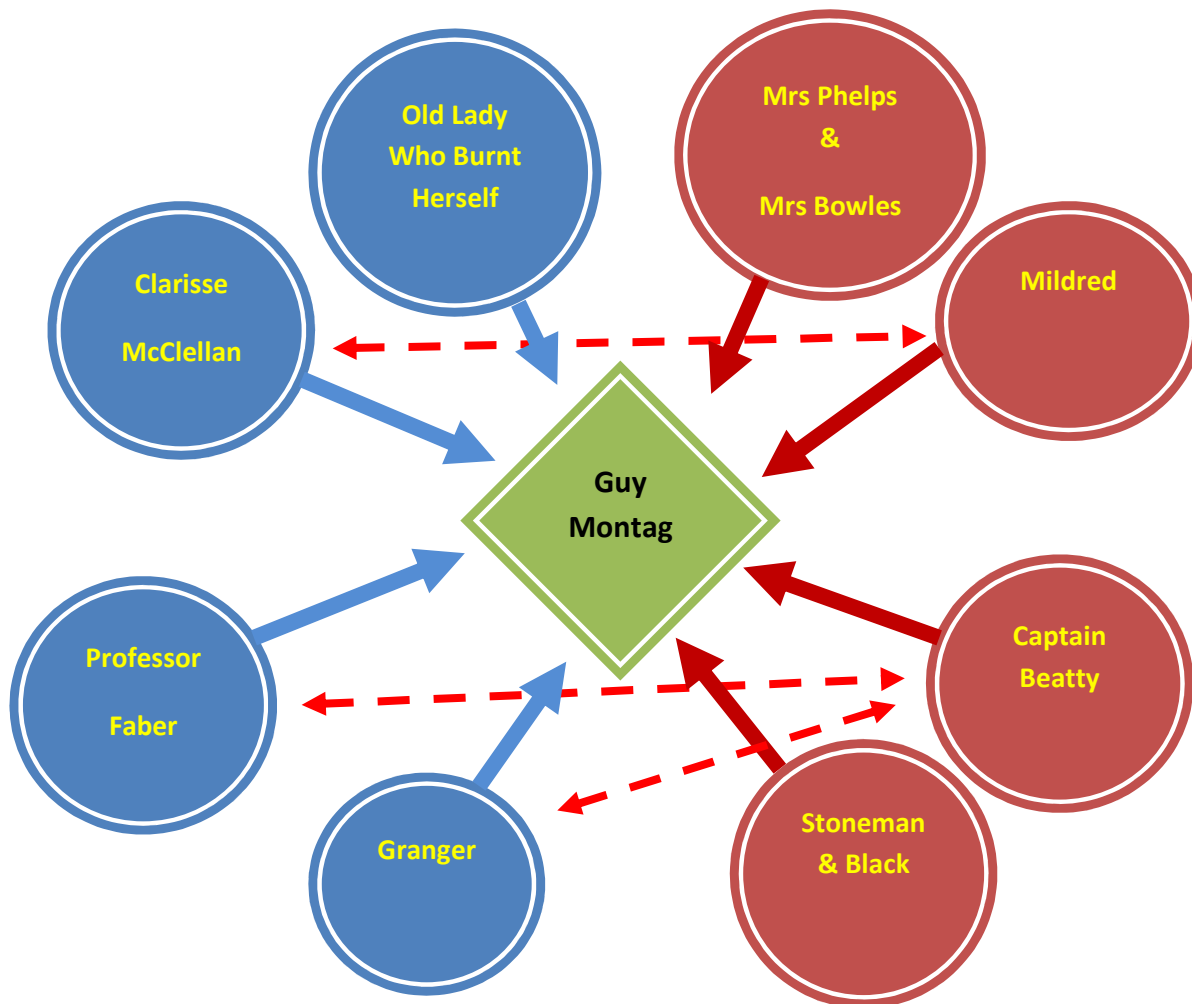




THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO RAY BRADBURY'S FAHRENHEIT 451

SECTION I: Character Analysis

The characters and their relationships can be represented in the form of a map:



What the colours and symbols mean	
	Characters who have a negative effect on Montag.
	Characters who have a positive effect on Montag.
	These characters have opposite effects on Montag. They function as foils to each other.



Guy Montag

Point: Initially, he appears confident and sees purpose in his life

Evidence: “his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning”.

Comment: A conductor is someone who controls the actions of an orchestra and creates beautiful music. In the same way, Montag sees himself as someone who has the power to manipulate the things around him and gets tremendous satisfaction from this.

Point: Pretends to be happy

Evidence: Descriptions of Montag’s smile –

1. “he would feel the fiery smile still gripped by his face muscles”
 - **Comment:** The word “gripped” refers to the act of holding onto something with great strength so that it does not drop or run away from us. It suggests that Montag badly wants to hold on to the smile, as if he is afraid of losing it. This means that he is not really happy, but only pretending to be.
2. “It never went away, that smile, it never ever went away, as long as he remembered.”
 - **Comment:** Smiles normally appear and disappear according to whether a person is happy or not. A smile that “never went away” is something unnatural, and we suspect that Montag’s smile is an artificial thing he holds on to so as to appear happy.
3. “He felt his smile slide away, melt, fold over, and down on itself like a tallow skin”
 - **Comment:** After Clarisse asks him whether he is happy, Montag has no choice but to admit to himself that he is not. “Slide”, “melt” and “fold over” are actions that happen only to physical objects, not to our own features; these words emphasize how artificial Montag’s smile is. “Tallow” is animal fat removed after an animal has been slaughtered. Comparing the smile to “tallow skin” reinforces the idea that Montag’s happiness is a pretence he cannot hold onto.

Point: Naïve and unthinking

Evidence: He tells Clarisse “Houses have always been fireproof, take my word for it”.

Comment: Ironically, what Montag asks Clarisse to do is exactly why he has been misled: he has taken someone’s word without thinking it over. Montag believes in the idea that houses have always been fireproof and this shows that he does not try to think for himself using his own logic.



Point: He is interested in others and will pay attention to them.

Evidence: Clarisse tells him that he is “not like the others” because “When I talk, you look at me”.

Comment: Montag pays attention to Clarisse when she speaks to him. This shows that he is willing to spend time and effort in getting to know others.

Point: Montag is a man divided against himself. He often experiences contradictory emotions and thoughts.

Evidence: “He felt his body divide itself into a hotness and a coldness, a softness and a hardness, a trembling and a not trembling, the two halves grinding one upon the other.”

Comment: The pairs of words in this sentence are opposites and they tell us how Montag suffers completely contradictory emotions and feelings. In addition, the word “grinding” refers to harsh sound produced when two uneven surfaces rub against each other and tells us how painful this inner conflict is for him.

Point: Montag is capable of change and growth.

Evidence: When Clarisse asks Montag why he did not have any daughters since he said he felt like a father to her, he replies that it was because his wife did not want any children. Clarisse apologizes for having asked the question, but Montag replies that it is “a good question”. His response here is different from the time when Clarisse asked him whether he knew that there is dew in the grass and a man in the moon; back then, he fell into a “clenching and uncomfortable silence” after having had his ignorance exposed.

Comment: This shows that Montag is capable of growth; previously, he was self-defensive whenever his image of happiness was threatened, but now he is able to answer questions about unhappy parts of his life calmly and thoughtfully.



