

SYNOPSIS

While collecting material for his book *The Day the World Ended*, about the bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, John, a hard-drinking, heavy-smoking, former Christian who calls himself Jonah, journeys to the Republic of San Lorenzo, a small island in the Caribbean. As a follower of the Bokonon faith, John interprets the events and themes of his experience in terms of a profound religious experience which was ordained by supernatural forces. He focuses on the family of Dr. Felix Hoenikker, one of the fathers of the atomic bomb. Studied in retrospect through his family's adult years, Hoenikker's life and career begin to take shape in the abstract, allowing John to moralize on technology issuing from Hoenikker's lab, especially the hardening agent, ice-nine, which destroys the world.

A chance reading of *The Delta Upsilon Quarterly* puts John in touch with Newton "Newt" Hoenikker, a fraternity brother who writes that his sister Angela, the discontented wife of Harrison C. Conners of Indianapolis, can supply details about their father. Newt, a midget and failed pre-med student, recalls that Hoenikker, a widower since 1939, sat in his study in Ilium, New York, playing with a cat's cradle, a string game, as a diversion from his work on the Manhattan Project, from which evolved the atomic bomb. Newt recalls that at age six, he was alarmed to see his intellectual father play a game.

John discerns that the Hoenikkers are a loveless clan. As a family, Newt, his brother Frank, aged twelve, and Hoenikker looked to Angela, then aged twenty-two, for mothering and structure in an otherwise unstructured life. Hoenikker was so free-formed in his thinking that he abandoned his work on atomic power and began studying turtles. Newt sends a answering letter to John announcing plans to marry Zinka, a forty-two-year-old Ukrainian midget and dancer with the Borzoi Dance Company.

A year later at Christmas, John searches Ilium in vain for Hoenikkers and questions Dr. Asa Breed, Hoenikker's supervisor at the Research Laboratory of the General Forge and Foundry Company, who tells about the wreck which damaged Emily Hoenikker's pelvis and caused her to die giving birth to Newt. Amid pre-holiday celebrations at the lab, John picks up bits of data from Naomi Faust and Francine Pefko, then learns from Breed the most significant achievement in Hoenikker's career—the crystallization of ethylene diamine tartrate, the seed of which can cause liquids as large as a lake or swamp to solidify. According to Breed, the substance would end the world, but Hoenikker, he insists, died without synthesizing it. John delves further into Hoenikker's past and discovers that the scientist did create ice-nine, the deadly solidifier, on Christmas Eve, shortly before his death. The three Hoenikker children discovered his corpse, disposed of it, and divided the crystals among themselves.

A side trip takes John from the Hoenikker burial plot by cab to a monument showroom. By coincidence, the carver is Marvin Breed, Asa's brother, who explains that the phallic symbol marking Emily's grave was purchased by the children, not her husband Felix. Marvin bitterly adds that Felix may have won a Nobel Prize, yet treated his wife with indifference. Marvin also accounts for Frank's disappearance that same Christmas, when he left Jack's Hobby Shop and entered a stranger's car. John learns from a special supplement to the New York *Sunday Times* that Frank lives in San Lorenzo, ruled by a dictator named Miguel "Papa" Monzano, and serves as minister of science.

John is assigned by a magazine to do a story on the San Lorenzo hospital, the House of Hope and Mercy in the Jungle, run by Julian Castle. Aboard the plane to the Caribbean, John meets Horlick Minton, the American ambassador to San Lorenzo, his wife Claire, and Lowe and Hazel Crosby, who hope to move Lowe's bicycle factory to the island. John learns from Minton that Frank lost his citizenship as a result of his allegiance to Monzano's government. Minton gives John a copy of *San Lorenzo: The Land, the History, the People*, a book by Philip Castle, owner of the island's only hotel, which details the emergence of Lionel Boyd Johnson, a religious visionary born in Tobago in 1891. A survivor of World War I, Johnson joined with voyager Remington Rumfoord, IV, who died off Bombay, and took passage aboard the *Lady's Slipper II* along with Earl McCabe, a Marine deserter. Johnson and McCabe wrecked off San Lorenzo.

Hazel interrupts John's reading to point out Newt and Angela, who are passengers on the plane. They tell John how Hoenikker died at his Cape Cod cottage and how Angela married his assistant, Harrison Conners, two weeks later. John returns to his reading and learns that Mona Aamons, a fetching cover girl, was the daughter of Nestor Aamons, the architect who built Castle's hospital. John also discovers that Johnson designed a new religion, named Bokononism after the island pronunciation of Johnson's name.

After landing in Bolivar, the port city of the island, John spies a sign that threatens death by the hook to anyone practicing Bokononism. A presentation at the airport features Mona on the xylophone and Papa Monzano arriving by limousine. The aged dictator, guarded by Frank, greets the ambassador and looks forward to the next day, the Day of the Hundred Martyrs to Democracy celebration. In obvious pain, Papa collapses, names Frank as his successor, and is taken away by ambulance.

