

Fahrenheit 451

A Study Guide



Reading the Book

We suggest exploring this text through discussion based inquiry. A few guidelines:

- Students will read the books and prepare their own questions, or explore the reading beginning with questions introduced for the class.
- Possible points for discussion are outlined in the chapter breakdown below, but students should guide the discussion during Socratic seminars.
- Students should be marked on participation in the discussion, respect for differing opinions, and evidence that they've read the book.
- If using Socratic seminars, periodic journals on class discussions should be kept by students for evaluation.
- Teaching material for the classes leading up to Socratic seminars and in line with the points for discussion outlined below follow the chapter-by-chapter breakdown.
- As the material in this study guide is based on student-led discussion questions, it may be necessary to experiment with different formats for the discussions. Literature Circles can work quite well, for example. Also worth considering: timed debates, Think/Pair/Share, Word Walls or role playing.

Discussion: Chapter 1

- What do you think of Guy Montag's world? How is it similar to ours, and how is it different?
- What do you think of Clarisse's view of this world? How is it different than Montag's?
- Why do you think Clarisse's experience is so different than Montag's?
- What do you think of Millie's view of the world? How is it similar to ours, and how is it different?
- How has technology changed the society we see in F451? Is this a positive or negative change? How does it affect each character?
- What do you think of Mrs. Blake? Why is she willing to die for her books? What do the books represent to her? How does this incident affect Montag?
- Before the digitization of information, how were histories stored?
- With this in mind, what do you think of the "Brief History of Firemen in America"? What has the elimination of books allowed in the world of Fahrenheit 451?
- What do you think of Beatty's claim to Montag that no government declaration was needed to eliminate the books, and that "Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick"?
- What do you think about everyone being made equal?
- Is everyone in the book treated equally? Are they equal, as Beatty claims?

Exercises *Chapter 1*

Famous incidents of book burning and the destruction of art:

The following materials are available through LiberalStudiesGuides.ca for students to use in research in chapter 1 exercises or allow them to research on their own:

- Nazi book burnings during the Second World War
- Burning of books by Jewish, pacifist, classical liberal, anarchist, socialist, and communist authors seen as subversive to the Nazi state.
- Photos of Nazi book burnings (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).
- Video of book burning during Joseph Goebbels speech (Minister of Propaganda) speech (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).
- Timeline of book burnings since WWII.
- Destruction of Nimrud (National Geographic — with video) in February, 2015 and of the ancient city of Hatra (Links from The Guardian — with video, and UNESCO) from the Islamic State today.

Can everyone be equal?

The short story referenced in Chapter 1 exercises is **Harrison Bergeron by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.** and is available through LiberalStudiesGuides.ca.

Families, reading and fairness:

Share the article: **ABC News — Is having a loving family an unfair advantage?** (available through LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) with your students.

- How are the arguments in this story similar to the arguments in Fahrenheit 451?
- Do you agree or disagree with the article that having different families is unfair?
- Do you believe there's anything we can do about the unfairness (if you think it is unfair) of different families?

Discussion: Chapter 2

- Why do you think Montag says that no one wants to discuss the wars? Do you think that we talk about the things that are happening in the world today, especially things happening in poorer parts of the world?
- Do you think Montag needs a teacher to learn from the books and think more critically about the world?
- Faber says “It’s not the books you need, it’s some of the things that once were in books. The same things could be in the ‘parlor families’ today. The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through the radios and televisions, but are not.” Do you think that this is something that’s changed since Bradbury was concerned by the rise of television? Think about how we access information on the internet, often without knowing where a quote or image came from. Does this change the information we receive?
- Faber says we need three things, in addition to what’s available in the world of Fahrenheit 451 to be happy: quality information, leisure to digest it, and the right to act based on what you learn. What do you think of this claim?
- Why do you think that Mildred, Mrs. Bowles, and Mrs. Phelps react as they do to the poem?
- How does the negative reaction of Millie and her friends affect Montag? How has he changed since his first conversation with Clarisse?
- What do you think of what Beatty says about the way that books contradicting your thoughts makes them like ‘traitors’?