Clarisse

Point: Observes the world around her with great curiosity

Evidence:

1. Her face shows “a kind of gentle hunger that touched over everything with tireless curiosity”.
 - **Comment:** The word “hunger” refers to the desire we have for food when we have not had it for a long time. The use of the word “hunger” tells us how eager she is to observe everything around her, as if it is food that she needs to eat.
2. Her “dark eyes were so fixed to the world that no move escaped them”.
 - **Comment:** The word “fixed” refers to the act of attaching an object so that it cannot be moved or shifted. This tells us that Clarisse’s attention is truly riveted to the objects around her and that she cannot be distracted.
3. “I like to smell things and look at things, and sometimes stay up all night, walking, and watch the sun rise.”
 - **Comment:** She is fascinated by the real physical world around her and appreciates it with her senses. Through the actions of “smell” and “look”, she wants to take in as much of the world as possible and enjoy it. She likes “walking” at night and to “watch the sun rise”, and these actions show how strongly she enjoys the things around her.
4. “I rarely watch the 'parlour walls' or go to races or Fun Parks. So I've lots of time for crazy thoughts, I guess.”
 - **Comment:** Because she does not occupy her time with mass entertainment, she has the time to think about and observe the world around her. She knows about why the billboards need to be stretched, that there’s dew on grass in the morning and that “there’s a man in the moon”. This shows that she is more interested in the real world and the sensations it offers than the man-made forms of entertainment her society offers.

Point: Pays attention to others and values their presence

Evidence: Clarisse’s attitude towards others can be seen from the way she speaks to them.

1. Montag “knew she was working his questions around, seeking the best answers she could possibly give”.
 - **Comment:** Clarisse carefully considers what others say and thinks hard before she replies. This shows that she values the people she speaks to, and that she looks to form meaningful relationships with them.
2. She tells him “I'm not afraid of you at all.”
 - **Comment:** This would be a strange thing to say to a stranger you have met for the first time, but in this case, it is relevant, because Montag is a fireman and firemen are intimidating figures in this story. Clarisse’s dialogue is usually eccentric but insightful, and this shows how she thinks carefully before speaking. If she had not, then her speech might be more clichéd and predictable.



Clarisse's Relationship with Montag

Point: Clarisse makes Montag feel safe and appreciated.

1. Evidence: "He saw himself in her eyes ... as if her eyes were two miraculous bits of violet amber that might capture and hold him intact".
 - Comment: Amber is sap that flows from trees and encapsulates organisms, preserving them. In the same way, Montag feels safe in Clarisse's presence. This shows that Clarisse has a calming effect on Montag.
2. Evidence: Montag sees a light in Clarisse's face and thinks "It was not the hysterical light of electricity but - what? But the strangely comfortable and rare and gently flattering light of the candle."
 - Comment: Unlike electrical light, which may be too bright and bring out the flaws in a person's face, candle light is soft and flattering. In the same way, Clarisse's presence makes Montag feel appreciated and makes him forget his flaws temporarily.
3. Evidence: This comparison to the light of a candle goes deeper when we find that he has a strong and important memory associated with a candle. He had been in a power failure when he was a child, and his mother had found and lit a candle. The light it produced "drew comfortably around them" and they went on "hoping that the power might not come on again too soon".
 - Comment: This shows how much Montag appreciates Clarisse's effect on him – she has an effect similar to his mother, who made him feel protected and unafraid.

Point: Clarisse helps Montag reflect on his life and prompts him to search for meaning and purpose in his life

1. **Evidence:** Clarisse "had a very thin face like the dial of a small clock seen faintly in a dark room in the middle of a night when you waken to see the time and see the clock telling you the hour and the minute and the second, with a white silence and a glowing, all certainty and knowing what it has to tell of the night passing swiftly on toward further darkneses but moving also toward a new sun."
 - **Comment:** When we wake up in the middle of the night, we often have no idea what time it is and remain disorientated until we find a clock to tell us what time it is. In the same way, Clarisse seems to have an enlightening affect on Montag and points him in the direction of knowledge. The word "darkneses" may refer to the crises that Montag will be plunged into, and the phrase "a new sun" may refer to the eventual enlightenment that he will find in the end.
2. **Evidence:** "How like a mirror, too, her face. Impossible: for how many people did you know that refracted your own light to you? People were more often - he searched for a simile, found one in his work - torches, blazing away until they whiffed out."
 - **Comment:** A mirror reflects our image back so that we can examine ourselves. In the same way, Clarisse's words and response to Montag enable him to reflect on his own thoughts and actions.



In contrast, most people are like torches, which “blaze away”. Blazing produces great amounts of heat and light, and people who “blaze away” are more interested in showing their personality to others than finding out more about others. In the presence of such people, you have to keep watching and listening to them, and end up having little room for self-reflection.

3. **Evidence:** “He wore his happiness like a mask and the girl had run off across the lawn with the mask and there was no way of going to knock on her door and ask for it back.”
 - Comment: Clarisse forces Montag to see the truth he has been hiding away from: the fact that he is in fact very unhappy with his life. A mask is something you wear to hide your identity; in Montag’s case, he has been hiding his unhappiness from himself. Clarisse is the girl who has “run off” with the mask and forced him to see himself truthfully for the first time.



MILDRED

Point: Mildred isolates herself from the real world through her obsession with mass entertainment

Evidence:

1. Her room is consistently linked with death:
 - i. We learn that the bedroom is like “the cold marbled room of a mausoleum after the moon had set. Complete darkness, not a hint of the silver world outside, the windows tightly shut, the chamber a tomb-world where no sound from the great city could penetrate”.
 - ii. She lies “stretched on the bed, uncovered and cold, like a body displayed on the lid of a tomb”
 - **Comment:** The words “mausoleum” and “tomb” refer to places where corpses are kept, and the description of Mildred lying “like a body displayed on the lid” shows that she is the one who creates that atmosphere of deathly confinement. We learn therefore that she has isolated herself from the real world.
2. We learn that Mildred has “her eyes fixed to the ceiling by invisible threads of steel, immovable”.
 - **Comment:** A ceiling is a plain block of concrete that blocks your view of the world above it. This shows that Mildred has her view of the outside world obstructed. “Threads of steel” are unbreakable objects and this shows how difficult it is to get Mildred to transfer her attention elsewhere.
3. The “thimble radios” are called Seashells and are associated with the ocean:
 - i. “And in her ears the little Seashells, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming in on the shore of her unsleeping mind.”
 - ii. “Every night the waves came in and bore her off on their great tides of sound, floating her, wide-eyed, toward morning. There had been no night in the last two years that Mildred had not swum that sea, had not gladly gone down in it for the third time.”
 - **Comment:** People say that when we press the opening of a seashell against our ear, we hear the sound of the sea. However, we know that the sound produced is not from the real sea, but from the emptiness of the shell. In the same way, the sounds produced by these thimble radios do not allow Mildred to experience reality and only give her the illusion of being happy. The sound produced by the thimble radios is compared to “an electronic ocean of sound” that “bore her off”. This suggests that she surrenders her senses to the sounds in the radio and allows her mind to be manipulated by it. We also learn that she has “gladly gone down in it” many times, and like a person immersed in water, she blocks out the real world when she presses the radio into her ears. Therefore, Mildred is someone who allows mass entertainment



to block out the real world and all its authentic experiences. Not only does she not see the physical world, she is also unresponsive and insensible to her husband's presence.

