



Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451

The Authorized Adaptation

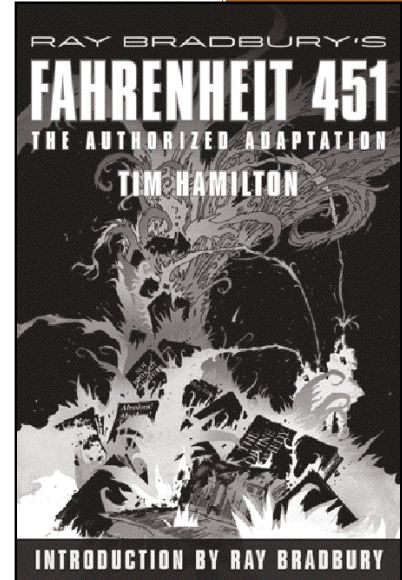
Accelerated
Reader

by **Tim Hamilton**

Introduction by Ray Bradbury

“Rendered in a vividly noir manner by artist Tim Hamilton . . . [this work] adds to the claustrophobia of Bradbury’s original nightmare vision. . . . His adaptation allows the reader to really inhabit this creepy landscape that provides an allegory for our society’s ongoing discomfort with people who think their own thoughts.

Where the novel felt scalding, the graphic novel feels necessary. It makes this cautionary tale hip to the present generation and updates it by transporting it to a newly vibrant medium.”—Laurel Maury, NPR



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TO THE TEACHER

It’s a point that has been made many times over the years, and it’s a valid one: Science fiction isn’t fiction about other worlds, other times, and other races—it’s fiction that comments upon, and even critiques, this world, this time, and this race. Such a point seems especially true when we remember Ray Bradbury’s classic *Fahrenheit 451*, which first appeared more than fifty years ago. The sensation this novel made in its day has become legendary—the book remains a key part of the modern American canon. Generations have grown up reading about, and referring to, Bradbury’s book-burning, thought-discouraging, fear-mongering dystopia.

And now comes a brilliantly colored, sharply illustrated new version of this work, *Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451: The Authorized Adaptation*—a graphic-novel rendering of Bradbury’s signature text from the celebrated and versatile artist Tim Hamilton, who worked with the author’s consent and blessing to create an unforgettable visualization of the novel. With its pitch-perfect mood and atmosphere, bright hues, and crisp drawings, Hamilton’s graphic novel distills both the adventures and the angst that define Guy Montag, Bradbury’s famous young hero: a fireman whose job it is to start fires, and whose living is made by the torching of books, but whose conscience finally gets the better of him.

Allegorical yet accessible, relevant yet readable, this dynamic work has spoken to countless students with an immediacy—and an otherworldliness—that few other books can claim. *Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451: The Authorized Adaptation* will prove exciting to readers both avid and reluctant, and will therefore attract even more students to this masterpiece.

“A graphic novel that even those who don’t read graphic novels will love, this visualization of Bradbury’s classic looks bold, bright, and almost too hot to handle. Even better: Hamilton, a noted artist who’s been all over the map, worked directly with the [sci-fi] legend.”—*Library Journal*

“With a fascinating and challenging new introduction by the author, [this] is a vivid reminder of the special power of a graphic novel, of the genre’s ability to do things that words alone can’t . . . [Even] if you know the novel, you’ll still be thrilled by Tim Hamilton’s artwork in this new version, which combines a comic-book clarity—the panels are simple and straightforward, without the distraction of a lot of visual razzmatazz—with a deep, humane rendering of the novel’s theme.”—Julia Keller, *Chicago Tribune*

“This evocative button-pusher will almost certainly entice readers to seek out the original. . . . Hamilton renders much of the story in triptych panels and moody, two-tone palettes that blot characters’ features into Munch-like stills. This mysterious and measured tone pays off during the fiery moments, when the art fractures into dazzling red sickles.”—*Booklist*

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This teacher’s guide consists of two sections, “Reading and Understanding the Work” and “Questions and Exercises for the Class.” The first section will help students closely follow along with (and fully comprehend) *Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451: The Authorized Adaptation*, while the second will help them conceive of this work in more associative, reflective, or exploratory ways. As the work at hand is a graphic novel, many of the questions in this guide, in both sections, are geared toward helping students think about how texts as well as images can be employed to convey narrative—and how words and pictures can not only function but flourish alongside one another.

