

# Basic Allusion Glossary for Comprehension—*Fahrenheit 451*

**451 degrees Fahrenheit**—The temperature at which book paper catches fire and burns.

**All's well that is well in the end**—a paraphrase of Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, Act IV, Scene iv, Line 35.  
**And on either side of the river was there a tree of life, which bore twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations**—a prophecy from verse two of Revelation 22, the last book in the Bible.

**atom-bomb mushroom**—on August 6, 1945, over Hiroshima, Japan, American pilots dropped the first atomic bomb used in the war. The explosion, which rose in a straight column two hundred miles high, ballooned outward like a huge mushroom.

**automatic reflex**—Beatty uses this term to describe how people stopped using their brains and began depending on nerve functions that require no thought.

**Beatty**—the fire captain, who "baits" Montag, is well-named.

**Benjamin Franklin**—founder of America's first fire company in Boston in 1736.

**black beetle-colored helmet**—in literature, the beetle, with its prominent black horns, is a symbol for Satan. Here, vehicles resemble beetles in the dystopian society.

**black cobra**—the "suction snake" that pumps Mildred's stomach repeats the earlier image of the python; the impersonal handymen who operate it have "eyes of puff adders." The fact that it has an eye suggests a sinister and invasive fiber optic tube that examines the inside of the body's organs and even the soul.

**The Book of Job**—Faber selects this book of the Old Testament, which describes how Job is tested by God. The upshot of Job's struggle with suffering, loss, and temptation is that he learns to trust.

**Cacophony**—A variety of harsh, jarring sounds heard all at once.

**Caesar's praetorian guard**—a reference to the bodyguards that surrounded the Roman Caesars, beginning with Rome's first emperor, Octavian, later named Augustus. While holding back the mob, the praetorians wielded supreme control over the rulers who they sought to protect, and they are thought to have assassinated Caligula and replaced him with Claudius, a crippled historian who was their choice of successor.

**Carcasses bleed at the sight of the murderer**—a line from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part I, Section I, Member 2, Subsection 5.

**Centrifuge**—the sight of being spun in a great gyre delineates Montag's impression of separation from reality.

**Cheshire cat**—a grinning cat, a character from Chapter 6 of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.

**Clarisse**—A name derived from the Latin word for "brightest".

**coat of a thousand colors**—Granger alludes to Joseph, the character in Genesis 37:3–4 who receives a long-sleeved, ornamental coat of many colors from Jacob, his doting father. The coat, symbolizing favoritism shown by Jacob toward his son, alienates the other sons, who sell their brother to passing traders, stain the coat with goat's blood, and return it to their father to prove that a wild animal has eaten Joseph.

**Consider the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they**—In his surreal dash on the subway toward Faber's house, Montag tries to read a line from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of St. Matthew. The line, which is taken from Chapter 6, verses 28–29, concludes, "And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." This quotation reminds Montag that spiritual hunger is greater than material need.

**Cricket**—English slang for fair play; sportsmanship.

**crying in the wilderness**—Granger compares his group's minority status to John the Baptist, the prophet whom Isaiah predicted would one day announce the coming of the Messiah (Isaiah 40: 3–5).

**Dentifrice**—Any preparation for teeth cleaning.

**The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose**—from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Act I, Scene iii, Line 99.

**The dignity of truth is lost with much protesting**—a line from Ben Jonson's *Catiline's Conspiracy*, Act III, Scene ii.

**A dwarf on a giant's shoulders sees the furthest of the two**—from *Democritus to the Reader*, Robert Burton's paraphrase from Lucan's *Civil War*, which is echoed in Sir Isaac Newton's letter to Robert Hooke, February 5, 1675 or 1676.

**electronic bees**—futuristic "seashell ear-thimbles" that block out thoughts and supplant them with mindless entertainment.

**Faber**—the character's name suggests that of Peter Faber (1506–1545), tutor of Ignatius Loyola and founder of two Jesuit colleges.

**fire plus water**—Montag, who perceives the split halves of his being, anticipates the distillation of his fiery self into wine after Faber has molded his intellect with wisdom and teaching.

**The folly of mistaking a metaphor for a proof, a torrent of verbiage for a spring of capital truths, and oneself as an oracle is inborn in us**—a paraphrase of Paul Valery's *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*.

**Guy Montag**—His first name refers to Guy Fawkes, a man who plotted to blow up British Parliament in 1605. Montag, a trademark of Mead (an American paper company), makes stationary and furnaces.

**the guild of the asbestos-weave**—Montag associates his desire to stop the burning with the formation of a new trade union. Like the guilds of the Middle Ages, the asbestos-weavers symbolize progress against the tyranny of the past.

