

I am doug spaulding:
accessibility and
symbolism in
"dandelion wine"



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ray Bradbury may have chosen Doug to be the twelve-year-old protagonist in *Dandelion Wine*, but I remain convinced that Bradbury took a pencil and paper to my childhood. Part of the reason why Doug's character resonates with me so much stems from Bradbury's use of symbolic language. Because symbolism leaves the audience to interpret the text's meaning, every reader draws a different interpretation of the text based on his or her own personal experiences. By picturing the experience associated with Bradbury's imagery, the reader gains a deeper understanding of the story. Bradbury effectively utilizes symbolism in *Dandelion Wine* to aid the audience in perceiving the text's significance and to impart the messages that form the novel's overall theme.

Bradbury reveals Doug's youthful nature in the form of animals, allowing the reader to visually imagine Doug's mental and physical characteristics. After Doug becomes aware of his existence, Bradbury writes, " Douglas, eyes shut, saw spotted leopards pad in the dark" (10). When Doug opens his eyes, Bradbury states, " The leopards trotted soundlessly off through darker lands where eyeballs could not turn to follow" (10). From a twelve-year-old's perspective, leopards seem like the fastest and scariest animals in the world. The reader envisions the leopards and gathers that Doug's realization of his existence strikes struck him unexpectedly, leading him to be justifiably frightened. When Doug opens his eyes, the leopards disappear because mortality now occupies his fears. Doug's epiphany about his existence marks a slight shift in his transition from boy to man. Another instance within the text where Bradbury symbolically employs animals materializes when Doug purchases shoes. After Doug laces the tennis shoes on his feet, the shoe

salesman asks Doug whether the shoes feel like antelopes or gazelles.

Bradbury then writes that what the tennis shoes feel like: “ Beautiful creatures leaping under the sky, gone through brush, under trees, away, and only the soft echo their running left behind” (25). Most children have a tendency toward wildness, which causes them to exude energy and excitement. Antelopes and gazelles perfectly capture the wildness characteristic of children like Doug because the two animals can often be found leaping and bounding through the grasslands. By symbolically comparing Doug’s attributes to animals, Bradbury aids the audience in sensing the novel’s youthful tone.

In yet another intricacy of his narrative, Bradbury symbolically exposes the limited nature of machines to communicate the message that human relationships prove more important than technology. Even though *Dandelion Wine* takes place in 1928 when technology was sparse, Bradbury includes various types of machines within his novel. In one instance within the text, Leo Auffmann, Doug’s neighbor, attempts to build a machine that captures happiness. Leo’s “ Happiness Machine” brings more sadness than happiness and ends up bursting into flames (Bradbury 61). Leo realizes that real Happiness Machine was “ patented a couple thousand years ago,” “ still runs,” and has “ been here all along,” meaning that true happiness exists in family dynamics (Bradbury 62). Another example of Bradbury’s message negating mechanical ability exists in the constantly changing nature of technology. Doug develops a fascination for the town’s trolley and relies on it for all his traveling and exploring needs. Doug’s enchantment with the trolley can be found in his statement:, “ Need to run anywhere on the main streets,

I got the Green Town Trolley to look around and spy on the world from” (Bradbury 88). When the town shuts down the trolley in favor of bus transportation, Doug says, “ But ... But ... They can’t take off the trolley! Why ... no matter how you look at it, a bus ain’t a trolley” (Bradbury 98). Doug seems to struggle with accepting the fact that nothing lasts forever. Current technology, especially, can only persist for so long before newer models phase out outdated versions. The only “ machine” in Dandelion Wine that transcends the limitations of technology happens to be human. Doug and his friends describe Colonel Freeleigh, an elderly neighbor, as a “ time machine” because Colonel Freeleigh transports the boys to other time periods with his stories. Doug says, “ I got to travel all those ways. See what I can see. But most of all I got to visit Colonel Freeleigh once, twice, three times a week. He’s better than all the other machines. He talks, you listen” (Bradbury 89). Bradbury didoes not coincidentally choose to compare Colonel Freeleigh to a time machine; he wanted to illustrate the prestige human interaction holds over technology. With the representation of various machines, Bradbury successfully employs symbolism to convey his message about the inadequacy of machines and the importance of personal relationships.

Moreover, Bradbury uses dandelions as a consistent symbol throughout the novel to represent many overlapping ideas. Doug’s grandfather produces wine from the weeds of dandelions every summer, so dandelions seem to be a memory Doug closely associates with the sultry season. Bradbury explores the connection Doug makes between dandelions and summer when he says, “ Dandelion wine. The words were summer on the tongue. The wine was summer caught and stoppered” (13). Dandelions generally sprout when the

temperature rises, and they have a yellow hue characteristic of sunny days and lemonade, which possess a direct link to summer. Because of this association, the audience easily connects dandelions with summer. Bradbury also capitalizes on a dandelion's position in nature by demonstrating the tie between man and earth. Grandpa says dandelions that " bend you over and turn you away from all the people and the town for a little while and sweat you and get you down where you remember you got a nose again"

(Bradbury 50). Considering Bradbury's negative portrayal of machines, it does not seem surprising that Bradbury thinks highly of nature. The phrase " remember you got a nose" seems to symbolize a recognition of man's humble relationship with God's creation. In addition to representing summer and the union between the world's natural elements, dandelions symbolize a collection of memories. At the end of summer when Grandpa bottles the wine, he says, that " you get to live the summer over for a minute or two here or there along the way through the winter ... that's dandelion wine" (Bradbury 236). Bradbury reveals that drinking a bottle of dandelion wine during winter means reliving the memories of summer. Each bottle captures the essence of a different summer day. Because dandelions hold so many memories of summer unique to every reader, Bradbury was wise to choose dandelions as the novel's prevailing symbolic feature.

Bradbury's use of symbolism in Dandelion Wine proves overly effective in aiding the audience's perception of the messages within the text. Bradbury takes advantage of all the feelings children associate with summer by convincing readers to recollect their own carefree memories of summers before the years of obligations and worries. When Doug Spaulding purchases

a pair of Royal Crown Cream-Sponge Para Litefoot tennis shoes, I envision myself at nine years old choosing a pair of Suede Classic Black and White Puma sneakers at the shoe store. When Doug picks dandelions for his grandfather, I see myself in the backyard of my childhood home blowing dandelions and watching the seeds float over the trees into unknown lands. My statement still stands firm: I am Doug Spaulding.