Point: Mildred is unreflective and lacks self-understanding. She does not take responsibility for her own mind and body.

Evidence: After the apparently traumatic operation where Mildred has tubes stuck inside her body, she wakes up having no idea what had happened the previous night. When Montag tells her that she had taken too many sleeping pills, she insists that she would never do such a thing.

Comment: Mildred denies having taken too many pills when it obviously happened, and does not realize she needed an operation to survive the overdose. This shows that she is totally oblivious to her own actions. She seems totally reliant on the machine that pumped out the drugs and replaced her blood, as she does nothing at all to prevent another overdose. This shows that she lacks responsibility for her own life.

Point: Mildred is self-absorbed and cares only about her own needs.

Evidence:

1. Montag "felt his way toward his open, separate, and therefore cold bed".
 - **Comment:** It is normal for husband and wife to share a common bed as this symbolizes their togetherness. The "separate" bed is a sign of the emotional distance between Montag and Mildred. She does not show any love towards her husband.
2. Mildred was "an expert at lip-reading from ten years of apprenticeship at Seashell ear-thimbles."
 - **Comment:** Instead of removing her ear-thimbles so that she can listen properly to her husband, she looks at his lips to guess what he is saying. This shows that she is more interested in her entertainment than her husband's words.
3. When Montag says that the new wall-TV would cost him "one-third of my yearly pay", she replies that "It's only two thousand dollars" and "I should think you'd consider me sometimes".
 - **Comment:** She does not think about what a financial burden the purchase of a new wall-TV would create for her husband and ironically asks him to "consider" her when she should show some consideration for him instead. This shows how selfish she is.

Point: Mildred is interested only in pleasures that stimulate the senses intensely

Evidence: While driving her car, Montag asks her to drive slower, but she ends up pushing the speed to "one hundred and five miles an hour".

Comment: Mildred enjoys the raw sensation of travelling at high speed. This shows that she prefers having her senses stimulated by intense bodily sensations rather than pursuing more intellectual pastimes.

Point: Mildred pursues external beauty

Evidence: She is described as having "her hair burnt by chemicals to a brittle straw", "the body as thin as a praying mantis from dieting", and "her flesh like white bacon".



Comment: The word “chemicals” suggests that she has dyed her hair to look blonde like “straw”, but the words “brittle straw” and “burnt” imply that she has simply overdone it and destroyed the natural vitality of her hair. As for her dieting, we learn that it has made her “as thin as a praying mantis”; as this is an insect that is stick-like, we can imagine how emaciated she must be. Finally, bacon when cooked is flat and rough; having flesh like “white bacon” suggests that she has subjected her skin to unnatural whitening, and that has resulted in it losing its healthy texture. All in all, we learn that Mildred is obsessed with her appearance and this has resulted in her putting her body through excessive modification. Instead of taking care of her body, she ends up destroying it.

Mildred’s Relationship with Montag

Point: She does not seem concerned about his feelings

Evidence: Montag is traumatized by the suicidal actions of the old lady whose house they were burning and cries when he gets home. Mildred knows this too, because she feels his face with her hand and “he knew that when she pulled her hand away from his face it was wet”. However, she does not try to comfort him; instead, we find her “listening to far people in far places” through her Seashell radio.

Comment: We would expect a wife to care about her husband when he is crying, but Mildred here shows no concern whatsoever. Instead of showing concern for someone close to her, she listens to “far people in far places”. The repetition of the word “far” emphasizes how the people she prefers to show interest in bear little relation to her and highlights her lack of concern for Montag.

Point: She has little love for Montag.

Evidence: When Montag asks her where and when they first met, her response is to first say “how funny, not to remember where or when you met your husband or wife” and then to finally say that “It doesn’t matter”.

Comment: The place and time when lovers first meet is an important chapter of their lives together and even if one cannot remember these details, one would not dismiss it so easily. Mildred first tries to see it as a joke, and then totally dismisses it. This clearly shows that she places little value in the romance she once shared with Montag.

Point: Montag’s love and concern for her have been eroded.

Evidence: We know that Montag is concerned for her well-being because he calls for an ambulance when she suffers an overdose of sleeping pills. However, Montag is also sure that when she dies, he will not cry because it would be “the dying of an unknown, a street face, a newspaper image”.

Comment: We know that Montag still feels concern for Mildred because he desperately calls for the ambulance when he discovers that she has suffered an overdose. However, this concern is not love, because



he is sure he will not cry for her when she dies. The words “street face” and “newspaper image” refer to the faces of strangers whom we would not miss if they died. This shows that Montag no longer sees Mildred as an important part of his life.

BEATTY

Point: Knowledgeable about Literature and History

Evidence: He knows who the old lady who burnt herself was quoting when she said “Play the man, Master Ridley” and informs the other firemen that it was “a man named Latimer said that to a man named Nicholas Ridley”. He admits that he is “full of bits and pieces”.

Comment: This shows that Beatty is well-read and well-informed. Quoting what Latimer said and remembering the exact words is proof that he not only read the historical account but knew it very well. Throughout the novel, he shows this ability to quote from various texts.

Point: Charismatic and has aura of authority

Evidence: Montag wants to feign illness but knows that if he were to speak to Beatty, he would not be able to resist saying he was well enough to return to work. Also, when Beatty asks Mildred to “Shut the 'relatives' up”, she immediately obeys even though she did not when Montag asked her to.

Comment: The ways that Montag and Mildred respond to Beatty show that he has an aura of command that cannot be resisted.

Point: The book hints that he suffers from a deep inner conflict.

Evidence: “I was doing a terrible thing in using the very books you clung to, to rebut you on every hand, on every point! What traitors books can be!”

Comment: Despite being a captain of the firemen whose job is to burn books, Beatty has a surprisingly wide knowledge of books and is able to quote a stunning variety of phrases and sentences from them. His ability in “using the very books” Montag wants to read to “rebut” him shows that he is tremendously well-read. Even though he insists that he is disappointed with way books can be “traitors” when they seem to lead people astray, his speech is so rich in literary allusions that we suspect he too has a love of books. This contradiction between what he does for a living and the way he speaks suggests that he may be suffering from a deep inner conflict. This would not be out of the ordinary since he would be maintaining a façade just like Montag’s at the start of the novel, when the latter felt that “it was a pleasure to burn”.



Evidence: While Montag is fleeing from the city, he realizes that “Beatty had wanted to die” and that he “had just stood there, not really trying to save himself, just stood there, joking, needling”.

Comment: Montag’s reasons for thinking that Beatty “had wanted to die” are compelling – it seems that he had tried to taunt Montag into burning and killing him. If this is true, then Beatty had committed suicide by giving Montag the chance to kill him. A person who makes such a choice is clearly deeply unhappy with his life. This means that Beatty must have suffered from a painful inner conflict he could not resolve.

Beatty’s Relationship with Montag

Point: Dominates Montag emotionally

Evidence #1: While Montag plays cards with Beatty, we learn that “In Beatty's sight, Montag felt the guilt of his hands.”

