

Reading Group Guide

Spotlight on:
Fahrenheit 451

Author: Ray (Douglas) Bradbury

Born August 22, 1920, in Waukegan IL; son of Leonard Spaulding and Esther (Moberg) Bradbury; married Marguerite Susan McClure, September 27, 1947 (died, 2003); children: Susan Marguerite, Ramona, Bettina, Alexandra. Education: Attended schools in Waukegan, IL, and Los Angeles, CA. Politics: Independent. Religion: Unitarian Universalist. Avocational Interests: Painting in oil and water colors, collecting Mexican artifacts. Memberships: Writers Guild of America, Screen Writers Guild, Science Fantasy Writers of America, Pacific Art Foundation. Addresses: Home: 10265 Cheviot Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90064. Agent: Don Congdon, 156 Fifth Ave., No. 625, New York, NY 10010. E-mail: RayBradbury@harpercollins.com.

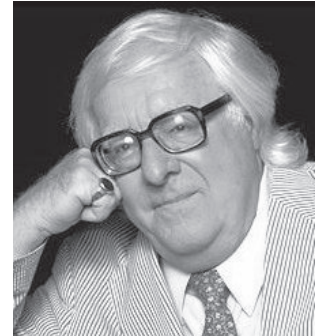
Name: Ray Bradbury

Born: August 22, 1920

Education: Attended schools in Waukegan, IL, and Los Angeles,

CA. **Addresses:** Home: 10265 Cheviot Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90064. Agent: Don Congdon, 156 Fifth Ave., No. 625, New York, NY 10010.

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Career:

Newsboy in Los Angeles, CA, 1940-43; full-time writer, 1943—.

Awards:

O. Henry Prize, 1947 and 1948; Benjamin Franklin Award, 1953-54, for *Sun and Shadow*; gold medal, Commonwealth Club of California, 1954, for *Fahrenheit 451*; National Institute of Arts and Letters award, 1954, for contribution to American literature; Junior Book Award, Boys' Clubs of America, 1956, for *Switch on the Night*; Golden Eagle Award, 1957, for screenwriting; Academy Award nomination for best short film, 1963, for *Icarus Montgolfier Wright*; Mrs. Ann Radcliffe Award, Count Dracula Society, 1965, 1971; Writers Guild Award, 1974; World Fantasy Award, 1977, for lifetime achievement; D.Litt., Whittier College, 1979, Woodbury University, 2005; Balrog Award, 1979, for best poet; Aviation and Space Writers Award, 1979, for television documentary; Gandalf Award, 1980; Body of Work Award, PEN, 1985; inducted into the University of Kansas Center for the Study of Science Fiction's Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame, 1999; medal for "*Distinguished Contribution to American Letters*," National Book Foundation, 2000; Bram Stoker Award nominee in novel category, Horror Writers Association, 2001, for *From the Dust Returned*, and 2003, for *One More for the Road*; the play version of *The Martian Chronicles* won five Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Awards; Grand Master Nebula Award, Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America; star on Hollywood Walk of Fame; National Medal of the Arts, 2004; honorary degree, National University of Ireland, 2005.

Writings:

Novels:

The Martian Chronicles (also see below), *Doubleday* (Garden City, NY), 1950, revised edition published as *The Silver Locusts*, Hart-Davis (London, England), 1965, anniversary edition published as *The Martian Chronicles: The Fortieth Anniversary Edition*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1990.
Fahrenheit 451 (novelette; also see below), Ballantine (New York, NY), 1953, Long Beach Public Library Foundation (Long Beach, CA), 2005.



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Dandelion Wine (also see below), Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1957, Avon (New York, NY), 1999.
Something Wicked This Way Comes (also see below), Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 1962, Avon (New York, NY), 1999.
Death Is a Lonely Business, Knopf (New York, NY), 1985, Avon (New York, NY), 1999.
A Graveyard for Lunatics: Another Tale of Two Cities, Knopf (New York, NY), 1990.
Quicker Than the Eye, Avon (New York, NY), 1996.
Green Shadows, White Whale, Knopf (New York, NY), 1992, published with a new afterword by the author, Perennial (New York, NY), 2002.
From the Dust Returned: A Family Remembrance, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2001.
Let's All Kill Constance, Morrow (New York, NY), 2003.

Story Collections:

Dark Carnival, Arkham (Sauk City, WI), 1947, revised edition, Hamish Hamilton (London, England), 1948, published as *The October Country*, Ballantine (New York, NY), 1955.
The Illustrated Man, Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1951, revised edition, Hart-Davis (London, England), 1952, Chivers Press (Bath, England), 1999.
Fahrenheit 451 (contains "*Fahrenheit 451*" [also see below], "*The Playground*", and "*And the Rock Cried Out*"), Ballantine (New York, NY), 1953.
The Golden Apples of the Sun (also see below), Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1953, fortieth anniversary edition with a new foreword by the author, G. K. Hall (Thorndike, ME), 1997.
A Medicine for Melancholy (also see below), Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1959, revised edition published as *The Day It Rained Forever* (also see below), Hart-Davis (London, England), 1959.
The Ghoul Keepers, Pyramid (New York, NY), 1961.
The Small Assassin, Ace (New York, NY), 1962.
The Machineries of Joy, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 1964.
The Vintage Bradbury, Vintage (New York, NY), 1965.
The Autumn People, Ballantine (New York, NY), 1965.
Tomorrow Midnight, Ballantine (New York, NY), 1966.
Twice Twenty-Two (contains *The Golden Apples of the Sun* and *A Medicine for Melancholy*), Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1966.
I Sing the Body Electric! Knopf (New York, NY), 1969.
(With Robert Bloch) *Bloch and Bradbury: Ten Masterpieces of Science Fiction*, Tower, 1969 (published as *Fever Dreams and Other Fantasies*), Sphere (London, England), 1970.
(With Robert Bloch) *Whispers from Beyond*, Peacock Press, 1972.
Selected Stories, Harrap (London, England), 1975.
Long after Midnight, Knopf (New York, NY), 1976.
The Best of Bradbury, Bantam (New York, NY), 1976.
To Sing Strange Songs, Wheaton, 1979.
The Stories of Ray Bradbury, Knopf (New York, NY), 1980.
Dinosaur Tales, Bantam (New York, NY), 1983.
A Memory of Murder, Dell (New York, NY), 1984.
The Toynbee Convector, Random House (New York, NY), 1988.
Quicker Than the Eye, Avon (New York, NY), 1997.
Driving Blind, Avon (New York, NY), 1997.
Ray Bradbury Collected Short Stories, illustrated by Robert Court, Peterson Publishing (North Mankato, MN), 2001.
One More for the Road: A New Short Story Collection, Morrow (New York, NY), 2002.
Bradbury Stories: 100 of His Most Celebrated Tales, Morrow (New York, NY), 2003.
The Cat's Pajamas, Morrow (New York, NY), 2004.



