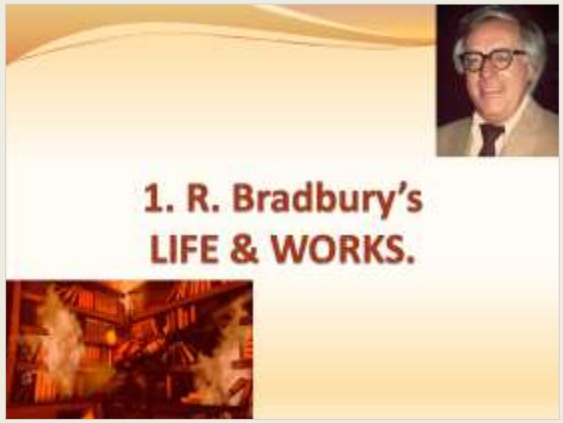
RAY BRADBURY

(Waukegan, 22nd August 1920 – Los Angeles, 5th June 2012)

American author best known for his highly imaginative short stories and novels, he inspired generations of readers and viewers to dream, think, and create. His shockingly prophetic dystopian work *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) has been highly praised for its stance against censorship and its defense of literature as necessary to civilization.

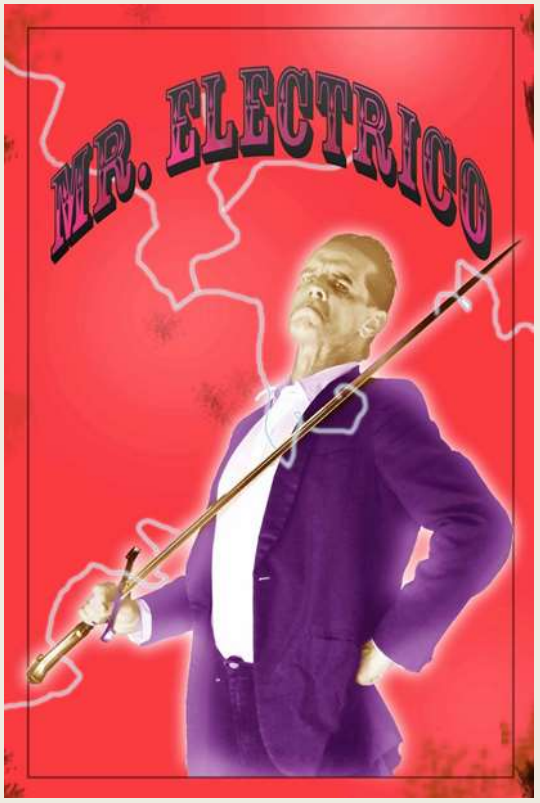
SECTION SUMMARY



1. R. Bradbury's LIFE & WORKS.

RAY BRADBURY

- **1920:** he was born in Waukegan, Illinois, and always maintained strong ties to his small-town upbringing.
  - As a child, he loved horror films such as *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) and enjoyed immensely the first science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*.
- **1932:** he had an encounter with a carnival magician which sparked his writing life.
  - Wreathed in static electricity Mr. Electrico touched him on the nose with his energy-charged sword, and said, *"Live forever!"* Bradbury later said, *"I decided that it was the greatest idea I had ever heard. I started writing every day and never stopped."*



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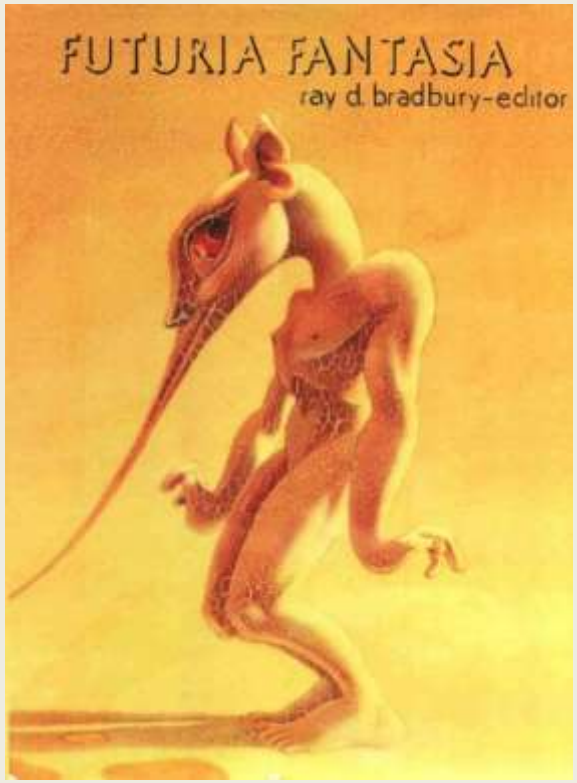
- **1934:** his family moved to Los Angeles and in **1937** he joined the Los Angeles Science Fiction League.