READING AND
UNDERSTANDING
THE WORK

1. In the upper-left panel of page 4, we see several classic books burning. We also find a similar image on the cover of this work. Identify and describe a few of these books, and then comment on why an oppressive, totalitarian society (such as the one imagined here) would want such books destroyed.
2. On page 7, in regard to kerosene, Montag says: “You never wash it off completely.” Explain the possible double meaning of this remark.
3. Part One of this book is entitled, “The Hearth and the Salamander.” What is a hearth? And a salamander? How are the meanings (and the typical imagery) linked to these two words reworked, or perhaps distorted, for the purposes of this tale?
4. Note (on page 11, for example, or page 48, or pages 124–6) how the houses, sidewalks, streets, cars, telephones, and people are drawn in this graphic novel. Do these objects look “futuristic” to you, or would “familiar” be a better adjective? What did you make of the fact that the world illustrated in this graphic novel—obviously a future version of society as we know it—looks so much like our own world?

5. Can you spot the “Cyclops” on page 15? Who is this person? Describe the mythological beast known as the Cyclops. (Do some research on its background, if necessary.) How might the “impersonal operator of the machine” symbolize the Cyclops, and why?
6. Consider the illustrations of Mildred on page 20 and Clarisse on page 21. These two drawings, both portraits, are quite close to each other, almost mirror images. Is it fair to say that these two women look alike, that they’re nearly identical? Why do you suppose artist Tim Hamilton depicts them so? (It’s also notable that, in the 1966 film version of *Fahrenheit 451*, Mildred and Clarisse were played by the same actress: Julie Christie.)
7. On page 26, we encounter a sequence of panels without any text—only artwork. But much is communicated to us. Who is this man? What is he doing? Why is he doing this? (Or are we not supposed to know “why”?) How do you account for the delay—the slight pause, as seen in the middle-bottom panel—that this man takes in executing his act? And finally, what’s the point, in terms of both art and narrative, of finally putting this act into “focus” in the lower-right corner?
8. In the upper-right panel on page 30—and then immediately thereafter, in the middle-left panel—we encounter a pair of illustrations as seen from below. Why? How do such illustrations influence the narrative? How do they alter (in any significant way) our understanding of the characters, setting, or events at hand?
9. A woman goes up in flames on page 40, and we see this horrid event up close (on the top half of the page) and from afar (at the lower right). What effect is achieved in presenting this murder from two distinct vantage points? Also, why does the woman decline Montag’s earlier offer, on page 38, to come along with him—thereby, instead, choosing to die? What does her speech on page 35 mean: “We shall this day light such a candle,” and so forth? What can you say about Beatty’s interpretation (on page 41) of her words, and what his commentary says about his character?
10. Look at the “two-faced” image in the middle-right panel on page 49. Montag wears a certain look on his visage; Mildred wears a completely different look. Why does Mildred’s look differ so dramatically? What is she reacting to? Explain how the tension of this moment is highlighted by the way in which these two faces have been drawn and positioned. (Is there also a visual pun at work here—about Montag behaving in a “two-faced” manner? Explain.)
11. Consider these rhetorical questions, which Beatty asks the bedridden Montag on page 50: “What do we want in this country, above all? People want to be happy, isn’t that right? That’s all we live for, isn’t it?” Could Beatty’s outlook be applied to the way we actually live in this country now? Does his (admittedly cynical) take on Americans and their lifestyles make sense—or ring true—to you? Why or why not? And if it does, then who are “the happiness boys” (as Beatty refers to himself and his fellow firemen, on page 51) of today’s American society?
12. Describe the “magnified page” presentation found on page 57. What is Montag reading? And why do you think Hamilton chose to zoom-in on the page under Montag’s thumb? Where else (if anywhere else) in Hamilton’s artwork do we perceive the world or its components exclusively through Montag’s point of view?
13. Identify and describe the plot-related foreshadowing that we as readers encounter in the panel at the lower-left corner of page 68.