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For Children:

- Switch on the Night*, Pantheon (New York, NY), 1955, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon, Knopf (New York, NY), 1993.
- R Is for Rocket* (story collection), Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1962.
- S Is for Space* (story collection), Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1966.
- The Halloween Tree*, Knopf (New York, NY), 1972.
- The April Witch*, Creative Education (Mankato, MN), 1987.
- The Other Foot*, Creative Education (Mankato, MN), 1987.
- The Foghorn* (also see below), Creative Education (Mankato, MN), 1987.
- The Veldt* (also see below), Creative Education (Mankato, MN), 1987.
- Fever Dream*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 1987.
- Ahmed and the Oblivion Machines*, Avon (New York, NY), 1998.
- The Country*, illustrated by Joe Mugnaini, Avon (New York, NY), 1999.

Plays:

- The Meadow*, produced in Hollywood at the Huntington Hartford Theatre, 1960.
- Way in the Middle of the Air*, produced in Hollywood at the Desilu Gower Studios, 1962.
- The Anthem Sprinters*, and Other Antics (play collection produced in Beverly Hills, CA), Dial (New York, NY), 1963.
- The World of Ray Bradbury* (three one-acts), produced in Los Angeles, CA, at the Coronet Theater, 1964, produced off-Broadway at Orpheum Theatre, 1965.
- Leviathan 99* (radio play), British Broadcasting Corp., 1966, produced in Hollywood, 1972.
- The New York, NYed Forever* (one-act), Samuel French (New York, NY), 1966.
- The Pedestrian* (one-act), Samuel French (New York, NY), 1966.
- Dandelion Wine* (based on his novel of same title; music composed by Billy Goldenberg), produced at Lincoln Center's Forum Theatre, 1967.
- Christus Apollo* (music composed by Jerry Goldsmith), produced in Los Angeles at Royce Hall, University of California, 1969.
- The Wonderful Ice-Cream Suit and Other Plays* (collection; *The Wonderful Ice-Cream Suit*, produced in Los Angeles at the Coronet Theater, 1965; *The Veldt* [based on his story of same title], produced in London, 1980; includes *To the Chicago Abyss*), Bantam (New York, NY), 1972, published as *The Wonderful Ice-Cream Suit and Other Plays for Today, Tomorrow, and Beyond Tomorrow*, Hart-Davis (London, England), 1973.
- Madrigals for the Space Age* (chorus and narration; music composed by Lalo Schifrin; performed in Los Angeles, 1976), Associated Music Publishers, 1972.
- Pillar of Fire and Other Plays for Today, Tomorrow, and Beyond Tomorrow* (*Pillar of Fire*, produced in Fullerton at the Little Theatre, California State College, 1973;
- The Foghorn* [based on his story of same title], produced in New York, 1977; includes *Kaleidoscope*), Bantam (New York, NY), 1975.
- That Ghost, That Bride of Time: Excerpts from a Play-in-Progress*, Squires, 1976.
- The Martian Chronicles* (based on his novel of same title), produced in Los Angeles, 1977.
- Fahrenheit 451* (musical, based on his story of same title), produced in Los Angeles, 1979.
- A Device out of Time*, Dramatic Publishing (Woodstock, IL), 1986.
- Falling Upward* (produced in Los Angeles, March, 1988), Dramatic Publishing (Woodstock, IL), 1988.
- To the Chicago Abyss*, Dramatic Publishing (Woodstock, IL), 1988.
- The Day It Rained Forever* (musical based on his story of the same title), Dramatic Publishing (Woodstock, IL), 1990.
- On Stage: *A Chrestomathy of His Plays*, Primus (New York, NY), 1991.



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Screenplays:

It Came from Outer Space, Universal Pictures, 1953.

The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms (based on his story, "The Foghorn"), Warner Bros., 1953.

Moby Dick, Warner Bros., 1956.

(With George C. Johnson) *Icarus Montgolfier Wright*, Format Films, 1962.

(Author of narration and creative consultant) *An American Journey*, U.S. Government for United States Pavilion at New York World's Fair, 1964.

(Under pseudonym Douglas Spaulding, with Ed Weinberger) *Picasso Summer*, Warner Bros./Seven Arts, 1972.

Something Wicked This Way Comes (based on his novel of same title), Walt Disney, 1983.

Also author of television scripts for *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Jane Wyman's Fireside Theatre*, *Steve Canyon*, *Trouble Shooters*, *Twilight Zone*, *Alcoa Premiere*, and *Curiosity Shop* series. Author of television scripts for Ray Bradbury Television Theatre, USA Cable Network, 1985-90.

Poetry:

Old Ahab's Friend, and Friend to Noah, Speaks His Piece: A Celebration, Roy A. Squires Press (Glendale, CA), 1971.

When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed: Celebrations for Almost Any Day in the Year (also see below), Knopf (New York, NY), 1973.

That Son of Richard III: A Birth Announcement, Roy A. Squires Press (Glendale, CA), 1974.

Where Robot Mice and Robot Men Run 'Round in Robot Towns (also see below), Knopf (New York, NY), 1977.

Twin Hieroglyphs That Swim the River Dust, Lord John (Northridge, CA), 1978.

The Bike Repairman, Lord John (Northridge, CA), 1978.

The Author Considers His Resources, Lord John (Northridge, CA), 1979.

The Aqueduct, Roy A. Squires Press (Glendale, CA), 1979.

This Attic Where the Meadow Greens, Lord John (Northridge, CA), 1979.

The Last Circus and The Electrocution, Lord John (Northridge, CA), 1980.

The Ghosts of Forever (five poems, a story, and an essay), Rizzoli (New York, NY), 1980.

The Haunted Computer and the Android Pope (also see below), Knopf (New York, NY), 1981.

The Complete Poems of Ray Bradbury (contains *Where Robot Mice and Robot Men Run 'Round in Robot Towns*, *The Haunted Computer and the Android Pope*, and *When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed*, Ballantine (New York, NY), 1982.

The Love Affair (a short story and two poems), Lord John (Northridge, CA), 1983. *Forever and the Earth*, limited edition, Croissant & Co. (Athens, OH), 1984.

Death Has Lost Its Charm for Me, Lord John (Northridge, CA), 1987.

