Fahrenheit 451 Discussion Questions

Part I: The Hearth and the Salamander (pp. 3-35)

1. Describe Clarisse McClellan. What makes her different from most of the people in her society? What qualities does Montag have that makes him receptive to her?
2. Describe Montag’s wife, Mildred. Under what circumstances are we first introduced to her? Why do you think this is significant to the story?
3. What is the point of Bradbury’s description of the kind of television show that Mildred likes to watch? Can you think of comparable shows in our own society?
4. How do Montag and the hound react to each other? What literary device do you think is at work here?
5. Having read the novel’s opening pages, what are your impressions of the society (a fictional United States) that Montag lives in? In what ways is it similar to our own society? What signs are there that it is a dystopia?

Part I: The Hearth and the Salamander (pp. 35-68)

1. Why do you think the woman chooses to burn herself along with her books? Why does this have such a powerful effect on Montag? What does it mean for him?
2. What is shocking or disturbing about the way Montag finds out about what happened to Clarisse? What does this suggest about Mildred and their society?
3. Why does Montag get ‘sick’ and avoid going to work?
4. What is Beatty’s explanation for the current state of their society?
5. What do you think of Mildred’s claim that she is happy (p.65)? How do you define happiness? Is being happy always the most important goal in life?

Part II : The Sieve and the Sand (pp. 71-91)

1. What does Mildred say about why television is better than books? What does she mean? What is the fundamental difference between television and books?

1. Why do you think Faber gave Montag his phone number?
2. How do you explain the title of Part II: The Sieve and the Sand?
3. Why does Montag visit Faber?
4. What three (3) things does Faber say are missing from their society? Why are each of these things important?

Part II: The Sieve and the Sand (pp. 91 – 110)

1. Describe the interaction between Mildred and her friends at her party. What fire metaphor does Bradbury use to describe the parlour? Why is this significant?
2. How does Montag interact with his wife’s houseguests? Describe the situation after he ‘pulls the plug’ (p. 94). What do some of the disturbing things they discuss reveal about their personalities?
3. What does Montag do at the party to jeopardize his and Faber’s plans? How do the women react? Why would he take such a risk?
4. How does Beatty interact with Montag once he returns to the firehouse? What is he trying to do? What does he know about Montag that gives him the advantage?

Part III: Burning Bright (pp. 113-139)

1. What action has Mildred taken, and what does this show about her values? What do you think she means when she says that “everything’s gone now”?
2. Why does Montag burn his entire house and everything in it?
3. Why do you think Montag does what he does to Beatty? Is it a simple act of revenge? How does Montag reflect on this later (p. 122)? What do you know about Beatty that support Montag’s theory?
4. What is remarkable and disturbing about the “declaration of war” scene at the gas station? Compare this scene to his encounter with the teenagers in the car who nearly kill him “for no reason at all in the world”.
5. What is Montag’s escape plan? What does Montag’s daydream about watching himself on television reveal about his mental state? What does it reveal about the viewing public?

Part III: Burning Bright (pp. 139-165)

1. What do you think the river symbolizes? What connection does Montag make between the sun and time? Why does he decide he must never burn again?
2. Describe the conclusion to the televised manhunt. Why do you think it ended this way?
3. How do the men and others like them preserve books? What are the advantages of using this method? What view do they have of their own significance? Why are they optimistic about the future of humanity?
4. Explain Granger’s views about why we miss people we’ve lost. Why doesn’t Montag miss Mildred? How do people achieve life after death?
5. According to Montag, in what way is humankind like the Phoenix? In what way is humankind different? How does this connect to the text that Montag has memorized?