

4

Lesson Four

FOCUS: Characters

The main character in a piece of literature is called the “protagonist.” The protagonist often overcomes a weakness to achieve a new understanding by the work’s end. A protagonist who acts with courage and strength may be called a “hero.” The protagonist’s journey is made more dramatic by challenges from characters with different beliefs or perspectives. A “foil” provokes or challenges the protagonist. The most important foil, the “antagonist,” opposes the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her success.

Captain Beatty, the fire chief, is a key foil and a historian of sorts. While Montag once followed Beatty’s values, he now resists Beatty’s commitment to burning books. Meanwhile, Faber represents a musty, academic link to the past. Clarisse McClellan, a teenager, longs for the romantic days of front porches and rocking chairs, complaining, “we never ask questions.” Mildred, the model citizen, attempts suicide while living in a world enchanted by television.

Discussion Activities

Divide the class into groups to examine the role of “foils” in the novel. Assign each group a character: Mildred, Clarisse, Faber, or Beatty. Ask students to review the first 91 pages of the novel. Look for occasions when this character brings out dramatic responses from Montag. How does the character lead Montag toward self-realization? How does Montag’s relationship to the character change? Have students present their conclusions to the class, using specific textual support for their conclusion.

Writing Exercise

Students have examined many dimensions of the protagonist by exploring secondary characters. Write two pages on the character you believe to be the antagonist. Why is this character opposed to Montag? How does this character force him to reevaluate himself? Use passages from the text to support your conclusions.

Homework

Finish Part Two (pp. 91-110). Students will write one page explaining why Bradbury chose his section titles. Choose one title either, “The Hearth and the Salamander” or “The Sieve and the Sand,” explaining what this title means.