- **1939:** he published his own "fanzine", *Futuria Fantasia,* making his first sale to a professional science fiction magazine in **1941** with his short story *Pendulum*.

  Many of Bradbury's **earliest stories** present **elements of fantasy and horror** and in the mid-1940s they started to appear in major magazines

RAY BRADBURY

It was the beginning of a career that spanned seventy-plus years in which he wrote **more than 400 short stories** and **nearly fifty books** across **a variety of genres**. He also penned numerous **poems, essays, plays, operas, teleplays, and screenplays** receiving **many honours** for his work.

- **1947:** he married Marguerite McClure and they had four daughters (Susan, Ramona, Bettina and Alexandra).

His wife of 56 years, Maggie, as she was affectionately called, was the only woman Bradbury ever dated!

FANTASY in BRADBURY's LIFE

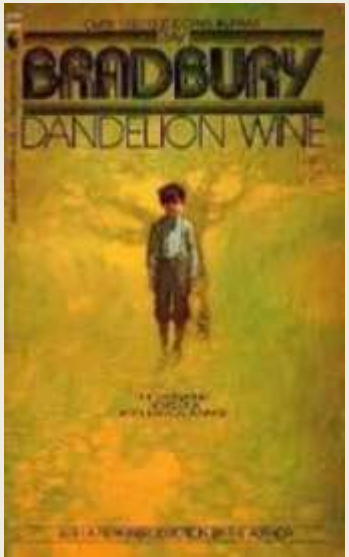
- Not only did Bradbury create fantastical worlds with pen and paper, he also lived in a surreal world of his own creation. His home basement office was filled with items that tickled his imagination: cartoons, figurines, stuffed animals, masks, and magic.

- He delighted in doodling, sketching, and painting: he especially loved to draw devil faces, pumpkins, cats, and monsters, and even painted a *Halloween Tree* which would become a fantasy novel (1972).

RAY BRADBURY

- **1953**: he published the collection *The Golden Apples of the Sun* and his masterpiece, *Fahrenheit 451*, of which the Boston Globe wrote

  «It's life-changing if you read it as a teen, and still stunning when you reread it as an adult. Censorship is at the core of the novel, which is both a literary thriller and a dark meditation on the future of humanity.»



- **1957**: he published *Dandelion Wine*, an autobiographical novel about a magical but too brief summer of a 12-year-old boy in Green Town, Illinois. His final novel, *Farewell Summer* (2006), was a sequel to it.

RAY BRADBURY

- **1962:** the Midwest of his childhood was once again the setting of his new novel, *Something Wicked This Way Comes,* in which a carnival comes to town run by the mysterious and evil Mr. Dark.
- **the 1970s**: he turned his energy to poetry and drama while in **the 1980s** he returned to the mystery genre, so dear to him earlier in his career.
- **2012**: he died at the age of 91 after a long illness.

HIS PASSION FOR…TOYS!!!

- Bradbury never lost his childlike sense of play, fun, and expressiveness: **each Christmas**, he would ask his wife to give him **toys** instead of any other gifts so his grandchildren remember him as having more toys than they did!

- He had toy ray guns, robots, stuffed dinosaurs, oversized stuffed animals and even **a head floating in a glass jar**—courtesy of Alfred Hitchcock!!!

SHORT-SIGHTED OR… LONG-SIGHTED?

- Though physically short-sighted he saw far into the future and had **a deep concern for the welfare and destiny of men.**

- Through his stories and in his life, he imagined **ways to create a better world** and **offered cautions designed to sustain the one we have**.

- Although he had no scientific or technical training, he had an innate sense of what might come in the future: from man's **interplanetary explorations**, which fascinated him, to his **loss of critical thinking**, which scared him.

