

Fahrenheit 113:

A Story

Anasty scratch of static in my ear bud totally breaks my concentration. I mean, I'm listening to a giga-hot story during SSLV in literacy class, and I'm really into it and all—and then out of nowhere comes this static.

Our literacy coach is cutting in on our listening time again. I hate it. I mean, how can she expect us to get anything out of Literacy class if they keep interrupting our Silent Sustained Listening and Viewing with brain-dead announcements? If my parents find out, they'll freak because they're laying out giga-credit—including a freakin' massive state voucher—for me to attend the best school in the state. Schoogle.com is ultra-tech, and it's funded by MicroIntellSoft, so we totally have the best-of-the-best literacy hardware and software credit can buy.

My friends dog me for being a total nerd, but I don't care anymore. I'm maxed on literacy, and I can't tell you how many great texts I've listened to and viewed since I started at Schoogle last year. We're on the block program, you know, concentrated classes that provide the best learning environment for us students. I get like five hours straight of literacy class once a week. It's totally cool. I mean, I

can watch an entire mini-series or two movies in one class period and still have time to put together a totally tech multi-media literacy response project on the texts I viewed.

More static. I roll my eyes, sigh, and look at the giga-tech board that dominates the wall in front of our learning lounge.

The video's already running, so I hit the switch on my desk console to change my audio input to Schoogle's channel.

It's another inquisition project—Schoogle's big on inquisition, you know—and an ancient old woman's strapped into a recliner in the NCTE's inquiry room. It looks a lot like our learning lounge, you know with video display units, download stations, and those totally-flash literacy posters from the AMA and NCTE:

"Watching is Fundamental."

"Have You Listened to Any Good Texts Today?"

"Viewing Rocks!"

And my favorite poster, the one that shows a buff NCTE policer totally decked out in black body armor and a techno helmet, nabbing some sorry old sucker in a ratty easy chair doing the unsmartest thing you can imagine:

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“reading” a dusty old book. The policer has his red laser dot aimed dead center on the outside of that book thing and his fiberoptic noose ready to drop over the neck of the stupid old geezer.

Bright neo-orange letters blaze across the top of the poster, reminding all us kids in Schoogle’s literacy classes to “Catch Someone Reading.”

We have those same posters in our learning lounge, and I have to admit that those art design dudes from the American Media Association and the National Council of Teachers of Everything really have hot taste. I mean, these posters are so totally wicked that all the kids at Schoogle have them in their bedrooms. Some of our parents even post them in their media rooms.

The audio feed is cool now, so I tune in to the vid running on the giga-tech board.

“We know what you’re up to,” says the totally hot NCTE policer babe, like literacy’s own Lara Croft! I mean, she’s wearing tight black spandex with the letters N C T E going down each arm.

The old bag in the inqui-chair looks totally fried. I mean, spaced. Lost. She has not a clue who’s even talking. Like she just woke up or something.

Weird thing, though.

Instead of looking totally freaked, I mean, you know, pet-ree-fied like a soon-to-be Freddy Krueger vic, she’s what? Not scared. I mean, I’d totally be shaking in my flip-flops. I mean, *everybody* knows those NCTE dudes don’t mess around. But instead, this ancient chick is, I can’t think of the word . . . Let me Google it: “Stubborn. Obstinate. Defiant.” Yeah, one of those.

Anyway, her watery blue eyes blink blink blink and she looks around the room at the NCTE/AMA posters. And she totally shakes her head. I mean right in front of the policer. A complete and total dis.

So the policer babe repeats: “We totally know what you’re up to.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” the old bag’s voice totally doesn’t fit her face. I mean, she’s so raisined that no amount of Botox or laser could iron out that road map. But her voice, not a wrinkle in it. She sounds like she’s the queen boss of the world.

She stares at the Policer. I mean, eye-to-eye, totally in her face! This is getting good, so I minimize my literacy desk screen that’s playing today’s lessons on Vid Gaming and Texting, and I kill the I-Tune

playing in my left ear bud.

This show is something I want to get the full impact of. I’m like so totally concentrated that I even miss a couple of the texts my homies sent me a few seconds ago.

The Policer babe again: “Like, we know what you’re up to. We have tele-vid evidence from multiple student I-phones. You haven’t been too sneaky in your attempts to roll over the NCTE literacy curriculum.”

The old woman sighs. “I am a *teacher of English*—not literacy.”

“That is like so twentieth century,” said the Policer. “Why do you resist moving into the present time, you know, the now time?”