At the hotel, John, the only guest, meets an American mosaicist who turns out to be Philip Castle, the hotel owner. John takes a cab to Frank's house on Mount McCabe and observes Newt painting the likeness of a cat's cradle. Castle tosses the painting into the abyss below. Angela plays the

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clarinet. Frank keeps a vigil by Papa's bedside, where the old man is treated for cancer by a former S. S. physician, Dr. Schlichter von Koenigswald.

Frank surprises John by asking him to accept a hundred-thousand dollar-a-year job as San Lorenzo's president and to marry Mona, who comes with the post. John accepts and goes to the castle to receive Papa's blessing. Lying in a gilded lifeboat, the old man agrees to the appointment and asks for Bokonon so that he can kill him. Papa requests that Frank and John teach the islanders science.

The Mintons, Crosbys, Castle, and the Hoenikkers assemble for the holiday, at which John plans to make his formal acceptance. John is struck by food poisoning from an albatross canapé and enters Papa's suite just as Dr. Koenigswald discovers that the dictator has committed suicide by touching to his lips to a bit of ice-nine, which he kept in a container about his neck. The doctor touches the crystal and also freezes into a contorted statue.

Frank, who saw his dog die with the same form of instant rigor mortis, proposes a cleanup of the deadly crystal, using blowtorches, dustpans, and buckets. As an air show of the island's six planes celebrates the holiday, one of the planes crashes and causes a rock slide. The resulting collapse of the castle tips Papa's corpse and ice-nine into the sea and crystallizes it. Mona and John hide in Papa's bomb shelter as catastrophe destroys the world.

On the seventh day, John peers out at a frozen world and finds a crater filled with dead islanders. Mona deliberately touches an ice-nine crystal and dies. The Crosbys and Newt, the only other survivors, take John to Frank's cave under the waterfall. Six months later, his work complete, John spies Bokonon sitting on a rock. The old man hands him a piece of paper containing the last sentence of *The Books of Bokonon*, which describes how Bokonon would kill himself while in the act of spiting God.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., (November 11, 1922-) has assembled from myriad experiences the nuclei of books that can best be described as different. Classed as a science fiction writer after a lengthy season of neglect by critics, he ranks among the world's first-rate fantasists and futurists. Vonnegut, the son of an architect, husband of a photographer, and father to three natural and three adopted children, is a native of Indianapolis and edited the Shortridge High School newspaper, the *Echo*. A student of biochemistry, he graduated from Cornell in 1947 and attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology and the University of Chicago, from which he obtained an M. A. in anthropology in 1971.

A decorated infantry draftee and survivor of the bombing of Dresden, Germany, in World War II, Vonnegut began his writing career writing columns for the *Cornell Sun* in graduate school and as a police reporter for the Chicago City News Bureau in 1947. He worked in public relations for General Electric in Schenectady, New York, from 1947 to 1950 before launching a free-lance career with his first novel, *Player Piano*. His published works include impressionistic novels, short stories, stage plays, screenplays, and essays. The most acclaimed, *Slaughterhouse Five*, received satisfactory reviews in its film version, released by Universal Studios in 1972.

CRITIC'S CORNER

Because Vonnegut specializes in short sentences, coined words, digressions, tragicomic satire, and general rebellion against the conventions of novel-writing, it is not surprising that he maintains a following of young readers. His comment to *Science Fiction* magazine expresses his own revolt against the mechanized world: "In the Golden Age of Magazines, which wasn't so long ago, inexcusable trash was in such great demand that it led to the invention of the electric typewriter, and incidentally financed my escape from Schenectady. Happy days!" His emphasis on exuberant incoherence and the sinister forces of a mechanized world marks him as a humanist, an explorer of the world's oldest questions. Although his works passed into obscurity early in his career, they resurfaced as a result of new interest in post-war trauma in the 1960s.

Receiving his first critical notoriety in 1963, Vonnegut still earns kudos for his mix of sci-fi, humor, fantasy, satire, and humanism. Despite his following, Leslie Fiedler comments that Vonnegut suffered the permanent mark of invisibility for the first thirteen years of his career. He reached the status of "cult figure" with the publication of *Cat's Cradle* and achieved wholeness in *Slaughterhouse Five*, which is based on Vonnegut's survival of the firebombing of Dresden, Germany, on February 13, 1945. The work was such an awakening to the post-World War II generation that he metamorphosed into a national hero in the Soviet Union after *Cat's Cradle* was translated into Russian in 1970.