2. FAHRENHEIT 451.

FAHRENHEIT 451 (1953)

- Regarded as Bradbury's greatest work, ***Fahrenheit 451*** was written not long after the Nazis burned books and, eventually, human beings. At the time America was living under a cloud of fear created by McCarthyism, which brought political **repression**, **blacklists** and **censorship** of literature and art.

- Using the **science fiction motif of dystopia** Bradbury presents a totalitarian, highly centralized, and, therefore, oppressive social organization that sacrifices individual expression for the sake of efficiency and social harmony, all of which are achieved through technocratic means.

THE PLOT

- The story takes place in an **unspecified city** in a **distant future**. The protagonist, Guy Montag, is a fireman whose job is to burn down houses in which books have been discovered.

- Montag takes great joy in his work until, after leaving the fire department one day, he meets Clarisse, a cheerful free-spirited teenager who loves life and nature and has an open curious mind: their brief friendship spark's Montag's awakening.

- Later, when the firemen are sent to burn down the house of an elderly lady, who chooses to die with her books, Montag starts to have doubts about his mission…

3. CHARACTERS, THEMES, STYLE, SYMBOLS.

MAIN CHARACTERS (1)

1. **Guy Montag** is by no means a real hero: clumsy and confused, misguided and often frustrated, he acts rashly and is too easily swayed but he seeks answers to his growing discontent. This will allow him to experience an epiphany…

2. **Clarisse McClellan**, *seventeen and crazy,* has an open and curious mind about the world around her. The questions she asks Montag impel him toward a painful but necessary self-examination which will spur him into action.

3. **Professor Faber** acts as the brain directing Montag's body. Cowardly and heroic by turns, he believes in the integrity of the individual.

MAIN CHARACTERS (2)

4. **Mildred Montag** represents shallowness and mediocrity. Completely immersed in an electronic world, she is totally acquiescent to a technological chamber of horrors. Unsurprisingly she is the one who denounces Montag…

5. **Captain Beatty** is a complex character, full of contradictions. He is a book burner with a vast knowledge of literature and a very dangerously perceptive manipulator.

6. **The Mechanical Hound**, an omnipresent menace, stands for government control and manipulation of technology.

KEY THEMES: CENSORSHIP

1. **WHY** are **BOOKS BANNED**? For two groups of factors:
   a. those that lead to a **general lack of interest in reading**, as
      - the popularity of competing forms of entertainment like **television and radio**;
      - a lifestyle with **too much stimulation** in which no one has the time to concentrate;
      - an **overwhelming** mass of **published material**.
   b. those that make people hostile towards books, i.e. **envy**.
      - People don't like to feel inferior to those who have read more than they have.
      - Special-interest groups and "minorities" object to things in books that offend them.

THE RESULT?

- For Bradbury, books were **repositories of knowledge and ideas**: without them we are left blissfully unaware of what is really happening in the world around us.

"Without libraries what have we?
We have no past and no future."

- Censorship leaves us with an inadequate and distorted picture of reality: thus we can be **easily manipulated** and ultimately **deprived of our freedom**:

"It's not books you need, it's some of the things that once were in books... [We need] the right to carry out actions based on what we learn [from books]. . . ."

KEY THEMES: TECHNOLOGY

2. **TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION** represents the central source of society's problems: it is seen as inherently

   a. **anesthetizing**, since new forms of media, like television and in-ear radios have a mesmerizing, immersive effect;

   b. **destructive**:

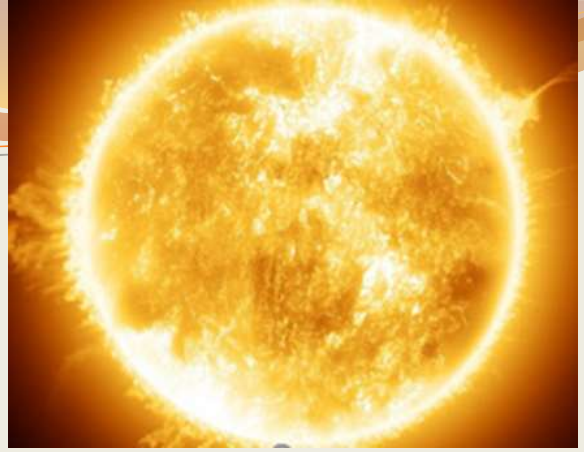
   - the **automobile** encourages fast, reckless driving and result in many fatal accidents;
   - the **Mechanical Hound**, a metal contraption designed to track down and kill lawbreakers, is easy to manipulate to nefarious ends;
   - the **atomic bomb** is an ever-present threat maintaining an atmosphere of anxiety.