**half out of the cave**—Bradbury alludes to Plato's cave allegory, found in Book 7 of his *Republic*. The analogy describes how people rely on flickering shadows as their source of reality.

**He is no wise man that will quit a certainty for an uncertainty**—an aphorism from Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Idler*.

**I hate a Roman named Status Quo!**—Granger's grandfather made a pun out of the Latin phrase, which means the situation as it now exists.

**Icarus**—the son of Daedalus; escaping from Crete by flying with wings made of Daedalus, Icarus flies so high that the sun's heat melts the wax by which his wings are fastened, and he falls to his death in the sea. Beatty alludes to Icarus with the comment: "Old Montag wanted to fly near the sun and now that he's burnt his damn wings, he wonders why."

**In again out again**—Finnegan a common nonsense rhyme indicating Mrs. Phelps' lack of concern about the war and her husband's part in it. The quotation restates "Off again, on again, gone again, Finnegan," a terse telegram about a rail crash from Finnegan (a railroad boss) to Flanagan (his employer).

**infinitely** lacking limits or bounds; extending beyond measure or comprehension.

**It is computed that eleven thousand persons have at several times suffered death rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end**—Jonathan Swift illustrates the pettiness of human controversy in Book I, Chapter 4 of *Gulliver's Travels*. The satire found in Swift's writing emphasizes the absurd extent to which society will go to enforce conformity. When Montag reads this quote to Millie, he is pointing out that people are willing to die rather than conform, even though others may believe their position to be absurd or irrational.

**Keystone Comedy**—from 1914 to 1920, director Mack Sennett and Keystone Studios produced a series of madcap silent film comedies featuring the Keystone Cops.

**A kind of excellent dumb discourse**—a line from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Act III, Scene iii, Line 38.

**Knowledge is more than equivalent to force**—an aphorism from Chapter 13 of Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*.

**Knowledge is power**—a line from Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, Book I, i, 3.

**A little learning is a dangerous thing. Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring; There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again**—a famous pair of couplets from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, which warns the learner that scholarship requires dedication for maximum effect.

**man in the moon**—the perception of children that the contours of the moon's surface are a face, which peers down at them. The image reflects the oppressive nature of a society that burns books because the man in the moon is always watching them.

**Mausoleum**—a large, imposing tomb; often a symbol of death used in literature. Used to describe the interior of Guy's bedroom.

**Moonstones**—an opal, or a milky-white feldspar with a pearly luster, used as a gem. The moonstone is connected with Mercury, the mythological guide who leads souls to the underworld.

**morphine or procaine**—a sedative and an anesthetic.

**Mr. Jefferson? Mr. Thoreau?**—Thomas Jefferson, the chief author of the Declaration of Independence, and Henry David Thoreau, author of *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*. This phrase is used to illustrate that all books and authors are valuable. These two authors are chosen to show who wrote about revolution and fighting oppression.

**November 4**—Historically, the eve of Guy Fawkes' "Gunpowder Plot" to burn the British Parliament, a plan meant to destroy James I who oppressed Catholics. In F. 451, the firemen play cards together on Nov. 4 early on Mischief Day (November 4), the eve of Guy Fawkes Day, when bonfires and burning of guys in effigy commemorate his Gunpowder Plot, an abortive attempt to destroy James I and his Protestant supporters, who oppressed Catholics.

**Oh God, he speaks only of his horse**—a paraphrase of "he doth nothing but talk of his horse" from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Act I, Scene ii, Lines 37–38.

**our fingers in the dike**—an allusion to the legend about the Dutch boy who performed a noble, selfless public service in holding back the sea by keeping his finger in a hole in the dike.

**Phoenix**—in Egyptian mythology, a lone bird that lives in the Arabian desert for 500 or 600 years and then sets itself on fire, rising renewed from the ashes to start another long life; a symbol of immortality.

**pigeon-winged books**—the books come alive and flap their "wings" as they are thrown into the fire. This connection between books and birds continues throughout the text and symbolizes enlightenment through reading.

**Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall**

**never be put out!**—Bishops Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, Protestant supporters of the late Queen Jane Grey, were burned at the stake for heresy at Oxford on October 16, 1555. They refused to endorse Queen Mary, a Catholic, claiming that she was an illegitimate daughter of Henry VIII, born after he married his late brother's wife, Catherine of Aragon. Later, Captain Beatty recites the latter portion of the quotation and indicates that he knows something of history.

