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## Lesson One

### FOCUS: Biography

The author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a novel. For example, authors often integrate their personal experience into a story. *Fahrenheit 451* is, in some ways, the author's tribute to the role that books and libraries have played in his life. After all, Bradbury wrote hundreds of works (novels, stories, screenplays, essays, and poems) with only a high school education and a worn out library card. However, while we more fully understand the book as we learn about the author, the artistry of the novel does not succeed or fail based on the author's life. The novel—a work of art—has an internal structure independent of the author's personality.

### Discussion Activities

Listen to The Big Read CD, Track One (17 minutes). Students will take notes as they listen and will present the three most important points they learned from the CD.

Copy Reader's Guide essays, "Ray Bradbury" (pp.4-5), "*Fahrenheit 451* and Censorship" (pp.6-7), and "Bradbury and His Other Works" (pp.12-13). Divide the class into groups. Assign one essay to each group. After reading and discussing the essays, each group will present what they have learned from the essay. Ask students to add a creative twist to make their presentation memorable.

The novel begins: "[I]t was a pleasure to burn." Why does Bradbury start the novel in this way? Why might it be more pleasurable to burn books rather than read them?

### Writing Exercise

Bradbury begins the novel with a quote from Juan Ramón Jiménez: "If they give you ruled paper, write the other way." Why did Bradbury select this statement, and what does it mean? Write two paragraphs on how this statement relates to what students have learned about Bradbury's life.

Write one page about a book that opened new doors for you. If a book had a profound impact on you, explain why. If the book was pleasurable, explain in detail what kind of pleasure you experienced. Share your writing with one classmate. Have students present their books, ideas, and conclusions to the class.

### Homework

Read Handout One: "The Fifties." Read to page 31\* of the novel. Consider the differences between Montag's life and Clarisse's life.

\* Page numbers refer to the Random House Publishing Group 1996 edition of *Fahrenheit 451*.