

Fahrenheit 451 Study Guide

God for God's strength and faithfulness. Concrete images often illustrate truth more vividly and memorably than abstract, propositional language; thus, as one scholar points out, similes and metaphors are more than "ornaments" of language . . . they are integral to the functioning of language, and in fact indispensable not only to poetry, but to all modes of discourse." [Abrams, 64]

These techniques certainly prove indispensable to *Fahrenheit 451*. Much of the book's emotional impact derives from Bradbury's loving attention to language—fitting for a novel in which a dominant theme is the power of words. Literary critics give special attention to Bradbury's "poetic, evocative, [and] consciously symbolic" style. [Nicholls, 151] Close attention to both the words Bradbury chooses and the way he uses them will result in a deeper understanding and appreciation of his work.

1. List below five similes from Part One. After the simile, describe what effect the simile produces that heightens the description or makes the event more clear.

Example

Simile: She 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. . . .

Effect: The image of a pale clock in the darkness implies that Clarisse stands out from everything around her; she has order, like a clock, while everything else is vague and uncertain.

a. Simile:

Effect:

b. Simile:

Effect:

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5. Literary scholar M. H. Abrams writes, “The physical setting . . . is an important element in generating the atmosphere of [some authors’] works.” [Abrams, 172] What atmosphere, or “mood,” do you think Bradbury wants to create through the setting of his story?

6. The phenomenon that critics often call “the willing suspension of disbelief”—readers’ ability to set aside objections to a narrative’s unusual or fantastic elements in order to experience the story—is particularly important to science fiction and fantasy. In your opinion, how does Bradbury’s portrayal of the novel’s setting contribute to or detract from your willingness to suspend disbelief? Respond with specific reference to the text.

Characterization:

Characterization is the process by which authors of fiction make the characters in their stories “come alive.” To create believable characters, authors employ several techniques. Even the divinely inspired authors of the Bible, when writing about real people, used these techniques to communicate a sense of biblical personalities to readers. Techniques of characterization include:

- Direct information (giving readers explicit knowledge about a character; *e.g.*, what does John 12:6 directly tell us about Judas?)
- Dialogue (allowing readers to infer something about the character based on what he/she says and how he/she says it; *e.g.*, what can you infer about Cain based on Genesis 4:9?)
- Physical action (showing the character engaged in an activity that reveals something about him or her; *e.g.*, what do we learn about Samson from his actions in Judges 13–16?)

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In your opinion, how are the effects of technology in your society similar or different?

3. During the firemen's raid of 11 North Elm, Montag thinks that the woman living there with her forbidden books is "spoiling the ritual." What does he mean by this?

4. Research the quote from Latimer that the woman at 11 N. Elm recites before lighting her match. Briefly describe its historical context. How does a deeper understanding of the quote add to your understanding of this episode in the novel?

5. How are the words Montag sees as he helps burn the library at 11 N. Elm significant for understanding *Fahrenheit 451*?

6. According to Beatty, what historical events and trends led to the firemen? What seems to be his attitude toward the history he discusses? How does his discussion shape your attitude toward him?

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10. Look up *hearth* and *salamander*. In relation to this book, what do you think these words mean? Who or what might they represent? Why do you think Bradbury titled Part One “The Hearth and the Salamander”?

Dig Deeper:

11. Clarisse asks Montag, “Are you happy?” How is Montag’s struggle with this question in Part One similar to and different from the Teacher’s struggle in Ecclesiastes 2:1–11? Consider also 2:24–25.
12. Read Psalm 1 and Matthew 5:1–12. How do these passages define happiness? What other scriptures support your answer?
13. As noted above, Bradbury, in *Fahrenheit 451* and in other works, warns against the tendency of technology to dehumanize those who use it. What has been your experience of the Christian faith’s attitude toward technology and innovation? Read Exodus 32:1–7; 35:30–36:5; Isaiah 44:12–22; Micah 4:1–5. How do these scripture passages address the use or abuse of technology? Based on these passages, and others of which you may be aware, are the Christian attitudes toward technology that you have experienced justified?

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14. With dehumanization comes isolation. How does Bradbury illustrate the isolation in his novel's society? What are its sources, and what are its consequences? Read Matthew 22:34–40; John 13:34–35; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Ephesians 2:11–22. How does Christian faith offer an alternative to isolation?

15. Was the woman at 11 N. Elm justified in taking the action she did? Why or why not? Read a definition of “martyr,” from a standard dictionary and from a Bible dictionary. How, if at all, can this woman be considered a martyr? Read Daniel 3:13–18; Isaiah 50:4–9; Matthew 27:11–14, 27–31; John 10:17–18; Acts 4:18–21, 5:41, and 7:51–60. How do these Scriptures help you evaluate the woman's act? How do they challenge you to consider for what you would be willing to give up your life? Consider Mark 8:35–37.

16. According to Beatty, how was religion a force that led to the firemen? To what extent, if any, are Beatty's charges against religion legitimate?

17. Read John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 14:16–17; 17:22–31; Romans 2:12–16, 28–29; Philippians 4:8–9; Jude 3:22–23. How can Christians, who profess to have received ultimate truth, witness to and defend that truth without contributing to a culture of, in Beatty's words, “vanilla tapioca” or bitter fighting?

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17. Faber calls himself a coward because he did not speak up on behalf of those who were persecuted for being intellectuals: “I’m one of the innocents who could have spoken up and out when no one would listen to the ‘guilty,’ but I did not speak and thus became guilty myself.” Read Esther 4:6–16; Job 29:11–17; Psalm 72:1–4, 12–15; Matthew 25:41–46; and Luke 16:19–25. What do these passages teach about opportunities and obligations to speak “up and out,” as Faber says, on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves? How can you follow these teachings?

18. Faber critiques his society for being “rootless,” for giving up the rich nourishment once found (among other places) in books. The society of *Fahrenheit 451* suffers from a collective amnesia. George Santayana wrote in *The Life of Reason* (Vol. 1, 1905), “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 8:10–20; Psalm 106:6–15; Jeremiah 6:16–19; John 14:25–26; Acts 2:42; 2 Peter 1:12–15; and Revelation 2:2:4–5. What do these texts teach about the importance of memory, both personal and corporate, in the life of faith? How do such passages as Isaiah 43:16–21 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 help define faithful remembering?

Optional Activities:

1. Find and support an organized effort to give Bibles to those who do not have them, or plan a project to support Bible translation efforts. Organizations include International Bible Society (www.ibs.org); American Bible Society (www.americanbible.org); Wycliffe Bible Translators (www.wycliffe.org); The Gideons International (www.gideons.org); or research your own church’s or denomination’s resources.