Vonnegut has declared that he is through with looking back. In the period of depression that followed *Slaughterhouse Five*, he turned to the healing safety of teaching, first at Hopefield School and then at the University of Iowa Writers Workshop and Harvard University. In 1973 he served as distinguished professor at City College of the City University of New York. His awards include a Guggenheim fellowship in 1967, which financed his return to Dresden; a National Institute of Arts and Letters grant in 1970; and an honorary degree from Hobart and William Smith Colleges in 1974. But perhaps even greater than these awards are the many modern fiction masters who honor Vonnegut, notably Graham Greene and Michael Crichton.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the role of technology in warfare and ecological destruction
2. To note the relationship between setting and events
3. To evaluate the need for friendship, nurturance, comfort, acceptance, and support
4. To justify the stereotype of the mad scientist
5. To account for the author's insistence on coincidence as a plot determinant
6. To discuss the author's use of ambiguity, cynicism, irony, black humor, and satire
7. To comment on the importance of events of World War II to the novel's development
8. To analyze the value of short chapters and humorous, prophetic chapter headings
9. To characterize the frequent bits of doggerel which dot the text

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explain John's interest in Dr. Felix Hoenikker
2. To assess the existence of good and evil on San Lorenzo

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3. To discuss the author's focus on John's interest in Bokononism
4. To account for John's journey to San Lorenzo
5. To describe stereotyping in the depiction of island life
6. To characterize Papa's and Frank's homes, workplaces, and hiding places
7. To predict John's success in recovering from world cataclysm
8. To explain the purpose of dramatic scenes, such as John's discussion with the mosaicist, tainted food at the reception, Papa's death in the gilded boat, the shop owner's memories of Frank's miniature village, the monument maker's leftover work, and the Hoenikker children's confrontation with their dead father and dead dog
9. To evaluate religious elements, particularly citations which reflect an outlook on life and its purpose

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Chapter and page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. When the Manhattan Project came along, the bomb project, Father wouldn't leave Ilium to work on it. (Chapter 5, p. 16)
For instance, do you know the story about Father on the day they first tested a bomb out at Alamogordo? (Chapter 6, p. 21)
(The Manhattan Project, the code name designating a combined effort to manufacture an atomic bomb, drew on physicists, engineers, and mathematicians fleeing eastern Europe after 1938 and in possession of top technology in manipulation of nuclear fission. Headed by Robert Oppenheimer, a specialist in weaponry, the group occupied a lab in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and a test site in Los Alamos, New Mexico.
The team constructed a projector which fired pieces of uranium-235 at each other to set off the necessary chain reaction. In the meantime in Chicago, Enrico Fermi, Italian Nobel Prize winner in physics, evolved a refined reaction in 1942 and helped end World War II by inventing a more manageable bomb. His device, composed of plutonium discharged by explosives, was tested on July 16, 1945, in Alamogordo, New Mexico, creating the world's first atomic blast.)
2. "Dynamite money," I marveled, thinking of the violence of dynamite and the absolute repose of a tombstone and a summer house. (Chapter 32, p. 51)
(Alfred Bernhard Nobel, a Swedish chemist and industrialist who established a trust fund to pay annual awards for creativity in chemistry, literature, peace, physics, and physiology or medicine, earned his fortune from the invention of dynamite. In 1862, he opened a nitroglycerin factory outside Stockholm, where his brother Emil and four other workers were killed in a laboratory explosion in 1864. To create a safer product, Nobel combined the charge with diatomaceous earth, which reduces the instability of the liquid by absorbing it into an inactive base. Later creations—blasting gel and ballistite—brought Nobel greater success and added to the fortune which undergirds the annual prize.)
3. And then, one day, one Sunday, I found out where the fugitive from justice, the model-maker, the Great God Jehovah and Beelzebub of bugs in Mason jars was—where Franklin Hoenikker could be found. (Chapter 27, pp. 59-60)
(Vonnegut alludes to the ambiguous role of Major Frank in the novel by comparing him to both God and Satan—also known as Beelzebub or the Lord of the Flies—while denigrating Frank's morality by mentioning insects in jars and his status as outlaw. This foreshadowing prepares the reader for the satire that follows the speaker's arrival on the Caribbean island of San Lorenzo.)
4. Was this Fata Morgana—the cruel deception of a mirage? (Chapter 39, p. 62)
(Fata Morgana, the Italian name for the Arthurian sorceress Morgan le Fay, names an optical illusion or mirage which causes the spikes of the distant horizon to resemble glittering battlements, like a fairyland castle. The phenomenon, which results when chill air close to water becomes saturated with water vapor and refracts rainbow images into a single perception of a dazzling structure rising from the mist, is used in literature as a symbol of baseless allure.)
5. Frank, having no passport, was put in jail in the capital city of Bolivar. (Chapter 39, p. 63)
(The capital and port city of San Lorenzo is named for Simon Bolivar, the Latin American crusader who in the first quarter of the nineteenth century swept away Spanish colonialism by liberating Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. Having survived serious setbacks which caused him to seek refuge in Haiti and Jamaica, he earned renown as intellectual, idealist, and rebel. His optimism concerning the people's right to power undergirded a significant amount of correspondence, which details how freedom and government can and should reflect human rights to liberty.)
6. It was to be about Julian Castle, an American sugar millionaire who had, at the age of forty, followed the example of Dr. Albert Schweitzer by founding a free hospital in a jungle, by devoting his life to miserable folk of another race. (Chapter 40, p. 63)
(In 1913, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, prodigy church musician, philosopher, theologian, and physician, abandoned a promising career for a less lucrative post as missionary to Congo natives in French Equatorial Africa. On the banks of the Ogowe River in Gabon, he established a clinic at Lambarene, which survived two world wars and grew into a crucial battlefield against native disease, trauma, malnutrition, ignorance, and poverty. For his philanthropy, in 1952 Schweitzer received a Nobel Peace Prize.)
7. In his selfish days he had been as familiar to tabloid readers as Tommy Manville, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Barbara Hutton. His fame had rested on lechery, alcoholism, reckless driving, and draft evasion. He had had a dazzling talent for spending millions without increasing mankind's stores of anything but chagrin. (Chapter 40, p. 63)
(Tabloid journalism utilizes condensed, highly romanticized or overstated reportage known as yellow journalism and employs dramatic photos to showcase titillating summaries of events in the lives of sports figures, gangsters, seedy politicians, and the vulgar rich. Manville was a

