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Harrison Bergeron

By Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

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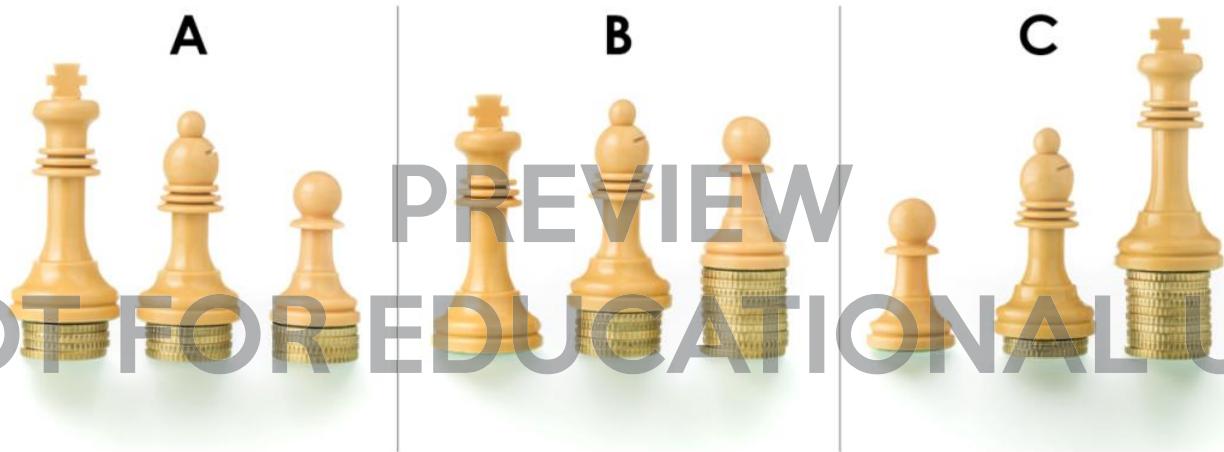


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Directions: look at the three photos below (A, B & C). Write a journal entry that explains which photo best describes what it means to be "equal" and "fair." Include your reasoning and explain what the other two photos symbolize. Which photo do you think is most representative of our society today and why?



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Strengths and Weaknesses

Directions: Make a list of 5 of your strengths, and 5 of your weaknesses. Can be physical or mental.

Discussion Questions: Do you ever feel guilty for your strong attributes? Do you ever feel like it's not fair that you have certain weaknesses or that others are more talented than you? What is one talent you wish you had? Explain.

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Writing Task: Using all of the following words, write a one paragraph story in five minutes.

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- Government
- Constitution
- Sash weights
- Jail
- Ballerinas
- Emperor
- Television
- Doozy

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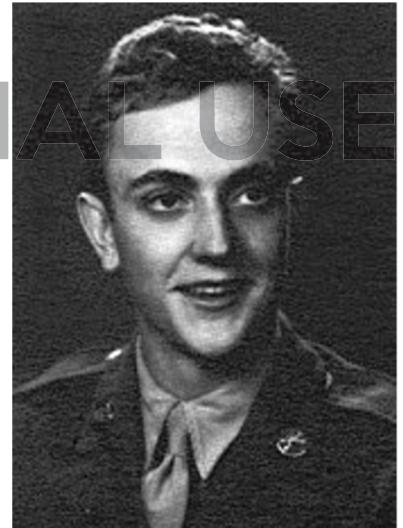
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Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

- Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was born in November 1922, in Indianapolis, Indiana. His formative years took place during the Great Depression.
- He was an American writer noted for his fantasy, science fiction, and dystopian stories that highlight the horrors and ironies of society.
- At age 20, Vonnegut served the U.S. Army (during WWII) and was shipped off to Europe where he was then captured by the Nazis. Vonnegut and his fellow POWs survived by luck. They were shielded from the bombings in Dresden by happenstance since they were being forced to stay underground in an old meat house.
- His most famous works include: *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Player Piano*, *Mother Night*, *Cat's Cradle*, *A Man Without a Country*, "2 B R 0 2 B," and "Harrison Bergeron."
- Kurt Vonnegut died on April 11, 2007.