OTHER THEMES

3. **IGNORANCE vs KNOWLEDGE**: the fire-man's responsibility is to burn those *"treacherous weapons"*, books, and therefore destroy knowledge. Through these actions, ignorance is promoted, to maintain the sameness of society in the name of a life of instant pleasure.
   - But what does true happiness consist of? Is ignorance bliss, or do knowledge and learning provide true happiness?

4. **LIFE vs DEATH**: many people die in the novel and the commonality of suicide attempts and saves blurs the line between life and death in this futuristic society. Montag, though, survives…
   - What saves him? His interest in knowledge and his dedication to a new and better society.

SYMBOLS (1)



- The **key symbol** is **fire**.
  - *At the beginning* of the book, it symbolizes the pleasure of **destruction**. It's an emblem of danger and a mark of artistry.
  - *By the end* of the novel, however, it turns into a symbol for **life**, becoming one with the sun:

"And what lights the sun? Its own fire.
And the sun goes on, day after day, burning and burning."

Burning no longer destroys. Instead, the perpetual fire of the sun keeps the world alive.

- **Blood** symbolizes people's **instincts** and **primal urges**. **Emotions**, for example, are described as circulating through a person's body, as blood does.

SYMBOLS (2)

- The **Electric-Eyed Snake**.

- It's the machine used to replace Mildred's poisoned blood with fresh blood after her overdose of sleeping pills and it represents the **removal of** the **misery and self-hatred** she possesses, replacing it with complacency and delusion.
- This is ultimately what the authorities want from people: complete and unchallenged acceptance of the *status quo*.

- **The Phoenix.**

After the bombing of the city, humanity is compared to a phoenix that burns itself up and then rises out of its ashes over and over again. It's the symbol of the **cyclical nature of history** and **the rebirth of mankind** as well as of **Montag's spiritual resurrection**.

STYLE & TONE

- The style of the book is **lyrical and descriptive**: it makes frequent use of **similes**, **metaphors**, and **personification**.

- The tone of *Fahrenheit 451* is **intense and gloomy** given by
  - the **apocalyptic atmosphere** that hangs over the city, constantly **threatening nuclear war**;
  - the **totalitarian policies** which are applied in Montag's society to punish citizens who break society's rules;
  - **extreme violence** both **in the real world and on TV**: when the Mechanical Hound is sent after Montag the chase is broadcast on live television, concluding with the dramatic capture and execution of an innocent lookalike.

A DYSTOPIAN NOVEL? YES…

- If we compare *Fahrenheit 451* with A. Huxley's *Brave New World* or G. Orwell's *1984* we find many points of **SIMILARITY**: all three authors imagine

  1. a technocratic social order accomplished through the **suppression of books** — that is, through censorship;
  2. a social order maintained through **oppression and regimentation** and by the complete effacement of the individual;
  3. a populace distracted by **the pursuit of images**, which has the effect of **creating politically enervated individuals**.

… and NO!

- In **CONTRAST** to dystopian novels, though, Bradbury
  1. does **not** focus on **a ruling elite**;
  2. does **not** portray **a higher society**;
  3. does **not despair**.

- While Huxley shows a cynical view of the intellectual & Orwell reveals his despair at the British working-class political consciousness, **Bradbury's** work reflects
  - the author's inherent (and very American!) **optimism**;
  - his **trust in the virtue of the individual** despite the inherently corrupt nature of government.

