

Instructor's Guide

Note To Teachers

A true literary living legend, Ray Bradbury was born August 22, 1920 in Waukegan, Illinois. Graduating from a Los Angeles high school in 1938, he became a full-time writer in 1943, contributing numerous short stories to periodicals before publishing a collection of them, *Dark Carnival*, in 1947.

The Martian Chronicles established Ray Bradbury's reputation as a writer of courage and vision. Published in 1950, *The Martian Chronicles* describes the first attempts of Earth people to conquer and colonize Mars, and the unintended consequences. *Fahrenheit 451*, published in 1953 and considered to be Ray Bradbury's masterpiece, is a scathing indictment of censorship set in a future world where the written word is forbidden. In 1962, Bradbury published *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, a coming-of-age tale that tells of the desperate attempt of 13-year-old boys Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade to save their town from the evil carnival of Cooger & Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show. The novel endures today as an unparalleled American literary classic and is a favorite of Ray Bradbury's devoted fan base.

In all, Bradbury has published more than thirty books, close to 600 short stories, and numerous poems, essays, and plays. His short stories have appeared in more than 1,000 school curriculums "recommended reading" anthologies.

Ray Bradbury's work has been included in four Best American Short Story collections. He has been awarded the O. Henry Memorial Award, the Benjamin Franklin Award, the World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement, the Grand Master Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America, and the PEN Center USA West Lifetime Achievement Award, among others. In November 2000, the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters was conferred upon Mr. Bradbury at the 2000 National Book Awards Ceremony in New York City.

Ray Bradbury has written for the theater and cinema, including the screenplay for John Huston's classic adaptation of *Moby Dick*. He has been nominated for an Academy Award (for his animated film *Icarus Montgolfier Wright*), and has won an Emmy Award (for his teleplay of *The Halloween Tree*) and has adapted sixty-five of his stories for television's *Ray Bradbury Theater*. He was the creative consultant on the United States Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair. In 1982 he created the interior metaphors for the Spaceship Earth

display at Epcot Center, Disney World, and later contributed to the conception of the Orbitron space ride at Euro-Disney, France. On April 1, 2002, Ray Bradbury received the 2,193 star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, initiating in Los Angeles the “One Book, One City L.A.” reading program, the goal of which was to have the citizens of Los Angeles simultaneously read and discuss Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*.

Questions For Class Discussion

1. In the first chapter of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, how does the foreshadowing of evil in the appearance of Mr. Fury, the lightning-rod salesman, set the overall tone for the book?
2. The use of symbolism in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is heavily employed by Ray Bradbury to establish the unique personalities of Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade. How do Will and Jim’s surnames and birth dates provide insights into their character? (“Nightshade. That’s quite a name.” “And only fitting,” said Will Halloway. “I was born one minute *before* midnight, October thirtieth. Jim was born one minute *after* midnight, which makes it October thirty-first.” “Halloween,” said Jim.” p.6). Discuss the numerous symbolic references and descriptive language Bradbury filters throughout the book that pointedly illuminate the divergent traits of the boys.
3. From the outset, the sudden appearance in the town of Green Town, Illinois of Cooger & Dark’s Pandemonium Shadow Show is a cause for concern. What clues does Ray Bradbury provide that illustrate from the beginning that the carnival is sinister?
4. Age is the recurring theme in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and is the ammunition that drives Mr. Dark to prey upon the vulnerability of the townspeople. Charles Halloway, Will’s father, is haunted by the fact that he is fifty-four-years-old and the father of a teenaged boy (“... Will ... makes me feel so *old* ... a man should play baseball with his son. ...” p. 37), while, much to the distress of Will, Jim yearns to ride on the carousel in order to be twenty-years-old (“You think *I* like being thirteen all of the time? Not me! But for cry-yi, Jim, face it, you don’t *really* want to be twenty!” “What *else* we talked about all summer?” p. 127). Miss Foley, Will and Jim’s seventh grade teacher, feels the lure of the carousel and becomes a victim of its evil when she heartbreakingly becomes a little girl who grieves for her lost adult self (“... someone must help me ... must help *her* ...” she mourned as for