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notorious playboy and womanizer. Both Hitler and Mussolini were responsible for the spread of fascism in Europe previous to World War II. Barbara Hutton was the spoiled Woolworth heiress known for frequenting in-crowd hang-outs.)

8. The words were a paraphrase of the suggestion by Jesus: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." (Chapter 46, p. 73) (In Matthew 22:21, Christ, who was bandying words with pettifogging Pharisees, refused to be cornered in a discussion of the right of the Roman emperor to tax Palestinian provinces. As a separation of theological matters from fiscal concerns, Christ emphasized that Caesar's domains and God's domains were separate entities.)
9. He was in the S. S. for fourteen years. (Chapter 83, p. 127) (Dr. Schlichter von Koenigswald, a caricature of the terrifying Dr. Josef Mengele, the monster who selected people from concentration camps for transportation to death camps and extermination in gas ovens, serves a kind of penance on San Lorenzo. The irony of Koenigswald's devotion to saving lives at the House of Hope and Mercy is that he would have to work until the year 3010 to make up for the carnage he created by the evil application of technology to Hitler's "final solution.")
10. The wreath was spanned by a cream-colored silk ribbon on which was printed, "PRO PATRIA." (Chapter 114, p. 170) (Horace, the odist of the late Roman republic, is famous for writing, "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" or "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country." A challenge to the notion that dying for patriotic causes is noble follows the citation in lines from Edgar Lee Masters's Spoon River Anthology. The speaker, a deceased Civil War soldier, wishes that he had remained in rural obscurity than to have lost his life in combat. He concludes that he can't even translate the phrase "Pro Patria.")

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages from the novel.

Questions 1 - 5 Literal Level

1. Why does John journey to San Lorenzo?
(While researching the life and achievements of Dr. Felix Hoenikker, one of the creators of the atomic bomb, as an adjunct to his book on the end of the world, John interviews the supervisor and secretaries at General Forge and Foundry and learns details of Hoenikker's life. The search for data leads John to look for the scientist's children, who no longer live in Ilium, New York. A chance reading of a newspaper article sends John in search of Philip Castle, an American philanthropist who founded the House of Hope and Mercy in the San Lorenzo jungle. John also locates Franklin, who has taken up residence on San Lorenzo, a small Caribbean island, where he serves "Papa" Monzano as Minister of Science and Progress. On the plane to the Caribbean, John also meets Franklin's married sister Angela and her dwarf brother Newt, who are on their way to Bolivar.)
2. Why is ice-nine a significant discovery?
(Dr. Felix Hoenikker, who met a Marine general in the

cafeteria of General Forge and Foundry, took one of his frequent digressions from work on the atomic bomb to study the problem of mud, which hampered the military's advance over various types of watery terrain. Hoenikker synthesized a crystalline seed of ethylene diamine tartrate, a lethal blue-white substance with a melting point of 114.4 degrees Fahrenheit. The discovery is capable of making "muck, marsh, swamp, creeks, pools, quicksand, and mire as solid as [a] desk." As Asa Breed describes ice-nine, "One Marine could carry more than enough of the stuff to free an armored division bogged down in the everglades." However, the substance carries a side effect of endangering human life because, like a nuclear chain reaction, the crystallizing process cannot be contained.)

3. Describe Felix as husband, father, and scientist.
(Dr. Felix Hoenikker, an amoral research scientist for General Forge and Foundry's laboratory, supplanted Marvin Breed as Emily's boy friend and charmed her into marriage. They produced two sons and a daughter. According to Marvin, Felix was a passionless husband who kept so great a distance between himself and his family that he caused serious dysfunction in his home. When Felix tried to play with Newt, he terrified the six-year-old, who was alarmed at the sight of his father holding out a cat's cradle. Angela, who is sixteen years older than Newt, replaces Emily as head of household after her death when Newt was born. A one-dimensional teen, Angela had no friends and took satisfaction in playing the clarinet in the Ilium High School band.

