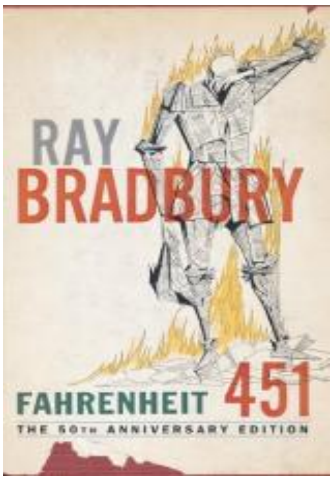
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Fahrenheit 451

by Ray Bradbury



About the Book

> "Three years ago I wrote a short novel entitled 'The Fire Man' which told the story of a municipal department in the year 1999 that came to your house to start fires instead of to put them out."
> --Ray Bradbury, 1953

Fahrenheit 451, the 1953 reincarnation of "The Fire Man," presents ideas that are far more complex than that brief description indicates. This novel is a soothsayer, warning of a future populated by non-readers and non-thinkers; a lost people with no sense of their history. At the same time it salutes those who dedicate their lives to the preservation and passing on of knowledge, and testifies to the quiet or passionate courage of the rebel with a cause. Fahrenheit also poses questions about the role(s) of government: Should it reflect the will of the people? Should government do the people's thinking for them?

Discussion Guide

1. Why would society make "being a pedestrian" a crime? (Clarisse tells Montag that her uncle was once arrested for this.)

2. One suicide and one near-suicide occur in this book. One woman, who shuns books but loves TV and driving fast in her car, anesthetizes herself,; "We get these cases nine or ten a night," says the medical technician. Another woman, who cherishes her books, sets herself on fire with them; "These fanatics always try suicide," says the fire captain. Why would two people who seem to be so different from each other try to take their own lives? Why does suicide happen so frequently in Montag's society?"

3. Captain Beatty quotes history, scripture, poetry, philosophy. He is obviously a well-read man. Why hasn't he been punished? And why does he view the books he's read with such contempt?

4. Beatty tells Montag that firemen are "custodians of peace of mind" and that they stand against "those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought." How well are the firemen accomplishing these objectives? Are conflicting ideas the only source of unhappiness in their society? What other sources might there be? Can conflicting ideas exist even without books that have been destroyed and outlawed?

5. Why do you think the firemen's rulebook credited Benjamin Franklin-- writer, publisher, political leader, inventor, ambassador--as being the first fireman?

6. Why does Beatty program the Hound to track Montag even before Montag stole the book? Do you believe Beatty had seen him steal books before? Or is it that Beatty had detected a change in Montag's attitude or behavior? Cite incidents in the book that support your answer.

7. Montag turns to books to rescue him; instead they help demolish his life -- he loses his wife, job and home; he kills a man and is forced to be a nomad. Does he gain any benefits from books? If so, what are they?

8. Do you believe, as Montag did, that Beatty wanted to die? If so, why do you think so?

9. Since the government is so opposed to readers, thinkers, walkers, and slow drivers, why does it allow the procession of men along the railroad tracks to exist?

10. Once Montag becomes a violent revolutionary, why does the government purposely capture an innocent man in his place instead of tracking down the real Montag? Might the government believe that Montag is no longer a threat?

11. Granger, spokesperson for the group on the railroad tracks, tells Montag, "Right now we have a horrible job; we're waiting for the war to begin and, as quickly, end...When the war's over, perhaps we can be of some use in the world." Based on what you've read of the world these men live in, do you believe that the books they carry inside themselves will make a difference? Might this difference be positive or negative? Point out episodes in Fahrenheit to support your response.

12. What does Granger mean when he says, "We're going to go build a mirror factory first and put out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long time to look at them?" Why would "mirrors" be important in this new society? (Note: In Part 1, Clarisse is said to be "like a mirror.")

13. Although Ray Bradbury's work is often referred to as science fiction, Fahrenheit has plenty to say about the world as it is, and not as it could be. As you review the book, list examples of the themes mentioned below, as well as others you notice. Discuss how you feel about the stands the author or characters take in Fahrenheit.

conformity vs. individuality
freedom of speech and the consequences of losing it
the importance of remembering and understanding history
machines as helpers to humans, machines as hindrances or enemies

-- Guide by Alice Jones-Miller. Ms. Jones-Miller is an editor and writer living in Westchester County, New York.

Author Bio

One of the most celebrated writers of our time, Ray Bradbury inspired generations of readers to dream, think and create. He wrote for magazines, the theater, cinema and TV, creating hundreds of short stories and more than three dozen books, as well as numerous poems, essays, operas, plays, screenplays and teleplays. His groundbreaking works include FAHRENHEIT 451, THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, THE ILLUSTRATED MAN, DANDELION WINE and SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES. Among his many honors, Bradbury was the recipient of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, the National Medal of Arts, an Emmy Award, and a Pulitzer Prize Special Citation.

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