Fahrenheit 451

Part One: The Hearth and the Salamander

1. In an ancient Greek myth, Prometheus, a son of Zeus, feels sorry for human beings, who are cold and helpless. He steals fire from the gods and gives it to mankind. Symbolically, the giving of fire is the beginning of wisdom and science. Fire is also destructive: the Christian Hell is supposed to be a place where people burn eternally, and some religions predict that the world will end in fire. What aspect of fire do we see in the opening of the book?

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2. How does Bradbury characterize Montag in the opening paragraphs of the book? What details does he use to accomplish this characterization?

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3. Why does Montag’s helmet have the number 451 on it?

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4. What details does Bradbury give to establish the setting of Montag’s encounter with Clarisse? Why might these be significant?

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5. What kinds of words and images does Bradbury use to characterize Clarisse? How might these be symbolic?

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6. What distinction does Bradbury make between electric light and candlelight? In light of Montag's conversation with Clarisse, why might this be significant?
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7. What do we learn about the society in which Clarisse and Montag live?
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8. What question does Clarisse ask that upsets him?
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9. Besides her complexion, what feature of Clarisse does Bradbury emphasize? Why does he do this?
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10. What image associated with light does Montag think of in connection with Clarisse after he is back in his house?
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11. What word does Montag think of repeatedly in connection with his bedroom and his wife? Why are these details here?
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12. What is happening in the background as Montag dials the hospital? What do these suggest?
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13. What is the most prominent feature of the machine used to pump Mildred's stomach? Why is this feature significant?

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14. The technician tells Montag that cases like Mildred's are extremely common. What does this indicate about the state of Montag's society?
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15. Describe the conversation between Montag and Mildred. What does it indicate about their relationship?
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16. Describe the play coming on the “parlor walls.” What does Montag seem to think about this form of entertainment? What does Mildred think?
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17. What word does Mildred use to describe the play? What does this suggest about her character?
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18. Compare Montag's conversation with Clarisse to his conversation with Mildred.
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19. What images are linked to Clarisse in the passage describing her second conversation with Montag? Why might Bradbury use these images in connection with her?
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20. What figure from mythology does the Mechanical Hound recall?
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21. Bradbury’s description of the Mechanical Hound makes it seem like a grotesque parody of a living thing. What are some details that contribute to this description?
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22. Describe the relationship between Montag and Captain Beatty. What are some details that give us information about their relationship?
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23. Clarisse notes that Montag’s laugh sounds “more relaxed” than it did when they talked before. Trace the change in Montag from the beginning of the book until now.
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24. What connection does Clarisse make between her school and the forms of entertainment that most of her peers prefer?
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25. What, according to Clarisse, would prevent young people from being so violent and destructive?

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26. An allegory is a story in which characters and objects have a direct symbolic function. In his philosophical dialogue, *The Republic*, the Greek philosopher Plato includes a passage known as “The Allegory of the Cave.” It imagines a group of people inside a cave, watching shadows playing on a wall. Unable to leave the cave, the people know only the shadows, and they believe that the shadows are reality. A person who escapes the cave and experiences the true reality is unable to convince the people chained in the cave of what he or she has seen. What allusion to this allegory occurs in this chapter?

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27. When Montag asks Beatty about the history of fire departments, two other firemen pull out their handbooks to remind him of something he already knows. How have the firemen changed history to suit their own ideas? What point is Bradbury making by bringing up Benjamin Franklin here?

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28. Explain the significance of the statement the woman in the house quotes before she is burned alive.

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29. Beatty tells the woman that she has been “locked up…in a Tower of Babel.” To what is he referring?

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30. What language relating to heat and cold does Bradbury use in the passage about Montag returning to bed and hiding the book?
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31. Why does Montag begin to cry when he thinks about Mildred dying?
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32. What is ironic about Montag referring to the people on the parlor walls as “relatives” and Mildred saying, “That’s my family”?
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33. As Montag lies in bed thinking about what is wrong with his marriage, what episodes does he remember? Why are these significant?
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34. How does Mildred treat Montag when he becomes ill?
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35. How is Beatty characterized during his visit to Montag’s house? What words and details contribute to this characterization?
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36. How does Bradbury build suspense during the passage describing Beatty’s visit?
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37. What vital role do firemen play in society, according to Beatty?

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38. Does Beatty really believe all of the things he tells Montag in the lecture? What evidence supports your answer?

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39. What does Beatty say about pleasure and happiness?

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40. During Montag’s conversation with Mildred after Beatty leaves, what indication is there that she has internal conflict?

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41. What book does Montag finally settle on to read with Mildred? What is the symbolism of this book?

