carnival. The next day, Bradbury attended the funeral of an uncle that had recently died. On their way to the wake, Bradbury begged for his father to skip the wake and go back to the carnival. Hesitantly, his father let him out of the car, and Bradbury went to visit Mr. Electrico. After showing Bradbury around, Mr. Electrico told Ray that he knew him—that he was the soul of a long lost friend—and told Bradbury to "live forever." That gave Bradbury something to live for. He now had a past and a future, and he was determined to live his life to the fullest. A few days later, he began to write seriously, and has written every day of his life since then. He later said about the incident: "I could teach everyone to ... get out of bed someday and look, as I looked when I was 12, on the fuzz on the back of my hand, and I said, I'm alive! Why didn't someone tell me? So I would tell every person to really know you're alive, as a gift ... that would really be the most important thing... in my life or anyone else's."

In 1934, the Bradbury family moved to Los Angeles, California. He attended Los Angeles High School, and was active in the drama club. After his teachers saw his writing abilities, he was encouraged to become a writer. He began to write for magazines, joined the local Science Fiction League, and his high school's Poetry Club.

After graduating from high school in 1938, Bradbury sold newspapers and continued to write. His first publications, published in 1938 and 1939, were short stories printed in his own fan magazine called Futurita Fantasia. He wasn't paid for his work, however, until 1941 with the publication of his story "Pendulum" in the magazine, Super Science Stories. By 1943, he began writing full-time, after leaving his job selling newspapers. His short story "The Big Black and White Game" was chosen in 1945 for Best American Short Stories, an anthology published every year since 1915. His short stories would again make the distinction of this list in 1946, 1948, and 1952.

In 1946 he met his future wife Marguerite "Maggie" McClure, a graduate of UCLA. Ray and Maggie were married in Los Angeles on September 27, 1947, and were together for over fifty years. In that same year, Bradbury's first collection of short stories, Dark Carnival, was published. Bradbury became further acclaimed for The Martian Chronicles, a series of short stories exploring the widespread fear of nuclear war and the threat of foreign political powers that plagued Americans in the 1950s.
In 1949, the first of the Bradburys' four daughters, Susan, was born. It is reported that the Bradburys only had $10 in the bank at the time they found out they were expecting. Later, daughters Ramona (born in 1951), Bettina (born in 1955) and Alexandra (born in 1958) joined the Bradbury family.

Another of Bradbury's best-known works, *Fahrenheit 451*, was published in 1953 in *Galaxy Science Fiction* magazine as the short story "The Fireman." According to Bradbury, the inspiration for the book came from an incident in Los Angeles in 1949 when he and a friend were stopped and questioned by police for no reason. At the time, a great paranoia had America by the throat—a period of extreme censorship and accusations of what were perceived as "anti-American" activities.

Viewed as one of the most prophetic books of all time, *Fahrenheit 451*'s eerie similarity to our modern-day life is astounding. According to Bradbury, he was considering the impact of radio and the newly-invented television when he wrote the book. He also explored lack of education, stating that he foresaw a time in the future when teachers no longer taught reading so books were no longer a necessity. He describes a fictional future in which people are bombarded with sensation and stimulation—which ultimately takes the place of thinking.

Bradbury's love for theater also motivated him to become involved in Hollywood. He wrote several screenplays, including the movie *Moby Dick*, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1953. He developed his own cable series entitled *Ray Bradbury Theater*, which ran from 1986 to 1992, where he adapted over sixty of his short stories for television. His works have also been seen in such television shows as *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *The Twilight Zone*, and *Night Gallery*.


Bradbury's work has won numerous honors, including the O. Henry Memorial Award, the Benjamin Franklin Award, the Aviation-Space Writer's Association Award for Best Space Article in an American Magazine, the World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement, the Grand Master Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America, the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, and the National Medal of Arts. One of Bradbury's most unusual, yet flattering awards was from an Apollo 15 astronaut who named a moon crater "Dandelion" after Bradbury's novel, *Dandelion Wine*.

Bradbury worked as an idea consultant for the World's Fair in 1964, helped to design *Spaceship Earth* for Disney World, and later contributed to the conception of the *Orbitron* space ride at Euro-Disney in France.

In November 1999, Bradbury suffered a stroke which hospitalized him. Despite his subsequent confinement to a wheelchair, Bradbury still continued to write. Arguably his most striking personal blow, however, came in 2003, when Maggie, his wife of 56 years, passed away.

Bradbury currently lives in Los Angeles with his much-adored cats, still writing every single day.