Franklin, the older son, who is six years older than Newt, withdrew into his own cocoon, held micro-gladiatorial events between insects in a Mason jar, worked at the hobby shop, and carried on an affair with the shopkeeper's wife as an antidote to his loveless childhood. In the basement of the hobby shop, Frank created a miniature village similar to a Kansas town by constructing houses and landscapes to scale. After Felix's death, Frank helped Newt and Angela divide the ice-nine and destroy the evidence of two deaths, their father's and the dog's. The children deck the mother's grave with a grotesque phallic monument and the word "mother." On their father's tomb they place a cold marble cube inscribed with "father," a suitable symbol for so cold and self-absorbed a father. Frank enters a stranger's car and disappears from Ilium.

As an adult, Frank immerses himself in Papa Monzano's island dictatorship while Newt, like a captive freak, remains in his own microcosm and paints a foreboding black canvas featuring a cat's cradle. When Frank discovers Papa's suicide, he remains detached and unmoved, proposes applying a blowtorch to the frozen remains, and hands over rule to John. Like the elder Hoenikker, Frank, who withdraws into a meaningless study of a glassed-in ant farm, distances himself from human involvements and maintains the godless objectivity of the scientist.)

4. What terms delineate Bokomonism?
(Vonnegut's creation of a set of religious jargon lampoons the vocabularies that grow up around social, religious, educational, and psychological philosophies. These are the key terms:
boko-maru—a two-person ritual requiring the rubbing together of the soles of the feet. Boko-maru is also used as

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last rites.

borasisi—the sun

calypso—a theological statement in verse form; a psalm

duffle—a coalition of human destinies

duprass—a duo performing God's will

foma—minor lies; misleading statements

granfalloon—a false karass

granfalloonery—falseness; deception

kan-kan—the instrument by which God's will is carried out

karass—a team who performs God's will

pabu—the moon

saroon—to acquiesce or yield

sinooka—a strand of one person's life which touches the strand belonging to someone else

sin-wat—a person who demands all of someone else's love

stuppa—a fogbound child

vin-dit—a movement toward Bokononism

wampeter—the focus of a karass

wrang-wrang—a detractor who violates a karass)

5. What real and fictional characters are the targets of the San Lorenzan Air Force?

(At the celebration of the Day of a Hundred Martyrs to Democracy, guests assemble on Papa Monzano's castle balcony to observe the air show, which will pit six island planes against cardboard cutouts representing individuals. As the guests sip acetone cocktails and nibble albatross canapés, they identify the likeness of Dr. Vox Humana, a Christian clergyman on San Lorenzo. The remaining eight caricatures are historical figures:

1. Joe Stalin, Russian dictator of the post-World War II era who defied human rights by placing dissenters in gulags or repressive prison camps.
2. Fidel Castro, the puppet dictator of Cuba who transferred Russian technology and Communism to the Western hemisphere and who menaced the southeastern shores of the United States with high-tech weaponry during the Cuban missile crisis.
3. Hitler, the German dictator who in the last half of the 1930s coalesced a political machine which menaced eastern European countries, victimized Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, retardates, and others who did not fit into Hitler's master race, and overran neighboring borders with his Wehrmacht or war machine.
4. Mussolini, the Italian dictator who, with the aid of his Red Shirts, spread a form of fascism similar to the German variety.
5. some old jap, an allusion to the Japanese command which led the attack on Pearl Harbor and thus brought the United States into World War II
6. Karl Marx, one of the founders of Communism and an author of the Communist Manifesto
7. old Kaiser Bill, the German warmonger who fomented World War I
8. old Mao, the Communist leader who ended the Japanese war with China and instituted Communist rule on mainland China.)

Questions 6 - 8 Interpretive Level

6. How does coincidence affect the plot?
(John undergoes a series of disconnected adventures

which lead him toward a fuller knowledge of Dr. Hoenikker's role in the world's end. While taking a taxi to the Hoenikker burial plot, John accompanies the driver on an errand to a monument shop. The shop owner, Marvin Breed, is the brother of Asa Breed, supervisor of General Forge and Foundry, where Hoenikker was working when he discovered ice-nine. Marvin supplies details from the Hoenikkers' unhappy marriage.

Another chance discovery is the copy of the New York Sunday Times, which contains an article about San Lorenzo, information about Frank, and a picture of Mona, whom John falls in love with. On his flight to San Lorenzo to meet Frank, John meets the other two Hoenikkers, Angela and Newt. At the critical moment when one of the six planes crashes at the air show, John is suffering a bout of nausea from spoiled albatross canapés. Because he is standing on a parapet on the land side of the castle, he observes the demise of Papa and the Crosbys but remains unharmed.)

7. Discuss the style of Cat's Cradle.

(Vonnegut, who is known for violating the conventions of fiction and creating his own style of expression, employs an impressionistic blend of language and format. He divides the work into 127 unusually short chapters with lengthy, meaningful headings which allow him to comment on the flow of the plot. For example, he makes an overt connection between Julian Castle's altruism and the philanthropic work of Dr. Albert Schweitzer with the heading for Chapter 75. A caption—"Dr. Schlichter von Koenigswald Approaches the Break-even Point"—reflects an S.S. physician's attempt to save enough lives to atone for killing so many victims at Auschwitz.