4. CONCLUSIONS & LEGACY.

BRADBURY'S LEGACY (1)

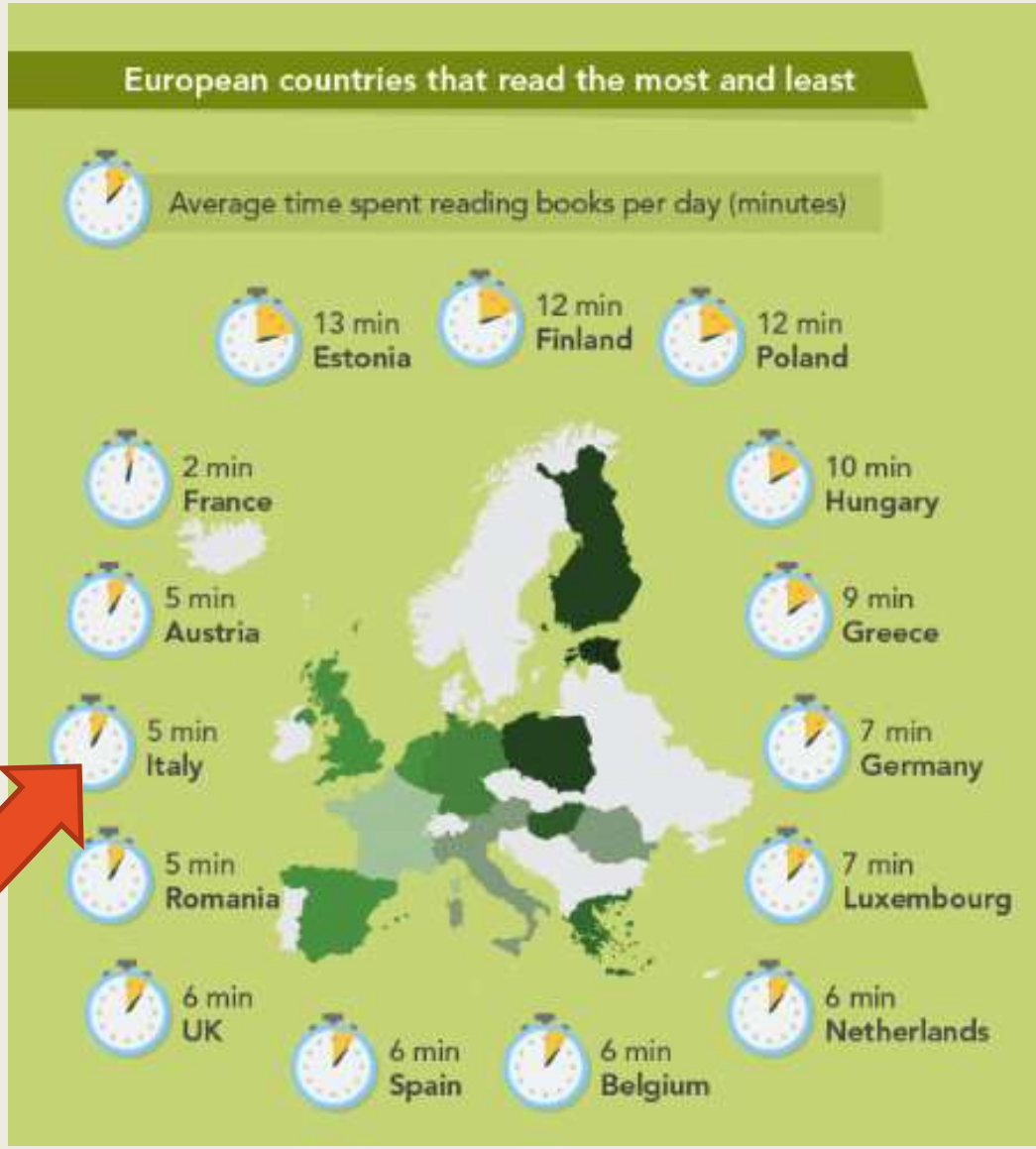
- Bradbury's most valuable contributions to humanity are the **warnings** he gave us: he was worried about

1. **the threat of mass media to reading;**
2. **the bombardment of digital sensations** that could substitute for critical thinking;
3. **the loss of our memory**.

WHAT has ACTUALLY HAPPENED?

