

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Fahrenheit 451

by Ray Bradbury

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PART ONE

The Hearth and the Salamander

1. As this science fiction novel opens, the main character, Guy Montag, is thinking about the excitement of being a fireman. He is going home after midnight, and the streets are deserted. There seems to be a tone of menace about the streets. Even though this is a futuristic novel, how different is this scene on a dark street from that same scene in our times? Imagine a conversation you might have with a family member who was awake when you arrived home late at night, as Montag did. Describe your feelings of being afraid while walking home alone to a friend.
2. Clarisse McClellan is an interesting character. She is seventeen years old, walking the dark streets alone, and acting totally unafraid. She seems quite odd in her behavior and the way she questions Guy. Everyone knows someone of their acquaintance who would qualify, like Clarisse, as being different. Think of a person you have known, or have been puzzled by in a book or film who would be almost as “different” as Clarisse. Imagine that you are entering a contest to win a prize for the best short article, no longer than one page, about a person who was different. Write as vividly as you can about the person you think would qualify.
3. Guy has a feeling that Clarisse sees right into his mind. She is extremely honest in the way she speaks her mind and questions the way life is. She questions why some seemingly innocent things are against the law. List some of the things that Clarisse questions which are illegal. Explain to a friend why you think that society made those things illegal and give your opinion of whether you do or do not think this is a good thing.

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4. We learn that Guy's job as a fireman is not to *put out* fires, but actually to burn books. Reading books is illegal, so whenever and wherever any are found, they are burned. The reasons behind the burning of books is the central theme of *Fahrenheit 451*. Imagine that the City Council of your town was planning to burn all books. Write a short speech that you would give to a Town Meeting where this proposal will be debated. In your speech give your reasons why this law should not be passed. Also include what you think would happen if all books were burned.
5. When Guy finally arrives home in the middle of the night, he finds his wife, Mildred, unconscious from an overdose of pills. He thinks she is dead and, in shock himself, calls the emergency services. Most people have had to face an emergency situation at some time or another in their lives. Imagine a life-threatening emergency situation or recall one that you know about from real life. Describe the emergency and make a list of exactly what you would do if you had to handle the situation all by yourself.
6. The medical persons who perform the emergency procedure on Mildred seemed to be casual and uncaring. Guy doesn't seem to be able to do much about it. Suppose you had had to stand by and watch this kind of thing happening to someone you cared about. Write what you might have done in the same circumstances.
7. Guy says, "I don't know anything anymore." Explain the statement to someone in your class who says, "What's he got to be confused about?"
8. Mildred's television world, "the TV Parlor," is made up of three walls upon which television programs are shown. It also lets a person interact with the programming. Write your opinion of what is good and what is bad about today's television programs and their effect on those who watch.

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9. Clarisse again meets Guy and has a long conversation with him. He seems fascinated about all the things in nature that she tells him. List all the natural things Clarisse tells Guy about. Tell what you think Guy's reaction to is and why you think that he feels that way.

10. The Mechanical Hound is both fascinating and very frightening. In this novel, animals do not exist, only mechanical versions of them. Imagine you are living in an environment which resembles that of *Fahrenheit 451*. Write a brief outline of a story in which the main character is a mechanical wolf, who by an accident has acquired human qualities and is eluding captivity.

11. Montag has what may seem to be an irrational fear of The Mechanical Hound, even though it is not a living thing and can be controlled. It is not easy to have an inward fear of something, even though our rational minds tell us that there is really nothing to fear. Imagine that a friend has shared a secret fear with you. Write about the fear he or she shared and what advice you would give to help him or her to handle the fear.

12. Captain Beatty is a secretive man, who controls the firemen completely and has given his allegiance to the book-burning government. He says, "Any man's insane who thinks he can fool the government and us." What is your opinion of the government of our time? Do you think that people today can and do fool our government? Give examples to back up your opinion.

13. The author writes, "Montag gazed beyond [the firemen] to the wall with the typed lists of a million forbidden books. Their names leapt in fire, burning down the years under his ax and his hose which sprayed not water but kerosene." What is your reaction to the idea that no one in that society is allowed to read books? In addition, think about the million forbidden books. Name five books that you have read or know about that you would hope would not be found on the list.

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14. When an alarm comes in that there are books to be found at 11 No. Elm, Montag, Beatty, and all the firemen rush to the scene. A neighbor has informed on the woman in the house. There has always been controversy about people who become informers, about “whistle-blowers,” about those who “tell” or “rat” on other people. Complete the dialogue below that you might have with your best friend about the good and bad points of reporting others to persons or institutions in authority.

You: I think it’s rotten to tell on your friends or neighbors. It’s especially bad if the informant is doing it for the reward that might be offered.

Friend: So, how’s the law going to be enforced if the cops, the FBI, or whoever doesn’t know who is breaking the law?

You:

15. How did reading about the scene of the book burning and its shocking conclusion make you feel? Write an imaginary diary entry describing the event. In the entry, write your feelings about the part taken in the book burning by Montag, Beatty, the other firemen, and the woman who owns the books.
16. One of the first laws Adolf Hitler instituted was burning of books the Nazi’s felt went against their beliefs. If you were a complete dictator, what would you ban? List five things and provide a reason for each choice.
17. On the way back to the fire station, Captain Beatty quotes from something said by a man in 1555. The firemen are shocked and wonder how he knows anything from a book. What do you think that this reveals about Captain Beatty? Write a one paragraph prediction from what you have read so far about Captain Beatty explaining what you think will happen to him before the end of the novel.

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18. Montag has broken the law by stealing a book from a burning job he has just finished. He has hidden it under his bed pillow so that his wife, who is in her bed next to his, will not know. Imagine you are able to talk to Montag. What advice would you give him about keeping the book?
19. Montag and Mildred seem not to be connecting at all. Montag does make some attempts at communicating with his wife, but she remains in her own little world of the three TV Parlor walls. Write an letter to Mildred, which tells her that she must begin to be involved with her husband and the world around her. Point out to her that if she does not change, another probable suicide attempt, or worse, awaits her.
20. Suppose you lived at the time of *Fahrenheit 451*, and you thought censorship is wrong. Write an anonymous letter, which you would post on the door of the firehouse telling why you disagree with censorship and why it is dangerous.
21. Montag's unhappiness with his life is now very apparent. In a previous section of the book, Clarisse asked him, "Are you happy?" and Montag did not quite know how to answer. Suppose Clarisse asked you that question. Finish the dialogue with your answer beginning with this sentence: "Well, Clarisse, my definition of happiness is..."
22. One of the reasons for Montag's confusion is that his secret thoughts and actions are setting him apart from everyone else; however, people generally need to feel part of the group in which they are living. Think of a time when you or someone you know disagreed with a position taken by most of the people you know. Write about that and how you felt. Were you satisfied with how the situation was resolved, or do you wish it had been handled it differently?



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