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Literary Terms

Anachronism: when someone or something is in the wrong time period

Satire: the use of irony or exaggeration to ridicule or criticize something

Dystopia: an imagined society where life is extremely bad because of politics, laws, customs, or government control

Dramatic Irony: when a reader understands an event that one or more of the characters do not

Situational Irony: when the unexpected occurs, opposite of what was thought to happen, in a tragic or humorous way

Verbal Irony: when a speaker speaks something contradictory to what she/he intends to say



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Vocabulary

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- cower
- transmitter
- synchronize
- birdshot
- grackle
- hindrance
- wince
- propaganda
- vigilance
- consternation

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Vocabulary

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Cower (v): to crouch down in fear

Transmitter (n): a set of equipment used to carry messages or signals through electromagnetic waves

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Vocabulary

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Synchronize (v): to occur or operate at the same time

Birdshot (n): a small kind of shotgun shell used for birds

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Vocabulary

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Grackle (n): a songbird of the American blackbird family

Hindrance (n): an obstacle that makes it harder for something to happen or be done

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Vocabulary

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Wince (v): give an involuntary shrinking movement of the body because of pain or distress

Propaganda (n): biased information used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view

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Vocabulary

Vigilance (n): the action or state of keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulties

Consternation (n): feelings of anxiety or dismay from something unexpected

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Reading Questions

- 1) What year does this story take place?
- 2) What is the state of the U.S. society as described in the first paragraph?
- 3) Why does the government handicap George but not Hazel?
- 4) What are George and Hazel watching on television? What's unusual about it?
- 5) Who is Diana Moon Glampers?
- 6) How does George seem to feel about his handicaps?

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Reading Questions

7. What is the punishment if George were to remove just one ball from his weight bag?

8. Why are Hazel and George satisfied with society?

9. How old is Harrison? Why is Harrison considered a threat to society?

10. What is the significance of the dance that Harrison performs with the ballerina?

11. Why don't Harrison's parents respond with more feeling to what they have seen on television?

12. How does the story end?

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After Reading Analysis Questions

1. What is an example of anachronism in this story?
2. Why do you think Vonnegut didn't include an advanced surveillance system or high-tech brain implants to alter intelligence in a story set so far in the future?
3. Name an example of each type of irony from the story.
4. Is there a hero in this story, why or why not?
5. What is the power of television in this story?
6. What foreshadowing does Vonnegut use?
7. What do you consider to be the theme of Harrison Bergeron? What is the author's message?
8. Why is "Harrison Bergeron" an example of satire?



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After Reading Project Options

A) Continue writing the story with an alternate ending. In at least one page, what would have happened if HB had not been shot dead?

B) In at least one page, describe what an equal society looks like to you and compare/contrast our current state of affairs to your ideal society. Reference The Bill of Rights... what Amendments should we change? Add? Remove?

C) Draw a detailed image of the story on a piece of blank 8.5x11 paper. Choose any scene (aside from where Harrison is shot). It should be colored as well as illustrated accurately and neatly.



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Name:

Date:

“Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

Before Reading

Task 1: Photo Comparison

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Task 2: Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

Weaknesses

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Task 3: Creative Writing

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Government
Ballerinas

Constitution
Emperor

Sash weights
Television

Jail
Doozy

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Task 4: List 3 Facts about the author Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

1.

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2.

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3.

Task 5: Literary Terms

Define the following:

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Anachronism

Satire

Dystopia

Dramatic Irony

Situational Irony

Verbal Irony

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Harrison Bergeron Vocabulary

Vocabulary Word	Definition	Definition in your own words or use the term in a sentence.
Cower (v)	PREVIEW	
Transmitter (n)	NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE	
Synchronize (v)	PREVIEW	
Birdshot (n)	NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE	
Grackle (n)	PREVIEW	
Hindrance (n)	NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE	
Wince (v)	PREVIEW	
Propaganda (n)		
Vigilance (n)	PREVIEW	
Consternation (n)	NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE	

Reading Questions “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

1. What year does this story take place?

2. What is the state of the U.S. society as described in the first paragraph?

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3. Why does the government handicap George but not Hazel?

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4. Who is Diana Moon Glampers?