**Pratfall**—Slang for falling on one's rear end. Often used in burlesque routines.

**Proboscis**—A tubular organ used for smell and sense. The human proboscis is the nose.

**Salamander**—Amphibian resembling a lizard. In mythology, salamanders are said to live through fire without burning.

**Salamander**—a mythological reptile, resembling a lizard, that was said to live in fire. In the concept of nature, the salamander is a visual representation of fire. In mythology, it endures the flames without burning.

**the salamander**—devours its tail Faber, who creates a way to implicate firemen in their own menace and therefore eradicate them, characterizes his plot with an image of self-destruction.

**the sheep returns to the fold. We're all sheep who have strayed at times**—Beatty alludes to the prophecy in Isaiah 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned ever one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The message implies that Montag has betrayed his fellow firemen.

**Stoneman and Black**—firemen whose names suggest that the hardness of their hearts and the color of their skin and hair come from contact with smoke.

**Sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge**—a line from Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*.

**That favorite subject. Myself.**—taken from a letter of the British biographer James Boswell, dated July 16, 1763. The quotation emphasizes the chasm that separates Montag from Mildred, who shuns self-analysis and submerges herself in drugs and the television programs that sedate her mind.

**That's what the lady said**—snappy stage comeback that Mildred uses in place of normal conversation.

**There is no terror, Cassius, in your threats, for I am arm'd so strong in honesty that they pass by me as an idle wind, which I respect not**—Beatty taunts Montag with a passage from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act IV, Scene iii, Line 66.

**Theremin**—An early electronic musical instrument whose sound is controlled by moving the air between two antennae. named after Russian inventor Leon Theremin; an early electronic musical instrument whose tone and loudness are controlled by moving the hands in the air between two projecting antennas

**there's lots of old Harvard degrees on the tracks**—Faber refers to the educated people who have dropped out of sight to live the hobo life outside the city.

**They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts**—a verse taken from Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, which in turn paraphrases a line from Beaumont and Fletcher's *Love's Cure*, Act III, Scene iii.

**This age thinks better of a gilded fool, than of a threadbare saint in wisdom's school**—a couplet from Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*.

**this electronic cowardice**—Faber, an old man who is too fearful to confront Captain Beatty, is willing to direct Montag's confrontation through his electronic listening and speaking device.

**this great python**—the fire hose, which resembles a great serpent; a key image in the novel that serves as a reminder of Adam and Eve's temptation to disobey God in the Garden of Eden.

**Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine**—from Chapter 1 of *Dreamthorp*, a collection of essays by Alexander Smith, a Glasgow lacemaker.

**To everything there is a season**—Montag recalls an often-quoted segment of Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, which reminds him that there is a time for dying as well as a time for living.

**Tower of Babel**—In Genesis 11:1–9, the mythic explanation of how Noah's children came to speak different languages. The word *babel* means a confusion of voices, languages, or sounds.

**trench mouth**—An infectious disease producing mouth ulcers in the mucous membranes of the mouth and throat caused by a bacterium; derived from its prevalence among soldiers in trenches..

**Truth is truth, to the end of reckoning**—Beatty's montage of quotations rambles on to a verse from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Act V, Scene i, Line 45.

**Truth will come to light, murder will not be hid long!**—from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Act II, Scene ii, Line 86.

**TV parlor**—a multidimensional media family that draws the viewer into action, thereby supplanting the viewer's real family.

**the tyranny of the majority**—from John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton's *History of Freedom and Other Essays*.

**V-2 Rocket**—The first long-range liquid fueled missile carrying one ton of explosives, used first by the Germans in WWII. the German's use of the first long-range, liquid-fuel missile carrying a ton of explosives during World War II changed the face of modern warfare.

**Vesuvius**—A volcano in Italy, near Naples, that erupted in August 24, 79 A.D., burying Pompeii in volcanic ash and the citizens of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

**We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship is formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is at last a drop which makes it run over; so in a series of kindnesses there is at last one which makes the heart run over**—from James Boswell's *Life of Dr. Johnson*, published in 1791. The quotation helps Montag understand his relationship with the mysterious Clarisse, who brings joy into his life for no obvious reason.

**whisper of a scythe**—an extended metaphor begins with a giant hand sowing the grains of bombs over the land. The image concludes with the death-dealing scythe, the symbol carried in the hand of Father Time, an image of death, which cuts down life in a single, silent sweep.

**Who are a little wise, the best fools be**—a line from John Donne's poem "The Triple Fool," which Beatty uses to confuse and stifle Montag.

**Words are like leaves and where they most abound, Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found**—Beatty quotes a couplet from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* as cynical commentary on his profusely garbled and contradictory recitation.

**You think you can walk on water**—Beatty alludes to Jesus walking on water, as recorded in Mark 6:45–51.