14. “It’s not books you need,” Faber tells Montag on page 73, “it’s some of the things that once were in books.” And a few pages later, on page 77, the old man continues his advice: “Don’t look to be saved in any one thing, person, machine, or library.” What, in the end, does Faber give to Montag—is there anything tangible, anything with a physical heft to it? Or are all of Faber’s gifts to the fireman of a conceptual, metaphysical, or strictly communicative variety? (Before answering, revisit the last meeting between these two men, circa page 129.)

15. Look at the top two panels on page 85. On the left, we find a scene of grotesque violence involving two clowns. On the right, we see Mildred’s face—and she has an expression that’s blissfully serene, maybe even enraptured. The mismatch—or, to put it another way, the disconnect—between these two panels is, on the face of things, almost surrealistically extreme. Yet it makes sense, given the world in which this book is set. Explain this disconnect; account for these two panels.

16. What does Beatty mean when he says, on page 100: “What traitors books can be”? How could an inanimate object be described in this way? Also, if Beatty has such disdain for books of all sorts, then why do you suppose he knows so much about them?

17. Why does Montag think to himself, on page 121, “Beatty wanted to die”? Is Montag correct on this score, in your view? Why do (or don’t) you think so?

18. The chromatic intensity of the way in which fire is illustrated throughout this work is readily apparent. (Witness the intensity, for example, of the fiery colors that correspond to the murder of Beatty, on pages 116-7.) But what about fire’s less hostile, more inviting qualities? Where do these show up? Look again at pages 138-145, where the light from a campfire is used to convey feelings of intimacy, comfort, and warmth. How, in your view, does Hamilton’s artwork conjure such feelings? Or doesn’t it?

19. Near the conclusion of this book, Montag and his newfound allies (on pages 146-7) witness a distant atomic explosion. The narration on page 146 reads, in part: “The war began and ended in that instant.” War is looming throughout this story, and does not arrive until the very end—but, until that end, it stays very much in the background for almost all of the narrative: Why? And why does this “war” happen so quickly? (When formulating your answers, revisit the “quick war” comment, on page 85, that one of Mildred’s friends makes almost in passing.)

20. Reread the dialogue balloon at the top-left corner of page 145: “It wasn’t planned, at first. Each man had a book he wanted to remember, and did. . . .” Explain the importance of this “it wasn’t planned” remark. What does it mean that people, when confronted with a society that destroys all literature, are compelled—for their own reasons, and in their own ways—to secretly memorize such literature? Why is it telling, and even crucial, that the hobos in Bradbury’s novel originally started memorizing their cherished texts individually? Explain how the act of remembering is being linked here to humanity’s thirst for thought, poetry, theology, and storytelling.

QUESTIONS AND
EXERCISES FOR THE
CLASS

1. In the first few pages of this graphic novel, we see leaping flames of fire, leaves twirling in the wind, and water streaming from a bathroom’s shower-head. Discuss the elemental or even tactile properties of the art in this book. How do such properties visually echo the story that’s being told?

2. In his Introduction, Ray Bradbury tells us (on page viii): “I am the hero, Montag, and a good part of me is also Clarisse McClellan. A darker side of me is the fire chief, Beatty, and my philosophical capacities are represented by the philosopher Faber.” Did you, as a reader, also see aspects of yourself in all four of this book’s main characters? Which characters in this work did you most identify with, and why?

3. “I rarely watch the ‘parlor walls’ or go to the races,” Clarisse announces on page 9. What are these “parlor walls” she refers to? What purpose do they play in this novel’s Orwellian world? And why is it significant that Mildred’s favorite “wall” program (or phenomenon) is something called the “Family”? Compare and contrast this novel’s “parlor wall” construct with the Internet, reality TV, and other such mass media. (Additionally, comment on Mildred’s desire to purchase a “fourth wall” for her home, as expressed on page 20, in light of the dramatic or theatrical term known as the “fourth wall.”)