Comment: Even without Beatty saying anything, Montag feels “guilt”. He is afraid that Beatty will find out about the books he has stolen and feels that fear intensely in Beatty’s presence. The fact that Beatty’s mere presence inspires such fear shows that he dominates Montag emotionally. Instead of feeling justified in his own actions, Montag feels only fear and guilt when Beatty is around.

Evidence #2: Montag wants Mildred to help him call Beatty because he is “afraid”. He compares himself to “a child feigning illness, afraid to call because after a moment's discussion, the conversation would run so: ‘Yes, Captain, I feel better already. I'll be in at ten o'clock tonight.’”

Comment: Montag is unable to lie to Beatty because he cannot resist Beatty’s aura of authority. A “child feigning illness” would not be able to keep up the pretence when questioned by an adult because the adult has superior intelligence and authority. In the same way, Montag’s confidence crumbles in Beatty’s presence.

Point: Confuses and disorientates Montag

Evidence: Montag's head whirled sickeningly. He felt beaten unmercifully on brow, eyes, nose, lips, chin, on shoulders, on upflailing arms. He wanted to yell, "No! shut up, you're confusing things, stop it!"

Comment: Conversations with Beatty typically leave Montag confused and disorientated. After Beatty describes the dream in which he holds a debate with Montag about the value of books, Montag feels as if he has been beaten and bruised. The words “beaten unmercifully on brow, eyes, nose, lips, chin, on shoulders, on upflailing arms” describe a situation where one is hit on several places at the same time and cannot do anything to defend oneself. The words “upflailing arms” tell us that the person is waving his or her arms wildly, but clearly this is not enough to stop the blows raining down on him or her. A person in such a predicament would obviously feel confused and helpless, and this is just how Montag feels as Beatty attacks him with



quotation after quotation. Because of Beatty's mental assault, Montag cannot maintain any mental focus. He cannot remain sure of the value of books.

FABER

Point: Appears to be lacking in spiritual energy and strength

Evidence: "There was white in the flesh of his mouth and his cheeks and his hair was white and his eyes had faded, with white in the vague blueness there."

Comment: The word "white" is repeated several times, and suggests the idea of palor, the lack of blood. In the same way, Faber lacks belief in himself and does not have the courage to do what he believes in.

Point: Filled with self-contempt

Evidence: He tells Montag that he is "looking at a coward" and admits that because he did not speak up for those who were unfairly accused in the past, he too is guilty.

Comment: "Coward" and "guilty" are both negative terms a person would normally avoid, yet Faber openly accuses himself of these two traits. He is therefore full of disdain for his own actions.

Point: Tends to avoid involvement and risk

Evidence: Montag wants Faber to help him with his plot to frame firemen for possession of books, but Faber asks Montag to "Let the war turn off the 'families'" and that "Our civilization is flinging itself to pieces". He also advises HOD to "stand back from the centrifuge."

Comment: We notice that Faber is fond of abrogating personal responsibility to external forces like "the war" and "civilization"; he wants to think that things can get better without himself getting involved and running the risk of being punished. This shows that he is afraid of becoming implicated and does not want to take risks.



GRANGER

Point: Granger believes in individual freedom

Evidence: “I wrote a book called *The Fingers in the Glove; the Proper Relationship between the Individual and Society*”.

Comment: A glove is something empty and that cannot move without a person’s fingers inside them. Granger’s title compares the fingers in the glove to the individual and his or her society. This implies that Granger believes in how individuals should determine the way a society works, instead of the society placing too much influence on the way individuals behave. This shows us that Granger believes in individual freedom and does not believe in placing the needs of society above those of individuals.

Point: Granger is patient and respects others’ ability to form their own opinion.

Evidence: He tells Montag that “you can't make people listen” and that “they have to come round in their own time”.

Comment: This shows that Granger does not believe in forcing others to follow his opinion. To “listen” is to pay careful attention to something; it is different from simply hearing something and forgetting it. Therefore, Granger believes that people cannot be forced to consider things carefully. Also, the phrase “come round in their own time” refers to how people may realize some truths, but only when given the time to do it themselves. Thus, Granger is a patient man who believes that people ought to be given time to form their own perspective on an issue.

Point: Granger deeply respects the role that others play in his life.

Evidence: While describing his grandfather’s effect on his life, Granger tells Montag that “if you lifted my skull, by God, in the convolutions of my brain you'd find the big ridges of his thumbprint”.

Comment: We would see “the big ridges” of a person’s thumbprint on clay or other malleable substances after he or she has shaped it by pressing his or her fingers on it. In the same way, Granger’s grandfather has left his mark on Granger’s personality. This shows that Granger sees himself as the product of his grandfather’s influence and does not attribute his ideas and personality simply to himself. He respects the role that others play in shaping and contributing to his life.



Point: Granger is modest and does not crave power.

Evidence #1: Despite having so much knowledge, Granger tells Montag that they “were not to feel superior to anyone else in the world” and that they are “nothing more than dust-jackets for books”.

Comment: Having so much knowledge, one would expect Granger to feel superior to those who are ignorant. Also, since he and his friends potentially have the ability to change society, we might expect them to feel proud of themselves. However, Granger places great emphasis on not feeling “superior to anyone else”. In addition, he compares his group of friends to “dust-jackets for books”. A dust-jacket is simply a cover that keeps the book clean and definitely not as important as the book itself. This shows that Granger sees the knowledge inside him as being far more important than himself. He is a modest man who does not look for personal glory.

Evidence #2: After getting up and starting to walk with the men he met in the forest, Montag notices that he was ahead of the others. “He was surprised, and moved aside to let Granger pass, but Granger looked at him and nodded him on. Montag went ahead.”

Comment: The surprise that Montag feels shows that he does not expect to determine the direction in which the others should walk; he does not see himself as a leader. The fact that he “moved aside to let Granger pass” shows that he sees Granger as the leader. However, Granger simply asks Montag to continue leading. This shows that Granger does not cling on to the position of leader and is modest.



SECTION II: THEMES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

POINT: We should pay full attention to others when interacting with them. This will contribute to their self-growth.

Evidence #1: Montag finds that Clarisse's face is "like a mirror" that "refracted your own light to you". Instead, most people were "torches, blazing away until they whiffed out".

Comment: A mirror is something that allows us to see ourselves. In the same way, talking to Clarisse enables Montag to reflect on his own actions and behavior. After his first encounter with Clarisse, he actually asks himself whether he is really happy or not. In contrast, the majority of people are "torches". A torch is something that generates a large amount of light. In the same way, some people are interested in displaying their ideas and personality that there is no real exchange of ideas between them and others around them.

Evidence #2: Montag asks Clarisse if she is alright after the operation to remove the drugs from her system, but we learn that "she was an expert at lip-reading from ten years of apprenticeship at Seashell ear-thimbles" and "she nodded again".

Comment: Instead of paying full attention to her husband's words, Mildred reads Montag's lips and gives a cursory response by simply nodding. Because of this, Montag feels no inclination to continue the conversation and nothing meaningful comes out from the exchange. This shows that when we interact with others, we should pay full attention to them; this will allow a strong exchange of ideas to occur.

POINT: In a relationship, we should try to be equals who support each other and become stronger because of it, and not try to dominate those around us.

Evidence #1: Faber tells Montag that "he would be Montag-plus-Faber, fire plus water", and one day, "neither fire nor water, but wine".

