



# Fahrenheit 451

By Ray Bradbury

First published in 1953

Genre & subject

Dystopian Fiction

## Synopsis

In a society in which books are outlawed, Montag, a regimented fireman in charge of burning the forbidden volumes, meets a revolutionary school teacher who dares to read. Suddenly he finds himself a hunted fugitive, forced to choose not only between two women, but between personal safety and intellectual freedom.

## Author biography

Ray Douglas Bradbury (August 22, 1920 – June 5, 2012) was an American fantasy, science fiction, horror and mystery fiction writer. He was an autodidact. Best known for his dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) and for the science fiction and horror stories gathered together as *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) and *The Illustrated Man* (1951), Bradbury was one of the most celebrated 20th-century American writers. Many of Bradbury's works have been adapted into comic books, television shows, and films.

## Discussion starters

- Why would society make "being a pedestrian" a crime? (Clarisse tells Montag that her uncle was once arrested for this.)
- One suicide and one near-suicide occur in this book. One woman, who shuns books but loves TV and driving fast in her car, anaesthetises 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?"
- 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?
- 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?
- Why do you think the firemen's rulebook credited Benjamin Franklin—writer, publisher, political leader, inventor, ambassador—as being the first fireman?

- 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?
- Do you believe, as Montag did, that Beatty wanted to die? If so, why do you think so?
- 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?
- 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?

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