With Cat for Comforter, illustrated by Louise Reinoehl Max, Gibbs Smith (Salt Lake City, UT), 1997.

Dogs Think That Every Day Is Christmas, illustrated by Louise Reinoehl Max, Gibbs Smith (Salt Lake City, UT), 1997.

(With others) *You Are Here: The Jerde Partnership International* (architecture), Phaidon Press Limited (London, England), 1999.

I Live by the Invisible: New and Selected Poems, Salmon (Dublin, Ireland), 2002.

Other Works:

(Editor and contributor) *Timeless Stories for Today and Tomorrow*, Bantam (New York, NY), 1952.

(Editor and contributor) *The Circus of Dr. Lao and Other Improbable Stories*, Bantam (New York, NY), 1956.

Sun and Shadow (short story), Quenian Press (Berkeley, CA), 1957.

(With Lewy Olfson) *Teacher's Guide: Science Fiction*, Bantam (New York, NY), 1968.

Zen and the Art of Writing, Capra Press (Santa Barbara, CA), 1973.

(With Bruce Murray, Arthur C. Clarke, Walter Sullivan, and Carl Sagan) *Mars and the Mind of Man*, Harper (New York, NY), 1973.



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- The Mummies of Guanajuato*, Abrams (New York, NY), 1978.
(Author of text) *About Norman Corwin*, Santa Susana Press (Northridge, CA), 1979.
Beyond 1984: Remembrance of Things Future, Targ (New York, NY), 1979.
(Author of text) Los Angeles, Skyline Press, 1984.
The Last Good Kiss: A Poem, Santa Susana Press (Glendale, CA), 1984.
(Author of text) *Orange County*, Skyline Press, 1985.
(Author of text) *The Art of "Playboy"*, Alfred Van der Marck (New York, NY), 1985.
The Dragon, B. Munster (Round Top, NY), 1988.
The Fog Horn, Creative Education (Mankato, MN), 1988.
Yesterday: Obvious Answers to Impossible Futures, Joshua O'Dell (New York, NY), 1991.
The Smile, Creative Education (Mankato, MN), 1991.
Journey to Far Metaphor: Further Essays on Creativity, Writing, Literature, and the Arts, Joshua O'Dell (New York, NY), 1994.
A Chapbook for Burnt-Out Priests, Rabbis, and Ministers, 2001.
Conversations with Ray Bradbury, edited by Steven L. Aggelis, University Press of Mississippi (Jackson, MS), 2004.
Bradbury Speaks: Too Soon from the Cave, Too Far from the Stars (essays), Morrow (New York, NY), 2005.

Work represented in more than seven hundred anthologies. Contributor of short stories and articles, sometimes under pseudonyms including Leonard Spaulding, to *Playboy*, *Saturday Review*, *Weird Tales*, *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Omni*, *Life*, and other publications.

Media Adaptations:

Fahrenheit 451 was filmed by Universal in 1966 and adapted as an opera by Georgia Holof and David Mettere and produced in Fort Wayne, IN, 1988; *The Illustrated Man* was filmed by Warner Bros. in 1969; the story "*The Screaming Woman*" was filmed for television in 1972; the story "*Murderer*" was filmed for television by WGBH-TV (Boston, MA), 1976; *The Martian Chronicles* was filmed as a television mini-series in 1980. Bradbury Theatre presented adaptations of Bradbury's short stories on the USA Network from 1985 to 1992. Several of Bradbury's short stories have been adapted as comics and included in *The Best of Ray Bradbury: The Graphic Novel*, 2003.

Many of Bradbury's works have also been adapted as sound recordings.



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Sidelights:

Ray Bradbury is one of the best-known writers of science fiction, thanks to his numerous short stories, screenplays, and classic books such as *The Martian Chronicles*, *Dandelion Wine*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Ironically, Bradbury does not identify himself as a science fiction writer and has proclaimed his aversion to portions of modern technology: he does not drive a car or own a computer. His fiction reflects this mindset, for unlike many of his colleagues, Bradbury deemphasizes gimmicky space hardware and gadgetry in favor of an exploration of the impact of scientific development on human lives. In general, Bradbury warns man against becoming too dependent on science and technology at the expense of moral and aesthetic concerns. Writing in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, George Edgar Slusser noted that “to Bradbury, science is the forbidden fruit, destroyer of Eden. ... In like manner, Bradbury is a fantasist whose fantasies are oddly circumscribed: he writes less about strange things happening to people than about strange imaginings of the human mind. Corresponding, then, to an outer labyrinth of modern technological society is this inner one—fallen beings feeding in isolation on their hopeless dreams.”

Bradbury’s works have provided a foundation for much of the science fiction written in the twentieth century. James Sallis, in an article for the *Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, described, “Some artists have a presence so pervasive that we take them wholly for granted; they’re the floor we walk on. Ray Bradbury, for instance.” In spite of his reputation, Bradbury maintained in *Writer*, “I do not feel like a science fiction writer at all,” stating that much of his work is too fantastic to be considered science fiction, which he felt had to be based on possibilities for the future. Regardless of how his work has been classified, whether in his prose, his children’s stories, his poetry, his noir mysteries, or his plays, it is clear that his writings have had a profound affect on his audiences. Writer contributor Beatrice Cassina summed up what makes Bradbury’s work stand out: “In his writing we meet people like us; people who are not all that involved with futuristic machines; human beings who cry, love and sometimes live in doubt. We read about people who are emotionally involved with their lives, and about places and times that everybody can, in some way, recognize and relate to.”

Bradbury was born in Waukegan, Illinois, in 1920. “At age six he began reading comic strips,” reported David Steinberg in the *Albuquerque Journal*. By the age of eight he was eagerly reading the popular pulp magazines of the time, such as *Amazing Stories*. Steinberg continued, “From there he moved on to reading Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Tarzan* and *Warlord of Mars* and the novels of H. G. Wells and Jules Verne.” He started writing when he was twelve years old, and has been reported to have written a short story every week from then on. In 1934 the Bradbury family moved to Los Angeles, California. Bradbury began to work seriously on his writing at that time, his efforts including attendance at a writing class taught by science fiction master Robert Heinlein. His first published story appeared in an amateur fan magazine in 1938. He continued to work hard on honing his writing craft, and by the 1940s he was publishing in the better magazines and receiving national recognition for his work, winning several important awards and being featured in major anthologies. His first short story collection, *Dark Carnival*, later published by its better-known title *October Country*, features eerie and fantastic short stories, including “*The Homecoming*,” the first tale to introduce the Elliott family, who appear in his later fiction.