Comment: The word "neither" emphasizes the fact that in the end, a totally new personality will come out of this interaction between Montag and Faber. Faber's influence will not be so strong that it will take over Montag's personality; instead, Montag will develop a completely new self. This shows that in a relationship, we should seek to contribute to each other's development, and not simply seek to influence and dominate others.

Evidence #2: Beatty describes a dream where he and Montag are in "a furious debate on books". While Montag "yelled quotes" at him, he "calmly parried every thrust". As a result, Montag was "scared silly". At the end of the dream, Beatty arrives in "the Salamander and said, Going my way?" Montag gets in.

Comment: In a debate, two parties struggle for superiority. In the same way, Beatty wishes to prove that he is superior to Montag. The phrase "parried every thrust" compares the debate to a duel where Beatty is clearly the superior combatant. When Montag agrees to sit on Beatty's vehicle, he really is "going" Beatty's "way" – he has



lost all faith in himself and surrendered to Beatty. This shows that in a relationship, one party can crush the confidence that the other party has.

Evidence #3: After Beatty tells Montag the dream where they have a debate, Faber tells Montag that he will have his say. He then tells Montag: "But I want it to be your decision, not mine, and not the Captain's."

Comment: The emphasis in this sentence falls on the word "your" – he wants Montag to make up his own mind, and not to simply follow his ideas. We see that Faber respects Montag's right to form his own opinion. This should be the way we treat others: we should only support them and not expect them to follow our lead.

POINT: Our relationships with others is the foundation of our self-worth. Our sense of self-worth should come from how we contribute to the lives of others, not from the things we selfishly desire.

Evidence #1: Granger describes to Montag what his grandfather was like. He tells Montag: "when he died, I suddenly realized I wasn't crying for him at all, but for the things he did" and that he cried "because he would never do them again, he would never carve another piece of wood or help us raise doves and pigeons in the back yard or play the violin the way he did, or tell us jokes the way he did."

Comment: We notice that "the things he did" were all done for others: whether it is carving wood, helping children to raise doves, playing the violin for others or telling people jokes, every action contributes to the happiness of those around him. These actions are what Granger remembers of his grandfather, and what make him special. Therefore, we see that our self-worth comes from how we contribute to the lives of those around us. The relationships we share with others is fundamental to what we are.

HAPPINESS

POINT: People find many different ways to escape from the fact that they are unhappy.

Evidence #1: At the start of the story, Montag felt that "it was a pleasure to burn" and imagined that "his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor" while he burned the house down. However, after the conversation with Clarisse, he admitted that he "wore his happiness like a mask and the girl had run off across the lawn with the mask".

Comment: Burning gives Montag a sense of power, as if he had control over his world. We can see this from the way he compares his hands to "the hands of some amazing conductor". Like the way a conductor influences the music produced by an orchestra, Montag feels that he controls the world he burns. However, after his conversation with Clarisse, he admits that he "wore his happiness like a mask". A mask is something we use to hide our true identity, and Montag has been hiding his unhappiness behind the façade of how much he enjoys his job as a fireman. This is similar to the way some of us escape from the true state of our minds by deriving a temporary sense of achievement from some other activity. However, in the end, we are still unhappy.



POINT: Happiness may in fact be ignorance. It may be better to be unhappy so that we deal with the real problems in life.

Evidence: According to Beatty, “if you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him” and “let him forget there is such a thing as war”.

Comment: Having “two sides to a question” forces us to think, and the effort spent doing so makes us weary; similarly, the knowledge that war is happening depresses or frightens us. For Beatty, happiness comes from having no knowledge about such things. However, these are things that indeed do exist; instead of ignoring them, we should actively seek to find out more and try to solve the problems.

POINT: We must not confuse entertainment with happiness.

Evidence: Beatty tells Montag that what makes people happy is “your clubs and parties, your acrobats and magicians, your dare-devils, jet cars, motor-cycle helicopters, your sex and heroin, more of everything to do with automatic reflex”. All this is “solid entertainment”.

Comment: All the things he mentions has something “to do with automatic reflex”. This refers to the way our bodies are instinctively stimulated by physical sensations. This is essentially what “solid entertainment” provides us, and it can help us attain a temporary state of happiness. However, these sensations do not provide any antidote for the real issues in our life. Mildred is a good example of how entertainment fails to provide true happiness. The day after her life was saved from an overdose of sleeping pills, she is found listening to her Seashell radio. She insists that there is nothing wrong with her, but the fact that she really did suffer an overdose tells us that something deeply troubling lies at the bottom of her mind. This shows us that while we can be entertained, this is not the same as true happiness.



TECHNOLOGY

POINT: Technology can be a convenient solution for physical problems, but may not solve our emotional and psychological problems.

Evidence #1: We can see how technology solves the characters' physical problems from the episode where Mildred suffers a drug overdose from sleeping pills and Montag calls for medical help. This arrives in the form of a machine that "drank up the green matter" from Mildred's body.

Comment: The word "green" suggests that the substances inside Mildred's body are filthy and dirty, while the word "drank" suggests that the operation was smooth and uncomplicated, and therefore effective. Therefore, the machine effectively cleans up Mildred's body.

Evidence #2: As the two men operate the machine that removes the harmful substances from Mildred, the writer asks the question "Did it drink of the darkness?" before telling us that the machine "fed with the occasional sound of inner suffocation and blind searching".

Comment: The word "darkness" probably refers to the despair and unhappiness in Mildred. This causes the machine to suffer "inner suffocation". When we suffocate, we struggle for air; therefore, the emotional problems inside Mildred are so immense that even the machine struggles to cope with it. Also, the words "blind searching" suggest that the machine cannot locate the emotional problems within Mildred because the word "blind" refers to the total loss of sight and this makes it practically impossible to do any "searching". Therefore, we can conclude that while technology can benefit the characters by solving their physical problems, it cannot solve their emotional problems.

POINT: Technology can be used to help us maintain law and order, but this can also be abused.

Evidence #1: Beatty describes the Mechanical Hound as "a good rifle that can fetch its own target and guarantees the bull's-eye every time."

Comment: A rifle is a weapon that we can use to shoot and kill others. Comparing the Hound to such a weapon emphasizes how dangerous and powerful it can be. In addition, it is a rifle that "can fetch its own target"; this tells us that the effectiveness of the Hound is no longer held back by human limitations. Those who know of the Hound's power would certainly think twice before committing a crime. The Hound therefore represents the effective use of technology as a means of maintaining law and order.

Evidence #2: Montag reflects on how "If someone here in the firehouse knew about the ventilator then mightn't they "tell" the Hound...?"

Comment: We know that Montag hides his books in the ventilator shaft and that is why he is afraid of people sending the Hound after him. The Hound is used to create the climate of fear that stops people from seeking out books and reading them. This shows that technology can be used to deny people their rights; if the technology used for surveillance and searching is too effective, there can be no chance at all for individuals to pursue actions that the authorities deem criminal.



POINT: Technology can provide entertainment to the masses, but it can also blind people to the beauty of real life.

Evidence #1: After Montag escapes from the city, he “remembered a farm he had visited when he was very young” and he had discovered that “beyond the walls of parlours ... cows chewed grass and pigs sat in warm ponds at noon and dogs barked after white sheep on a hill.”

