

Fahrenheit 451: Study Guide Questions

The Hearth and the Salamander:



Research: The mythological history of the salamander:

<http://www.mythicalcreaturesguide.com/page/Salamander>

1. “The Hearth and the Salamander” seems an odd choice for a chapter title. Why do you suppose Bradbury chooses it? What connections is he creating?
2. The lines, “It was a pleasure to burn. It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and *changed*” (1) tell the reader a great deal about the protagonist, Guy Montag. What assumptions can the reader make?
3. Bradbury’s use of metaphor and animal imagery begins on page one of the novel. He writes, “With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head...” (1). Why would he have chosen to characterize a fire hose as a “great python?” Is the imagery positive or negative?
4. Also on the first page, we learn that Montag’s fire-helmet is inscribed with the number 451. What is the symbolic importance of this number?
5. Explain how Clarisse McClellan is first described. What is it about her that immediately strikes Montag?
6. The names “Clarisse” and “Guy” are significant. How?
7. Clarisse questions Montag about his way of life. How does she question him, and how does he react to her questions?
8. During the first conversation between Clarisse and Montag the reader discovers several odd things about the society in which these two characters live. Describe at least three odd things we learn.
9. Montag employs two similes in thinking of Clarisse. What comparisons does he make and why?



Read: “To Build a Mirror Factory: The Mirror and Self-Examination in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*” from “Bloom’s Literature” in the *Facts on File Inc.* Database.

10. What does Montag realize about himself after Clarisse leaves him the first time?
11. What are “Seashells” and how does Montag’s wife, Mildred/Millie, use them?
12. There is a stark difference between Bradbury’s first description of Clarisse and his first description of Mildred. What does the reference to her face (11) signify and how does it contribute to our understanding of both her character and the marriage between Montag and Mildred?
13. Describe the machine used on Mildred. Explain the symbolism.
14. Montag’s comment that “Nobody knows anyone” (14) is telling. What is the epiphany he has?
15. Unthinkingly, Montag finds himself drawn to the window of the McClellan household. Explain the contrast between his house and this one. What does the contrast tell the reader about society at large?
16. Montag’s confused statement, “I don’t know anything anymore” (15) signifies a pivotal moment in the text. Explain.
17. When Mildred wakes up from her near-death experience, she does not seem to remember what happened. Describe her mood at this point. Why has Bradbury characterized her this way? What does Millie’s conversation with Montag reveal about her?
18. Why does Clarisse visit the psychiatrist?
19. What is “the Hound” and what is its function? Why is Montag bothered by the Hound?



Research: The mythological history of the phoenix:

20. Describe the types of activities that are practiced by the young people of the society. What do these activities reveal about the culture?
21. What happens to the people the firemen visit as they perform their work?
22. The firemen's book, the brief histories of the Firemen of America is filled with ironies. What is ironic about this text?
23. As the reader accompanies Montag to his first fire scene, he/she meets an old woman who lights her books and her house on fire. Just prior to this act, she says, "“Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out”" (33). Explain Bradbury's allusion. What is the woman's intention in burning her own home?
24. In this same scene, Bradbury builds a simile in which he compares books to birds. What is the effect of the comparison?
25. What crime does Montag commit during this episode? Why does he do it?
26. What does the reader learn about the fire captain, Beatty, on the ride back to the fire station?
27. Following the death of the old woman, Montag returns home and realizes that Millie "was so strange he couldn't believe he knew her at all" (39). He then wonders how she came to be so empty (41). Why does he feel this way?
28. Describe the function of the parlor walls. What are the implications if most citizens in *F451* possess these parlors?
29. There are two interesting things about Millie's announcement of Clarisse McClellan's death. One is her choice of words when telling Montag, and the other is her description of the manner of death. Explain why these two elements are significant.
30. Describe Millie's reaction to Montag's story about the death of the old woman. What does Millie's reaction and Montag's frustration with it indicate about each character?
31. Bradbury's use of fire is clearly important. Explain the literal and the metaphorical meaning of the following: "“You ever see a burned house? It smolders for days. Well, this fire'll last me the rest of my life. God! I've been trying to put it out, in my mind, all night. I'm crazy with trying”" (48).
32. Beatty's history of the fireman's job is a critical section of this novel. According to Beatty, why did people turn away from reading? Do you agree with his assessment? Explain.
33. Beatty says, "“...the public, knowing what it wanted, spinning happily, let the comic books survive. And the three-dimensional sex magazines, of course. There you have it, Montag, It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God!”" (55). If Beatty is correct, what are the implications for modern society?
34. He also says, "“We must all be alike...Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon”" (55-56). Analyze these lines carefully and paraphrase Beatty – what is he truly saying?
35. In the end, Beatty sums up his lecture by telling Montag that the only thing standing between society and the unhappiness that would inevitably result if people had to think for themselves is the fireman system. Yet Beatty is clearly a well-educated man. Explain the juxtaposition using specific details from the text.
36. What does Montag's realization that he does not like the other firemen, nor does he like himself (64) imply?
37. Explain how the following motifs or themes are introduced in the first chapter: ignorance/self-deception, alienation, mindlessness, reflection, censorship, conformity, the journey/quest, and guilt.