4. Reread the Benjamin Franklin-related “rules” on page 34. What do these rules tell us about American history? Or about Franklin’s role in that history? Or about how the government and society depicted in this book effectively critique that history? Did you find other instances in *Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451: The Authorized Adaptation* where ironic points were made about America’s ideas of itself? If so, where?

5. At the bottom of page 47, we see an array of book covers with titles like “Hamlet for Dimwits” and “Classic Comics: Moby Dick”—and next to this illustration, the text reads, in part: “Everything boils down to the snap ending. Classics cut to fill a two-minute book column.” What comments are being made about the decline of literacy—and the demise of thoughtfulness, attention spans, etc.—in modern times? Is it at all peculiar to you, or maybe even ironic, that such points are being made in the pages of a graphic novel, i.e., a comic book? Explain your views.

6. As a class, discuss Beatty’s explanation of why books became banned—and why they’re fit only to be destroyed—which he thus relays to Montag on page 49: “It didn’t come from the government down. There was no dictum, no declaration. Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick.” What does Beatty mean by the phrase, “carried the trick?” What is he saying here—especially in reference to the powers of a government, and those of a people? Further, how (if at all) might Beatty’s remarks be said to support controversial past assertions made by Bradbury himself, as reported in *The New York Times* (Page B8, August 22, 2007), that *Fahrenheit 451* “was not a novel about censorship?”

7. Screaming sirens, roaring flames, voice alarms, breaking windows, growling mechanical hell-hounds, “door-voice” devices, buzzing ear-borne “seashells”—the world created by Bradbury and Hamilton is a noisy one. How, if at all, do these many blaring sounds add to the psychological drama of this work? That is, how do all these sounds affect what is already a rather taut and intense narrative to start with? And how are such noises articulated, as it were, within the artwork of this book? How did these noises “sound” to you, as a reader?

8. On page 62, an exasperated Montag shouts at his wife, Mildred, “We’ve started and won two atomic wars since 1990!” How does Mildred feel about this? Why isn’t she as upset about this fact as Montag is? Do we ever really know? And later, circa pages 85-9, what do we learn about Mildred’s—and her two good friends’—feelings about war, politics, and marriage? Is Montag disgusted by these women—or, rather, does he pity them? Use citations (with page numbers) from the book to defend your view.

9. On page 90, Montag reads to his wife and her friends. He reads a famous poem, “Dover Beach,” written by the English poet and critic Matthew Arnold. As a class or in smaller groups, read and discuss this poem. What does it mean, or say, to you? Who is being addressed in this poem, and who is its “speaker”? And why do you think this poem so upsets Mrs. Phelps (Mildred’s friend who cries)?

10. In a review of this graphic novel, a critic writing for *Publishers Weekly* noted, “Fire, tapering and curling, is rendered into a crucial additional character.” Would you agree? Why, or why not? Must the aggressive yet artistic manner in which fire appears throughout *Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451* mean that fire is a character in this work? What sort of character is fire: good, bad, or indifferent?

11. While playing poker at the firehouse with Montag and the other firemen, on pages 95-100, Beatty engages in a protracted—and quite well-spoken—mock debate with Montag, who by this point in the tale is fast becoming his nemesis. Beatty does all the talking—making assertions for his own side of the argument as well as Montag’s—but what, in your view, is this argument about? What’s the point of all this (one-sided) back-and-forth? The talk escalates—although it’s really just Beatty talking to himself, in a way—and the argument intensifies, but what does this monologue-presented-as-dialogue finally come down to? Is Beatty’s point here simply that quotations—that is, books (and all the high and mighty ideas we find in books)—can be used to prove, or disprove, anything? Discuss.

12. Artist Tim Hamilton (in an interview quoted, in part, on the artist’s own blog, which can be found at <http://iconotrust.livejournal.com>) has said the following about his approach to creating this work: “I wanted to adapt *Fahrenheit 451* as a modern-day fable, so I avoided using that ‘hyper-real’ look that’s so popular in comics today. The story takes place in an unknown city and an unknown time period, so I wanted the art to reflect that ambiguity.” Do you think he succeeded in his aims? Explain why or why not.

