

**Tiffany Southwell**  
**Steinbrenner High School, Hillsborough County**  
**2020 NIE Teacher of the Year Grand Prize Winner**



Tiffany teaches English at Steinbrenner High School in Hillsborough County.

Tiffany was chosen as 2020 NIE Teacher of the Year Grand Prize Winner for her innovative use of the Tampa Bay Times to teach the dystopian novel Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury.

In Fahrenheit 451, Bradbury created a future society obsessed with technology and plagued with war and violence. The society does not value education. Books are illegal and are hunted down and burned by "firemen". Reading is a capital offense.

Tiffany uses the Times throughout this annual six-week unit to explore the novel's themes and to illustrate how they remain relevant in today's society. Themes discussed include war, reliance upon and obsession with

technology, human desensitization, education and face-to-face communication.

Tiffany notes, "Many times, high school students wonder, 'What does this lesson have to do with my life?' or they might ask, 'When will I ever use this information? How does it pertain to me?'"

"This is where we look to the Times... As the students investigate the themes of the novel, we discuss how these themes may be present in our society today. The students use the Times to investigate and present real world instances which parallel the themes in the novel. The Times makes it possible for students to answer their "What does this have to do with me?" questions through their own individual research. Some of the discoveries are eye-opening to all of us. Here are some powerful statements from my students (after completing this unit)."

"I read this book two years ago and I thought it was stupid. Now that I read the newspaper, I realize the book is about our world now."

"When I read the nation and world (section), it's like I can hear the planes and bombs that killed Mildred in her hotel room."

"Today I looked at the real estate section and wondered, do people walk the beautiful streets on Davis Island or are they too busy cooped up inside on their phones or playing video games? When will it be strange to go for a walk like Clarisse did?"

Tiffany believes that the Tampa Bay Times gives students the answer to the burning question that many teens ask: "What does this have to do with me?"



*Tiffany's students hold up copies of Fahrenheit 451.*