

CliffsNotes.com® Conversation Starters for **FAHRENHEIT 451**

What is the symbolic meaning of books in the novel? How do they represent different things to different characters?

How does the setting affect the novel? Would the novel have been different with a different setting? Do you think the novel serves as a cautionary tale?

Clarisse, though she is a teenager, enlightens Montag about many things. Why is this ironic, given the popular saying that teenagers think they know everything? Why does Montag listen to what she has to say?

Describe Clarisse. What is her purpose as a character in the novel?

Why does Beatty seem to encourage Montag's curiosity with the books, only to punish him for it later?

Though he doesn't even know her name, the woman who burns with her books has a profound impact on Montag. Why?

Do you think Millie's overdose was a suicide attempt or just an accident? Why?

Why do you think Montag has been stealing books? Does this suggest he's been second guessing his life before he met Clarisse?

Why does Millie panic when Montag tries to show her his books? Do you think it is simply because collecting books is illegal, or is there a deeper, psychological explanation for her reaction?

Part 1 covers just a few days in Montag's life, yet we still learn a lot about him and the society he lives in. Why do you think we're able to get such an accurate picture of what Montag's world is like, even though we're only exposed to it briefly?

At first, Montag doesn't question his job of burning books because it is what everyone else did and it was law. However, was he happy? Do you think conformity grants happiness? If not, can happiness be achieved by refusing to conform? Is there a balance between the two?

Technology is a major player in this novel, especially in the form of the Mechanical Hound. Are there any examples of technology being used "for good" in the novel?

Do you think Clarisse's death was an accident? Or planned to stop her dangerous ideas?

Why does Faber initially refuse to help Montag?

The country is preparing for war, yet no one seems to know the cause of it or who they're fighting. Why do you think the country is able to get away with this?

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Why do people in Montag's society seem to desire death?

Describe the significance of the phoenix motif in the novel.

Trace the steps that lead to Montag's decision to preserve books rather than destroy them.

Discuss the idea of conformity versus individuality as presented in *Fahrenheit 451*.

Choose one important character in the novel and write a character analysis that includes appearance, actions, ideas, manner, reactions of others to the character, and feelings of the character throughout the novel. Do the character's feelings or ideals change? Why is this character important to the novel? How well does this character fit into a utopian and dystopian society?

Compare and contrast the characters of Mildred and Clarisse. How is one a threat to the stability of the ideas presented in *Fahrenheit 451* and the other an ideal example of a *Fahrenheit 451* character? How have each of these characters been influenced?

What roles do Clarisse, the Unidentified Old Woman, Faber, and Beatty play in reeducating Guy Montag? How does each character influence Montag's change? How do these characters question his beliefs? How does he answer their questions?

Explain how the titles to the three parts of the book are significant to the general action that occurs within each part.

What messages or themes is Ray Bradbury trying to impart on his audience? What things in society is he commenting on? Could this type of society really exist? Why or why not?

In comparing and contrasting the film and book of *Fahrenheit 451*, point out three similarities and three differences between the book and film. Then explain why, you believe, changes were made in the film.

Discuss the dual image of fire in the novel.

Examine the psychological complexity of Captain Beatty. Account for his knowledge of books, while also accounting for his desire to burn them.

Explain why no female characters are alive at the end of the novel. Why did both female characters die in the novel, but in the film, why does Clarisse, as a human book living in the woods, survive and greet Montag?
