

Fahrenheit 451 Study Questions

Note:

- *The highlighted questions are the ones I think are the most important and/or interesting questions to reflect on and discuss.*
- *The page numbers given in some questions may differ from other editions of the book.*

Part 1

- 1.** Describe the society (a fictional America) that Montag lives in. In what ways is it similar to, but more extreme than, our society? What signs are there that it is a “dystopia” (the opposite of a utopia, an ideal society)?
- 2.** What makes Clarisse so special—so different from most people in her society? What qualities does Montag have that make him receptive to her influence?
- 3.** Why do you think the mechanical hound has been programmed to react to Montag?
- 4.** Why do you think the woman chooses to burn herself along with her books? Why does this have such a powerful effect on Montag—what does it mean to him?
- 5.** What is the point of Bradbury’s description of the kind of television show that Mildred likes to watch (p. 44-46)? [“sound and fury, signifying nothing”—I’ll explain this quotation in class]
- 6.** What is shocking and disturbing about the way Montag finds out what happened to Clarisse? What does this tell us about Mildred and about their society?
- 7.** Why does Montag get “sick” and try to avoid going to work?
- 8.** What does the revelation that Montag has so many books hidden in his home tell us about him? Why do Montag’s hands seem to have a mind of their own—what does this actually mean?
- 9.** What is Beatty’s explanation for the current state of their society?
- 10.** What do you think of Mildred’s claim that she is happy, and why? How do you define happiness? Is being happy always the most important goal of life?
- 11.** What events trigger Montag’s transformation from aloof, unthinking fireman to passionate, philosophical rebel?
- 12.** Find three examples of foreshadowing in Part 1.
- 13.** Like Hemingway, Bradbury sometimes writes in an elliptical style, giving us bits of information from which we must infer what is happening, what the characters are thinking and feeling. Find one example of this in Part 1.
- 14.** Choose one paragraph or passage from Part 1 that is an example of Bradbury’s unusual writing style (e.g. p. 17/18, p. 24) and interpret its meaning.
- 15.** What predictions might you make about later events in the story?

Part 2

1. What does Mildred say about why the television is better than books? What does she mean? Do you agree with her? Why or why not? What is the essential difference between books and television?
2. Why do you think Faber gave Montag his name and phone number?
3. How do you think Montag would respond to Mildred's question about which is more important—her, or Montag's books?
4. What do you think is the meaning of the title of Part Two ("The Sieve and the Sand")?
5. Why does Montag visit Faber?
6. What does Montag mean when he tells Faber that his wife is dying?
7. What three things does Faber say are missing from their society? Explain the importance of these things.
8. What has Faber invented, and why is it important?
9. What disturbing things do the women in Montag's parlor say to each other?
10. Why does Montag start reading poetry to the women? How do they react, and why?
11. What does Beatty say to Montag after he shows up at the firehouse? What is he trying to do? What does he know about Montag that gives him an advantage?

Part 3: 1st half

1. What does Beatty's speech about Clarisse reveal about him—why does he speak about her so passionately?
2. What action has Mildred taken, and what does this show about her values? What do you think she means when she says that "everything's gone now"?
3. Why do you think that everyone in the world of *Fahrenheit 451* thinks that, as Beatty puts it, "nothing will ever happen to *me*...there are no consequences and no responsibilities"? Is this similar to people in our society today?
4. What attitude or aspect of human nature is fire symbolic of? Think about Beatty's philosophy of "burning a problem" rather than facing it.
5. Why does Montag burn his entire house and everything in it?
6. Why do you think Beatty "let the first alarm ride"?
7. What is the "earthquake" that had come?
8. Why do Beatty's eyes widen when Montag toggles the safety on his flame thrower? Why do you think Montag kills him? Is it a simple act of revenge?

9. What does Bradbury's description of Montag's knee as being hit by a car really mean? This is another example of Bradbury's idiosyncratic style of description.
10. What do you think Montag is expressing regret about when he calls himself "an awful fool, an idiot"?
11. How does Montag know Beatty wanted to die? Why do you think he wanted to die? Think about your answer to question number 1.
12. What is remarkable and disturbing about the "declaration of war" scene at the gas station?
13. Why do you think the kids who almost run over Montag could kill him "for no reason at all in the world"?
14. What does Montag do on the way to Faber's house, and why?
15. What does Montag mean when he says, "I was saving something up" and "It's a wonder it didn't show on me, like fat"?
16. How does Faber feel now, and why?
17. What does Montag's daydream about watching himself get caught by the Mechanical Hound on TV reveal about his mental state? Connect this with question number 3—could watching TV have something to do with this? (Refer also to the top of page 138.)
18. What is Montag's escape plan?

Part 3: 2nd Half

1. What does Montag's description of the TV audience mean? ("He imagined thousands of faces with gray colorless eyes, gray tongues, and gray thoughts looking out through the numb flesh of the face.")
2. What do you think the river symbolizes?
3. What does the sun represent? What connection does Montag see between the sun and time? Why does he decide he must never burn again?
4. How does Montag think Mildred would react to the silence of the countryside? Why?
5. Why do you think Montag is sure that Clarisse has walked along that railroad track before?
6. What is the significance of Montag's being "fully aware of his entire body"—why is that so unusual for him?
7. In what ways might Montag and other people of his society be comparable to an animal ("knowing himself as an animal come from the forest")?
8. What way do the men at the campfire provide for Montag to escape from the Mechanical Hound?
9. How does the chase end for the TV audience? How is this accomplished, and what more does it reveal about the police? What explanation do the men give Montag for the way the chase ends?

10. What is ethics, and why would it be “an ancient study” to the people of Montag’s society?
11. How do the men and others like them preserve books, and what makes this possible? What are the advantages of using this method to preserve books?
12. Describe the men’s strategy for bringing books back to society. What view do they have of their own significance? Why are they optimistic about the future of humanity?
13. Why does one of the men tell Montag, “Don’t judge a book by its cover”?
14. Explain Granger’s views about why we miss people we’ve lost. Why doesn’t Montag miss Mildred? How do people achieve life after death?
15. What is the “wilderness that will one day come and get us”?
16. Describe Granger’s grandfather’s philosophy of life. Why does he “hate a Roman named Status Quo”? (Hint: Look *status quo* up in the dictionary.) Why does he reject the idea of guarantees and security in life?
17. Why do the people of the city not believe in the bombs that kill them—why haven’t they tried to escape destruction? In what way are they like savages that don’t believe in bullets because they are invisible?
18. Why do you think Montag suddenly remembers where he and Mildred met?
19. What does Montag mean when he says that he wants to hold onto the world?
20. In what way is humankind like the Phoenix? In what way is humankind different?
21. What is the meaning of Granger’s comment about building a mirror factory?

Afterword

1. What more is revealed about Beatty in the play version of *Fahrenheit 451*?
2. What is the significance of the names Montag and Faber? What lesson might we draw from this about the processes of writing fiction and poetry and analyzing/interpreting fiction and poetry?

Summary Questions

1. Describe the major characters: Montag, Clarisse, Beatty, Faber, and Granger.
2. What do you think are the important themes and messages of the novel?
3. For what reasons might books be perceived as a threat to a society? Why shouldn’t they be burned? In what ways might books be truly dangerous? Think about the version of history told in the firemen’s handbook.
4. In what ways is Montag’s society similar to, but perhaps more extreme than, our own?