Context

• Published in 1953

• Post-World War II era

• Nazi book burnings of the 1930s were widely published after WWII – became a major symbol of the repression in Nazi Germany
Context

• Television became dominant medium for mass communication
  – 1946: 7,000 TV sets existed in the U.S.
  – 1948: 148,000 sets
  – 1950: 4.4 million sets
  – Television vs. books – debate over bringing television into schools because reading level of students was dropping

• The importance of books and the freedom to read them was a central concern of liberal-minded people during the 1950s.
Context (McCarthyism)

- **McCarthy trials**
  - Senator Joseph McCarthy
  - McCarthy made a public accusation that more than two hundred “card-carrying” communists had infiltrated the United States government. Incited a huge “communist scare,” which helped lead to the Korean War and the Cold War.
  - McCarthy accused many Army officials of espionage and communist ties.
  - He also focused on writers and filmmakers, creating a great debate on artistic freedom.
Thousands of people lost their jobs as, all across America, state legislatures and school boards mimicked McCarthy and his House on Un-American Activities Committee.

Books were even pulled from library shelves, including *Robin Hood*, which was deemed communist-like for suggesting stealing from the rich to give to the poor.

Above all, several messages became crystal clear to the average American: Don’t criticize the United States. Don’t be different. Just conform.

By 1953, his accusations were at their height. His hearings were held in 1954 and were the first to be publicly broadcast (ruined his reputation and career).
Fear of robots and other technology was prevalent in the 1950s ("mad scientist" movies compounded such fear by portraying machines that turned on their creator).

Mentality of hard work and following orders to get ahead was prevalent at this time.

Atmosphere of fear and repression left over from WWII, development (and use) of atomic bomb, communist scare, the Cold War, and McCarthy made it possible for government or any other powerful group to manipulate public opinion.
Context

• Mob mentality vs. individual rationalization

• Silence of those who were intimidated and the indifference of those who didn’t can lead to further manipulation in any time period!

• “Written five years after the end of the Second World War at the advent of the Korean War, Bradbury’s book evokes an intense atmosphere of entrapment, an oppressive presence of an unavoidable doomsday, and the unmistakable apprehension of individuals living in fear of an authoritarian government.”
Censorship

• “the suppression of speech or deletion of communicative material which may be considered objectionable, harmful or sensitive, as determined by a censor”

• We just discussed the prevalence of censorship during the time that Bradbury wrote this book. Movies, books, television shows, people’s opinions, works of art, and other expressions of speech were all censored by the government and other groups. What are some things that get censored in today’s society?

• Ironically, Bradbury’s publishers, unknown to him, “cleaned up” or deleted some of the language that Bradbury used in Fahrenheit 451 in order to make the book saleable to the high school market.
Overview

- Guy Montag is a fireman who burns books in a futuristic American city. In Montag’s world, firemen start fires rather than putting them out. The people in this society do not read books, enjoy nature, spend time by themselves, think independently, or have meaningful conversations. Instead, they drive very fast, watch excessive amounts of television on wall-size sets, and listen to the radio on “Seashell Radio” sets attached to their ears.

- Montag will meet a 17-year-old girl named Clarisse McClellan, who will open his eyes to the emptiness of his life by enjoying those things that her society tells her not to.

- A series of strange events will unfold for Montag, causing him to question his life, his career, and his society.

- Montag will turn to books for answers, which is strictly forbidden in his society.
Overview

• **Protagonist:** Guy Montag

• **Antagonist:** Society as a whole and, specifically, Beatty

• **Narrator:** Third person limited from Montag’s perspective

• **Setting:** Some time in the twenty-first century; two atomic wars have taken place since 1990; in and around an unspecified American city
Themes to Consider

• Conformity vs. Individuality
• Freedom of speech and the consequences of losing it
• The importance of remembering and understanding history
• Machines as helpers to humans vs. Machines as hindrances or enemies
• Apathy and Passivity
• Alienation and Loneliness
• Change and Transformation
Works Consulted


• “McCarthy Hearings.” http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1769.html