In 1950 Bradbury published *The Martian Chronicles*, a cycle of stories chronicling the Earth’s colonization of, and eventual destruction of, the planet Mars. The portrayal of the Martians ranged from sympathetic to threatening, but the stories really focus on the Earthling colonists. *The Martian Chronicles* was lavishly praised by such literary standouts as Christopher Isherwood, Orville Prescott, and Angus Wilson, bringing its author a standing as a writer of highest merit. “The book owed much to the American tradition of frontier literature, and quickly consolidated Bradbury’s reputation as one of science fiction’s leading stylists,” commented an essayist for *St. James Guide to Science Fiction Writers*. The book continued to be published throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first; a 2000 edition was published with dates pushed back, so that the events take place in 2030 instead of 1999. “I did not change them for any other reason than to encourage (people) to go to Mars,” he told Steven G. Reed of the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*. “I didn’t want people to read the book and get discouraged, you see.” In the years *The Martian Chronicles* has been in print, it has been made into a movie, a miniseries,



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a radio show, a stage play, and an interactive adventure game on CD-ROM. According to a contributor to the Newark, NJ, *Star Ledger*, on Bradbury's eighty-third birthday, the author made the following wish, "One night, 100 years from now, a youngster will stay up late reading *The Martian Chronicles* with a flashlight under his blanket—on the Red Planet."

The Illustrated Man, which appeared the following year, is another story cycle; in this volume, though, each story represents a tattoo that has come alive. The Martian setting of the previous book is revisited in a few of the tales, notably "*The Fire Balloons*," which probes the question of whether or not an alien life form can receive Christian grace. The amoral tendencies of children is the basis of "*The Veldt*" and "*Zero Hour*." In "*Kaleidoscope*," Bradbury dramatized the fate of a crew of astronauts whose spaceship has exploded, and who are drifting through space to slowly meet their deaths. Charles De Lint, reviewing a new edition of the collection published in 1997 for the *Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, commented that the stories are "still as vibrant and startling and telling" as they were when the book was published, containing "strong characters, fascinating ideas, crisp dialogue."

The novella *Fahrenheit 451*, along with *The Martian Chronicles*, Bradbury's most famous work. In this story, "firemen" are those who set forbidden books aflame, rather than those who put out fires. Guy Montag, the protagonist, is a fireman himself; however, he begins to question his work when he takes home one of the books he is supposed to have destroyed and reads it. *Fahrenheit 451* is a somewhat simple tale, "as much an attack on mass culture as it is a satire of McCarthy-era censorship," remarked the essayist for *St. James Guide to Science Fiction Writers*. The tale implies that the government-sanctioned illiteracy is the outgrowth of pandering to special interest groups in the mass media, as well as a result of the rise of television. A society of outcasts is the only bastion of great literature; its members dedicate themselves to memorizing the great books of the world. Many commentators note a disturbing similarity between Bradbury's fictional world and our real one. The repressive future world is so vividly depicted in this work that the novella has become as much a staple of political study as George Orwell's *1984*. *Fahrenheit 451* has become both a banned book and a book used in many high school classrooms to discuss the topic of censorship. In 2002 Los Angeles Mayor Jim Hahn used the book as the focus of a citywide reading campaign.

Fahrenheit 451 has an interesting history: the germ of the idea came to Bradbury when he was a teenager, watching a newsreel of Nazis performing a book burning in Berlin. The first draft, published as "*The Fireman*," introduces Montag for the first time, and was written in nine days on a typewriter that Bradbury rented in the library for ten cents per half hour. At the urging of a publisher, Bradbury expanded the novella into its current form. The title, *Fahrenheit 451*, refers to the temperature at which paper ignites. Robert A. Baker, in an article for the Syracuse, NY, *Post-Standard*, reported that Bradbury explained, "he called several places to get the answer before thinking of the fire department. He asked the fire chief, who left the phone briefly before returning to tell him '451 Fahrenheit.' 'I hope he wasn't lying to me,' Bradbury said." Reviewers of the anniversary edition made a point of acknowledging the book's continued relevance. "It has reminded readers over the past fifty years that books can be dangerous things," wrote a reviewer from Australia's *Canberra Times*.

After the publication of *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury moved away from the science fiction genre with which he had become identified. He published other story collections during the 1950s containing a mix of fantasies, stories set in Mexico (a setting which had a lasting fascination for the author), crime stories, and small town tales. In *A Medicine for Melancholy*, Bradbury published his first stories concerning Irish life and character. This interest, sparked during a stay in Ireland in 1954, would be another ongoing concern in his work for years to come. He also continued publishing regularly in magazines, both inside the science fiction genre and in more mainstream publications.

Published in 1962, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* was Bradbury's first full-length novel, and another of his best-known works. This fantasy concerns a malevolent carnival that disrupts life in a small Midwestern town. The action occurs mostly at night and explores the darker parts of humanity. The supernatural powers within the carnival have the power to grant dreams, but also to steal away one's soul. "The merry-go-round, the Hall of



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Mirrors, the parade and other carnivalesque trappings become truly creepy under Bradbury's skillful pen," noted the writer for *St. James Guide to Science Fiction Writers*.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Bradbury's subject matter became more realistic, and his output slightly less prolific. His themes were frequently rather dark, concerning dysfunctional marriages, fear of aging and death, and more warnings on the dangers of technology. Such stories can be found in *The Machineries of Joy* and *I Sing the Body Electric!* The author also worked on nonfiction, plays, editing of anthologies, and writing children's stories. Many of his plays are adaptations of his short stories, and they have continued to appear on stage over the years and in many incarnations. Bradbury's love of theater began at an early age; he was cast for the first time in a musical when he was twelve years old. "His second love has always been theater," reported Ben P. Indick in *Publishers Weekly*. In 2003 Los Angeles theaters featured no less than four of Bradbury's plays.

Bradbury's children's books have featured elements of his science fiction writing; *Switch on the Night* tells of a boy who is afraid of the darkness until a girl named Dark shows him that there are many things to be experienced at night that can't be seen or heard during the day: the stars, the crickets, the croaking frogs. In 1993 *Switch on the Night* was published with new illustrations by Caldecott Medalists Leo and Diane Dillon. Another of Bradbury's children's tales, *Ahmed and the Oblivion Machines*, tells the story of a young boy who is separated from his family in the desert and rescued by an "old god" who shows him the meaning of life.

