

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

Book Information

Ray Bradbury, The Martian Chronicles

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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 (YII) Martian man and husband of Ylla who murders the men of the First Expedition

Mr. William Stendahl vengeance-seeking owner of a Mars reproduction of the House of Usher

Mr. Xxx a Martian psychologist

Mrs. K (Ylla) Martian woman who dreams of first Earth men arriving on Mars

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

ethanasia 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

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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.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

What stopped Williamson from destroying the likenesses of Hathaway's family?

He was touched by their humanness and goodness. He had entered the hut with the intention of turning them off or shooting them, for he had only seen them before as robots, creations of a lonely man. He came to see their dignity and genuineness, and felt it would be murder if he destroyed them.

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

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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?