A Taste of Fahrenheit 451: Lesson Explanation

**Overview:** This activity will give you and your adult learners a little taste of Fahrenheit 451 through a 10-15 minute reading with discussion before and after. Feel free to adapt this lesson to suit your needs.

**Time:** So that you have plenty of time for the ‘Before you Read’ activity and to discuss the ‘Reading Questions’, it is suggested that you reserve about 30 - 45 minutes for the reading and discussion. Plan additional time for the writing activity.

**Difficulty Level:** The reading passage is made up of unedited excerpts directly from Fahrenheit 451 with some of the flowery descriptions edited out. It shows as a 2.5 grade level on the Flesch-Kincaid scale. For learners that may not be able to read the excerpt or the lesson materials themselves, this activity can be done by reading along with a tutor or just by listening.

**Feedback:** We would greatly appreciate your feedback about this Big Read activity. Please fill out the A Taste of Fahrenheit 451 feedback form on the last page of this packet after you complete the activity with your learner or learners.

**Writing Activity Publication Opportunity:** If adult learners would like, they can have their letters published in the Literacy Volunteers of Lake County’s annual adult learner writing anthology *Collections*. Learners who contribute writings will be invited to the 2016 *Collections* publication release party next spring and be given a free copy of the book.

Simply send a copy of the letter including the learner’s name, phone number, and E-mail address (optional) to janderson@waukeganpl.info or Josh Anderson, 128 N County St., Waukegan, IL 60085. Anonymous submissions are accepted too.

**A Taste of Fahrenheit 451**

Ray Bradbury was a famous author who was born and raised right here in Waukegan. He wrote many books and short stories. Some of his stories were about Waukegan. He called Waukegan ‘Green Town’ in his stories. He also wrote for movies and TV including episodes of the Twilight Zone. For our Big Read, the Waukegan Public Library is getting the community together to read his most famous book Fahrenheit 451. This activity will give you a little taste of the book. If you like it, copies of the book and the movie based on it are available at the Waukegan Public Library.

**Before you read:** Look at the picture below and then discuss the questions.

* What do you think of this entertainment set-up?
* Do you have a TV room at home? What is it like?
* What is your favorite TV show? Do you watch a lot of TV?

**Background**

Read the following selections from Fahrenheit 451. They are from a conversation between a man named Montag and his neighbor, Clarisse. She is out for a walk. Montag is on his way home from work.

The book is set in a fantasy world. Books are illegal. Montag’s job as a ‘fireman’ is to set them on fire. In this conversation, Montag and Clarisse talk about what Clarisse does for fun. Montag and his wife have a room in his house even fancier than the picture we just talked about. They call it the parlor. Three of the walls are just big TV screens! His wife spends all of her time in the parlor.

**Reading Questions:** Take a look at these questions before you read. When you are done reading, you can come back and discuss.

1. Do you ever go for walks? How do you feel after?
2. What things does Clarisse know that Montag doesn’t know?
3. How do you think Clarisse feels about books?

1. What does Clarisse’s family do that is different from most people?
2. What would Clarisse think of Montag’s ‘parlor’?
3. Who do you think is a happier person, Clarisse or Montag? Why?

**Reading: Montag and Clarisse**

She turned to face the sidewalk going toward their homes. “Do you mind if I walk back with you? I’m Clarisse McClellan.”

 “Clarisse. Guy Montag. Come along. What are you doing out so late wandering around? How old are you?”

 “Well,” she said, “I’m seventeen and I’m crazy. My uncle says the two always go together. When people ask your age, he said, always say seventeen and insane. Isn’t this a nice time of night to walk? I like to smell things and look at things, and sometimes stay up all night, walking, and watch the sun rise.”

They walk on again in silence and finally she said, thoughtfully, “You know, I’m not afraid of you at all.”

He was surprised. “Why should you be?”

 So many people are. Afraid of firemen, I mean. But you’re just a man, after all… Do you mind if I ask? How long’ve you worked at being a fireman?”

**Reading: Montag and Clarisse (continued)**

 “Since I was twenty, ten years ago.”

 “Do you ever *read* any of the books you burn?”

 He laughed. “That’s against the law!”

 “Oh. Of course.”

“They walked still further and the girl said, “Is it true that long ago fireman put fires *out* instead of going to start them?”

 “No. Houses have *always* been fireproof, take my word for it.”

 “Strange. I heard once that a long time ago houses used to burn by accident and they needed firemen to *stop* the flames.”

 He laughed.

 She glanced quickly over. “Why are you laughing?”

 “I don’t know.” He started to laugh again and stopped. “Why?”

 “You laugh when I haven’t been funny and you answer right off. You never stop to think what I’ve asked you.”

 He stopped walking. “You *are* an odd one,” he said, looking at her. “Haven’t you any respect?”

 “I don’t mean to be insulting. It’s just I love to watch people too much, I guess. Have you ever watched the jet cars racing on the boulevards down that way?”

 “You’re changing the subject!”

 “I sometimes think drivers don’t know what grass is, or flowers, because they never see them slowly,” she said. “If you showed a driver a green blur, ‘Oh yes!’ he’d say, that’s grass. A pink blur? ‘That’s a rose garden!’ White blurs are houses. Brown blurs are cows. My uncle drove slowly on a highway once. He drove forty miles an hour and they jailed him for two days. Isn’t that funny, and sad, too?”

 “You think too many things,” said Montag uneasily.

**Reading: Montag and Clarisse (continued)**

 “I rarely watch the ‘parlor walls’ or go to races or Fun Parks. So I’ve lots of time for crazy thoughts, I guess. Have you seen the two-hundred-foot-long billboards in the country beyond town? Did you know that once billboards were only twenty feet long? But cars started rushing by so quickly they had to stretch the advertising out so it would last.”

 “I didn’t know that!” Montag laughed abruptly.

 “Bet I know something else you don’t. There’s dew on the grass in the morning.”

 He suddenly couldn’t remember if he had known this or not, and it made him quite irritable.

 “And if you look—” she nodded at the sky—“there’s a man in the moon.”

He hadn’t looked for a long time.

They walked the rest of the way in silence. When they reached her house all its lights were blazing.

“What’s going on?” Montag had rarely seen that many house lights.

“Oh, just my mother and father and uncle sitting around, talking. It’s like being a pedestrian, only rarer. My uncle was arrested another time—did I tell you?—for being a pedestrian. Oh, we’re *most* peculiar.”

“But what do you *talk* about?”

She laughed at this. “Good night!” She started up her walk. Then she seemed to remember something and came back to look at him with wonder and curiosity. “Are you happy?” she said.

“Am I *what?*” he cried.

But she was gone—running in the moonlight. Her front door shut gently.

**Write About It!**

Pretend you are Clarisse. Write a letter to Montag and his wife Mildred giving them some advice about what they can do to be happier.

Dear Montag and Mildred,

I think you might be unhappy. I have some ideas that might help. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Your Crazy Neighbor,

Clarisse

A Taste of Fahrenheit 451: Lesson Feedback

Thanks for participating in this Big Read activity! Please E-mail answers to janderson@waukeganpl.info or mail to Josh Anderson, 128 N County St., Waukegan, IL 60085.

**Participants:** How many people participated in your activity? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Highlights from discussion:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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How many participants expressed an interest in reading the whole book, Fahrenheit 451, after this activity? **\_\_\_\_**

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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