English teacher. I think I heard of that before. My grampa—Mom’s dad, the one no one hardly talks about—wasn’t he an English teacher back at the end of the 20th? I think Mom said something about it once, but she was whispering so I don’t know for sure. Well, and my tunes were hopping too, so I wasn’t hearing external audio all that great. Funny, but that 2K memory of Grampa never uploaded before. But it doesn’t make any sense. I mean, I know nobody in our family is from English or has ever even been to London or anything, so I have no clue how Grampa could’ve been an English teacher. Or even what that is.

Weird.

I touch the desktop screen and link to Wikipedia Brain of the Universe and text in “English teacher.”

Nothing comes up, so I guess I totally misheard Mom way back then. I mean, everybody knows, if it’s not in Wikipedia, it’s not real.

So I’m zoned back on to the giga-tech board, hoping they’re going to release this old English teacher. Releases are always everybody’s favorite parts of the inqui-vids. Usually there’s all kinds of crying and screaming and stuff, then comes the confession, then, well, the best part—the vivisection, bleeding, burning, and clean up. A total release. It is so cool, I mean so realistic. Unbelievable graphics, almost as good as a video game.

The policer has a Book in each hand, but it’s cool because she’s totally wearing the Nike grip gloves to protect herself. She holds the books up and smiles all

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mean and hot: “*Warriner’s English Grammar and Composition* and *Norton’s Anthology of American Literature*. C’mon, Mrs. Montag, you know these relics were replaced decades ago. Yet you held onto ’em anyway, and we’ve got more than 75 televid-adavits from students’ I-phone-cams as evidence. You’ve not only had these in your learning lounge—taking up space on the shelves where the retro-Book deco antique replicas are supposed to be—but you’ve also . . .” and now she shudders like a cold wind just blew through her—“*exposed* your literacy students to them!”

“I will not apologize,” she says in a voice like that really hard metal stuff, “for having real books—not book spines and plastic imitations—on the shelves in my classroom.”

“Oh, come on, Mrs. Montag,” the hot policer says. “You’re a crook, not a saint. You know you broke the literacy laws.” The camera zooms in and we see the

policer slip a taser rod from her thigh holster and touch the old woman’s chest. A blue bolt jags out of the rod, and the old woman screams and writhes in her chair. If she hadn’t been strapped down, no way she’d have stayed in it. Over my ear buds, I hear most of the kids in class laughing too. I mean, she flexed like a frog leg when that jolt ripped into her.

The policer smiles. “And you thought you were *so* smart, thought nobody would turn you in. Well, guess what?” She shocks her again and more screams and flashing bolts of light. So real, I mean I can almost smell

the toasted flesh. “You are totally busted!”

The camera zooms on the old woman’s face; she’s sweating like a shower head and her hair’s all messed up and you can tell she’s hurting big time.

Now the policer’s on the screen. She’s got shiny

red lips, her hair’s perfect, and she’s smiling right into the camera. “I think it’s time we speak the charges against her, OK, kids?”

Everybody in my learning lounge is woofing now and hitting the yes spot on their desktop touch pads.

“Looks like it’s unanimous!” the policer grins.

“OK, then, let’s get down to bidness! Mrs. Dora V. Montag, here is Charge One: you used *paper* notes to lecture from on the fall of English departments. How do you plead?”

“Guilty.”

The policer looks surprised but continues.

“Charge Two: despite the NCTE’s eco-friendly and green policy outlawing possession and use of paper products—books, magazines, newspapers, notebook paper—you repeatedly displayed such banned products in your learning lounge and openly promoted their use to your students. Plead?”

The old woman smirks. “Guilty.”

“Charge Three,” the policer touches her ear bud to make sure she’s hearing the prompter correctly, “You promoted really old fashioned and illegal school activities, namely writing, and tried to distribute pencils and pens to your students.” The policer grins at the camera again, “And I totally have to say, you must be really stupid to think kids would want to “write” anything. Plead?”

Mrs. Montag nods, too wiped out to say anything.

“I take that for guilty” the policer says. “Charge Four: even though years of research have proven otherwise, you have repeatedly tried to make your students ‘read’ in open rebellion against the NCTE’s literacy standards. As we all know, eyes are for viewing, ears are for hearing, and a true literate is someone who can view with intelligence and text message really fast. How do you plead?”

“Writing is thinking,” the old woman whispers between winces of pain. “It’s the last vestige of civilization.”

