

- This extract is from the opening of *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. It was first published in 1954.

1 It was a pleasure to burn.

It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and *changed*. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history. With his symbolic helmet numbered 451 on his solid head, and his eyes all orange flame with the thought of what came next, he flicked the igniter and the house jumped up in a gorging fire that burned the evening sky red and yellow and black. He strode in a swarm of fireflies. He wanted above all, like the old joke, to shove a marshmallow on a stick in the furnace, while the flapping pigeon-winged books died on the porch and lawn of the house. While the books went up in sparkling whirls and blew away on a wind turned dark with burning.

Montag grinned the fierce grin of all men singed and driven back by flame.

He knew that when he returned to the firehouse, he might wink at himself, a minstrel man, burnt-corked, in the mirror. Later, going to sleep, he would feel the fiery smile gripped by his face muscles, in the dark. It never went away, that smile, it never went away, as long as he remembered.

He hung up his black-beetle coloured helmet and shined it, he hung his flameproof jacket neatly; he showered luxuriously, and then, whistling, hands in pockets, walked across the upper floor of the fire station and fell down the hole. At the last minute, when disaster seemed positive, he pulled his hands from his pockets and broke his fall by grasping the golden pole. He slid to a squeaking halt, the heels one inch from the concrete floor downstairs.

He walked out of the fire station and along the midnight street toward the subway where the silent, air-propelled train slid soundlessly down its lubricated flue in the earth and let him out with a great dull of warm air on to the cream-tiled escalator rising to the suburb.

Whistling, he let the escalator waft him into the still night air. He walked toward the corner, thinking little at all about nothing in particular. Before he reached the corner, however, he slowed as if a wind had sprung up from nowhere, as if someone had called his name.

The last few nights he had had the most uncertain feelings about the sidewalk just around the corner here, moving in the starlight toward his house. He had felt that a moment before his making the turn, someone had been there. The air seemed charged with a special calm as if someone had waited there, quietly, and only a moment before he came, simply turned to a shadow and let him through. Perhaps his nose detected a faint perfume, perhaps the skin on the backs of his hands, on his face, felt the temperature rise at this one spot where a person's standing might raise the immediate atmosphere ten degrees for an instant. There was no understanding it. Each time he made the turn, he saw only the white, unused, buckling sidewalk, with perhaps, on one night, something vanishing swiftly across a lawn before he could focus his eyes or speak.

But now, tonight, he slowed almost to a stop. His inner mind, reaching out to turn the corner for him, had heard the faintest whisper. Breathing? Or was the atmosphere compressed merely by someone standing very quietly there, waiting?

He turned the corner.

Question 1

Read again **lines 14 to 23**.

List **four** things from this part of the text which describe what Montag did when he returned to the firehouse.

[4 marks]

Question 2

Look in detail at **lines 1-12** of the extract.

How does the writer use language here to describe the fire?

You could include the writer's use of:

- Words and phrases
- Language features and techniques
- Sentence forms

[8 marks]

Question 3

You now need to think about the **whole** of the **source**.

This text is from the opening of a novel.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

You could write about:

- What the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning
- How and why the writer changes this focus as the extract develops
- Any other structural features that interest you.

[8 marks]

Question 4

Focus this part of your answer on the second part of the source **from lines 24 to the end**.

A student, having read this section of the text said: "Montag is paranoid that someone is following him and means him harm. He clearly feels guilty about burning the books and thinks that someone is going to punish him."

To what extent do you agree?

In your response, you could:

- Write about your own impressions of the character
- Evaluate how the writer has created these impressions
- Support your comments with references to the text

[20 marks]

Question 5

You are going to enter a creative writing competition.

Your entry will be judged by a panel of people of your own age.

Either: Write a description suggested by this picture



Or: Write the opening part of a story about a dangerous fire.

(24 marks for content and organisation
16 marks for technical accuracy)
[40 marks]