

CliffsNotes.com® At a Glance for FAHRENHEIT 451

In Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, you journey to the 24th century to an overpopulated world in which the media controls the masses, censorship prevails over intellect, and books are considered evil because they make people question and think.

The novel is set in an unidentified American city in the distant future, Guy Montag works as a fireman, which means that when books are discovered in someone's home Montag and his coworkers set them on fire to destroy them. In Montag's own home, which is dominated by giant interactive television screens, Montag and his wife Mildred barely speak. But one day after work Montag is approached by a neighborhood girl named Clarisse who inspires him to question his way of life.

While visiting the house of a book-owning woman to set it aflame, Montag steals one of her books. He tries, unsuccessfully, to discuss the book with Mildred, who tells him Clarisse has died. Montag calls in sick, but his boss, Captain Beatty, visits him at home, attempts to dissuade him from his interest in books, and says he must give up the stolen volume within 24 hours so it can be destroyed.

Montag reveals a great stash of books to Mildred and contacts an old professor, Faber, who agrees to coach Montag via a tiny, concealed radio. Back home, Montag scares Mildred and two of her friends by reading them a poem. Returning to work, he is summoned with the other firemen to his own house — which Montag helps destroy before turning the flamethrower on Beatty and the fire department's lethal robotic dog, known as the Mechanical Hound. Directed by Faber, Montag flees down the river and discovers a group of outcasts, each of whom has memorized the contents of a book; Montag realizes that he knows Ecclesiastes, from the Bible, by heart. The Book People witness the nuclear annihilation of Montag's home city and set out to help the victims of the blast.

Written by: Ray Bradbury

Type of Work: novel

Genres: social commentary; science fiction

First Published: 1953

Setting: dystopia; twenty-fourth century; American

Main Characters: Guy Montag; Captain Beatty; Clarisse McClellan; Professor Faber; Mildred Montag; Granger; The Mechanical Hound

Major Thematic Topics: burning of books; censorship; dystopian society; freedom of the individual

Motifs: repression of individuality

Major Symbols: books; the sun; birds; nature

Movie Versions: *Fahrenheit 451* (1967)

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The three most important aspects of *Fahrenheit 451*:

- The setting of *Fahrenheit 451* is a dystopia: an imagined world that is far worse than our own (versus a utopia, which is an ideal place or state). Other dystopian novels include George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.
- Most of the female characters in *Fahrenheit 451*, including Montag's wife and her friends, are shallow and materialistic. They are balanced, however, by the character of Clarisse, who not only sets the plot in motion by approaching Montag, but does so at the expense of her life, making her one of the novel's heroes.
- It is important to remember that the ban on books in *Fahrenheit 451* was not imposed by the government, but by the American people themselves. The novel's implied warning is that ordinary citizens of the United States are responsible for upholding the freedoms that make our country great; we should never take them for granted. The title of the novel refers to the temperature at which paper, and thus books, burn.