Watch the charming Lego film that comically describes the story of The Danaids, the 50 daughters of Danaus who asked that his girls murder their husbands on their wedding night, 49 of whom did just that and were punished by having to carry water in sieves for all eternity.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVat_une248

1. What is the significance of the title of this chapter? How does it contribute to the overall themes of the novel?
2. What is the initial mood of this chapter as Montag and Millie begin to read the stolen books?
3. The novel is riddled with literary allusions, references to other texts. Firstly, name a minimum of five authors or texts referenced in *F451*. Secondly, explain the author's choice of works (why did Bradbury choose what he chose?).
4. a. When Millie questions Montag's desire to read, Montag explodes. He says, "We've started and won two atomic wars since 2022!...the world is starving, but we're well fed...Is that why we're hated so much?...Do you know why? I don't, that's sure! Maybe the books can get us half out of the cave" (70). Why is this the first time Bradbury has given us any indication of the novel's setting – specifically the time and the place?
b. What does Montag instinctively hope to learn from books?
5. When Montag realizes that Millie will not support his desire to learn from books, he has a second flashback of an old man he once met in a park. Explain the significance of this flashback.
6. On his way to meet Faber, Montag has another flashback of a time from his childhood when he attempted to fill a sieve with sand only to have it continually slip away. He then has the thought that "if you read fast and read all, maybe some of the sand will stay in the sieve" (74). He attempts to read and to memorize the text he is carrying, but cannot concentrate due to the incessant wailing of the advertisements on the train. Describe the atmosphere of this scene. How does Bradbury manipulate our feelings for Montag?
7. Faber is an instrumental figure in this novel. He, like Clarisse, awakens Montag's mind by telling him what it is that Montag feels is lacking in his life, which is not the books themselves, but is quality (true details that reflect life), leisure to think, and the right to act as individuals (79-81). How do the two men propose to change this state of affairs?
8. Describe the irony present in the line "The salamander devours his tail" (82).
9. What is the effect of Faber's metaphor in which he describes himself as a Queen Bee (87)?
10. How does the actual war (fought with bomber jets) mirror the war planned by Montag and Faber?
11. The conversation between Millie, Mrs. Phelps, and Mrs. Bowles is significant for many reasons. Firstly, what does it reveal about the women's characters? Secondly, what effect does it have on Montag and why?



Read: Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach"

12. Why would Bradbury choose this poem for Montag to read aloud to women who clearly do not believe there is anything wrong with the way in which they live?
13. Explain why the poem upsets Millie's female guests.
14. The lines "the old man would go on with this talking and this talking, drop by drop, stone by stone, flake by flake. His mind would well over at last and he would not be Montag any more" (99) indicate that a change is taking place in Montag, and that he will not be able to return to his old life. What is the change?
15. During the conversation between Montag and Beatty, a conversation that Faber can hear, Bradbury develops the visual image of Montag's hands. To what effect?

16. What is the significance of Beatty's "dream?"
17. Beatty's belief that books are "traitors." Why?
18. Explain Beatty's tone when he talks to Montag. What is the intended effect?