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5. How does George seem to feel about his handicaps?

6. What is the punishment if George were to remove just one ball from his weight bag?

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7. Why are Hazel and George satisfied with society?

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8. How old is Harrison? Why is Harrison considered a threat to society?

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9. What is the significance of the dance that Harrison performs with the ballerina?

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10. Why don't Harrison's parents respond with more feeling to what they have seen on television?

11. How does the story end?

After Reading Analysis

1. What is an example of anachronism in this story?

2. Why do you think Vonnegut didn't include an advanced surveillance system or high-tech brain implants to alter intelligence in a story set so far in the future?

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3. Name an example of each type of irony from the story:

Dramatic:

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Situational:

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Verbal:

4. Is there a hero in this story, why or why not?

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5. What is the power of television in this story?

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6. What foreshadowing does Vonnegut use?

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7. What do you consider to be the theme of "Harrison Bergeron"? What is the author's message?

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8. Why is "Harrison Bergeron" an example of satire?

After Reading Project Options
Pick One to Complete

A) Continue writing the story with an alternate ending. In at least one page, what would have happened if HB had not been shot dead?

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B) In at least one page, describe what an equal society looks like to you and compare/contrast our current state of affairs to your ideal society. Reference The Bill of Rights... what Amendments should we change? Add? Remove?

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C) Draw a detailed image of the story on a piece of blank 8.5x11 paper. Choose any scene (aside from the moment where Harrison is shot). It should be colored as well as illustrated accurately and neatly.

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Harrison Bergeron Answer Key

Reading Questions

1. What year does this story take place? **2081**
2. What is the state of the U.S. society as described in the first paragraph?

Everyone is "finally" equal. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. People are unhappy because they are all burdened with certain "handicaps" to weaken their strongest attributes that are considered unfair advantages. Everyone is "the same," but the government is obviously more powerful than everyone.

3. Why does the government handicap George but not Hazel?

George is very intelligent, so the government wants to prevent him from thinking. Thinking might cause a rebellion or revolution. Hazel is not naturally as smart, she has an average intelligence. The government does not need to worry about her having such valuable (and dangerous) thoughts or ideas. George also must wear weights because he is stronger than Hazel.

4. What are George and Hazel watching on television? What's unusual about it?

They are watching ballerinas dance on screen. It's bizarre because the ballerinas are all-wearing masks to hide their beauty, and they are covered in weights to keep them from being more graceful than others.

5. Who is Diana Moon Glampers?

She is the Handicapper General of the United States and she is in charge; she enforces the handicap laws.

6. How does George seem to feel about his handicaps?

He says he doesn't mind it anymore because it's become part of him. Even when Hazel tells him he can remove the handicaps to be more comfortable, he doesn't. This is probably because it's easier to be numb to what is going on around him, since he can't think long enough to stop anything and they are powerless in this society.

7. What is the punishment if George were to remove just one ball from his weight bag?

The punishment is severe. "Two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball I took out."

8. Why are Hazel and George satisfied with society?

They are convinced if they cheat or break the laws, it will return to the dark ages. They have been convinced (probably by means of propaganda) that this is the safest, most equal way to live and if something changed, society would become chaos and fall apart.

9. How old is Harrison? Why is Harrison considered a threat to society?

Harrison is only 14 years old. He was put in jail for supposedly plotting to overthrow the government. He is a threat because he is a genius, an athlete, good looking, and thus is regarded as dangerous since he is better than others.

10. What is the significance of the dance that Harrison performs with the ballerina?

The dance symbolizes freedom. He is publicly rejecting and disobeying the law. In direct contrast to all the hindrances pulling him down to an average state, he leaps high into the air, above others. This act of rebellion could inspire others to want to be free and see Harrison as their new leader.

11. Why don't Harrison's parents respond with more feeling to what they have seen on television? Every time George has a thought, his ear radio distracts him. As soon as George realizes his son is a fugitive, he hears the sound of an automobile collision in his head. After his son is shot dead, both George and Hazel forget what they have seen. She is crying, but she doesn't know why. They can acknowledge something happened, but do not dwell on it because they will never remember it anyway.

12. How does the story end?

Glampers shoots Harrison and the female dancer dead. The television burns out and the Bergerons go back to "normal."