In 1985 Bradbury published a long-awaited new novel, a noir mystery titled *Death Is a Lonely Business*. Based loosely on his early years as a writer in the pulp fiction market, it features a protagonist whose optimism works to save him from the strange deaths that are striking down his comrades. Characters introduced in this book are the tough cop Elmo Crumley and the hard-living Constance, both of whom appear in later mysteries; with these two, wrote John Coleman of *London's Sunday Times*, Bradbury has "created a memorable couple of tough, compassionate characters: the match for any Martian."

A Graveyard for Lunatics is another noir tale of a writer, working in Hollywood during the 1950s, who discovers a body, frozen in time, in the graveyard next to the studio that employs him. There are autobiographical threads in this story as well; Bradbury wrote for such popular early television shows as *The Twilight Zone* and the Alfred Hitchcock series, and his work in Hollywood included writing the award-winning screen adaptation of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. "Bradbury is at his best when he grants real people and actual events the quality of hallucinations," commented Stefan Kanfer in his *Time* review of *A Graveyard for Lunatics*. Sybil Steinberg, writing for *Publishers Weekly*, pointed out that "Bradbury toes the fine line between reality and illusion."

Using another of his screenwriting experiences, Bradbury developed the novel *Green Shadows, White Whale* around his work adapting *Moby-Dick* as a screenplay in Ireland. In the novel, the director John Huston has a large impact on everything that occurs—reviewers compared Huston in the novel to the white whale in Melville's original tale. Kanfer, again writing for *Time*, called the novel Bradbury's "most entertaining book in a distinguished fifty-year career." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer noted, "Bradbury's prose is as vibrant and distinctive as the landscape in which these delightful tales are set."

Several of Bradbury's short story collections were released in the late 1990s and early 2000s. *Driving Blind* features twenty-one new tales by the author. *One More for the Road* is a collection of short stories and novellas, most of them new to print. Several of Bradbury's earlier themes appear here as well: nostalgia for childhood, love, and time travel. Dorman T. Shindler of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* noted that Bradbury's writing has a "fluid, elegiac style that's impossible to copy." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor considered the collection "slight, affecting, voluble, exuberant," and Roland Green, writing for *Booklist*, stated that "Bradbury is justly considered a master of the short story."



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As Bradbury turned eighty-three, he selected one hundred of his stories to be collected in *Bradbury Stories: 100 of His Most Celebrated Tales*. “This will quite likely go down as grandmaster Bradbury’s magnum opus,” commented a critic for *Kirkus Reviews*. Bradbury’s 2004 collection *The Cat’s Pajamas* combines new stories with “lost” stories, written early in his career but never before published; “old or new, they are remarkably of a piece,” Ray Olson noted in his *Booklist* review. Some critics felt that Bradbury’s earlier unpublished stories were stronger than the collection’s newer stories. According to Meg Jones in her review for *Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service*, “Bradbury still writes great stories, but it’s his older tales that shine in this collection.” However, Jessie Milligan, also writing for the *Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service*, was unabashed in her praise: “This collection is a true gift from a powerful writing talent who has entertained Americans for almost sixty years.”

With *From the Dust Returned*, Bradbury returns to the Elliot family of “*The Homecoming*.” The Elliots live in a Victorian style castle; each of them has a supernatural ability that makes them something more or less than human. “Like the members of his Family, Bradbury’s talents are immortal,” praised Shindler, this time writing for the *Denver Post*. “The book reads like liquid poetry while telling the interconnected stories of a number of unusual ... family members,” Rachel Singer Gordon declared in her *Library Journal* review. Featured family members include Grand-Mere, a mummy who was once a pharaoh’s daughter; Uncle Einar, whose bat wings allow the younger family members to use him as a kite; Cecy, who enters people’s minds and occasionally controls their actions; and Timothy, a human foundling who is recording the family history.

In 2003 Bradbury penned another mystery with a film noir flavor: *Let’s All Kill Constance*. “When Bradbury writes stories set during Hollywood’s heyday of the ‘40s and ‘50s, the result is a crackerjack tale full of sly wit and gentle insight,” Shindler praised in his review of the book for the *Austin American Statesman*. In this tale, the screenwriter/detective who appeared in *Death Is a Lonely Business* and *A Graveyard for Lunatics* is asked for help by Constance Rattigan, an aging film star who seems to be the next prey of a killer. Constance visits the screenwriter in the middle of the night, producing an old address book of hers and an ancient phone book, both of which have old contacts and friends marked with red crucifixes. Once Constance confesses her fears, she vanishes into the night, leaving the screenwriter to try to pick up her trail—along which there are plenty of dead bodies. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer called the book a “whirlwind of staccato dialogue, puns and references to old Hollywood,” and added that “it’s the author’s exuberant voice more than the mystery itself that will have readers hooked.” Meg Jones, in a review of the book for *Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service*, concluded, “In Bradbury’s breathless and unbeatable prose, the mystery slowly reveals itself like a flickering projector in a darkened theater.”

Throughout his career, Bradbury has remained an energetic and insightful writer. Damon Knight observed in his *In Search of Wonder: Critical Essays on Science Fiction*: “His imagery is luminous and penetrating, continually lighting up familiar corners with unexpected words. He never lets an idea go until he has squeezed it dry, and never wastes one. As his talent expands, some of his stories become pointed social commentary; some are surprisingly effective religious tracts, disguised as science fiction; others still are nostalgic vignettes; but under it all is still Bradbury the poet of twentieth-century neurosis. Bradbury the isolated spark of consciousness, awake and alone at midnight; Bradbury the grown-up child who still remembers, still believes.” As Shindler wrote in his *Denver Post* article, “After nearly six decades of professional publication, Ray Bradbury could lie back and relax.... Yet, instead of resting on his laurels, Bradbury is riding his third wind into a creative vortex, hurling out screenplays, stage adaptations, new stories,” not to mention new novels. In addition, Bradbury has declared he has no intention of slowing down. He still writes every day. “It is not that I have to,” he explained to Beatrice Cassina in *Writer*. “It is just that I feel I need to. Every day, every morning when I wake up. It is nice to be in the twenty-first century. It is like a new challenge. It is really a good and threatening new century to create for!”



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Reading Group Guide

Spotlight on:
Fahrenheit 451

About This 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?

Plot Summary:

There is power in the fire hose, the power to sweep the legs out from under history and bring it crashing down. The power to change things. This power is the one certainty in the life Guy Montag, a thirty-year-old fireman, and wielding it thrills him. Then he meets Clarisse McClellan, his new neighbor, almost seventeen, and different, and their meeting changes him.