To sharpen the religious satire, Vonnegut amalgamates legend, narrative, aphorism, psalm, parody, and parable, with frequent side comments from the speaker concerning the Bokononist interpretation of events. An adjunct to this concoction of verbal texture is the use of symbolic character names, particularly Castle for the philanthropist, Faust for the secretary at the laboratory, Nestor for the aged architect, and Angela for Hoenikker's daughter and wife replacement. Richly salted among details are moments of black humor, especially the final scene in which Bokonon proposes to commit suicide while lying on his back razzing God.)

8. Why does the work require a speaker?

(Vonnegut's use of John as a central intelligence is a cohesive element which allows the author leeway in commenting on the bizarre characters and unexpected plot turns which lead to the end of the world. Since the speaker is seeking information on the topic and ostensibly remains objective about his findings, he symbolizes the writer's role in reminding the world of its faults and warning that disaster may result from a departure from morality and humanism. Like Ishmael, the survivor who opens Herman Melville's Moby Dick, John speaks from the existential point of view—alone at the end of the world as the witness to mass death. Like a reclusive Jeremiah, John, twice divorced and bereft of cat and avocado plant, has known loss in his personal life, yet contemplates destruction on a vast scale at the collapse of the San Lorenzan dictatorship.

In a setting where walls are solid or blanked out with blue-green glass and where windows open only to the sea,

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John serves as reliable eyes as he takes the lone island taxi about the island and views the squalor of a land where prosperity is perverted by an intense duel between evil lurking in the jungle and totalitarianism installed in the castle. Between the jungle and the castle, the natives exist like scenery, out of sight and mind. John proposes the dissolution of retribution to these innocents by conceiving a plan to dismantle the hook, the island's Byzantine punishment.

The destruction of San Lorenzo and the earth beyond its shores occurs as John suffers a moment of human malady, a queasy stomach beset by albatross, which is the bird in Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner that symbolizes guilt. By turning aside from festivities celebrating the hundred martyrs who died in World War II, John survives to return to a womb-like bomb shelter and re-emerge seven days later. Like Adam and Eve surveying Eden, John and Mona ascend the ladder to witness paradise destroyed. The conclusion of the framework appears in Chapter 1, where John notes that, like Jonah, he has been compelled "to be certain places at certain times" and now represents the Bokononist faith, a bittersweet pack of lies which sustains him through tragedy.)

Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. Explain why technology is a major issue in science fiction. (Vonnegut, like other fantastists and futurists, approaches questions of human worth from the humanistic point of view. Through his characters, he presses key questions: What is God? What is love? What is sin? The disinterest evident in greedy, dehumanized characters provides John, the writer, with an answer to why the world ended the day the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima. Because technology perverts pure science, misapplies research to militaristic problems, and supplants religion and ethics with amorality, the world comes to a quick halt, frozen into perpetual winter, symbolic of the amoral, passionless soul.
- A significant irony to the plot is Felix Hoenikker's lack of direction. Incapable of remaining focused on the atomic bomb project, he plays with toys and stops to study turtles, rubber bands, and other peripheral subjects which distract his attention from his laboratory work. Unintentionally, Felix creates a substance to help the military and simultaneously sets up the world's end by failing to assess the effect on planet Earth of ice-nine, his "last batch of brownies" and the solidifier of liquids. As the laboratory secretaries foreshadow in their twisted Christmas carols, Hoenikker's diligence resulted in "the hopes and fears of all the years," which loom over humanity's last days on Earth.)
10. How does Vonnegut employ rhetorical devices? (Much of Vonnegut's success at satire depends on his utilization of rhetorical language. For example:
- biblical allusion: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's."
 - motto: **MAKE RELIGION LIVE!**
 - dialogue: "How's the writing going?" Hazel asked me.
"Fine, Mom, just fine."
"When you going to show us some of it?"
"When it's ready, Mom, when it's ready."
 - parallel construction: *If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity; and I would climb to*

the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes statues of men; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who.