- one dead, “someone must help her . . . nobody will . . . nobody has . . . help her if not me . . . terrible . . . terrible . . .” p. 159). What is Ray Bradbury saying in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* about the concept of age?
5. Explain the complex father-son relationship between Charles and Will Halloway in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. How does Will’s perception of his father evolve throughout the book from wariness and shame (“Way down the third book corridor, an oldish man whispered his broom along in the dark, mounding the fallen spices. . . . Will stared. It was always a surprise—that old man, his work his name. That’s Charles William Halloway, thought Will, not grandfather, not far-wandering, ancient uncle, as some might think, but . . . my *father*.” pp. 13-14) to admiration and hero worship (“Oh, Dad, Dad, you *did* it, you did it!” “No, we did it together.” “But without you it’d be all over. Oh, Dad, I never knew you. I sure know you now.” p. 287).
 6. Analyze the intense bond of friendship between Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade. Do you feel it is a healthy relationship that is equally appreciated by the two boys? Based on the behavior of Will and Jim in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, whom would you choose to be your friend and why?
 7. Jim Nightshade’s mother is a minor player in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, making only one speaking appearance in the book, yet what she says has significant haunting resonance. Explain the brief conversation between her and Jim on pp. 40-41. What insights does this exchange between Jim and his mother reveal about Jim’s tragic family background and his innate character?
 8. Why don’t the freaks stop Charles and Will Halloway from destroying Cooger & Dark’s Pandemonium Shadow Show? How do you feel about the role of the freaks in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*? Are they innocent victims of Mr. Dark, or are they willing accomplices to carry out his master plan of evil?
 9. What is the core theme of Ray Bradbury’s *Something Wicked This Way Comes*? Is it age? Temptation? Good versus evil? Happiness and laughter in life always triumphs over sadness and adversity? Explain what you feel to be the ultimate message of the book and if you agree with it.

Topics For Research And Writing Projects

1. In the prologue for *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, Ray Bradbury measures time in the succinct way that children do by assigning “good” months and “bad” months to the calendar year (“First of all, it was October, a rare month for boys. Not that all months aren’t rare. But there be bad and good, as the pirates say. Take September, a bad month: school begins. Consider August, a good month: school hasn’t begun yet.” p.1). Write an essay explaining which months are “good” and “bad” for you, taking into account personal things that may have occurred (i.e., birthdays, anniversaries, deaths, etc.) in your life to shade your feelings towards those months.
2. Ray Bradbury utilizes smells and sounds in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* in order to provoke profound sensory memories and emotions from his characters. Mr. Crosetti, the barber, weeps when he smells the distinctive scent of cotton candy in the air, reminded of his distant youth (“I haven’t smelled that in years,” said Mr. Crosetti. Jim snorted. “It’s around.” “Yes, but who notices? When? Now, my nose tells me, breathe! And I’m crying. Why? Because I remember how a long time ago, boys ate that stuff. Why haven’t I stopped to think and smell the last thirty years?” p.22). Charles Halloway becomes melancholy by hearing a Christmas song in October (“It was a tune from another season, one that never ceased making Charles Halloway sad when he heard it. The song was incongruous for October, but immensely moving, overwhelming, no matter what day of what month it was sung.” p. 23), while train whistles at night make his son Will cry (“Way late at night Will had heard—how often?—train whistles jetting steam along the rim of sleep, forlorn, alone and far, no matter how near they came. Sometimes he woke to find tears on his cheek, asked why, lay back, listened and thought, Yes! *they* make me cry, going east, going west, the trains of far gone in country deeps they drown in tides of sleep that escape the towns.” p. 49). Write an essay detailing what smells and sounds have a profound emotional effect on you. Do these smells and sounds have negative or positive connotations to you? How do they make you feel and react?
3. In order to understand what is happening in his hometown since the arrival of Cooger & Dark’s Pandemonium Shadow Show, Charles Halloway uses his beloved library to research the history of carnivals. Prepare a research paper documenting the history of carnivals in the United States. When did carnivals first appear in the United States? How

have people throughout the years perceived them? How did carnivals obtain their motley entourage of freaks? Are carnivals still popular in certain parts of the country, or are they representative of a bygone, simpler era?

4. *Something Wicked This Way Comes* was adapted into a 1983 motion picture starring Jason Robards and Jonathan Pryce, with the screenplay written by Ray Bradbury. Rent the video, and then write a paper comparing and contrasting the book and the movie. Is the movie faithful to the story line of the original book? Did you prefer the book to the movie, or vice versa?

Suggestions For Further Reading

Also by Ray Bradbury: *Dark Carnival, Death Is a Lonely Business, Driving Blind, Fahrenheit 451, From the Dust Returned, I Sing the Body Electric!, The Golden Apples of the Sun, A Graveyard for Lunatics, The Martian Chronicles, A Medicine for Melancholy, Quicker Than the Eye*