Their first conversation is strange, especially in light of the fact that although he is the elder of the two it is she who brings up all sorts of recollections of the past, when firemen used to put fires out, when billboards were only twenty feet long and not two hundred (they were lengthened, she says, because the cars whizzed by too swiftly for drivers to read the shorter signs). Clarisse asks startling questions, too: "Do you ever read any of the books you burn?"--a notion which Montag laughingly dismisses. "Are you happy?" He ponders this one long after they part.

After this puzzling yet refreshing encounter, Montag discovers his wife, Mildred, lying unconscious in their bedroom, having swallowed a deadly dose of sleeping pills. He summons medical help immediately and soon, thanks to two snake-like machines that suction out the poisons and pump in fresh blood, she is restored.

The next morning, Mildred is vibrant. Oblivious to the previous night's events, she becomes engrossed in the broadcasts beamed onto the larger-than-life TV walls in their living room. Now Montag is the depressed one; he goes out for a walk and again he meets Clarisse. This time she is out savoring the rainfall, and when she dashes off to a psychiatric appointment (school officials consider her pensiveness, curiosity, and nonconformist behavior abnormal), Montag tilts his head back and tastes the rain himself. This from a man who only one day before could not remember the last time he'd noticed the dew on the grass or the man in the moon.

At work that night Montag is menaced, though not attacked, by the Mechanical Hound. An amalgam of police dog, spider, and computer, the Hound has one function, to track down enemies of the state (people who read books, for example) and render them helpless with sleep-inducing drugs. Montag's boss, Captain Beatty, makes light of the incident when Montag reports it, teasing the fireman about having something to hid. Montag wonders if Beatty suspects the stash of books he has pilfered during house raids.

Every day for a week Clarisse walks Montag to the subway, always surprising him with little gifts from nature or with stories about her life, about life in general, about the past. She tells him that she is considered anti-social because of her distaste for racing around in cars, sports, watching classroom lectures on TV (no live teachers),



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and violence. She speaks of the days her uncle has told her about, when children did not kill each other and when pictures were not all abstract, but sometimes “said things and even showed people.” At the end of this week, though, Clarisse suddenly disappears. The Hound threatens Montag more boldly than ever. And a particularly distressing fire call claws at Montag’s conscience: a woman, betrayed by a neighbor, sets herself aflame, along with her books and her house, before the awestruck firemen have a chance to light the kerosene—but not before Montag snatches up another book for his forbidden collection.

Shaken by these events and by Mildred’s news of Clarisse’s possibly fatal accident (Mildred isn’t sure whether the girl actually died, but her family has moved away), Montag feels too sickened to face another day at the firehouse. Like a truant officer, Captain Beatty comes to call at Montag’s bedside, apprising him of the true history of book burning—which, according to Beatty, began without the lighting of a single flame but instead with the advent of mass communications; the masses, says Beatty, wanted all information boiled down to a “paste-pudding norm,” to “snap endings”—like those provided by the TV parlor shows that fascinated Mildred but disgust Montag, who finds them meaningless.

As Beatty speaks, Mildred discovers a book hidden behind her husband’s pillow. Beatty, who doesn’t actually see the book, nevertheless assures Montag that curious firemen have swiped books before and that if such a fireman turns the book in within twenty-four hours, there is no harm done.

After Beatty’s departure, Montag reveals his cache of books to Mildred. He pleads with her to sift through the books with him for any bits of enlightenment that can save the couple from the desolate future gaping before them—an ever-growing estrangement between them; a community rife with suicide and violence; a world at war constantly, perhaps endlessly.

Not being able to make sense of the books, Montag visits a retired English professor, Faber, whom he had met in a park the year before. (At that time, although sure Faber was concealing a book, Montag had not reported him; instead he talked to him and listened to poetry.) Using a rare book, the Bible, as bait, Montag coaxes Faber into become his ally. Faber gives him a tiny transmitting device for secret long distance communication; through this Faber will be able to advise Montag on-the-spot during his next meeting with Captain Beatty.

Back at home, enraged by the alternatively trivial and callous dinnertime conversation of Mildred’s visiting friends and by their obsession with the TV parlor, Montag recklessly whips out a book of poetry and reads to them. The distraught women (including his own wife) report him to the authorities and Beatty forces Montag to set fire to his own house. But when the transmitter drops out of Montag’s ear in front of Beatty, exposing Faber to possible discovery, Montag turns the flame thrower onto Beatty and then the Mechanical Hound.

Now a fugitive from the law he once gleefully enforced, Montag races to Faber’s house and with the professor’s assistance evades a second Hound and escapes to the river. Soon he joins a band of hobos who turn out to be walking, talking “books”—they’ve memorized the words, storing them for the times and places where people will be willing to listen.

This is a time of endings and new beginnings, for Montag and for the world as he knows it: a massive bombardment levels the city he has just fled. Perhaps his newly acquired knowledge—the Book of Ecclesiastes—will be a valued commodity in the new world that rises from the ashes.



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About The Author

When Mr. Electrico, a magician with a traveling show, came to Waukegan, Illinois during the 1920s, a twelve-year-old boy was among the lucky youngsters selected for a special honor. Once Mr. Electrico tapped young Ray Bradbury on the shoulder with a sword and directed him to “live forever,” the boy “was changed forever. I will grow up, [he] though, and become like him. I will be the greatest magician who ever walked the world.”

While the young Bradbury indeed spent time as an amateur magician in Waukegan, it was the magic of mastering the written word that ultimately captivated him, of capturing and, at the same time, freeing the words, spinning them into fantastic tales that entertain, perplex, frighten, stimulate thought, and inspire dreams.

The boy went on collecting his Buck Rogers and Prince Valiant comics and reading the works of H.G. Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs and when he moved with his parents and older brother to Tucson, Arizona in 1932, Ray read comic strips over the air on a radio show for children. He also began writing short stories in Tucson.

And he never stopped. In 1934 the family moved again, this time to Los Angeles. Here Ray won accolades from high school peers for his participation in and writing for theater. After graduation in 1938 he found himself a small office, sold his first story at age twenty, and before twenty-five was already selling a story a month, to *Weird Tales*, *Mademoiselle*, *Collier's* and others. Bradbury has since been published in such diverse publications as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *McCall's* and *Harpers*. An imaginative marketer of his stories, he would send and sell them to magazines that did not usually print fiction—*Gourmet* and *Life*, for example.

