

The Big Read Comes to Kansas with *Fahrenheit 451*

by Diana Friend, Public Relations Coordinator, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library

Topeka, Junction City/Fort Riley, Hiawatha, Syracuse libraries and the Watermark Bookstore in Wichita will come together to read and celebrate *Fahrenheit 451*.

The Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library (TSCPL) and the State Library of Kansas have received a \$15,000 grant to participate in The Big Read, an effort to encourage literary reading by asking communities to come together to read and discuss one particular book. Through the months of May and June, TSCPL and the State Library of Kansas will partner with four satellite communities: Junction City/Fort Riley, Syracuse, Wichita and Hiawatha in the reading and celebrating of *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury.

The five communities have planned a series of programs in the months of May and June that will begin with kick-off events coordinated with the four satellite communities. Programs will focus on excerpts from *Fahrenheit 451* with firefighters, National Guardsmen, policemen and local public officials. Author Ray Bradbury has been invited to engage in a live radio show in cooperation with Kansas Public Radio. The projects will also feature programs about the burning of the Kansas prairies and the tie-ins to rebirth and re-growth that occurs after the burns.

This is the fourth community reading program TSCPL has provided to the Topeka and Shawnee County community. Past books read include *Rocket Boys* by Homer Hickman (On the Same Page in Shawnee County, 2003), *When the Emperor was Divine* by Julie Otsuka (On the Same Page in Shawnee County, 2005), and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston (The Big Read, 2006).

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents the Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest. The Big Read for military communities is made possible by The Boeing Company. The Big Read brings together partners across the country to encourage reading for pleasure and enlightenment.

The Big Read Program sponsored by Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library and the State Library of Kansas is one of 72 projects in the nation that were selected to receive an NEA Big Read grant. For more information on The Big Read, visit www.tscpl.org.