



Farewell Summer

By Ray Bradbury
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Introduction

On an early October day, with summer still lingering, thirteen-year-old Douglas Spaulding dreams that he is set adrift alone on a ship as his family and friends remain on the shore, waving good-bye. This disturbing dream catapults Douglas, his younger brother, Tom, and their friends into a "civil war" with the elderly men of the town, who are led by Calvin C. Quartermain, chairman of the school board.

The conflict's first shot, fired by Doug, fells Mr. Braling, an elderly man and close friend of Quartermain, and the war begins in earnest. A series of skirmishes between Douglas's and Quartermain's respective forces ensue for control over the boys' lives and destinies, and culminates in the boys' assault on the town courthouse tower clock in an attempt to literally stop Time and remain as they are. Eventually, Douglas learns about the inevitability of maturity when Lisabell, whom he met at a party thrown by Quartermain, kisses him.

In a scene reminiscent of the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, both sides learn their lesson about the inevitability of adulthood and death, and the futility of warring against the inexorable march of Time. Peace is declared. As Doug and Tom lie in bed, they hear the wind outside blow the last leaves from the trees. Summer has ended, and Autumn has begun.

Questions for Discussion

1. The three parts of the novel are named for famous battles of the Civil War; Antietam, Shiloh, and Appomattox. Antietam was the single bloodiest day of the war and a somewhat inconclusive victory for the North due to the failure to pursue and destroy the Confederate Army. Shiloh was a draw that could have been a Union disaster because of poor positioning of the troops. Appomattox is almost a synonym for surrender and the end of a war. How do these titles reflect the action of the book and how are the events in each part illustrative of the Civil War battles? Why do you think Bradbury named each part in this fashion?
2. The title *Farewell Summer* means more than merely a goodbye to a season. What is the phrase "farewell summer" a metaphor for? What other than a season are the characters, specifically Douglas and Quartermain, saying goodbye to?
3. At the beginning of the novel, Douglas has a dream—a nightmare, really—in which he is set adrift on a ship by himself as his family and friends say goodbye to him from the dock (pp. 9–11). When Douglas awakens why is he so afraid of the dream, and how does this lead to his subsequent actions in the novel? What is Douglas afraid of, other than the obvious motif of death?
4. What is the importance of Douglas's grandfather to the novel? Why does the grandfather, also an elderly man, seem to be above the conflict? Why does Douglas not include him among the enemy?
5. When Bleak accuses Quartermain of cutting himself off from life because he never married and had children (pp. 148–165) Bleak states that all of life is about letting go. How is Quartermain's problem, the refusal to let go, similar to Douglas's refusal to grow up? Do both characters essentially have the same problem, a refusal to accept that growth and change are a part of life and that they cannot do anything to stop it?

Dandelion Wine was published in 1957, and *Farewell Summer* is the sequel to that beloved novel. In case you would like to include *Dandelion Wine* as part of your discussion, as well, here are some questions that address both novels to help you direct your reading group's conversation.

1. The ravine figures largely in both novels, but is treated differently in each. How is the ravine different in each novel? Does it have the same importance in both stories? Are there any similarities between the two novels in the representation of the ravine?
2. Both novels contain a scene in which organization is considered stifling. In *Dandelion Wine*, the aunt organizes the grandmother's kitchen and the grandmother is no longer able to cook. In *Farewell Summer*, part of the reason the boys attack the clock at the old courthouse is because the courthouse symbolizes where their lives are recorded and organized. What is Bradbury saying about the power of bureaucracy and organization in these two scenes? Must this power be thrown off completely, or can some accommodation be made with it? Does each novel present the same conclusion about this power?
3. Both novels present a piece of a past boyhood summer. How are the depictions of the past summers different in each novel? Are both depictions nostalgic? Why or why not?
4. How is the character of Douglas different in each of the two novels? How is he the same? What are the reasons for the similarities and differences?
5. Both novels deal with the theme of the fear of death. In *Dandelion Wine*, the losses with which Douglas deals lead to his fever. In *Farewell Summer*, this fear leads to war. How is the fear of death "cured" in each novel? How are the cures similar or different? Why do you think Douglas is so preoccupied with death?