Comment: The phrase “walls of parlours” refers to the Wall-TV. The Wall-TV is a technologically advanced device that provides an immersive experience for its viewer. It is so effective at entertaining its audience that it can replace reality for people. Without visiting the farm, the young Montag would not have realized that there were cows, pigs and dogs doing various actions in a natural environment. These are all animals, and they represent the real world that we can forget when we are used to the virtual representations of the world that technology can produce for us. Furthermore, watching these animals go about their daily activities can in itself be an enjoyable activity, but those who are preoccupied with the entertainment produced by Wall-TVs would never appreciate this. In the same way, we may become so absorbed in the virtual world that we ignore the beauty of the real world.

MASS MEDIA

POINT: The mass media can provide absorbing entertainment, but this entertainment can prevent people from developing healthy relationships with others.

Evidence #1: When Montag attempts to talk to Mildred, he finds her too busy preparing to watch a programme on the Wall-TV. We learn that “she didn't look up from her script”. This script has a part meant to be played by her, the viewer: “The home-maker, that's me, is the missing part.”

Comment: The fact that Mildred “didn't look up from her script” tells us that she is far more interested in her role on the Wall-TV than talking to her husband. Ironically, by playing the “missing part” of the “homemaker” in the Wall-TV, she becomes the missing homemaker of her own household. This tells us that mass entertainment can become so addictive that individuals no longer pay attention to the people in their real lives. They prefer interacting with the characters in the virtual world created by the mass media.

POINT: The mass media can be used as a means of manipulating the opinion of the masses.

Evidence #1: Granger shows Montag how the chase is proceeding using a small television set. He comments on how “they can't admit” that they have lost Montag, so they have to find a “scapegoat”. Also, “they know they can hold their audience only so long.” As the television shows the final sequence of the chase, he asks Montag: “See how our camera is coming in? Building the scene. Suspense. Long shot.”



Comment: The use of a “scapegoat” shows that the mass media can be dishonest when it seeks to protect the interests of the authorities and make them seem infallible. In addition, the words “suspense”, “long shot” and “building the scene” refer to techniques used in filming movies that entertain people. Such films affect their audience emotionally by stimulating their senses, not by giving clear information. These two aspects of the mass media shows that the mass media does not simply give its viewer a factual report of events; instead, it uses techniques employed by the entertainment industry to influence its audience.

Evidence #2: While travelling on a train, Montag hears an advertisement for “Denham Dentifrice”. It interferes with his reading of the Bible, so he asks the advertisement to “Shut up, shut up, shut up!” but it just continues. The other passengers are “tapping their feet to the rhythm” and their “mouths had been faintly twitching the words Dentifrice Dentifrice Dentifrice”. We learn that “the train radio vomited upon Montag ... a great ton-load of music” and that “the people were pounded into submission”.

Comment: Montag’s reading of the Bible represents an attempt at enriching oneself intellectually. However, he is interrupted by the advertisement, which keeps repeating the same phrase in different ways. Even though Montag wants the advertisement to “shut up”, he has no means of stopping it. This shows how the mass media can interfere with one’s intellectual development. In addition, we learn that the other passengers start “tapping their feet to the rhythm” of the advertisement and that their “mouths had been faintly twitching the words”. This shows that advertisements affect us by stimulating our senses, and do not allow us to make rational decisions based on clearly communicated information.

POINT: The mass media can be an effective means of entertainment, but it can also cause its audience to lose the ability to formulate intelligent thought.

Evidence #1: When Mrs Bowles and Mrs Phelps visit Mildred, they watch the Wall-TV. It shows how “a woman smiled and drank orange juice simultaneously” and “an X-ray of the same woman revealed the contracting journey of the refreshing beverage on its way to her delightful stomach”. We also learn that “Abruptly the room took off on a rocket flight into the clouds, it plunged into a lime-green sea where blue fish ate red and yellow fish” and “a minute later, Three White Cartoon Clowns chopped off each other's limbs to the accompaniment of immense incoming tides of laughter”. Finally, we read about how “two minutes more and the room whipped out of town to the jet cars wildly circling an arena, bashing and backing up and bashing each other again.”

Comment:

Each of the scenes described do not have any meaningful content. Instead, they are simply sensational scenes that excite the senses. The “X-ray” of the woman drinking orange juice is fascinating but not used for any educational purpose; the scene where the fish eat each other provide excitement through the violence and the vibrant colours of each fish; finally, the clowns and the jet cars entertain the audience through nothing but gratuitous violence. None of these scenes provide any enriching or informative content. In addition, the words



“abruptly”, “plunged”, “a minute later” and “two minutes later” tell us that the scenes follow one after the other quickly and suddenly, leaving the audience with very little time for reflection on the meaning of whatever they are watching. In the same way, much of what we see in the movies or on TV only stimulates the senses and does not enrich the mind. Watching too much of such entertainment would only cause one’s mind to degenerate in terms of intellectual capacity.

LITERATURE

POINT: Books are important because they give us detailed information about the real world.

Evidence #1: Faber explains to Montag that books have “Quality, texture of information” and “show the pores in the face of life” even though “comfortable people want only wax moon faces, poreless, hairless, expressionless.”

Comment: The words “poreless, hairless, expressionless” describe a face that looks beautiful but unnatural. In the same way, we like things to be superficially perfect; we do not enjoy finding imperfections and problems. However, we are only escaping from reality. In contrast, books “show us the pores in the face of life”. These pores represent the imperfect and problematic side of life, and books allow us to observe these things.

POINT: Books are important because they allow us to reflect on their ideas and make our own rational choices.

Evidence: Faber tells Montag that the second thing people need is “leisure” and “time to think”, which must not be confused with the time we spend “driving a hundred miles an hour, at a clip where you can't think of anything else but the danger” or “sitting in some room where you can't argue with the fourwall televisor”. In contrast, “books can be beaten down with reason”.

Comment: By “leisure”, Faber means “time to think” -- the freedom and ability to read and think on one’s own. If we spend our free time driving at high speeds to enjoy the thrill, or simply watching the Wall-TV, then we still do not enjoy the “time to think”. In the same way, we often spend our time on activities that stop us from engaging actively in thinking deeply. In contrast, books allow us time to contemplate ideas and arrive slowly at conclusions. Therefore, books are effective means of stimulating our intellect.



SECTION III: Beginning & Ending

EFFECTIVE BEGINNING

Point: We are introduced to an arresting protagonist.

Evidence #1: “It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed.”

Comment: The novel starts off by introducing us to a rather sinister figure: a person who thought that “it was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed”. The words “blackened and changed” implies a destructive transformation of things. In addition, the word “eaten” suggests that this destruction involves an entire object, leaving nothing behind. This desire to see something totally annihilated hints at a dark, malevolent side in the character, and immediately grabs the reader’s interest because we would be interested in finding out how he became like this, or his reasons for being so destructive. In addition, most stories feature heroes who have positive, likeable traits, so this departure from the norm is fresh and interesting.

Evidence #2: We learn that Montag “strode in a swarm of fireflies” and that he wanted “to shove a marshmallow on a stick in the furnace, while the flapping pigeon-winged books died on the porch and lawn of the house.”