Exercises *Chapter 2*

Self-censorship on university campuses:

Consider the claim by Beatty that no government action was needed to get people to start censoring themselves and phasing out books. An interesting parallel is happening today on university campuses. Share the one, two, or all of the articles **Ithaca Voice — Ithaca College student gov. considers new reporting system for microaggressions**, **Aeman Ansari — Ethnic Minorities Deserve Safe Spaces Without White People** and **The New York Times — In College and Hiding From Scary Ideas** (available on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca).

- What are some parallels between these articles and the book?
- There is a need to be sensitive to people who have lived through traumatic events, but how far should caution go? Do you believe that “safe spaces” can go too far? Is Beatty, and are Mildred, Mrs. Bowles, and Mrs. Phelps right about the danger of troublesome words?
- The piece by Aeman Ansari uses the right to privacy as the basis for a right to safe spaces. Is this different than safe spaces for students who might be upset by ideas grossly out of line with their own? Is this different than Beatty’s claim about minorities demanding censorship?

A light-hearted approach to discussing self-censorship:

Share the satirical article, **Parents Dedicate New College Safe Space in Honor of Daughter Who Felt Weird In Class Once** (available on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) with your class.

- This is a satirical article, but do you think there is truth to it?
- How does this article relate to chapter 2?
- Do you think Beatty would recognize that this article is meant to be funny?

Discussion: Chapter 3

- Montag keeps repeating, “This is happening to me.” And Beatty reminds us that “everyone nowadays knows, absolutely is certain, that nothing will ever happen to me.” What do you think of this? Is it true in our world, too?
- Are you surprised by Millie’s betrayal? What finally pushed her to this act?
- Now that the war is on, and not just troubles around the world, it’s made the news. What do you think are the government’s priorities? Why?
- Will The Book People be effective in preserving the knowledge? How is it better than the firemen’s way? How is it better than war? Is it worse in any ways? Could they succeed without the war?
- What’s the difference between the way The Book People see people in the world and the way the government does?
- Will they rebuild a better world, or will it be the same or worse?

Exercises *Chapter 3 and cumulative exercises*

Methods for social change:

Share the resource **Methods for Social Change** (available on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) with your students.

- What method of social change do you think Montag would think is best?
- What method of social change do you think Faber would think is best?
- What method for social change do you think Beatty would think is best?
- What method of social change do you think Mildred would think is best?
- What method of social change do you think Clarisse would think is best?
- What method for social change is best? Discuss within the class.

Topics for discussion, final presentations for groups, or individual essay topics:

- What kind of world would you rebuild? How would you do it? Do you think that Montag and his new friends will succeed in the end?
- Where are cultural battles like the ones we saw in Fahrenheit 451 happening today? Research and present a case for how these challenges are similar or different to those we saw in the book.

Additional resources:

- Film: Fahrenheit 451 (linked on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca)
- Film: V For Vendetta

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A Study Guide

Liberal Studies Guides help teachers engage their students when discussing literature through study guides and cross-curricular resources made freely available for classroom use. We also offer free workshops on using the Socratic method with secondary students of all levels.

Our study guides break down novels into lessons with ideas for discussion, exercises, and assignments. We tie our guides together with additional resources on our website, LiberalStudiesGuides.ca, including ready-to-use worksheets, to encourage the discussion of current events, history, music, philosophy, and economics to help tie the lessons to the real world.

Although our guides are aimed at English classrooms, the supplementary resources may be useful for history, music, drama, communications studies, economics, philosophy, and social studies.

Liberal Studies Guides is a project of the Institute for Liberal Studies, a non-partisan educational charity. We believe that encouraging discussion in the classroom helps to better equip students to discuss the problems facing Canadian society.



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