- rhetorical question: *Why should I bother with made-up games when there are so many real ones going on?*
- historical allusion: *Nobel Prize money bought it.*
- symbolism: *So good and evil had to remain separate; good in the jungle, and evil in the palace.*
- aphorism: *It is never a mistake to say good-bye.*
- dialect: *... if you tell, we'll die on the hy-u-o-ook-kuh!*
- pun: *... chips, in a manner of speaking, off the old block.*
- parody: *Call me Jonah.*
- humor: *His memorial—as specified in his will, I later discovered—was a marble cube forty centimeters on each side. "FATHER," it said.*
- verse: *And I made up lies
So that they all fit nice,
And I made this sad world
A par-a-dise.*
- legend: *... the golden boat will sail again when the end of the world is near.*
- repetition: *What memories for mud to have! What memories for mud to have!*

Questions 11-13 Creative Level

- Compose a conversation with a critic in which you discuss your response to *Cat's Cradle*. Be specific about your likes and dislikes in fantasy literature. Suggest books and videos about other fantastic characters and satires.
- List and characterize people who knew Felix. Explain his relationship with each.
- Compose an oral report on the world dictators whose pictures the six San Lorenzo pilots use for targets. Using drawings, slides, or other graphic displays, point out how each influenced the world before, during, and after World War II.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Math

- Make a historical time line of events mentioned in the book, such as Dr. Schweitzer's jungle hospital, the rise to power of Hitler and Mussolini, the Manhattan Project, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the atomic test at Alamogorda, and the bombing of Hiroshima.
- Collect lines from the novel which disclose passage of time and the relative ages of the characters. For example, note that Frank is six years older than Newt and Angela ten years older than Frank.

Economics and Social Studies

- Compose an oral presentation detailing the interrelation of economics, politics, and religion in San Lorenzo.
- Draw or create on a computer a map on which you pinpoint locations of pertinent scenes, particularly Ilium, Indianapolis, Bolivar, the airport, Mount McCabe, the crater, the cave under the waterfall, and Philip Castle's hotel.
- Explain why Felix Hoenikker's work appears underpaid and undervalued in terms of its worth to science.

CAT'S CRADLE

Psychology

1. Discuss reasons for the multiple suicides.
2. Make a short oral presentation on the doctor/patient relationship as demonstrated by Dr. Koenigswald and Papa Monzano.
3. Explain why the tension between political and theological dogma keeps islanders content amid squalor.

Cinema

1. Make a list of dramatic scenes from the novel which would require intense use of lighting, costume, makeup, music, props, and stunts, particularly the placement of the phallic symbol over Emily's tomb, the destruction of the painting of the cat's cradle, Angela's clarinet solo, Mona's performance on the xylophone, Papa's arrival at the airport, Papa's suicide, the cleanup of Papa's room, the holiday air show, the collapse of Papa's tower, and John's first venture out of the bomb shelter.
2. Contrast the film version of *Slaughterhouse Five* with themes and episodes in *Cat's Cradle*. Note the author's attitude toward war and technology.

Science

1. Discuss the discovery and use of atomic power during the twentieth century.
2. Identify the scientists who participated in the Manhattan Project and explain the roles of each.
3. Explain the process by which a seed forms colonies of crystals. Experiment with simple types of crystallization, such as the making of rock sugar suckers.

Language Arts

1. Create an alphabetized glossary of Bokonon terminology. Define each term.
2. Using examples from the novel, make an extended definition of Bokononism. Include contrasts to other religions.
3. Make a list of sense images under the headings of sound, touch, sight, smell, and taste. For example, "We came to the castle. It was low and black and cruel" and "In his playful way, and all his ways were playful, Felix suggested that there might be a single grain of something—even a microscopic grain—that could make infinite expanses of muck, marsh, swamp, creeks, pools, quicksand, and mire as solid as this desk."

Art

1. Use a computer to create memorials to Papa Monzano, the Hoenikkers, the researchers who created the atomic bomb, Bokonon, Rumfoort, Dr. Castle, Mona, and Ambassador Crosby. Select an appropriate symbol to top Mount McCabe.
2. Join with a group to design a comfortable bomb shelter for two. Indicate the storage of food, oxygen, water, bedding, first aid supplies, short-wave radio, and other necessities. List personal effects which would make your tenure more pleasant, such as musical instruments, books, tapes, and art supplies.

Health

1. List warning signs that Papa is not in full control of himself or the island as a result of cancer.

2. Name types of crystals which benefit health, such as sodium chloride.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Compose a theme in which you compare Kurt Vonnegut's dystopia to the social situations in Ayn Rand's *Anthem*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Karel Capek's *R. U. R.*, Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon*, Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*, George Orwell's *1984*, and J. R. R. Tolkien's Ring Trilogy.
2. Lead a discussion comparing the fictional cataclysm in *Cat's Cradle* with John Hersey's observations in *Hiroshima*. Contrast the behavior of fictional and real characters and their displays of fear, altruism, compassion, and selfishness.
3. Relate the following literary terms to *Cat's Cradle*: caricature, biblical allusion, literary foils, dialect, poetic justice, denouement, dramatic irony, symbol, simile, grotesque, flat and round characters, stereotyping, gothic elements, romantic conventions, parody, and legend.
4. Contrast Mona and Angela as central female figures. Note the differences in their family backgrounds, optimism, courtesy, authority, and sexuality. Explain why Mona at first rejects John.
5. Write a minor character's diary entry on significant days, particularly Miss Faust before the Christmas party, Emily shortly before Newt's birth, Koenigswald's observations of Papa's health, the pilots' preparations for the air show, and the Crosbys' expectations of San Lorenzo.
6. Compose John's acceptance speech. Comment on the blessing which Papa conferred on his successor and note plans for the destruction of the hook and for a state marriage to Mona.
7. Write a chapter describing John's final days on San Lorenzo. Select an appropriate death for him. Explain what happens to his book.
8. Create a musical background to accompany the Day of the Hundred Martyrs' air show and celebration. Supply posters advertising the event, especially the food.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List major and minor characters who die during the course of the novel and the causes of their deaths.
2. Make a list of scenes from the novel which express contrasting attitudes toward romance, loyalty, sexuality, religion, friendship, self-esteem, greed, science, progress, and philanthropy. Next to each, indicate what you think is the author's personal philosophy.
3. Compose a brief definition of totalitarianism as it applies to San Lorenzo.
4. List examples of neglect and lack of love in the five Hoenikkers.