How many stories has he written? Who's counting? Enough to fill at least twenty published collections of his own stories. Enough to have contributed to more than seven hundred anthologies. Then there are the screenplays: among them “*Moby Dick*,” the 1956 film based on the Herman Melville classic; “*Something Wicked This Way Comes*,” a 1983 Disney film based on Bradbury's 1962 book of the same name; his 1948 story “*The Dark Ferris*”; “*It Came from Outer Space*”; and “*The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*” from his story “*The Foghorn*.” There are teleplays for “*Twilight Zone*” and “*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.” There are stage plays and poetry. And there are his novels: his first, *Fahrenheit 451* (brought to the screen by Francois Truffaut in 1966) and *The Martian Chronicles* (a 1980 NBC- TV mini-series).

How much has he written? Take a clue from his words: “I'm accustomed, you see, to getting up every morning, running to the typewriter, and in an hour I've created a world.” And from this, his advice to aspiring young writers: to start disciplining themselves early in their careers, he says, they should put down “one or two thousand words everyday for the next twenty years.”

He has garnered many awards for his writings, including one from the National Institute of Arts and Letters for *Fahrenheit 451*, an Academy Award nomination for a 1963 short film, “*Icarus Montgolfier Wright*,” and a World Fantasy Award for life achievement.

Discussion Questions:

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?”



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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*.

Composition:

1. Although Montag appears to be satisfied with his work when the book opens, later information reveals that he does not always follow the stationhouse policy to the letter. It also suggests that, perhaps even before meeting Clarisse, Montag is less than ecstatic about his work and home life. As you review "The Hearth and the Salamander" and "The Sieve and the Sand," seek out and discuss examples of Montag's thoughts and actions that support this view of him as a disenchanting man.
2. Why do you think Montag stole his first book? Do you think it was an automatic action done entirely by his



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hand “with a brain of its own” as the author describes Montag’s theft on page 40? Why did he continue to take and hide books despite the disastrous consequences?

3. What will Montag do after the war? Will he stay with his new friends, “the books,” traveling and sharing his message from Ecclesiastes with whomever will listen? Will he break off with them to search for Clarisse and/or Mildred? Will he try to keep his appointment with Professor Faber in St. Louis. And if those two do meet, will they carry out their plot involving the retired printer and planting books in firemen’s homes? Imagine the course of action you hope that Montag will take and write your own epilogue to the novel.

Activities:

Censorship watch: Who says “it can’t happen here?” Scan current newspapers and magazines over a period of time for evidence that censorship of books and information goes on in the 1990s. Keep notes and report on your findings. Or, cut out or make copies of the articles you’ve found and develop a bulletin board or scrapbook of these materials with your classmates, to be discussed in class periodically.

Beyond The Book:

A Note On Censorship:

“Whether or not my ideas on censorship via the fire department will be old hat by this time next week, I dare not predict. When the wind is right, a faint odor of kerosene is exhaled from Senator McCarthy.”

—Ray Bradbury, 1953

Firemen paid to start fires may have been a Bradbury idea but he did not have to invent book burning. Censorship was a real and frightening concern in the U.S. when *Fahrenheit 451* came out in 1953 during the height of the career of Joseph McCarthy, the U.S. Senator from Wisconsin whose unfounded accusations of a Communist-infiltrated Department of State led to the suppression of information and the propagation of falsehoods and fear—effects not unlike those the firemen of *Fahrenheit* had on citizens in their state.

Fallout from the McCarthy cloud spread beyond government boundaries into the private sector as well. The pressure to scrutinize, modify, and prohibit was on, and writers, publishers, moviemakers, performers and advertisers felt the squeeze. In 1953, the Chicago Archdiocese Council of Catholic Men was spearheading a pro-censorship campaign; the city government in St. Cloud, Minnesota, was adding new names each month to its list of three hundred banned books. This alarming trend prompted President Dwight D. Eisenhower to speak out:

“Don’t join the book burners,” he cautioned graduating seniors at Dartmouth College. “Don’t think you’re going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever existed. Don’t be afraid to go into your library and read every book...” “Freedom cannot be censored into existence,” he wrote to the American Library Association. “A democracy chronically fearful of new ideas would be a dying democracy.”

Despite the President’s words and the freedom of press and expression written into our Constitution, censorship thrives in the U.S. today. In 1983, a major publisher canceled the printing or shipping of two novels and a book of verse whose authors did not comply with suggestions to “soften” the language and replace two of the poems. In 1984, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck was banned in Scottsboro, Alabama, high schools because of “profanity,” and a group of parents and students in Church Hill, Tennessee, went to court to fight against use of “anti-Christian,” “anti-American” English textbooks approved by the state. For ten years up until April 1984, publishers who wanted their textbooks bought in Texas had to leave out any mention of evolution unless it was labeled theory rather than fact and called “one of several explanations of the origins of mankind.”



Book: Fahrenheit 451

Your students may be especially interested in investigating and debating school newspaper and textbook censorship, issues which affect them most directly.

Bradbury's own 1973 "Author's Afterward" in *Fahrenheit 451* (pp. 181-184) is a spirited, provocative commentary on censorship from a writer's point of view, prompting such questions as: Where should one draw the line between "editing" and "censorship"? Is all censorship harmful? Who is best qualified to judge what is right for other people to read? What are alternatives to book burning when individuals and groups are displeased with what they read?

About This Guide:

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From Contemporary Authors Online
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Book: Fahrenheit 451

Themes, Motifs and Symbols From: SparkNotes

Themes:

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Censorship:

Fahrenheit 451 doesn't provide a single, clear explanation of why books are banned in the future. Instead, it suggests that many different factors could combine to create this result. These factors can be broken into two groups: factors that lead to a general lack of interest in reading and factors that make people actively hostile toward books. The novel doesn't clearly distinguish these two developments. Apparently, they simply support one another.

The first group of factors includes the popularity of competing forms of entertainment such as television and radio. More broadly, Bradbury thinks that the presence of fast cars, loud music, and advertisements creates a lifestyle with too much stimulation in which no one has the time to concentrate. Also, the huge mass of published material is too overwhelming to think about, leading to a society that reads condensed books (which were very popular at the time Bradbury was writing) rather than the real thing.

The second group of factors, those that make people hostile toward books, involves envy. People don't like to feel inferior to those who have read more than they have. But the novel implies that the most important factor leading to censorship is the objections of special-interest groups and "minorities" to things in books that offend them. Bradbury is careful to refrain from referring specifically to racial minorities. Beatty mentions dog lovers and cat lovers, for instance. The reader can only try to infer which special-interest groups he really has in mind.

As the Afterword to *Fahrenheit 451* demonstrates, Bradbury is extremely sensitive to any attempts to restrict his free speech; for instance, he objects strongly to letters he has received suggesting that he revise his treatment of female or black characters. He sees such interventions as essentially hostile and intolerant, as the first step on the road to book burning.