Burning Bright:



Read: William Blake's "The Tiger"

1. What is the significance of the title of this chapter? What does the title foreshadow?
2. Who was Icarus and why does Bradbury allude to this story when Beatty says, "'Old Montag wanted to fly near the sun and now that he's burnt his damn wings, he wonders why'" (107).
3. a. In the society of *F451* the natural world is banished and distrusted. What effect is created when Beatty refers to Clarisse's "'Flowers, butterflies, leaves, sunsets...a few grass blades and the quarters of the moon'" (107)?
- b. What are the implications of Beatty's derision regarding Clarisse?
4. What is the effect of Millie's betrayal on Montag?
5. Beatty's belief that fire's "'real beauty is that it destroys responsibility and consequences. A problem gets too burdensome, then into the furnace with it'" (109) is a reflection of his society's belief. Identify at least three of the consequences you see the characters suffering from as a result of ignoring their problems.
6. Why does Montag burn his own house?
7. Why did Beatty not turn Montag in earlier when he clearly knew what Montag was doing?
8. Who is responsible for Beatty's death? What does the death of Beatty symbolize?
9. Discuss the significance of the "concrete river" (119) Montag must cross to get to Faber's house.
10. Explain the atmosphere of the scene in which Montag is almost run over. How might the reader feel about this event?
11. If Montag's life is in danger, why does he risk stopping at the home of his co-worker, Mr. Black, and planting his own books there?
12. Montag and Faber each have strong reactions to what they have started, although the reactions are slightly different. Compare and contrast the two men's feelings at this point.
13. Explain the irony in Faber's statement, "'I've heard there are still hobo camps all across the country, here and there; walking camps they call them, and if you keep walking far enough and keep an eye peeled, they say there's lots of old Harvard degrees on the tracks between here and Los Angeles'" (126).
14. Why would the television announcers say that the "'-Mechanical Hound *never* fails'" (126) when Montag clearly just burnt one to a crisp?
15. Describe Montag's reaction to watching his own manhunt on the television.
16. What steps does Montag take to try and protect Faber?
17. Bradbury's allusion to the "Keystone Comedy" is a deliberate reference. Identify the similarity between these silent film characters and the hunt for Montag.
18. Explain the symbolism of the river.
19. Montag's realization that "After a long time of floating on the land and a short time of floating in the river he knew why he must never burn again in his life" (134) is a significant one. What does he mean?
20. Discuss the importance of Montag's daydream of sleeping in a barn and the contrast with reality.
21. As Montag begins to walk along the old railroad tracks, his idea that "Once, long ago, Clarisse had walked here, where he was walking now" (138) seems rather odd. What does he mean?
22. The image of the Book Men's fire stands in stark contrast to the previous use of this image. Why is this image different?
23. Why does Granger tell Montag to drink the contents of a small bottle of colorless liquid? What does this small detail tell us about those who live outside the city?

24. How can the Book Men have known that “Montag” would be caught? What are the implications?
25. Why are these men living in the woods, seemingly on the run?
26. Granger’s statement, ““When we were separate individuals, all we had was rage”” (143) indicates the powerlessness of the lone man. If Granger is no longer alone, what might we expect from him and his group?
27. List the members of Granger’s group. Why are these men so important to mankind, particularly if there ever comes a day when society wakes up? How have they managed to hide?
28. What is the drawback to the Book Men’s method of protecting books?
29. Explain the significance of Granger’s statement, ““The most important single thing we had to pound into ourselves is that we were not important, we mustn’t be pedants”” (146).
30. Describe the irony present in the line, ““Don’t judge a book by its cover”” (148).
31. How is Granger’s grandfather’s advice to ““live as if you’d drop dead in ten seconds”” (150) similar to Faber’s insistence that each individual needs to “touch” life?
32. What kind of bomb is dropped on the city? Use details from the novel to support your answer.
33. What does Montag hope for Millie as he imagines her final seconds?
34. Why is it that in the moment of the city’s destruction, Montag suddenly is able to remember the bits of *Ecclesiastes* and *Revelation* that he was unable to recall earlier?
35. What is the mood created by Montag’s thought, “...my God, look at it out there, outside me, out there beyond my face and the only way to really touch it is to put it where it’s finally me, where it’s in the blood, where it pumps around a thousand times ten thousand a day. I’ll get hold of it so it’ll never run off. I’ll hold onto the world tight some day. I’ve got one finger on it now; that’s a beginning” (154-155)?
36. Compare and contrast the use of the phoenix symbolism as it applies to Beatty and to the Book Men (and others like them).
37. Why does Granger want to build a mirror factory?
38. Who now leads the group and why?
39. What is the effect intended by Bradbury in ending his novel with specific references to *Ecclesiastes* and *Revelation*?
40. Why would Bradbury’s initial publisher want the Book Men to be unable to recall their memorized texts? Why would Bradbury insist on leaving their memories intact? Which would create the better ending, in your opinion?