

PREVIEW

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“Repent, Harlequin!” said the
Ticktock Man by Harlan Ellison

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HARLAN ELLISON

- Harlan Ellison was an American writer from Cleveland, Ohio.
- He wrote 70 books, over 400 short stories, dozens of TV screenplays and more than 1,000 essays and columns.
- Ellison had a reputation for being controversial and argumentative.
- Ellison grew up in a Jewish family and subsequently struggled with anti-Semitism in school; he frequently ran away from home as a result of being bullied.
- Ellison attended Ohio State University for 18 months until he was expelled for verbally abusing a professor.
- Ellison moved to New York City in 1955 to pursue a writing career, primarily in science fiction.



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HARLAN ELLISON

- Ellison was drafted into the US Army in 1957 and served two years.
- After leaving the military, he relocated to Chicago, where he edited Rogue magazine.
- Ellison worked as a creative consultant on the original TV series *The Twilight Zone*.
- Ellison married five times; each relationship ended within a few years, except the last marriage which lasted until his death.
- Harlan Ellison died in his sleep, at home in Los Angeles on June 28, 2018.
- Ellison said, “What I write is hyperactive magic realism. I take the received world and I reflect it back through the lens of fantasy, turned slightly so you get a different portrait.”
- Ellison also stated, “I see myself as a combination of Zorro and Jiminy Cricket. My stories go out from here and raise hell. From time to time some denigrator or critic with umbrage will say of my work, 'He only wrote that to shock.' I smile and nod. Precisely.”



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REPENT

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- feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing

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OSTENTATION

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- noun
- an excessive display or show especially for the purpose of attracting attention

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STRATA

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• noun

- (plural of stratum) a level or class to which people are assigned according to their social status, education, or income



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HERETIC PREVIEW NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

- noun
- a person holding an opinion at odds with what is generally accepted



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REVOCATION

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- noun
- an act of revoking or cancelling something



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JANGLE

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- noun
- the act of doing something unproductive, sometimes for the sake of annoying or amusing another person

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METRONOMIC
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- adjective
- in a steady rhythm or tempo; in even cadence



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MOTLEY

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• noun

- the particolored costume of a jester



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VAGRANT NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

- adjective
- describes moving or occurring unpredictably

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ANTEBREVIAN

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• adjective

• belonging to the time before the Biblical flood; ridiculously old-fashioned

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INFLECTION

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- noun

- change in pitch or loudness of the voice; also describes a departure from a normal or straight course



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BILLET-DOUX

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- noun
- French for “sweet note” or love letter



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Name:

Date:

Before Reading

Directions: For each of the following statements, circle AGREE or DISAGREE. Justify your opinion in 1-3 sentences.

1. Laws are written for the protection of citizens.

AGREE

DISAGREE

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2. Class clowns are disruptive and offensive.

AGREE

DISAGREE

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

3. Comedians are happier than most other people.

AGREE

DISAGREE

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

4. People who are always late are incompetent.

AGREE

DISAGREE

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

5. Time is limited in supply.

AGREE

DISAGREE

6. Being fashionably late improves your social status.

AGREE

DISAGREE

PREVIEW

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7. Practical jokes are harmful.

AGREE

DISAGREE

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

8. Too much structure lowers your happiness.

AGREE

DISAGREE

PREVIEW

9. Punctuality is a social construct.

AGREE

DISAGREE

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10. Give a man a mask and he will show his true self.

AGREE

DISAGREE

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Name:

Date:

"Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktock Man by Harlan Ellison

Vocabulary

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Word	Part of Speech	Definition
repent	verb	
ostentation	noun	
strata	noun	PREVIEW
heretic	noun	PREVIEW
revocation	noun	
jangle	noun	
metronomic	adj	PREVIEW
motley	noun	PREVIEW
vagrant	adj	
antediluvian	adj	
inflection	noun	PREVIEW
billet-doux	noun	PREVIEW

Name:

Date:

"'Repent, Harlequin!' said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison
During Reading Questions and Literary Analysis

1. What does Thoreau believe about great men? What might the beginning quote foreshadow?

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2. What information is revealed about the social hierarchy in this dystopian society? What social class views the Harlequin as a hero and why do you think that is?

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3. Why is *personality* frowned upon in this society?

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4. What do these people have in common: Bolivar, Napoleon, Robin Hood, Richard (Dick) Bong, Jesus, and Jomo Kenyatta? If you don't recognize some of these names, make an educated guess.

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5. What do you think is a *cardioplate*?

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6. What did people call the TickTockman to his mask? Why?

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7. What practical joke does the Harlequin play on the Timkin workers? How do the workers react?

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8. Explain the following metaphor: “*He had tapped the first domino in the line, and one after another, like chik chik chik, the others had fallen.*”

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9. How does this narrative structure break the rules? Why is it symbolic?

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10. What is the author's purpose for repeating the phrase "so it goes"?

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11. What is the significance of the Harlequin's attire?

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12. What does the inflection in Harlequin's voice symbolize? Explain.

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13. What is the relationship like between Alice and the Harlequin?

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14. What is the Harlequin's real name? What was special about him?

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15. How does the Harlequin get caught? What happens to the Harlequin as a result?

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16. What is the irony at the end of the story?

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17. Do you agree that you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs? Explain.

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18. Is the Harlequin a hero, antihero, or neither? Explain.

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Write a short summary for "Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison. You must use at least 6 of the 8 words in the box below. Underline the words from the word bank in your summary.

rebel
future

tardiness
time

dictator
conformity

schedule
technology

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Name:

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"Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison

After Reading Questions

1. What truth can we learn from dystopian fiction?

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2. What is the difference between a prankster and a criminal?

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3. Do you think comedians should be encouraged to make political statements or actions? Why or why not?

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4. Explain the aphorism "Time is money." How valuable is your time?

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5. How does it make you feel when someone is late? Even though being late is not a crime, is it a sin, or merely an inconvenience? What do you think the penalty for tardiness should be?

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Name:

Date:

"Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison

Theme Analysis

"The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailors, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purposes as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the Devil, without intending it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it."

Directions: Re-read Henry David Thoreau's excerpt of Civil Disobedience. Explain the significance of quoting Civil Disobedience in "Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison. How does the excerpt illustrate the theme present in the story? Your response should be a minimum of five sentences.

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**"Repent, Harlequin!" Said The Ticktockman by Harlan Ellison—
Suggested Lesson Procedure**

1. Assign students the before reading questions for the story "Repent, Harlequin!" Said The Ticktockman.
2. Review the vocabulary terms and author's background with students using the Powerpoint presentation. Students should copy the definitions into their graphic organizers.
3. Read the short story "Repent, Harlequin!" Said The Ticktockman (This takes about 30 minutes *not* including the time it will take students to answer the questions). While your students read the story, they should answer the "during reading" questions. I prefer to complete this as a whole class out loud, but you may also assign it independently.
4. Assign the after reading discussion questions. Students may complete this independently or in pairs. Review the answers and facilitate a class discussion.
5. Direct students to complete the theme analysis worksheet. Collect and grade.

Note to teachers: Due to copyright law, I am unable to offer a full text version of the story. If you enter "Repent, Harlequin! Said The Ticktockman Full Text by Harlan Ellison" into any search engine, you will find a copy of the story available for you to print and use in class. Here is the link I used: [Full Text Repent Harlequin](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email me at
chompingatthelit@gmail.com

Before Reading

Directions: For each of the following statements, circle AGREE or DISAGREE. Justify your opinion in 1-3 sentences.

PREVIEW
Answers will vary for all.

1. Laws are written for the protection of citizens.

AGREE

DISAGREE

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2. Class clowns are disruptive and offensive.

AGREE

DISAGREE

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3. Comedians are happier than most other people.

AGREE

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4. People who are always late are incompetent.

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5. Time is limited in supply.

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6. Being fashionably late improves your social status.

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7. Practical jokes are harmful.

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8. Too much structure lowers your happiness.

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10. Give a man a mask and he will show his true self.

AGREE

DISAGREE

Name:

Date:

"Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison**Vocabulary**

Word	Part of Speech	Definition
repent	verb	feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing
ostentation	noun	An excessive display or show especially for the purpose of attracting attention
strata	noun	(plural of stratum) a level or class to which people are assigned according to their social status, education, or income
heretic	noun	a person holding an opinion at odds with what is generally accepted
revocation	noun	an act of revoking or cancelling something
jangle	noun	The act of doing something unproductive, sometimes for the sake of annoying or amusing another person
metronomic	adj	in a steady rhythm or tempo; in even cadence
motley	noun	the particolored costume of a jester
vagrant	adj	describes moving or occurring unpredictably
antediluvian	adj	belonging to the time before the biblical flood; ridiculously old-fashioned
inflection	noun	change in pitch or loudness of the voice; also describes a departure from a normal or straight course
billet-doux	noun	French for "sweet note" or love letter

"'Repent, Harlequin!' said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison During Reading Questions and Literary Analysis

1. What does Thoreau believe about great men? What might the beginning quote foreshadow?

Thoreau believes truly great men—often reformers or martyrs—follow their moral consciences even if that means resisting and becoming enemies of the state. The quote is foreshadowing that someone in the story will make the difficult decision to resist conformity and become an outlaw in order to do the right thing.

2. What information is revealed about the social hierarchy in this dystopian society? What social class views the Harlequin as a hero and why do you think that is?

There is presence of a lower class, middle class, and upper class in this society. The lower class thinks the Harlequin is a hero and inspiration because he threatens the hierarchy and the powerful people at the top, specifically the Ticktockman. The lower class always suffers the most from a dysfunctional or tyrannical government, so you can infer that they would benefit the most from a collapse in the chain of command. The middle class and upper class view the Harlequin as vulgar and shameful. People with a lot of money typically have an easier time, even in a rigid society like this, because they can afford luxuries others cannot.

3. Why is *personality* frowned upon in this society?

Personality or individualism is frowned upon because people who think for themselves are difficult to influence and manipulate. Harlequin is driven in a way that is deviant to the government, but inspirational to a large group of common people. Because he has become a hero to those in the lower class, his defiance may inspire a rebellion against the tyrannical government. People who have *personality* are most likely to disrupt the order, just as the Harlequin is simply doing by making a mockery of the Ticktockman.

4. What do these people have in common: Bolivar, Napoleon, Robin Hood, Richard (Dick) Bong, Jesus, and Jomo Kenyatta? If you don't recognize some of these names, make an educated guess.

All of these people were famous, brave, transcendent, and intelligent; they're all known as controversial heroes who left a large impact on the world.

Bolivar was a Venezuelan military and political leader who led what are currently the countries of Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia to independence from the Spanish Empire.

Napoleon was a French military and political leader who rose to prominence during the French Revolution and led several successful campaigns during the Revolutionary Wars. He is seen as a savior of France and he laid down the foundations of the modern French state. In Britain, Napoleon is seen as a villain by many, mainly for overthrowing the government and for war. Napoleon was responsible for a lot of death and destruction.

Robin Hood is a legendary heroic outlaw who infamously stole from the rich to give to the poor.

Dick Bong was a United States Army Air Forces major and Medal of Honor recipient in World War II. He was one of the most decorated American fighter pilots and the country's top flying ace in the war, credited with shooting down 40 Japanese aircraft.

Jesus was the Son of God who died for human sin. He was a man of great character. Jesus is wise, compassionate, selfless, and forgiving.

Jomo Kenyatta was a Kenyan anti-colonial activist and politician who governed Kenya as its Prime Minister from 1963 to 1964 and then as its first President from 1964 to his death in 1978. He was the country's first indigenous head of government and played a significant role in the transformation of Kenya from a colony of the British Empire into an independent republic. Kenyatta was a controversial figure. Prior to Kenyan independence, many of its white settlers regarded him as a rebel.

5. What do you think is a *cardioplate*?

Example: Cardio is short for cardiovascular and the cardiovascular system consists of the heart, blood vessels, and blood. This might suggest that a cardio plate is some kind of device that measures, controls, or tracks humans' cardiovascular systems.

Answer: In this story, the Ticktockman uses a device called a "cardioplate" to stop the heart of any violator who has lost all the remaining time in their life through repeated violations of tardiness.

6. What did people call the TickTockman to his mask? Why?

They call him the Master Timekeeper because they are afraid of him; he has the ability to take time off your life, so no one wants to offend him.

7. What practical joke does the Harlequin play on the Timkin workers? How do the workers react?

The Harlequin releases one hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of jelly beans from a plane onto the workers who are in the middle of changing shifts. This causes the workers to tumble off in fits of laughter. They pop the "little jelly bean eggs of childish color into their mouths howled and laughed and were pelted, and broke ranks." This disruption makes the workers smile and they enjoy the random hilarity of the moment.

8. Explain the following metaphor: "*He had tapped the first domino in the line, and one after another, like chik chik chik, the others had fallen.*"

A domino effect or chain reaction is the cumulative effect produced when one event sets off a chain of similar events. Ellison defines the Harlequin's act of dropping jelly beans on the workers like setting off a line of dominoes. "It was a tiny matter, one hardly worthy of note, but in a society where the single driving force was order and unity and promptness and clocklike precision and attention to the clock, reverence of the gods of the passage of time, it was a disaster of major importance." Although this one little stunt seemed harmless, it threw the system off by seven full minutes as one tiny push made several other metaphorical dominoes fall down.

9. How does this narrative structure break the rules? Why is it symbolic?

The story opens in the middle then moves to the beginning and then the end – all without the use of flashbacks. It is symbolic because the story warns people that those who serve time

becomes slaves of the schedule. The author wants to emulate the idea that it's ok to be a non-conformist; being unconventional or nontraditional is not the same as breaking the law or committing a crime.

10. What is the author's purpose for repeating the phrase "so it goes"?

Ellison is trying to emphasize the subtle progression of how lateness turned into a crime. It starts by simply missing the deadline of a college application, for which the consequence is waiting an entire year to resubmit. It progresses to students who get good grades but are kicked out of school for tardiness. The slow criminalization of all forms of lateness eventually reaches the point where the punishment is death.

11. What is the significance of the Harlequin's attire?

The Harlequin must disguise himself so that no one knows his true identity—if his identity is revealed, he will be captured or killed by the Ticktockman. The Harlequin's goal is to make people laugh and break social norms. He wants to bring spontaneity and happiness back into a society of people that have become slaves to time. The motley suggests he is putting on a clown costume or that of a jester or joker. This reveals he is not trying to harm anyone, he is trying to entertain.

12. What does the inflection in Harlequin's voice symbolize? Explain.

The Harlequin's inflection represents a deviation from the norm. The Harlequin cannot hide his individualism and it is upsetting Alice. He cannot even hide it in his voice.

13. What is the relationship like between Alice and the Harlequin?

Alice is frustrated with the Harlequin's habitual lateness and his overall mannerisms. She is angry that he is apologetic which shows she's heard the apologies before, and she no longer sympathizes with him, she just wants him to change. Likewise, he understands how she feels but does not want to give up his alter-ego. The two most likely had a close relationship at one point since he trusted her enough to confide in her about his criminal activities, but their relationship has suffered as a result of his public pranks. She says, "Oh for God's sake, Everett, can't you stay home just one night! Must you always be out in that ghastly clown suit, running around annoying people?" Alice is not amused by the Harlequin and proves she is no longer loyal to him as she turns him in to the Ticktockman.

14. What is the Harlequin's real name? What was special about him?

Everett C. Marm is the Harlequin's real name and he is just "a man who had no sense of time." Everett wasn't considered "special" in many traditional ways, as he was just a person who was always late; however, he was a non-conformist which was special in this society as most of them were "filtered out of the system many decades ago." He is also special because of his bravery; even when face to face with the Ticktockman—who will undoubtedly destroy him—the Harlequin refuses to repent and stands by his morals and values.

15. How does the Harlequin get caught? What happens to the Harlequin as a result?

Alice turns the Harlequin in to the Ticktockman by revealing his true identity. The Ticktockman demands that the Harlequin "repent" and beg forgiveness. The Harlequin refuses and as a result, the Ticktockman sends Everett to Coventry—a place of brainwashing. Using "ancient techniques," the government successfully rewrites Everett's mind to no longer be a non-conformist. The Harlequin publicly addresses his wrongdoings on the web; on the broadcast, he

says he had been wrong, "that it was a good, a very good thing indeed, to belong, and be right on time hip-*ho* and away we go." This prevents a resistance from forming.

16. What is the irony at the end of the story?

After the Ticktockman has essentially destroyed all the progress the Harlequin made, he is told that he himself is now "three minutes late" and that the schedule is off.

17. Do you agree that you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs? Explain.

Answers will vary.

18. Is the Harlequin a hero, antihero, or neither? Explain.

Answers will vary.

Write a short summary for "'Repent, Harlequin!' said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison. You must use at least 6 of the 8 words in the box below. Underline the words from the word bank in your summary.

rebel
future

tardiness
time

dictator
conformity

schedule
technology

"Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison is a short story set in a dystopian future where tardiness is not only an inconvenience, but it is a crime punishable by death. The unwavering laws to stay on schedule are inescapable as each person has a "cardioplate" attached to them which tracks their time. This technology is controlled by a totalitarian dictator known as the Ticktockman. The Ticktockman can also remove minutes from your life as a "minor penalty" for running late. This society prioritizes both punctuality and conformity which is why the protagonist—the Harlequin—challenges the status quo. The Harlequin is a rebel who plays practical jokes on people in the community. He successfully, though marginally, throws the system off balance.

Name:

Date:

"Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison

After Reading Questions

1. What truth can we learn from dystopian fiction?

Answers will vary.

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2. What's the difference between a prankster and a criminal?

Answers will vary.

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3. Do you think comedians should be encouraged to make political statements or actions? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.

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4. Explain the aphorism "Time is money." How valuable is your time?

Answers will vary.

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Answers will vary.

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"'Repent, Harlequin!' said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison Theme Analysis

"The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailors, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purposes as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the Devil, without intending it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it."

Directions: Re-read Henry David Thoreau's excerpt of Civil Disobedience. Explain the significance of quoting Civil Disobedience in "'Repent, Harlequin!' said the Ticktock Man" by Harlan Ellison. How does the excerpt illustrate the theme present in the story? Your response should be a minimum of five sentences.

One major theme of the short story "'Repent, Harlequin!' said the Ticktock Man" by

Harlan Ellison is the danger of conformity over individualism. Ellison sends the message to readers that people who value compliance over freedom have no conscience or noble qualities.

To pledge allegiance to the structure of society instead of living by your own values makes someone a slave to the state, just as Henry David Thoreau mentions in his essay "Civil Disobedience." Ellison chose to headline the passage from "Civil Disobedience" because Thoreau argues that men who serve the state may consider themselves principled and ethical, but they are also more likely to serve the "Devil" without even knowing it. Those who are martyrs are the real heroes of society because they fight against the majority to do what is right and best

for everyone. In Ellison's short story, the Harlequin is a rebel and a martyr as he makes the dangerous but admirable choice to follow his own conscience, no matter the consequences. For example, one night Alice begs him to stay home, but he is compelled to continue disrupting the schedule even if it risks losing his relationship with Alice. In the story, the Harlequin is eventually destroyed, yet he did manage to throw the Ticktock man off by three minutes. Echoing the words of Thoreau, "if you make only a little change, then it seems to be worthwhile." While the Harlequin has been vanquished, his effect is nevertheless felt in the ripples in time he has left

behind.