13. Why is “having fun” so severely criticized in this work? What’s wrong with having fun? Why, for example, does Faber say to Montag (sarcastically, on page 79): “In any event, you’re a fool. People are having fun.” Write a short essay exploring the points made by this work on both the pleasures and the perils of “having fun.”

14. When Montag befriends a group of professors-turned-vagabonds in the final pages of this work—“bums on the outside, libraries inside,” as one of them puts it (on page 144)—our protagonist confesses, on page 141, “I don’t belong with you, I’ve been an idiot all the way.” To which one of the vagabonds replies, “We all made the right kind of mistakes, or we wouldn’t be here.” What does this mean, “the right kind of mistakes?” On your own or as a class, name several notable figures from real life—important persons known for their historical, literary, social, or political deeds—who also had to “make the right kind of mistakes” in order to succeed at their chosen endeavors.

15. Another question about the vagabonds mentioned immediately above: What did you make of the ironic fact that these highly civilized, highly cultured individuals—formerly prestigious professors, one-time progressive authors, and so on—have been forced to exist outside of civilization, surviving the outskirts of human culture? What might Bradbury be telling us here about how a society could outlive its own demise? (To this end, revisit the “phoenix” metaphor described on page 148.)

16. Who was Bertrand Russell (the essayist referred to briefly on page 145)? Prepare a short report on this man, explaining his ideas, achievements, and notable publications. Or, if not Russell, prepare such a report for another name that you encountered, and that was new to you, as you read this book.

17. In one sense, this novel, and this graphic novel, can be read as the heroic journey—or quest, if you like—of 30-year-old Guy Montag, as his spiritual, intellectual, and psychological transformation from a book-burning pyromaniac-in-uniform to a book-preserving “carrier” of the Book of Ecclesiastes. In this regard, who or what is it that initially sets Montag on this path? What is it, at first, that puts him on his quest? Is it the young muse known as Clarisse? Or the old pedagogue known as Faber? Is it the would-be suicide of Mildred? Or the murder of the woman on page 40? Or is it another person or event entirely? Discuss and defend your views among those of your classmates.

18. “We’re remembering” are the final two words of spoken dialogue to appear in this work (see page 148). So, we as a people will endure and thrive—even amid conditions that are not only post-literate but, indeed, post-apocalyptic—and we will survive to the extent that we succeed at preserving the great books of our past: retaining their lessons, reciting their lyrics. And also, conversely, books will go on living—and continue to live, always—because they have the ability to live inside of people, to stay with people, to exist solely within people. But do you think that graphic novels could ever be memorized and shared and perpetuated in this way, too? That is, in the way that the works of Darwin and Swift and Lincoln are being “carried” at the end of *Fahrenheit 451*? Explain why or why not.

19. Finally, conclude your discussion with the advice that Bradbury gives us on page viii: “May I suggest that anyone reading this Introduction take the time to name the one book that he or she would most want to memorize and protect from any censors or ‘firemen.’ And not only name the book, but give the reasons why they would wish to memorize it and why it would be a valuable asset to be recited and remembered in the future.”

OTHER RESOURCES

Two websites about graphic novels and their use in the classroom are: www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/graphicnovels.asp and www.teachingcomics.org.

The newly created website for this book contains, among other useful information, a streamable video for a 13-minute interview with Ray Bradbury concerning how this novel—and how this graphic novel—came into being. The website can be accessed at: www.451graphicnovel.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ray Bradbury is an award-winning novelist, short-story writer, essayist, playwright, screenwriter, and poet. Among the most popular American authors to emerge during the twentieth century, Bradbury is mainly known for his science-fiction and mystery works. His canonical writings include *Fahrenheit 451*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and *The Martian Chronicles*.

Tim Hamilton has produced art for *The New York Times Book Review*, *Cicada* magazine, King Features, BOOM Studios, *Mad Magazine*, and ACT-I-VATE. He has also adapted Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* into a graphic novel (for Puffin Graphics).

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