The Martian Chronicles
by Ray Bradbury

Concept Analysis for Tenth Grade
Based upon the 1979 Bantam publication

Prepared by Megan Botts-Hamzawi
Brigham Young University
Organizational Patterns

The Martian Chronicles is an accumulation of short stories by Ray Bradbury that revolve around the destruction of earth and emigration to Mars. There are 36 stories in total, ranging from one page to twenty-five pages. Most of the chapters are tied together by rather open transitional sentences that either continue a particular theme or plot line. The novel is in third person throughout.

Themes and Issues

The primary theme of The Martian Chronicles is how individuals claim new land as their own during colonization. Specifically, this novel shows how a civilization can conquer another with little respect for the native people and their cultural wealth. One can draw a clear connection from this novel to Europeans colonizing the Americas and forcing the Native Americans out of their land.

This book also revolves around the theme of hubris, particularly the hubris of human achievement. Minor themes that fall in with this theme are validation, nostalgia, the overwhelming desire for freedom, greed, jealousy, and disbelief. An interesting point to touch on is that, despite new landscape or technological advancements, basic human instincts never really change. Even with the best intentions of starting life over on Mars, man’s nature kicks in and provides a similar experience.

Setting

The majority of the novel’s action takes place on Bradbury’s fictitious Mars; however, there are several chapters that take place in the United States. Bradbury’s Mars is very allegorical and is not intended to be viewed as factual.

Point of view / Narrative Voice

This novel is written in third person throughout. The narrative voice vacillates between somber and woefully ironic. Because there are many morals at play in the novel the text is charged with a wide array of emotional reactions. One senses the settlers’ sentiments about (1) excitedly leaving Earth of the opportunity to explore Mars, (2) the bitter regrets of other individuals for having to leave Earth, (3) pain at the loss of family, and (4) their playful or pained reactions to life on Mars.
Affective Issues related to This Novel

The teacher will need to point out connections between this book and student experiences; otherwise, students may struggle to relate to this book. After all, not all students are interested in science fiction or fantasy in general, so they may be resistant to the novel at first. However, there are many elements of this story that may interest them:

**Censorship.** “Usher II,” in particular, makes a strong statement about censorship. Teenagers find censorship relevant because they, themselves, frequently feel controlled and stifled.

**Being alone in your beliefs.** One story that I think students will be able to relate to is “--and the Moon Still be as Bright.” Spender raises valid concerns and is passionate about his beliefs, and yet he stands alone. This chapter allows students to debate if one can ever be alone in his beliefs.

Vocabulary Issues

This novel is not based upon scientific fact; therefore, it does not contain too many difficult scientific terms. What Bradbury does, however, is rely on opulent descriptive words that may be unfamiliar to the class (impassive, pallid). Therefore, no contextual-vocabulary front-loading is required. Unfamiliar vocabulary may be addressed during readings, but it is not required to teach the class a particular jargon before beginning the novel.

Background Knowledge

This novel is highly allegorical; therefore, the students will pull more meaning from the text if they are familiar with United States History. It may be worthwhile to review settlers’ relations with the Native Americans and what it was like to settle a new continent.

Implications for Students of Diversity

Much of the conflict in this novel revolves around the clash of two cultures. Students of diversity may be able to relate to the different sentiments that arise from this conflict: the trial of trying to assimilate into a new place, the urge to resist new culture, or the fear of change. Students who have immigrated to the United States may be able to relate to the feeling of moving to an “alien planet” where even the smallest customs are different.
There are not many women in The Martian Chronicles, but the women who exist are frequently shown as being inferior to men. In “Ylla,” for example, Ylla is like Nora in “The Dollhouse” by Henrik Ibsen. She is a sensitive but capable dreamer with large ideas, but she is very much confined to the role of a housewife. When he mentions to her husband Yll that she dreamed of an Earthman coming to Mars, he becomes enraged and feels that the only way to get Ylla back to her duties is by killing the man. In “The Off Season,” Sam Parkhill pushes his wife frequently and disregards her opinion.

An interesting journal question for the class might be: “Why do you think so few women are represented in The Martian Chronicles?” Then, the class could discuss Bradbury’s reasons (or lack of) for neglecting women in this particular text.

Research Issues and Project Ideas

Research Ideas:
Spender, and the “Majority of One”
Women in The Martian Chronicles
Nuclear war
Dissection of literary references in “Usher II”
Comparison of Bradbury’s works

Project Ideas:
• Students may complete a “Wanted” poster for a character in the book and base it upon character description and interesting plot points.
• Students may keep a character journal in which they “diary” the thoughts of that character.
• Students may write a short story in diary-entry form, centered around personally relevant themes.
• Students may rewrite the novel in a different genre.
Enrichment Resources

Images

Video clips from Youtube
(“The Simpsons” do Poe in several episodes.)

Current event articles

Updated count of nuclear weapons (available on Wikipedia)

Additional Ideas:

Edgar Allan Poe
“The Fall of the House of Usher”
“The Cask of Amontillado”
“The Pit and the Pendulum”

Ray Bradbury
FAHRENHEIT 451
THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION