

Implementation Plan
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I have created a script to allow my students to interact more deeply with the book *Fahrenheit 451* through theater.

The plan will supplement a more traditional unit based around the book's three chapters.

For the first chapter, "The Hearth and the Salamander," use the prepared scripts for low-tech classroom performances of various key scenes. The first three scenes use a choral reading approach, with many lines read in unison by all characters. The fourth scene has a narrator reading while most of the characters participate in a tableau. The fifth scene splits Guy Montag the character from Guy Montag's stream of consciousness, represented by the narrator.

Minimal props and costuming create distinctions between characters. Students should have read the chapter before a theatrical engagement with the text.

In the second chapter, "The Sieve and the Sand," divide students into groups of three or four and ask them to create tableaus based on the following scenes:

Montag and Mildred's initial encounter with books.

Montag's initial contact with Faber in the park.

Montag's encounter with Mildred's friends.

Montag's return to the firehouse.

The fire truck arriving at Montag's house.

After the students present their tableaus, allow each group to create a short piece (either a choral reading, or a scene splitting GUY from his inner voice) that explores Montag's engagement with one of the following characters or groups:

Mildred

Faber

Beatty

Mildred's Friends

After the students have finished reading the book (at the end of Chapter 3), each group will create a short dramatic piece (a series of tableaus, a choral reading, or a split narration) based on a scene their group views as important.

Fahrenheit 451: The Hearth and the Salamander.

Characters:

GUY MONTAG, a fireman, his character distinguished by a plastic helmet and a medallion with 451 written on it.

MILDRED, his wife, wearing an apron.

CLARISSE, his neighbor, wearing a daisy chain.

THE UNCLE, another neighbor, wearing a distinctive hat.

CAPTAIN BEATTY, Montag's boss

FIREMAN #1—wearing a plastic helmet

FIREMAN #2-- wearing a plastic helmet

FIREMAN #3-- wearing a plastic helmet

FIREMAN #4-- wearing a plastic helmet

THE WOMAN, dressed casually

ALL participate in the chorus.

SCENE 1

CLARISSE and GUY walk back and forth in a small space. THE FIREMEN and CAPTAIN BEATTY stand off to one side. THE UNCLE stands on the opposite side. MILDRED is lying down in the middle of the stage area.

ALL: It was a pleasure to burn.

GUY: I've worked at being a fireman since I was twenty, ten years ago.

CLARISSE: I'm Clarisse McClellan, your new neighbor. I'm seventeen and I'm crazy! *(pause)* Do you ever read any of the books you burn?

ALL: It was a pleasure to burn.

GUY: *(laugh)* That's against the law!

CLARISSE: Oh, of course. *(pause)* My uncle said that long ago firemen put fires *out* instead of going to start them.

GUY: No. Houses have *always* been fireproof, take my word for it!

CLARISSE: Strange. I heard that once houses used to burn by accident, and they needed firemen to *stop* the flames. My uncle told me that, though. He was arrested one for driving slowly on a highway, and another time for being a pedestrian.

GUY: You think too many things.

CLARISSE: Oh, we're most peculiar! Are you happy?

GUY: Am I happy? Of course I'm happy!

ALL: It was a PLEASURE to burn.

SCENE 2

CLARISSE and UNCLE walk to the left side of the stage; the FIREMEN retreat to the right side. GUY approaches MILDRED, who appears to be sleeping in the center of the stage. Guy kicks a bottle of pills and catches it.

GUY: MILDRED!

He kneels down beside her and dials an imaginary phone.

GUY: Emergency services? Emergency services? *Looks at audience.*

CLARISSE (from a distance): Are you happy?

GUY: No, I am not happy. I am not happy.

ALL: Is it a pleasure to burn?

Mildred stands up.

GUY: You all right?

MILDRED: I don't know *why* I should be so hungry. Didn't sleep well. Feel terrible.

GUY: I wanted to talk to you. You took all the pills in your bottle last night.

MILDRED: Oh, I wouldn't do that!

GUY: The bottle was empty.

MILDRED: Why would I do a silly thing like that?

GUY: Maybe you took two pills, and forgot and took two more, and forgot again, and took two more.

MILDRED: I didn't do that. Never in a billion years. Can we get another wall TV? Then it'd be just like this living room wasn't ours at all, but all kinds of exotic people's rooms!

Guy walks back towards Clarisse, who is ignoring him and looking up at her uncle.

THE UNCLE: This is the age of the disposable tissue. Blow your nose on a person, wad them, flush them away, reach for another, blow, wad, flush.

CLARISSE: How are you supposed to root for the home team when you don't even have a program or know the names?

The Uncle, Clarisse, and Mildred start walking in a circle around Guy Montag and reciting together.

ALL: One drop of rain.

GUY: Clarisse.

ALL: Another drop.

GUY: Mildred.

ALL: A third.

GUY: The uncle.

ALL: A fourth.

GUY: The fire tonight.

ALL: One.

GUY: Clarisse.

ALL: Two.

GUY: Mildred.

ALL: Three.

GUY: Uncle.

ALL: Four.

GUY: Fire.

ALL: One, two, three, four, five.

GUY: Clarisse, Mildred, uncle, fire. Sleeping tablets, men, disposable tissues.

ALL: Blow, wad, flush!

SCENE 3

CLARISSE, MILDRED, and the UNCLE stand to one side. GUY stands in the middle of the FIREMEN, with CAPTAIN BEATTY at his side.

ALL: One Day.

GUY: The Firehouse.

ALL: Two days.

CAPTAIN BEATTY: Montag, you shin that pole like a bird up a tree.

ALL: Three days.

CAPTAIN BEATTY: Montag, I see you came in the back door this time. The Hound bother you?

GUY: No, no.

ALL: Four days.

CAPTAIN BEATTY: Montag, a funny thing. Heard tell this morning. Fireman in Seattle, purposely set a Mechanical Hound to his own chemical complex and let it loose. What kind of suicide would you call that?

ALL: Five days.

GUY: And then, Clarisse was gone.

ALL: Six days.

GUY: The lawn was empty, the trees empty, the street empty.

ALL: Seven days.

GUY: At first I didn't even know I missed her or was looking for her.

<alarms sound>

FIREMAN #1: Answer the alarm quickly!

FIREMAN #2: Start the fire swiftly!

FIREMAN #3: Burn everything!

FIREMAN #4: Report back to the firehouse immediately!

CAPTAIN BEATTY: Stand alert for other Alarms.

(All walk off stage. CAPTAIN BEATTY comes back.)

CAPTAIN BEATTY: Montag, you forgot your helmet!

Scene 4: Tableau

The Woman stands in the middle of a pile of books; perhaps she has cardboard cutout flames or another visual representation of the fire. The Firemen stand to one side, shocked and leaning away from or fleeing the fire. GUY and CAPTAIN BEATTY stand to the other side, looking on without fear. GUY holds a book under his arm, away from Captain Beatty.

NARRATOR:

The engine slammed to a stop. Beatty, Stoneman, and Black ran up the sidewalk, suddenly

odious and fat in the plump fireproof slickers. Montag followed.

They crashed the front door and grabbed at a woman, though she was not running, she was not trying to escape. She was only standing, weaving from side to side, her eyes fixed upon a nothingness in the wall as if they had struck her a terrible blow upon the head. Her tongue was moving in her mouth, and her eyes seemed to be trying to remember something, and then they remembered and her tongue moved again:

" '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.' "

Tonight, someone had slipped. This woman was spoiling the ritual. The men were making too much noise, laughing, joking to cover her terrible accusing silence below. She made the empty rooms roar with accusation and shake down a fine dust of guilt that was sucked in their nostrils as they plunged about.

The men walked clumsily to the door. They glanced back at Montag, who stood near the woman.

"You're not leaving her here?" he protested.

"She won't come."

"Force her, then!"

Beatty responded, "these fanatics always try suicide; the pattern's familiar."

Montag placed his hand on the woman's elbow. "You can come with me."

"No," she said. "Thank you, anyway."

"I'm counting to ten," said Beatty.

ALL: One. Two.

NARRATOR: "Please," said Montag.

"Go on," said the woman.

ALL: Three. Four.

NARRATOR: "Here." Montag pulled at the woman.

The woman replied quietly, "I want to stay here"

ALL: Five. Six.

NARRATOR: "You can stop counting," she said. She opened the fingers of one hand slightly and in the palm of the hand was a single slender object.

An ordinary kitchen match.

The sight of it rushed the men out and down away from the house. Captain Beatty, keeping his dignity, backed slowly through the front door, his pink face burnt and shiny from a thousand fires and night excitements. God, thought Montag, how true! Always at night the alarm comes. Never by day! Is it because the fire is prettier by night? More spectacle, a better show? The pink face of Beatty now showed the faintest panic in the door. The woman's hand twitched on the single matchstick. The fumes of kerosene bloomed up about her. Montag felt the hidden book pound like a heart against his chest.

Scene Five: Split Narrator from Character

In this scene, the narrator represents Montag's inner voice; another actor portrays Montag in his interactions with his wife.

GUY and MILDRED are laying on the ground next to each other. NARRATOR stands off to the side.

NARRATOR: Late in the night, I looked over at Mildred. And suddenly she was so strange I couldn't believe I knew her at all. I was in someone else's house, like the jokes people tell of the gentleman, drunk, coming home late at night and entering the wrong house.

GUY: Millie?

MILDRED: What?

GUY: I didn't mean to startle you.

GUY and MILDRED sit up.

GUY: When did we meet? And where?

MILDRED: When did we meet for *what*?

GUY: I mean—originally. The first time we ever met, where was it, and when?

MILDRED: Why, it was at—I don't know.

NARRATOR: I was cold.

GUY: Can't you remember?

MILDRED: It's been so long."

GUY: Only ten years, that's all, only ten!

MILDRED: Don't get excited, I'm trying to think. Funny, how funny, not to remember when or where you met your husband or wife.

NARRATOR: It was suddenly more important than any other thing in a lifetime that I knew where I had met Mildred.

MILDRED: It doesn't matter.

MILDRED stands up and walks to the side. GUY stands up and stands by the NARRATOR.

GUY: No, I guess not.

NARRATOR: I tried to count how many times she swallowed. I wanted to call out to her.

GUY: How many capsules have you taken tonight? How many will you take later and not know, every hour, tonight, tomorrow night!

NARRATOR: I thought of her lying on the bed with the two technicians standing straight over her.

GUY: If she died, I wouldn't cry.

NARRATOR: It would be the dying of an unknown, a street face, a newspaper image.

GUY: It was so wrong I began to cry at the thought of *not crying* at death.

NARRATOR: I was a silly empty man near a silly empty woman.

GUY: How do you get so empty? Who takes it out of you?

NARRATOR: And that awful flower the other day, the dandelion! What a shame, I'm not in love with anyone!

GUY: And why not?

NARRATOR: Isn't there a wall between me and Mildred? Literally not just one wall, but so far three! And expensive, too.

GUY holds up a book.

NARRATOR: We've got to figure out why we're in such a mess, Mildred and the medicine nights, and me and my work.

GUY: Let's see what's in the books. Let's start over again, at the beginning.