MASS MEDIA & READING

- Thanks to research from Global English Editing we have some really interesting information about **reading habits around the world**.
- This infograph refers to **2018** and tells us about what is happening **in Europe**.
- Take a look at **Italy**…



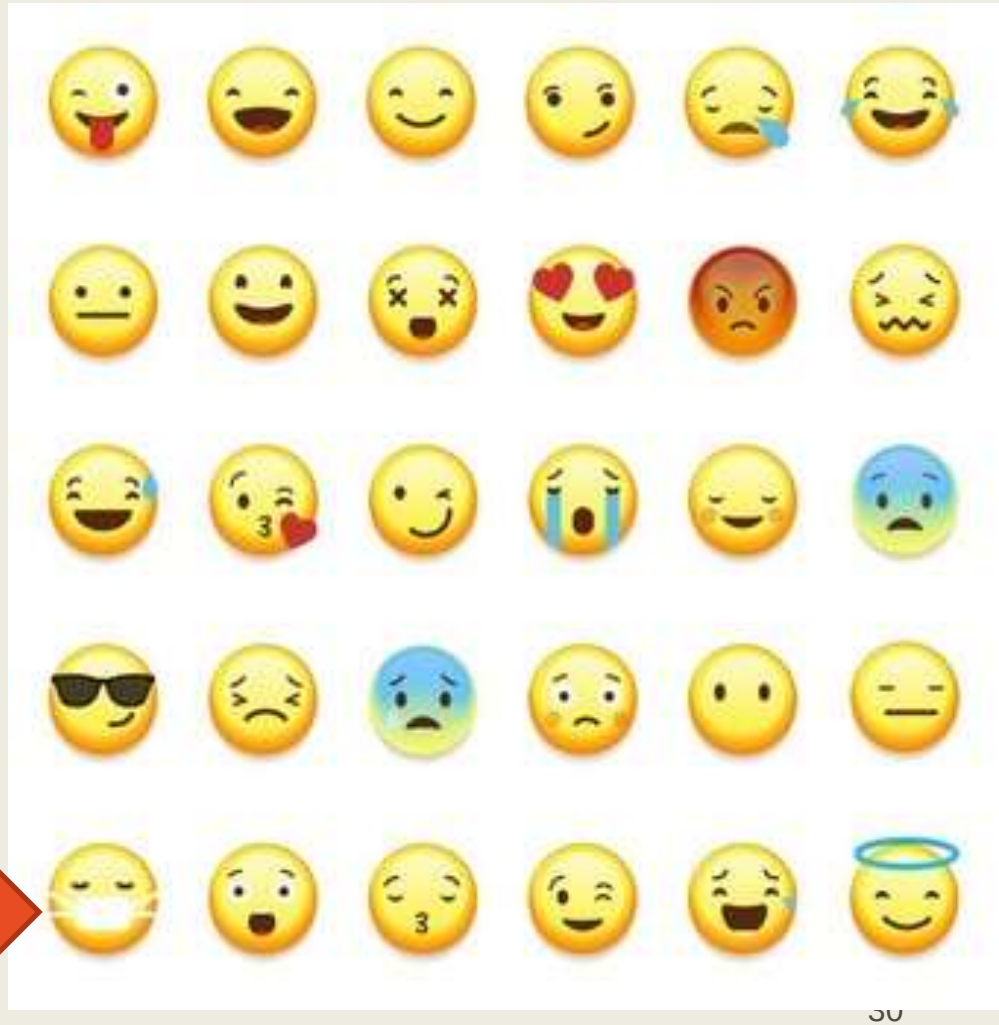
EMOJIS & LANGUAGE

- Today it seems that half the words online have been replaced with **emojis**.

- Flexible and immediate, they substitute words, thoughts, emotions…

BUT

the more we erode language, the more we erode complex thought and **the easier we are to control**.



FAKE NEWS & MEMORY

- Today we have designated **Google and** our **social-media accounts** as **the guardians of our memories, emotions, dreams and facts**.

- As the virtual world has become more dominant and tech companies have consolidated their power the rise of *"alternative facts"* and of *"post-truth"* has become a grim reality.

- **Fake news is doing serious harm all over the world…**

https://www.facebook.com/QuintFactCheck/videos/the-real-damage-of-fake-news-meet-the-victims-of-disinformation/462763354399715/

BRADBURY'S LEGACY (2)

- To think like Bradbury is to dream and to be aware of possibilities—the good, the bad, and the unknown.
- The questions his work raised are vital ones:
  - **what lies ahead and how can we best prepare for it?**
  - **how can we protect freedom?**
  - **how can we all start believing that anything is possible?**

We need to **keep asking these same questions** in order **to make our world a better and safer place**!