“Wrong,” shouts the policer, and more shocks and screams follow. “The NCTE and modern technology have freed all of us from the tyranny of typeface conventions! The idiocy of italics, the stress of spelling, the cramps of capitalization, the garbage of grammar. Thanks to wiser minds than yours, today’s students in literacy classes are no longer bound by these ancient ‘English’ chains.

“On to Charge Number Five: you have taught

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fiction, poetry, and drama in your literacy classes.”

“Guilty, guilty . . .” the old woman says tiredly but with a smile. “Of course I taught those.”

“Wrong!” says the policer. “Everyone knows that literacy scores got really good when kids were allowed to choose their own texts—and in the NCTE’s literacy curriculum, we expose students to all forms of literature, regardless of format: DVD, Blue-Ray, Digital, even VHS. The multi-modal, multigenre literacy curriculum accepts all texts as texts; there are no genre anymore—only texts.”

The old teacher shakes her head. “But it’s not literature.”

“Exactly,” snaps the policer. “Reading was pointless. When we allowed students to choose their own texts, test scores soared. With today’s cyber-students in our digital literacy learning lounges, it’s the only way to manage students. Plus, that material is high interest!”

The tortured teacher groaned. “You’re right, sadly, you are right. No one has read *City of Ember*; *Feed*; *The House of the Scorpion*; *The Last Book in the Universe*; *The Giver*; *Fahrenheit 451*; *Brave New World*; or even Forster’s short story, ‘The Machine Stops.’ If anyone in NCTE had, we wouldn’t have gone down the disastrous road to literacy.”

The policer whips her shock rod behind her back, makes a groove dance move, and shocks the teacher again. More sparks and screeches of pain. Cool, so cool. I love this show!

“On to the Sixth Charge against you: speaking a story to students during the two-hour SSVL time.”

“I didn’t *spea*k a story to my students,” the teacher said, and I was amazed she could even talk; but her voice was rock-hard. “I *read* a book to my students.”

“And” shock “for that” shock “you must” shock “pay!”

The teacher’s convulsing against the chair restraints, and foam’s oozing out of her mouth, dripping down her chin. It’s turning pink—that means that the best part is close—blood’s almost to the surface. I can’t wait for the finale!

The policer babe faces the camera again and tugs at the zipper at the throat of her spandex body suit. A bunch of guys in our learning lounge start cheering. “And now, the moment we’ve all been waiting for: the Ultimate Charge, the one that puts the last nail in your

coffin, Mrs Montag. We have in our possession, a paper manuscript of a memoir you’ve been writing—and reading to—your students. Your illegal book attacks the NCTE, Schoogle.com, MicroIntelSoft, and every other important literacy agency in our continent today. You have titled this text ‘Fahrenheit 113,’ and before we stick you with the full smackdown of the National Council of Teachers of Everything for your totally on-purpose rule-breaks of established literacy curriculum, we must know what the title means.”

The old woman moans, then whispers something inaudible.

The policer pokes her with the taser but doesn’t pull the shock trigger. The teacher flinches, then catches her breath.

“Ironic,” the teacher gasps.

That stalls the policer and her smile fades. “Ironic?”

A weak chuckle, a delirious sick kind of weary laugh tumbles from the old woman’s lips. She squints and gags, then falls silent.

And I’m mad, all of a sudden, really mad. Cheated. Ripped off. She can’t kick off that easy. Where’s the show?

But then she shivers and gasps. She’s back!

“It is ironic,” she says in a voice so low that I have to jack up my pod volume to max, “it is ironic that you don’t understand my title. If you or any of your literacy numskulls had read any literature, had learned to read, write, or think, you would know . . .” A fit of coughing racks her body, and the camera zooms in for a close up of her face. A red bubble of blood billows in one nostril. A deep breath, then she says, “you would know that Fahrenheit 113 is the

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I watch for a while, but my Schoogle buddies are all texting me and she's stopped moving and screaming, and it's kind of boring now. The action and graphics aren't as realistic as the stuff in our vid-games, so I tap my desktop and go back to my Halo 16 lesson.

are all texting me and she's stopped moving and screaming, and it's kind of boring now. The action and graphics aren't as realistic as the stuff in our vid-games, so I tap my desktop and go back to my Halo 16 lesson.

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temperature at which the brain dies.”

The woman tries to smile, but before she can do anything, the policer jumps back and out of the way to let a huge shiny blade drop down from the ceiling and start swinging left to right, each swing cutting deeper into the old woman's body, splattering blood on the walls of the National Council of Teachers of Everything inquisition room, dripping on the posters—and coolest of all, coating the camera lens with the teacher's blood.

I watch for a while, but my Schoogle buddies

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