Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for
The Martian Chronicles
by
Ray Bradbury

Book Information
Ray Bradbury, The Martian Chronicles
Quiz Number: 12790
Bantam Books, 1954
ISBN 0-553-27822-3; LCCN
181 Pages
Book Level: 6.2
Interest Level: UG

These haunting stories about man's attempt to explore and settle Mars capture both beauty and horror.

Topics: Adventure, Discovery/Exploration; Classics, Classics (All); Emotions, Fear; Fantasy/Imagination, Dreams; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Science Fiction, Other Worlds

Main Characters
"Tom" Martian who assumes many identities
Benjamin Driscoll a tree-planting Johnny Appleseed of Mars
Biggs one of the crew members of the Fourth Expedition
David Lustig navigator of the Third Expedition
Elma Parkhill wife of Sam
Garrett an investigator of Moral Climates
Grandpa Quartermain the man who encourages Teece to let Silly go
Hathaway a physician/geologist of the Fourth Expedition; one of a few remaining people on Mars after the Great War on Earth
Jeff Spender archaeologist of the Fourth Expedition who identifies with the Martians of the vacant cities
John Black captain of the Third Expedition
Mr. K (Ylla) Martian woman who dreams of first Earth men arriving on Mars
Mr. William Stendahl vengeance-seeking owner of a Mars reproduction of the House of Usher
Mr. Xxx a Martian psychologist
Muhe Ca the Martian whom Tomas meets
Pikes a former actor and now partner of Stendahl, who plots the murder of those who censure fantasy
Sam Parkhill destructive crew member of the Fourth Expedition who later opens a hot dog stand on Mars
Samuel Hinkston archaeologist of the Third Expedition
Samuel W. Teece bigoted hardware proprietor on Earth
Silly a seventeen-year-old black boy who works for Teece
Tomas Gomez an Earth man who meets an other-reality Martian
Walter Gripp the "last" man on Mars, who chooses a solitary life rather than being with the last woman
Wilder captain of the Fourth Expedition and of later expeditions to Pluto and Jupiter
William, his wife, and sons, Timothy, Robert and Michael a Minnesota family that journeys to Mars to build a new Martian civilization free of Earth influences

Vocabulary
euthanasia the act of putting to death painlessly; mercy killing
hydroponic the cultivation of plants by placing the roots in liquid nutrient solutions rather than in soil
warrens mazelike places containing many passageways or small rooms

Synopsis
This science fiction story chronicles Earth's attempt to explore and populate Mars. Mars is represented as an ancient civilization that at first succeeds in repelling three early expeditions from Earth by means of telepathy, misdirection, and murder. In the process, Martians are introduced to a common Earth disease for which they have no immunity, and with the exception of a few, their population is wiped out.

The story becomes one of how the conquerors from
Earth seek to import and introduce the values and ways of Earth to the Martian environment. Ironically, those same values and ways are now leading to the destruction of Earth by atomic war. The reader is given glimpses of people who wish to see and do things differently on Mars, but for the most part, those people have little influence due to the unending streams of new immigrants and human insensitivity. When the final conflict breaks out on Earth, the space emigrants are called back, leaving only a few individuals on Mars to witness what appears to be the Earth engulfed in total war.

At the end of the story, one rocket ship family with sons lands on Mars in the hopes of beginning a new Martian civilization. This time, free of Earthly influences as represented by the burning of Earth documents and cessation of radio signals, the family hopes for the successful landing of a ship known to have left Earth bearing a family with daughters. They are determined to have a better human life as new Martians.

**Literary Analysis**
How is the picture of the American family of the 1950s reflected in the projections the author makes of both family life in the new century and Martian marriages?

*Most of the marriages show an at-home wife as the helpmate, performing cooking and other domestic chores while the man has a career or provides for the family in some way.*

**Inferential Comprehension**
How did Spender challenge Captain Wilder?

*In a concrete sense, he caused problems for Wilder by disrupting the unity of the crew. On a deeper level, he challenged Wilder to see himself as a steward on this new planet, to think about the meaning and repercussions of the men’s actions, to treat Mars with a reverence. We learn that Captain Wilder was, in a sense, exiled to Jupiter and Pluto for advocating this philosophy.*

**Constructing Meaning**
What insight into human nature do we gain from *The Martian Chronicles*?

*Possible responses: our problems follow us wherever we go; visionaries’ ideas are often unheeded; our basic nature is difficult to change; we are a people of conquest and control; we have a tremendous need for companionship.*

**Teachable Skills**

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors**
The *Martian Chronicles* showed Southern blacks leaving earth en masse. Samuel Teece expresses outrage and has an attitude of "what more do they want?" Research the plight of the Southern black during the 1950s. Find out the nature of the Jim Crow laws. What real rights did black people have? What role did the U.S. Supreme Court play in perpetuating racial inequality?

**Comparing and Contrasting**
The major religions of the world all have prophets that point out wrong-doings and call people to a more noble...
existence. Research the role of prophet. Choose a prophet and learn how he/she shaped the history of a particular faith or region. Examine the role Spender played in *The Martian Chronicles*. In what way is he a prophet? Compare and contrast him to the prophet you learned about.

**Identifying Reasons** During the course of the story we see characters interacting with proprietors of various businesses or using a particular service on Mars. If you were to go to Mars, what business would you like to get involved in or own? Why? How would your product be useful to the inhabitants?

**Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning** The Martians in the story wear masks. They have, in a way, ritualized or formalized the "invisible" masks we wear when we hide our feelings. Have students go through the book and list who and when a Martian wore a mask. Write down the real emotion behind that mask. Examine your own life and find a time that you hid behind a mask and did not reveal your true feelings. Create a mask of your own, but in this case, show on the mask what you really felt. Was it boredom, fear, insecurity, disgust, sadness, joy?