



## Dandelion Wine

By Ray Bradbury  
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### Introduction

Twelve-year-old Douglas Spaulding arises on an early June morning in a small bedroom in the cupola of his grandparents' house. As Douglas looks out the window, the small town of Green Town, Illinois awakens, and Doug is filled with the joy of being alive. And so begins the summer of 1928 as re-imagined by Ray Bradbury in his novel *Dandelion Wine*, a rich, evocative tale of a summer long past and its memories, joys, and frustrations.

The central metaphor of the novel is the creation of *Dandelion Wine*, which becomes a distillation of the summer's days and may be reopened and revisited during the bleak winter months to come.

Throughout the summer, Douglas and his brother, Tom, also record, in a notepad, specific incidents and lessons learned. One of the first lessons Douglas learns is that adults and children are different species. The brothers also come to the conclusion that old people were never children.

But while the summer seems idyllic, darker things, such as change and death, lurk in the background. Douglas is exposed to these through a series of events that include the loss of best friend (who moves away) and the death of his great-grandmother. The ravine and a serial killer called the "Lonely One" are embodiments of the fear of death and change.

As a result of these events, Douglas falls into a fever, but is saved by the town's junk man, Mr. Jonas, who gives the boy two bottles of pure winter air, which break the fever. When Doug and Tom see new school supplies displayed in the dime store window, they realize that summer is coming to an end.

### Questions for Discussion

1. In his description of the making of *Dandelion Wine*, Bradbury describes the significance of what is bottled and how a bottle of wine preserves a certain summer day for the bleak winter months (pp. 13-16). How is the metaphor of *Dandelion Wine* the central metaphor to the story Bradbury tells? What is Bradbury saying about memory and its importance in the make-up of any given person?
2. Leo Auffman, an inventor, attempts to build a "happiness machine." His wife is skeptical and thinks the whole idea is misguided. Why does she feel this way? After the machine is built and Leo's son and wife go inside (p. 67) why are they so unhappy? What, ultimately, does the machine do to people and why does it fail so miserably? How does this incident tie in with other scenes of the novel where Bradbury reflects on what happiness truly is?
3. What is the significance of the ravine to the story? In what way does the ravine reflect the untamed or uncivilized side of life?
4. Several young girls convince Mrs. Bentley to deny her past and that she was ever a child. Later, Mrs. Bentley recalls a discussion with her late husband, in which he argued that a person can only be the person he or she is at the present moment and all of the past is another person [p. 82]. Upon reflection, Mrs. Bentley decides to give all of her things away to the girls. Is Mrs. Bentley right in denying she had a past? Is Bradbury's entire novel essentially a refutation of Mr. and Mrs. Bentley's position?
5. Throughout the novel, Douglas and his younger brother, Tom, keep a written record of what they learn and discover during the summer. Does this accounting reflect what they actually learn? Why or why not?
6. Who is the "Lonely One" and what is his function in the novel? Why is he connected with the ravine? Does Lavinia Nebbs actually kill him in her home [p. 194]? Why do Douglas and his friends refuse to believe that the man Lavinia killed was the "Lonely One?"
7. Douglas falls ill with a fever late in the novel and the doctor is mystified as to his illness. What causes Douglas's illness and how does Jonas, the traveling junk dealer, cure him?
8. At the end of the novel, Bradbury states that Douglas puts an end to the summer of 1928 when he goes to sleep. However, immediately prior to this statement Douglas reflects that he can go stare at the bottles of *Dandelion Wine* that are dated for each day of the summer until he recalls the day. Does the summer of 1928 truly end? What do you think of Bradbury's evocation of the summer?

*Farewell Summer* is the sequel to *Dandelion Wine*. 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?