Knowledge versus Ignorance

Montag, Faber, and Beatty's struggle revolves around the tension between knowledge and ignorance. The fireman's duty is to destroy knowledge and promote ignorance in order to equalize the population and promote sameness. Montag's encounters with Clarisse, the old woman, and Faber ignite in him the spark of doubt about this approach. His resultant search for knowledge destroys the unquestioning ignorance he used to share with nearly everyone else, and he battles the basic beliefs of his society.

Motifs:

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Paradoxes:

In the beginning of "The Hearth and the Salamander," Montag's bedroom is described first as "not empty" and then as "indeed empty, because Mildred is physically there, but her thoughts and feelings are elsewhere." Bradbury's repeated use of such paradoxical statements, especially that a character or thing is dead or alive or there and not there, is frequently applied to Mildred, suggesting her empty, half-alive condition. Bradbury also uses these paradoxical statements to describe the "Electric-Eyed Snake" stomach pump and, later, the Mechanical Hound. These paradoxes question the reality of beings that are apparently living but spiritually dead. Ultimately, Mildred and the rest of her society seem to be not much more than machines, thinking only what they are told to think. The culture of *Fahrenheit 451* is a culture of insubstantiality and unreality, and Montag desperately seeks more substantial truths in the books he hoards.



Book: Fahrenheit 451

Themes, Motifs and Symbols From: SparkNotes (Continued)

Animal and Nature Imagery

Animal and nature imagery pervades the novel. Nature is presented as a force of innocence and truth, beginning with Clarisse's adolescent, reverent love for nature. She convinces Montag to taste the rain, and the experience changes him irrevocably. His escape from the city into the country is a revelation to him, showing him the enlightening power of unspoiled nature.

Much of the novel's animal imagery is ironic. Although this society is obsessed with technology and ignores nature, many frightening mechanical devices are modeled after or named for animals, such as the Electric-Eyed Snake machine and the Mechanical Hound.

Religion

Fahrenheit 451 contains a number of religious references. Mildred's friends remind Montag of icons he once saw in a church and did not understand. The language Bradbury uses to describe the enameled, painted features of the artifacts Montag saw is similar to the language he uses to describe the firemen's permanent smiles. Faber invokes the Christian value of forgiveness: after Montag turns against society, Faber reminds him that since he was once one of the faithful, he should demonstrate pity rather than fury.

The narrative also contains references to the miracle at Cana, where Christ transformed water into wine. Faber describes himself as water and Montag as fire, asserting that the merging of the two will produce wine. In the biblical story, Jesus Christ's transformation of water into wine was one of the miracles that proved his identity and instilled faith in his role as the savior. Montag longs to confirm his own identity through a similar self-transformation.

The references to fire are more complex. In the Christian tradition, fire has several meanings: from the pagan blaze in which the golden calf was made to Moses' burning bush, it symbolizes both blatant heresy and divine presence. Fire in *Fahrenheit 451* also possesses contradictory meanings. At the beginning it is the vehicle of a restrictive society, but Montag turns it upon his oppressor, using it to burn Beatty and win his freedom.

Finally, Bradbury uses language and imagery from the Bible to resolve the novel. In the last pages, as Montag and Granger's group walk upriver to find survivors after the bombing of the city, Montag knows they will eventually talk, and he tries to remember appropriate passages from the Bible. He brings to mind Ecclesiastes 3:1, "To everything there is a season," and also Revelations 22:2, "And on either side of the river was there a tree of life . . . and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations," which he decides to save for when they reach the city. The verse from Revelations also speaks of the holy city of God, and the last line of the book, "When we reach the city," implies a strong symbolic connection between the atomic holocaust of Montag's world and the Apocalypse of the Bible.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Blood

Blood appears throughout the novel as a symbol of a human being's repressed soul or primal, instinctive self. Montag often "feels" his most revolutionary thoughts welling and circulating in his blood. Mildred, whose primal self has been irretrievably lost, remains unchanged when her poisoned blood is replaced with fresh, mechanically administered blood by the Electric-Eyed Snake machine. The symbol of blood is intimately related to the Snake machine. Bradbury uses the electronic device to reveal Mildred's corrupted insides and the thick sediment of delusion, misery, and self-hatred within her.



Book: Fahrenheit 451

Themes, Motifs and Symbols From: SparkNotes (Continued)

The Snake has explored “the layer upon layer of night and stone and stagnant spring water,” but its replacement of her blood could not rejuvenate her soul. Her poisoned, replaceable blood signifies the empty lifelessness of Mildred and the countless others like her.

“The Hearth and the Salamander”

Bradbury uses this conjunction of images as the title of the first part of *Fahrenheit 451*. The hearth, or fireplace, is a traditional symbol of the home; the salamander is one of the official symbols of the firemen, as well as the name they give to their fire trucks. Both of these symbols have to do with fire, the dominant image of Montag’s life, the hearth because it contains the fire that heats a home, and the salamander because of ancient beliefs that it lives in fire and is unaffected by flames.

“The Sieve and the Sand”

The title of the second part of *Fahrenheit 451*, “The Sieve and the Sand,” is taken from Montag’s childhood memory of trying to fill a sieve with sand on the beach to get a dime from a mischievous cousin and crying at the futility of the task. He compares this memory to his attempt to read the whole Bible as quickly as possible on the subway in the hope that, if he reads fast enough, some of the material will stay in his memory.

Simply put, the sand is a symbol of the tangible truth Montag seeks, and the sieve the human mind seeking a truth that remains elusive and, the metaphor suggests, impossible to grasp in any permanent way.

The Phoenix

After the bombing of the city, Granger compares mankind to a phoenix that burns itself up and then rises out of its ashes over and over again. Man’s advantage is his ability to recognize when he has made a mistake, so that eventually he will learn not to make that mistake anymore. Remembering the mistakes of the past is the task Granger and his group have set for themselves. They believe that individuals are not as important as the collective mass of culture and history. The symbol of the phoenix’s rebirth refers not only to the cyclical nature of history and the collective rebirth of humankind but also to Montag’s spiritual resurrection.

Mirrors

At the very end of the novel, Granger says they must build a mirror factory to take a long look at themselves; this remark recalls Montag’s description of Clarisse as a mirror in “The Hearth and the Salamander.” Mirrors here are symbols of self-understanding, of seeing oneself clearly.



Book: Fahrenheit 451

Discussion Questions From: Reading Group 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.”)



Book: Fahrenheit 451

Discussion Questions From: Reading Group Guide: (Continued)

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.

Courtesy of Del Rey