This week science fiction writer Ray Bradbury died at the age of 91. He was most famously known for his dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451*.

**Written in 1953, *Fahrenheit 451* sent out a stark warning to future generations about the importance of reading.** The novel follows Guy Montag, a fireman who starts to question his life after a chance encounter with a strange girl. Within this world, books are outlawed because they are considered dangerous and the root cause of society’s problems.

In place of reading, people sit in their parlors watching inane television shows on screens the size of walls. The other key element to this world is that instead of putting out fires, firemen burn books, *Fahrenheit 451* being the temperature at which paper burns.

The people of Bradbury’s world stop asking questions because they are engrossed in these television shows that lack any sort of substance. They are simply blinded by bright colors and loud sounds. Unlike most dystopian novels though, such as George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Bradbury offers readers the hope of a better time to come. Unfortunately, we seem to be moving towards the reality that he feared, as we spend more time sucked into reality television shows while leaving books to one side.

Bradbury believed that the ills of society could be cured by reading books and he is right. Statistics reveal that those with a higher level of literacy are more likely to be in full-time employment at the age of 30 compared to those with a lower level of literacy. The written word has the power to enlighten, to entertain and to inform. A book can take you to places you never knew existed and open you up to new ideas.

According to research from the Literacy Trust released earlier this year, one in six people in the UK struggles with literacy which means that their level of literacy is below that expected of an 11-year-old. While a quarter of young people do not recognize a link between reading and success, and this seems to be where the problem partly lies. If this link is reinforced then it may encourage young people to aim higher and realize the opportunities that education and literacy can create.

Perhaps at a time when libraries are being closed across the country and we face shocking levels of illiteracy, it is now more important than ever to heed Bradbury’s warning. Reading books and education have never been more important if we want to aspire and achieve.

A life without reading is only half lived and with the passing of Bradbury we should not forget the value of the written word.