Comment: Again, these phrases show us that the character is a callous and sinister figure who treats the destruction around him as both pleasurable and amusing. Fireflies are known for the beautiful scenes they create when they fly in a swarm, but here they are being used to describe the sparks and burning embers flying around him as he walks through the wreckage. This shows that, far from feeling remorse for the destruction he is causing, Montag in fact sees the scene as beautiful and attractive. This shows how nonchalant he is about the destruction he is causing. In addition, he wants to “shove a marshmallow on a stick in the furnace”. This action is associated with the tranquil, pleasant activity of cooking during a barbeque or campfire – something totally incongruous with the destruction we see in this scene. This confirms how destructive and utterly malevolent Montag is and further engages the reader to continue reading to find out what lies in store for his atypical protagonist.

Evidence #3: We learn that “Montag grinned the fierce grin of all men singed and driven back by flame” and that “it never went away, that smile, it never ever went away, as long as he remembered”.

Comment: When we are close to flames, we may grimace and pull back our facial muscles in some discomfort. This ends up, ironically, looking like a grin. Since the smile on Montag’s face is “the fierce grin of all men singed and driven back by flame”, we suspect that the smile is not a real smile at all and that perhaps he does not really enjoy the burning so much after all. Also, we learn that he is “singed” and “driven back” by the fire. This means that he, too, is a victim of the fire. In addition, we learn that the smile “never went away”. The writer repeats this phrase to add emphasis to the fact that it is a smile Montag cannot get rid of. This suggests that



the pleasure and delight he apparently feels is a façade, and that he is not the simple character the first paragraph of the story had portrayed him to be. A complex character like Montag arrests our interest because we would enjoy finding out how he became like this.

Point: The novel begins *in medias res*

Evidence: With a “brass nozzle in his fists”, Montag burnt the house and it “jumped up in a gorging fire that burned the evening sky red and yellow and black”.

Comment: When the novel begins, we find ourselves in the middle of the action: Montag is enjoying himself burning the house. We can visualize the main character wielding his “brass nozzle” like a monstrous weapon, and the words “jumped up” suggest that the house exploded violently in flames. In addition, the fire is a “gorging” fire that “burned the evening sky”. The word “gorging” suggests that the fire consumes everything, leaving nothing behind. It even burns the sky, and this implies that the flames were so powerful that it left nothing unscathed. Because the scene is so dramatically described, we are immediately sucked into the action of the story in a moment of high drama. This is an unpredictable and unexpected beginning, because many stories start on a gentler note. We therefore expect to be engaged on a similar note in the rest of the story, and continue reading on in anticipation of more high drama.

Point: The use of fresh, captivating figurative language stimulates our imagination.

Evidence: We learn that Montag’s “hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history”

Comment: A conductor is someone who leads an orchestra as it plays music. The word “symphonies” refers to classical music. Both are associated with a sophisticated, refined form of art. This is incongruous with the violent and destructive burning that it is being compared to. However, we realize that the comparison is actually apt because like a conductor leading his or her orchestra, Montag is in command of the flames and the comparison actually succeeds admirably in emphasizing the sense of power he enjoys, as well as how delightful the flames appear to him. It is as if the flames are a visual treat like music is enjoyable to the ears. This fresh, original yet entirely apt comparison compels us to read further as we would anticipate more of such artful and inventive use of language from the author.



EFFECTIVE ENDING

Point: The ending shows how the main character has grown.

Evidence #1: By the end of the book when the war has leveled the city, Montag remembers a verse in the Bible about “a tree of life” which “yielded her fruit every month” whose “leaves” were for “the healing of the nations”. He believes that it will be appropriate when they “reach the city”.

Comment: Initially, Montag has no real appreciation of the value of books. He instinctively reaches for them and keeps them behind his ventilator grille, but he does not truly understand why they are important. After witnessing an old lady commit suicide because of the firemen, he tells Mildred that “there must be something in books, things we can't imagine, to make a woman stay in a burning house.” The word “something” tells us that he has no real inkling of what makes books so important.

However, Montag eventually comes to appreciate the value of books. By the end of the book when the war has leveled the city, Montag remembers a verse in the Bible about “a tree of life” which “yielded her fruit every month” whose “leaves” were for “the healing of the nations”. He believes that it will be appropriate when they “reach the city”. At this point in the story, the city has already been destroyed. We associate a tree with vitality and growth, and fruits and leaves are associated with fertility and life. In the same way, life always offers the possibility of growth and fertility. Those people whose lives are shattered by the war would be comforted by such knowledge. Montag understands that books contain ideas and words that stimulate contemplation and reflection in people, and that he can use these things to contribute positively to others' lives. This shows that he has, by the end of the novel, learnt the true value of books.

Evidence #2: After the war “began and ended” with the destruction of the city, Montag walks with the new friends he has found in the forest. He “found that the others had fallen in behind him” and when he “moved aside to let Granger pass”, Granger “nodded him on” and Montag “went ahead”. We also learn that “he would walk along here again, alone, and keep right on going until he caught up with the people”.

Comment: At the start of the story, Montag was not sure of his identity. Even though he kept books behind the ventilator grille in his house and wants to quit his job after seeing an old lady commit suicide after her books are burnt by the firemen, he cannot even bring himself to tell Captain Beatty that he does not want to work that day – he knows that after talking to the Captain, he will end up like “a child feigning illness” and say “I'll be in at ten o'clock tonight.”. A child is dependent on adults and must always obey them, and this comparison tells us how Montag is unable to break free from the grip that Captain Beatty has on him. He cannot lead his life the way he wants to. In addition, he tells Mildred that his “grandfather and father were firemen” and “in my sleep, I ran after them.” When we sleepwalk, we do things unconsciously; when Montag says he “ran” after his father and grandfather in his “sleep”, he means that he simply followed their example without thinking about his actions. This shows that he did not actively determine his own identity, but simply followed others.

However, at the end of the book, Montag seems to have found his own voice. This is symbolically revealed through what may at first appear to be a minor episode. When he “found that the others had fallen in behind him”, he “moved aside to let Granger pass”. Being in front of everyone implies that he is leading them, and he



is uncomfortable with this role, so he prefers to let Granger take over. However, when Granger simply “nodded him on”, Montag “went ahead”. This shows that Montag is no longer only a follower who moves with the crowd unthinkingly; he is able to choose his path independently and is able to lead. In addition, we also learn that “he would walk along here again, alone, and keep right on going until he caught up with the people”. When we are alone, we may become lost or start to lose confidence in our sense of direction; in contrast, to be able to walk “alone” and “keep right on going” shows a strong sense of self-belief. This shows that Montag now is able to plot his own destiny and determine what he wants to do with his own life.

Point: The ending shows us how the society in the novel is destroyed by the problems explored earlier in the text.

Evidence #1: We learn that “the war began and ended in that instant “ and “the city rolled over and fell down dead” after the bombs struck.

Comment: At the start of the story, we are introduced to a society plagued by hedonism and a lack of respect for intellectual activity. Beatty explains to Montag: “Don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy.” Philosophy and sociology are disciplines that examine the nature of life and human existence. The word “melancholy” refers to a state of depression, and disciplines like psychology and sociology do indeed embroil the mind in difficult issues and may lead to depressing truths. The society in this story rejects such disciplines, opting instead to focus on what Beatty calls “solid entertainment”. Entertainment only creates a superficial, temporary form of happiness.

