

Fahrenheit 451: Clarisse's Vision

Important characters in Bradbury's book always get a chance to make a speech about the world—what it is like, why it is flawed, how it came to be that way. Clarisse is no exception. She affects Montag from the first moment, but it is after they have had several conversations that Bradbury lets her speak at length. The following questions are taken from (and in response to) her speech.

Read the following two question prompts silently to yourself. Choose one that you think you can answer with depth and insight, and write a ten-minute response. Remember, this is half the time you get for the SAT essay; we expect you to write at least two well-developed paragraphs with detailed examples. You might want to look up the quote before you write, but you do not have to.

Prompt 1:

I'm antisocial, they say. I don't mix. It's so strange. I'm very social indeed. It all depends on what you mean by social, doesn't it? ...I don't think it's social to get a bunch of people together and then not let them talk, do you" (29)?

Antisocial means "unwilling to or incapable of beginning and maintaining normal human relationships."

Question: Discuss what kind of social events are typically sponsored by schools for teens. What kinds of activities take place? Do people have an opportunity to talk about serious or important things? What do people think about individuals who refuse to participate in these social events?

Prompt 2:

Clarisse describes her school as having TV class, transcription history, and lots of sports, then comments, "but do you know, we never ask questions, or at least most don't; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film teacher" (29).

Transcription means "copying word-for-word."

Question: Compare and contrast Clarisse's school with your own. Explain whether Clarisse's school truly educates its students.

Clarisse makes six important points in her speech:

1. Nature of Social Interaction: (question 1 above): Bradbury seems to be concerned that, as we rush around in modern life, we will interact with other people less and less. He notes that social events, rather than providing outlets for real human contact, tend to increase this separation. Clarisse, who wants to ask questions and discuss things, is considered to be abnormal.
2. Theories of Education (question 2 above): Bradbury clearly thinks that modern education spends too much time on memorization and not enough time on thinking. In the world of the novel, people have given up books—and anything else that causes controversial thought. School then becomes a place to play sports and copy down information. Bradbury feels, and most teachers would agree, that students do not really learn much in this kind of setting. It is useless, like pouring water through funnels.

3. Violent recreation: Clarisse notes that teens do strange things for fun: they meet at Fun Parks to bully people, smash windows, race cars and play driving “games” like getting close to lampposts, chicken and knock hubcaps. Teens are wild, she says. 6 of her friends have been shot and 10 died in car wrecks (30).

Bradbury did not predict the popularity of violent computer games, but I think he would not be surprised by them. He was concerned about giving young people too many violent outlets fifty years ago. The people in the world of F451 are not always aware of their own unhappiness, but they *are* unhappy. Bradbury seems to feel that dissatisfied people will seek out increasingly violent acts to relieve stress. Also, as violent deaths—as from shootings or car wrecks—become more common, people tend to become “immune” to them, blocking them out of their awareness. Thus, the cycle continues.

4. Responsibility: Clarisse comments that she was spanked when she needed it, and says, ‘I do all the shopping and housecleaning by hand’ (30).

Bradbury clearly implies that other children are not spanked; he does not want to encourage child beating, but rather discipline. He foresaw a future in which children would be so spoiled that they would never have to take responsibility for their actions. At the same time, parents would be increasingly separated from their kids because of the demands of job and entertainment in which the kids could not participate. Finally, technology would do more and more of the “work” of running a home, such as cleaning or shopping, leaving people with little to do. Meanwhile, they would have forgotten how to be *together*. This was an important theme in “The Veldt,” too.

5. Vapid conversation: Clarisse claims that “People don’t talk about anything” really; their conversations are about cars or clothes, or the same old jokes (31). This is connected to issues of social interaction.

Bradbury was obviously aware of the lack of depth in most people’s conversation. He doesn’t mean that every conversation has to be deeply philosophical, but he seems to be aware (and I agree) of how often people’s conversations are taken up by things that are not truly important (such as sports events and fashion) and may not even be real (such as TV shows or gossip). How often do people talk about what is happening on a favorite TV show—and why don’t people talk about their own lives instead?

6. Modern Art: Clarisse tells Montag that the paintings at the Museum are all abstract, but that her uncle says paintings used to show objects and people that you could recognize (31). I think it is clear that Bradbury is not a big fan of modern art, but his message goes deeper than that. In the F451 world, all new paintings are abstract, but more important than that, all the old paintings have been *taken down and forgotten*. This is connected to society’s decision to forbid anything offensive...and thereby forbid anything that causes thought. Art is not illegal, as far as the reader can tell, but I would guess that a person whose house is full of old artwork would be investigated—and maybe jailed—just as fast as someone who has books.