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After Reading Analysis

1. What is an example of anachronism in this story?

It is the year 2081 and Glampers uses a shotgun (an outdated weapon) to kill Harrison.

2. Why do you think Vonnegut didn't include an advanced surveillance system or high-tech brain implants to alter intelligence in a story set so far in the future? There's no one with that kind of thinking power.

In a world where thinking and overachieving is discouraged, technology would most likely be stagnant. There would be no inventions or discoveries because people are handicapped into being the same and being average.

3. Name an example of each type of irony from the story:

Dramatic: We know that Harrison has been killed while his parents can't quite remember.

Situational: Everyone is "equal" but nothing is fair. Dancers can't dance, announcers can't speak, and smart people can't think.

Verbal: George says, "You can say that again" to Hazel, and she repeats herself though he did not mean it literally.

4. Is there a hero in this story, why or why not?

Answers may vary. You could say there is no real hero though because while Harrison is bravely rebelling against the seemingly evil and oppressive government, Harrison uses his few minutes of power to claim authority over everyone and order them around, calling himself an emperor.

6. What is the power of television in this story?

The television sedates and distracts society from what is really happening. It's used for propaganda in order to perpetuate fear and enforce the laws. For example, they claim Harrison is "extremely dangerous" and shows what happens if you break the law (shot on scene).

7. What foreshadowing does Vonnegut use in this story?

When George first thought of his son in jail, it was the sound of twenty-one-gun salute in his head that stopped him from thinking any further. His son is later shot to death.

8. What do you consider to be the theme of Harrison Bergeron? What is the author's message?

Multiple answers are correct. Vonnegut is warning people of the danger of total equality, big government, and propaganda. The message is that freedom and individuality are vital in a thriving society. He also demonstrates that freedom and equality are not the same. The characters are all equal, but no one is free. Equality and fairness are also not the same thing. Another theme is that the people who stand up to power are not always looking out for others' best interest either; in the case of Harrison, he is looking to be in power himself. Vonnegut also emphasizes the significance of memory and why it is needed.

8. Why is "Harrison Bergeron" an example of satire?

Vonnegut criticizes a society with complete government control. He uses satire to mock the ideal of equality by exaggerating the lengths people would take to make everyone "fair" (using weights, ear radios, etc.)

Teacher Directions

HARRISON BERGERON

by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

Day 1: Pre-reading Activities

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Task 1: Have students look at the three photos of the chess pieces sitting on coins. Have them decide what they believe is the most fair. There is no right answer. Have students share thoughts/ideas. This will lead to a great discussion on what is equality.

Task 2: Have students list their strengths and weaknesses. Discuss whether they ever feel like life is unfair because they weren't born good at something. Share answers and discuss.

Task 3: This activating strategy gets students thinking about what this story might be about and it's fun for them to make predictions even though they have no background knowledge about what the story is about. It's ok if your students don't know what some of the words mean, just have them guess at first. Once everyone is done, it's up to you if you'd like students to share. It is usually fun to hear at least 2 or 3 stories.

Sash weights: a weight attached by a cord to each side of a window sash to balance it at any height.

Doozy: something unusually severe, bad, or unique of its kind.

Task 4: Review background information on Kurt Vonnegut Jr. and literary terms with students. Have them write down the definitions in their packets.

Task 5: Start vocabulary if you have time. If not, save it for the next day. For vocabulary terms, you can have your students look up the definitions by themselves (either in the dictionary or on the computer)... or you can use the Powerpoint presentation to give students the definitions. The graphic organizer in the packet includes a column for students to include the definition in their own words that way they are not just copying and pasting without thinking about what each word actually means.

Day 2: Read the Story

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Task 1: Make sure all vocabulary is completed.

Task 2: Read the short story "Harrison Bergeron." The full text can be found online for free.

Task 3: Have students begin the reading comprehension questions.

Day 3: Literary Analysis

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Task 1: Have students complete both the reading questions and the after reading questions. You can do this as a whole class, individually, or allow students to work in pairs.

Task 2: Provide students with the three project options, directing them to choose one. Give them 1-2 days to complete the assignment.