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Part Two: The Sieve and the Sand

1. The first two books mentioned in this section are by James Boswell, an eighteenth-century lawyer and friend of the writer Samuel Johnson. Boswell is best known for his biography of Johnson and his diaries describing their travels together. Why does Montag think these books have something to do with Clarisse?

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2. What connection does Montag make between books and empathy?

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3. In relation to the Allegory of the Cave, who would Faber be? What does he say that indicates this is the case?

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4. Describe Montag’s state of mind as he rides the train to see Faber. Has he made a complete break with his old self?

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5. Why does Montag, at this point, have the memory about the sieve and the sand?

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6. What Bible verse is Montag trying to memorize during the train ride? Who or what is his antagonist in this scene?

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7. What, according to Faber, has been done to Jesus by the television programs?
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8. What does Faber mean when he says that good books have “pores”?
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9. What metaphors does Faber use to describe the texture that good literature has? What do all of these metaphors have in common, and what is Faber’s larger message here?
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10. Why, according to Faber, is it impossible to argue with the “parlor walls”?
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11. Faber warns Montag not to look for answers in one “person, machine, or library.” Where, according to Faber, do the answers lie?
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12. What does Faber say about the public that echoes Beatty’s lecture?
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13. How does Montag force Faber to become his guide?
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14. How is Faber’s use of technology different from society’s?

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15. How is the “blind faith” that Montag has in Faber different from the blind faith that he had in the fire chief?

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16. Faber reads Montag the Book of Job, about a virtuous man whose faith is tested by God. The main question of the Book of Job is why God allows pain and suffering in the world. Why might Bradbury have chosen the Book of Job for this moment in the story?

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17. What it the women do that drives Montag over the edge? To what does he compare them in his mind?

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18. From what the women say, what can we infer about the election?

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19. The poem that Montag reads is “Dover Beach,” by Matthew Arnold. The speaker of this poem stands with his lover at night, watching the waves crash on the shore and the armed boats signal with their lights. He concludes that the world is not a caring or hopeful place, and hopes that their love will be able to survive. Why does Bradbury choose to have him read this poem?

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20. What does Bradbury tell us about the development of Montag's character in this section? What allusion is suggested in the references to fire, water, and wine?

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21. What is ironic about Beatty saying “the sheep returns to the fold”?

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22. Sum up the two sides of the argument in Beatty's dream.

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23. Why does Beatty's speech make Montag so upset?

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24. What images does Bradbury use to describe Beatty and the other firemen? What ideas do these images evoke?

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Part Three: Burning Bright

1. To what story is Beatty alluding when he says Montag “wanted to fly near the sun”?

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2. What, according to Beatty, is the real attraction of fire?

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3. What is the last thing that Montag burns?

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4. What does Montag mean when he says, “We never burned right”?

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5. Why does Montag run to Faber’s house?

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6. Who almost kills Montag? What is the significance of the motivation for this attempted murder?

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7. Where does Faber advise Montag to travel? Why might this be thematically significant?

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8. Why does Bradbury compare the Hound to autumn? What other mention of autumn have we seen in the book?
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9. Bradbury says that Montag feels the pressure of the Hound's silence rising. How does this echo the description of Montag burning his own parlor walls?
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10. What is ironic about the broadcast of the chase?
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11. Why does Bradbury describe the people looking out of their homes as gray?
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12. What does Montag do right before he enters the river?
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13. Verse 11 of the Book of Ecclesiastes reads as follows:

There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

How does this fit in with Montag’s realization about the sun?

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14. Why does Montag want “a glass of milk, an apple, a pear”?

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15. What language relating to fullness and emptiness does Bradbury use when Montag steps out of the river?

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16. Montag’s foot hits “something that (rings) dully”—it turns out to be the railroad track. What episode from earlier in the book does this sentence echo?

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17. How is the campfire different from the other kinds of fire mentioned in the book?

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18. How does Montag’s approaching the fire echo the story of Prometheus?

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19. What is significant about the fact that the police find a substitute for Montag to end the chase?
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20. How is the death of the substitute Montag symbolic?
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21. What theme of *Fahrenheit 451* does the title of Granger's book hint at?
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22. What Biblical references does Granger make?
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23. Chapter 19 of the Old Testament Book of Genesis tells the story of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the story, these cities are destroyed because of the sins of their people. One man, Lot, is righteous enough to be saved. He takes his wife and leaves the city; they are told by an angel not to look behind them. Lot's wife looks back anyway and is turned into a pillar of salt. What scene at the end of the book echoes this story?
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24. What symbolic action do the men take after they recover from the bombing?
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25. Granger says that the men are “going to build a mirror factory.” What earlier events in the book does this wording recall?
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26. Does the book seem to have a hopeful or a pessimistic conclusion?
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27. A parable is a story that teaches a moral lesson. What is the lesson of Fahrenheit 451?
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