

Dossier de Synthèse: The Meaning of Art

Prenez connaissance des documents A, B et C et traitez le sujet suivant en anglais :
Write a commentary on the three documents (about 500 words): taking into account their specificities, analyse how the three documents deal with the issue of censorship.

Document A

In the 21st century, books have been outlawed by the state and must be burnt by firemen. Montag, the hero, is one of them. He and other firemen are hunting down books and burning them.

A fountain of books sprang down upon Montag as he climbed shuddering up the sheer stairwell. How inconvenient! Always before it had been like snuffing a candle. The police went first and adhesive-taped the victim's mouth and bandaged him off into their glittering beetle cars, so when you arrived you found an empty house. You weren't hurting anyone, you were hurting only *things*! And since things really couldn't be hurt, since things felt nothing, and things don't scream or whimper, as this woman might begin to scream and cry out, there was nothing to tease your conscience later. You were simply cleaning up. Janitorial¹ work, essentially. Everything to its proper place. Quick with the kerosene! Who's got a match!

But now, tonight, someone had slipped. This woman was spoiling the ritual. The men were making too much noise, laughing, joking to cover her terrible accusing silence below. She made the empty rooms roar with accusation and shake down a fine dust of guilt that was sucking in their nostrils as they plunged about. It was neither cricket nor correct. Montag felt an immense irritation. She shouldn't be here, on top of everything!

Books bombarded his shoulders, his arms, his upturned face. A book lit, almost obediently, like a white pigeon, in his hands, wings fluttering. In the dim, wavering light, a page hung open and it was like a snowy feather, the words delicately painted thereon². In all the rush and fervor, Montag had only an instant to read a line, but it blazed in his mind for the next minute as if stamped there with fiery steel. "Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine." He dropped the book. Immediately, another fell into his arms.

"Montag, up here!"

Montag's hand closed like a mouth, crushed the book with wild devotion, with an insanity of mindlessness to his chest. The men above were hurling shovelfuls of magazines into the dusty air. They fell like slaughtered birds and the woman stood below, like a small girl, among the bodies.

Ray BRADBURY, *Fahrenheit 451*, 1954

¹ Janitorial work: work to do with cleaning and repairing.

² Thereon: on it.

Document B

In a small town a battle over a book

If a group of local parents had let her speak to them before "The Catcher in the Rye"¹ was banned from her high school, Shelley Keller-Gage says she would have told them she believes it is a highly moral book that deals with the kinds of difficulties their own children are facing.

5 But Mrs. Keller-Gage, an English teacher, was asked not to speak, and a small group of people led by a woman who says she has not read - and never would read - such a book, persuaded the school board to ban it this month from the Boron High School supplementary reading list.

10 "Unfortunately, what happened is not at all unusual," said Anne Levinson, assistant director of the Office of Intellectual Freedom in Chicago. "Censorship is still very much with us. As a matter of fact, I think 'The Catcher in the Rye' is a perennial No. 1 on the censorship hit list."

Ms. Levinson said J. D. Salinger's 1951 novel about a troubled teenager named Holden Caulfield seems to have a narrow lead over John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and 15 Men" and "Grapes of Wrath" in arousing the objections of communities or special-interest groups that are increasingly moving to ban books. [...]

On Wednesday, People for the American Way, a group that opposes censorship, issued a report listing 172 incidents in 42 states of attempted or successful censorship in schools in the last year, illustrating what the group's president, Arthur 20 Kropp, called "an unreasonable undercurrent of fear about the so-called 'dangers' of public school instruction."

The report, the group's seventh annual censorship roundup, said efforts to restrict books and curriculums from classrooms and school libraries were on the rise nationwide, with nearly half of them succeeding. [...]

25 Although "The Catcher in the Rye" is now banned from Boron's classrooms, it has gained a new readership among townspeople, and Helen Nelson, the local librarian, has a waiting list of 15 people for the book, which she says has been sitting on the shelf all these years pretty much unnoticed. [...]

Mrs. Keller-Gage said she observed this same poignant and ultimately impossible 30 hope among the Boron townspeople who banned the book.

"They're wanting to preserve the innocence of the children," she said, "and I think that instead of trying to preserve their innocence, we have to try to deal with these children losing their innocence. I think society is the one that is kind of taking the innocence away. Things are not innocent anymore, and I think we've got to help them 35 deal with that, to make reasonable choices, to be responsible citizens."

Seth MYDANS, *The New York Times*, September 3, 1989

¹ A novel by J. D. Salinger published in 1951, which led to much controversy. Its detractors denounced its use of vulgar language, blasphemy and violence.