At the end of the novel, we witness how the problems of this society cause itself to finally implode. Beatty says that mankind should “forget there is such a thing as war.” This is consistent with way society rejects reflection and self-examination. By forgetting war, people remain happy and contented. Aptly, war is what then destroys the city in the end. We learn that “the city rolled over and fell down dead” after the bombs struck. Thus, we see how humanity is finally destroyed by the mindless hedonism he pursues. This is a satisfactory ending as we see the consequences of the problems explored by the text in the early stages of the novel.

Point: The novel ends on a note of hope.

Evidence #1: Granger tells Montag that they are “going to go build a mirror-factory first and put out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long look in them.” In addition, Montag remembers this verse and plans to recite it to others when he reaches the city: “And on either side of the river was there a tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

Comment: By the end of the novel, we learn that “the city rolled over and fell down dead” after the bombs struck. However, the novel does not end on such a despondent note. Instead, we see signs that humanity will pick itself up again. A “mirror” is something we use to examine our own features; in the same way, Granger hopes that they will be able to help people take a careful look at their own lives and learn from their mistakes. The verse that Montag remembers also offers hope for the future. The phrase “healing of the nations” is



appropriate because this is a time when humanity needs to recover from the consequences of the mistakes it has made. A tree is associated with strength and vitality, and fruits and leaves symbolize fertility and growth. Therefore the “tree of life” is a symbol of the fertility and vitality that mankind can still find after the destruction of his society. All in all, the ending of the novel promises much hope and gives the reader a satisfactory sense of optimism regarding the characters in the novel. Also, because the society in the novel is so similar to ours, it is pleasing to the reader to find that there is hope for regeneration and re-birth for us in the real world. We learn that so long as we, like what Granger suggests through his metaphor of the mirror, carefully reflect on our actions, we can still find hope for our society.



SECTION IV: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FIRE

Point: Fire in the novel is associated with destructive, irresponsible enjoyment.

Evidence: “his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history”

Comment: In this scene Montag is burning down someone’s house and the books within it. The words “charcoal ruins of history” emphasize the cultural and historical value of the things being burnt. These books are a vital part of our cultural heritage, and yet Montag feels nothing but pleasure burning them. We know this because “symphonies” are refined, enjoyable musical pieces and comparing the act of burning to that of a symphony being played tells us that Montag sees the burning as a feast for his senses. This shows that the act of burning is associated with destructive, irresponsible pleasure.

Point: Fire is sometimes a symbol of a nurturing, loving relationship.

Evidence #1: To Montag, Clarisse’s face did not contain “the hysterical light of electricity” but “the strangely comfortable and rare and gently flattering light of the candle”. He associates it with the time when “in a power-failure, his mother had found and lit a last candle” and “space lost its vast dimensions and drew comfortably around them”.

Comment: The word “hysterical” refers to a state where things are out of control, and when applied to the “light of electricity”, helps us understand that this light is strong and unsettling to the senses. Under such lighting, things become harshly lit up. In the same way, some people may cause us to look at ourselves harshly and critically, and reinforce a sense of inferiority.

In contrast, the light of a candle can be “gently flattering”. Things lit up by candlelight are basked in a warm glow that makes them appear beautiful, and in the same way, there are people who make us more comfortable with who we are.

This symbolism of the flame of a candle is reinforced by Montag’s childhood memory. Under the influence of the candle’s illumination, space “drew comfortably around them”. The light from the candle creates a sense of security around the young Montag and his mother. Thus, fire when gentle can be a symbol for a nurturing, loving relationship.

Evidence #2: When Montag first found Granger and the others gathered around a fire, he was surprised to see that the fire was “not burning” but “warming”, and that “it could give as well as take”.

Comment: Instead of burning houses and books, and ultimately destroying things, the fire here is being used to keep people warm. Fire is, therefore, something that can be either destructive or constructive. In the same way, people can be like firemen and devote their lives to destruction, or they can be like Granger’s group and



devote their lives to forming strong relationships and healing society. Fire is therefore also a symbol of the nurturing relationships human beings can form with one another. Like fire, human beings can turn from a life of destructiveness to one devoted to healing and helping others.

Point: Fire is also used as a symbol of egotism.

Evidence: “People were more often - he searched for a simile, found one in his work - torches, blazing away until they whiffed out.”

Comment: A torch that is “blazing away” provides a great amount of light, and can end up blinding those who look at it. In the same way, those who are only interested in themselves and in making their presence known to others do not give other people the chance to express their opinions and ideas. Therefore, fire is also a symbol of egotism.

Point: Fire is also a symbol of escapism.

Evidence #1: Beatty tells Montag: “Someone's written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book. Serenity, Montag. Peace, Montag.”

Comment: When a book about tobacco and the cancer of the lungs upsets “the cigarette people”, the book is burned so that people can enjoy “serenity” and “peace”. This shows that the people in this society simply run away from facts and truths that cause them unhappiness. Burning the books does not solve the problem of cancer; it simply allows people to carry on smoking without having their enjoyment soured by the knowledge that it is harming them. Fire therefore is a symbol of escapism.

Evidence #2: Beatty tells Montag that “Its real beauty is that it destroys responsibility and consequences.”

Comment: When we destroy the things that cause us problems, we no longer need to take up the duty of solving these issues. We also no longer need to care about the consequences of our actions because anything that appears problematic can be gotten rid of. However, such behavior only encourages more irresponsible actions, which in turn creates more problems. Also, burning things cannot really solve the problems; it is only a temporary reprieve that will eventually come to an end. In the end, the consequences of our actions will still catch up with us. Therefore, fire is a symbol of the escapism that people in the society of Fahrenheit 451 suffer.



Point: The act of burning is a symbol of the ephemerality* of things.

Evidence: Montag realizes that the sun “burned Time” and that either the firemen or the sun “had to stop burning”. We learn that “the guild of the asbestos-weaver must open shop very soon”.

Comment: The sun “burned Time” because the passage of time wears things out. Things either get eroded, rotten or forgotten as time goes by. Therefore, if man does not learn how to treasure things, he will end up accelerating the speed at which things of value disappear. Asbestos is a fireproof material that can protect things from fire. In the same way, people can offer various objects protection from the erosion of time. Fire, therefore, is a symbol of how things in our life can be eroded by time.

**Ephemerality refers to the state of lasting only for a short period of time.*

Point: Fire is also a symbol of rebirth.

Evidence: Describing the Phoenix, Granger tells Montag that “every time he burnt himself up he sprang out of the ashes, he got himself born all over again” and that “it looks like we're doing the same thing, over and over”. However, he is confident that human beings have “one damn thing the Phoenix never had. ... some day we'll stop making the goddam funeral pyres and jumping into the middle of them”.

Comment: Like the Phoenix that burns itself and then gets born anew, mankind seems to have a long history of self-destruction, followed by healing. The “funeral pyres” he mentions represent problems that mankind creates for itself and that ultimately lead to mankind’s own destruction. However, Granger is hopeful that one day mankind will stop this self-destruction. Human beings, according to him, will rise up from their next calamity and learn to not commit the same mistakes again. We are like the Phoenix in the way we can recover from our mistakes. Therefore, fire, which is the element we associate with the Phoenix, is also a symbol of rebirth.

Composed by Sim Joo Jin, 2008. This guide was written specifically for students taking the Literature Elective in St. Andrew's Secondary School. If you would like to use any portion of this guide, please write in to simjoojin@gmail.com and ask for express permission to do so.