

Guided Reading: *Fahrenheit 451*
Critical Thinking in Science Fiction

Name: _____

Instructions: These questions, quotes, and reflections are designed to guide the reader through the novel—particularly the intellectual growth of Montag’s character and the ideas explored by Bradbury—by addressing the book’s plot, style, and themes. Effective comprehension requires a thorough reading of the book, insightful annotating, and using our lecture notes as reference. Consider this your study guide for future assessments.

Part One

1. Though curious, why does Montag feel anxious, even annoyed, by Clarisse during their first interaction?

2. Clarisse describes a past that Montag has never known: one with front porches, gardens, rocking chairs. What do these items have in common, and how might their removal have encouraged the repressive society in which we meet these characters?

3. At the end of their first encounter, why does Clarisse ask Montag, “Are you happy?” How do you think Clarisse defines happiness? What does Montag say at first? Does his answer evolve? How?

4. How are Mildred and the bedroom she shares with Montag described when he arrives home? What does this suggest?

5. What does Mildred’s overdose and Montag’s interaction with the technicians sent to help suggest about this society?

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6. What does Mildred watch on the parlor walls? What does such entertainment (and Mildred's inability to actually explain what is happening) suggest about her?

7. When Clarisse tells Montag that "people don't talk about anything," what does she mean?

8. Bradbury makes clear that Clarisse and her family are unusual in this culture, while Mildred, with her seashells and parlor walls, probably represents a much more typical member of this society. What does this suggest about the way most of these people approach their interior lives and intellectual growth?

9. Near the end of part one, the fire alarm goes off and the firemen are sent to the house of a woman whose neighbors reported her for having books. When they break down the door, they find the woman, Mrs. Hudson, still inside, which is unusual in such situations. What Mrs. Hudson chooses to do next is even more unusual and leaves Montag questioning himself and his society like never before. What does Mrs. Hudson choose to do? And why is it so perplexing to Montag?

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10. Later that night, Montag mentions to Mildred that he hasn't seen their neighbors in a while. What does Mildred tell him happened to them and to the girl (Clarisse)? What does her tone suggest?

11. In an extended monologue, Beatty explains to Montag just how society evolved into its current shape: "Bigger the population, the more minorities. Don't step on the toes of the dog lovers, the cat lovers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, Mormons, Baptists, Unitarians, second-generation Chinese, Swedes, Italians, Germans, Texans, Brooklynites, Irishmen, people from Oregon or Mexico. The people in this book, this play, this TV serial are not meant to represent any actual painters, cartographers, mechanics anywhere. The bigger your market, Montag, the less you handle controversy, remember that!... Authors full of evil thoughts, lock up your typewriters. They *did!*" What might Bradbury be suggesting about freedom of speech through Beatty's monologue? Who deserves it? Who doesn't?

12. "Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal." What is the distinction?

13. "Burn all, burn everything," says Beatty. "Fire is bright and fire is clean." But what might be the social, cultural, and historical impact of such destruction for those societies who choose to solve their problems in such a way?

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14. “The important thing for you to remember, Montag, is we’re the Happiness Boys... you and I and the others. We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought.” Which two themes (recall our lecture) is Beatty’s quote tying together? Explain.

Part Two

15. “I don’t talk things... I talk the meaning of things.” What does Faber mean by this? Which theme is being addressed?

16. After an argument with Mildred, in which Montag asks her if her TV “family” loves her, he leaves, dejected. On the subway, Montag feels numb. He remembers a time as a child at the beach when he tried, unsuccessfully, to fill a sieve with sand. Now he realizes he’s holding the Bible open in his lap (almost certainly a crime). He tries to read a passage, but he’s distracted by an advertisement for toothpaste. What do the sieve and the sand represent?

17. Looking for guidance as he attempts to walk this new path of knowledge, Montag finds his way to the house of an old English professor he once met named Faber. Montag feels that something is missing from people’s lives, and books are the only thing he knows for sure are missing. So, maybe books are the answer, he suggests. Faber responds that it’s not the books that are missing. It’s what’s in the books—and could also be on radio or television or anywhere else, for that matter, but isn’t. Faber then goes on to explain three things that are missing from people’s lives, and which are crucial to a culture if it is to thrive. What are those three things and why are they each important?

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18. "Don't ask to be saved in any one thing, person, machine, or library...Do your own bit of saving, and if you drown, at least die knowing you were headed for shore." Which thematic idea is Faber addressing in here? Explain.

19. "Those who don't build must burn." In this quote, what is Faber suggesting about the role we choose to play in our society, and the dangerous impulse that some of us given into?

20. One of the most significant of the many literary allusions in *Fahrenheit 451* occurs when Montag reads aloud Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach." What is the response of Mildred's friends? Why?

21. When the fire alarm goes off near the end of part two, at whose house do the firemen arrive?

Part Three

22. "[I]t was good to burn... Fire was best for everything!" says Montag, as he torches his own home. Given the context of this scene, in what way is "fire" being used as a paradoxical symbol?

23. Who is Granger?

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24. Why does Montag memorize the Old Testament's Ecclesiastes and the New Testament's Revelation? How do the final two paragraphs of the novel allude to both biblical books?

25. Having finished the novel, how does the Phoenix operate as a possible symbol for Montag's society?

26. Having finished the novel, how might the mechanical hound be viewed as a symbol for Montag's society?

27. Are there any circumstances where censorship might play a beneficial role in society? Are there some books that should be banned?

28. If you had to memorize a single book or risk its extinction, which book would you choose? Why?
