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Ray Bradbury

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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

PART ONE

The Hearth and the Salamander

1. As this science fiction novel opens, the main character, Guy Montag, is thinking about the excitement of being a fireman. He is going home after midnight, and the streets are deserted. There seems to be a tone of menace about the streets. Even though this is a futuristic novel, how different is this scene on a dark street from that same scene in our times? Imagine a conversation you might have with a family member who was awake when you arrived home late at night, as Montag did. Describe your feelings of being afraid while walking home alone to a friend.
2. Clarisse McClellan is an interesting character. She is seventeen years old, walking the dark streets alone, and acting totally unafraid. She seems quite odd in her behavior and the way she questions Guy. Everyone knows someone of their acquaintance who would qualify, like Clarisse, as being different. Think of a person you have known, or have been puzzled by in a book or film who would be almost as “different” as Clarisse. Imagine that you are entering a contest to win a prize for the best short article, no longer than one page, about a person who was different. Write as vividly as you can about the person you think would qualify.
3. Guy has a feeling that Clarisse sees right into his mind. She is extremely honest in the way she speaks her mind and questions the way life is. She questions why some seemingly innocent things are against the law. List some of the things that Clarisse questions which are illegal. Explain to a friend why you think that society made those things illegal and give your opinion of whether you do or do not think this is a good thing.

Fahrenheit 451

9. Clarisse again meets Guy and has a long conversation with him. He seems fascinated about all the things in nature that she tells him. List all the natural things Clarisse tells Guy about. Tell what you think Guy's reaction to is and why you think that he feels that way.
10. The Mechanical Hound is both fascinating and very frightening. In this novel, animals do not exist, only mechanical versions of them. Imagine you are living in an environment which resembles that of *Fahrenheit 451*. Write a brief outline of a story in which the main character is a mechanical wolf, who by an accident has acquired human qualities and is eluding captivity.
11. Montag has what may seem to be an irrational fear of The Mechanical Hound, even though it is not a living thing and can be controlled. It is not easy to have an inward fear of something, even though our rational minds tell us that there is really nothing to fear. Imagine that a friend has shared a secret fear with you. Write about the fear he or she shared and what advice you would give to help him or her to handle the fear.
12. Captain Beatty is a secretive man, who controls the firemen completely and has given his allegiance to the book-burning government. He says, "Any man's insane who thinks he can fool the government and us." What is your opinion of the government of our time? Do you think that people today can and do fool our government? Give examples to back up your opinion.
13. The author writes, "Montag gazed beyond [the firemen] to the wall with the typed lists of a million forbidden books. Their names leapt in fire, burning down the years under his ax and his hose which sprayed not water but kerosene." What is your reaction to the idea that no one in that society is allowed to read books? In addition, think about the million forbidden books. Name five books that you have read or know about that you would hope would not be found on the list.

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23. In Beatty's world, the goal is to make everyone think and act the same. The government sees books as symbols of striving for uniqueness, which is forbidden, as well as containing thoughts that are detrimental to the world order. The idol of this society is fire—considered to be bright and clean, as opposed to books, which they see as moldy and dead. Suppose you were a reporter who was living just before all the new laws about books and censorship were enacted. You could see into the future and knew what that would mean to the world. Write a headline and an article warning about the dangers of having no access to the written thoughts of the past eras' finest minds and most uplifting ideas.
24. Bradbury describes the scene in which Montag confesses to Mildred that he has been stealing and hiding books. Mildred has a very emotional reaction. If you had been able to be an unseen witness to talk, what would you do?
25. At the end of the part of this novel called "The Hearth and the Salamander" as the forbidden books are littering the floor, someone has appeared at the front door. In fright, Mildred and Montag are unified and decide not to open the door. Montag begins doing the unthinkable—reading a book aloud. Mildred listens to the reading. Considering that this couple now has broken the law, what advice would you give them? Be sure to write your answers in complete sentences.
26. Captain Beatty seems to be a man who has a fine command of the works of literature, and even quotes from various books from the past. This seems strange because of the work of burning books of which he is in charge. Explain to a friend what you think of Captain Beatty and what might explain his knowledge of books.

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39. Montag has finally reached decision time. On the one side, is the sly and dangerous Captain Beatty, who is subtly threatening him. On the other, is Faber telling him through the earpiece that he must now choose. Today, we have a name for the position in which Montag finds himself, which is “being caught between a rock and a hard place.” Write about a “rock and a hard place” situation you or someone you know has at some time been in, and tell how it was finally resolved.
40. Though Captain Beatty alone did not create the environment found in *Fahrenheit 451*, he seems to love the society and enforcing the laws of that time regardless of the pain they cause. Based on everything you have read about Captain Beatty so far, write a profile of him, in which you discuss not only his actions but also the kind of man you think he is.
41. When the call comes into the fire station to respond, Captain Beatty, unusually, opts to drive the Salamander. He knows that they are responding to a call to Montag’s house, but he does not tell Montag that that is where they are going. What do you suppose Montag’s reaction will be when they arrive at his house? Give reasons for your answer.