VONNEGUT'S PUBLISHED WORKS

Player Piano (1952)
The Sirens of Titan (1959)
Canary in a Cathouse (1961)
Mother Night (1962)
Cat's Cradle (1963)
God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965)

CAT'S CRADLE

Welcome to the Monkey House (1968)
Slaughterhouse Five (1969)
Happy Birthday, Wanda June (1970)
Between Time and Timbuktu (1973)
Breakfast of Champions (1973)
Wampeters, Foma and Granfaloon: Opinions (1974)
Slapstick, or Lonesome No More (1976)
Jailbird (1979)
Palm Sunday (1981)
Deadeye Dick (1982)
Galapagos (1986)
Bluebeard (1988)
Hocus Pocus (1990)
Fates Worse Than Death: An Autobiographical Collage of the 1980s (1991)
Who Am I This Time? (1991)

RELATED READING

Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*
Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*
Karel Capek's *R. U. R.*
Arthur Clark's *2001*
Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon*
Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*
Ursula LeGuin's *Earthsea Trilogy*
George Orwell's *1984*
Ayn Rand's *Anthem*
Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*
Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*
J. R. R. Tolkien's *Ring Trilogy*.

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CAT'S CRADLE

VOCABULARY TEST

Using words from the list that follows, complete each sentence below with replacements for the underlined words. You will have answers left over when you finish.

absurdity	demoniacal	gnashing	mission	platinum	spry
anecdotal	dioxide	heresy	nihilism	privileges	stabilized
bristly	droll	implications	nihilist	queasy	subsequent
cantilevered	excrement	inclined	nobility	ribald	tormentor
convoy	expedition	individualistic	nuclear	rift	twanging
crescent	feudalism	injustice	parable	spaniel	ulterior
debauch	flaccidly	machinations	pessimistic	speculations	zeal

During my trip to Ilium and to points beyond—a two-week journey (1) _____ bridging Christmas—I let a poor poet named Sherman Krebs have my New York City apartment free. My second wife had left me on the grounds that I was too dismal (2) _____ for an optimist too live with.

Krebs was a bearded man, a silvery (3) _____ blond Jesus with fawning (4) _____ eyes. He was no close friend of mine. I had met him at a cocktail party where he presented himself as National Chairman of Poets and Painters for Immediate fissionable (5) _____ War. He begged for shelter, not necessarily bomb proof, and it happened that I had some.

When I returned to my apartment, still vibrating (6) _____ with the puzzling spiritual hints (7) _____ of the unclaimed stone angel in Ilium, I found my apartment wrecked by a nihilistic orgy (8) _____. Krebs was gone; but, before leaving, he had run up three-hundred-dollars' worth of long-distance calls, set my couch on fire in five places, killed my cat and my avocado tree, and torn the door off the medicine cabinet.

He wrote [a] poem, in what proved to be feces (9) _____, on the yellow linoleum floor of my kitchen . . . I have not seen Krebs since. Nonetheless, I sense that he was my *karass*. If he was, he served it as a *wrang-wrang*. A *wrang-wrang*, according to Bokonon, is a person who steers people away from a line of surmise (10) _____ by reducing that line, with the example of the *wrang-wrang*'s own life, to an inanity (11) _____.

I might have been vaguely biased (12) _____ to dismiss the stone angel as meaningless, and to go from there to the meaninglessness of all. But after I saw what Krebs had done, in particular what he had done to my sweet cat, pessimism (13) _____ was not for me.

Somebody or something did not wish me to be a cynic (14) _____. It was Krebs's task (15) _____, whether he knew it or not, to disenchant me with that philosophy.

Well done, Mr. Krebs, well done.

CAT'S CRADLE

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Identify the characters described below.

- _____ 1. paints an obscure black canvas with the likeness of a cat's cradle.
- _____ 2. pursues the wife of the owner of Jack's Hobby Shop.
- _____ 3. relaxes from a demanding motherhood role by playing the clarinet.
- _____ 4. falls in love with Mona at first sight of her picture on a journal cover.
- _____ 5. carries ice-nine in a container around his neck.
- _____ 6. left rubber bands on his desk.
- _____ 7. was christened Lionel Boyd Johnson and sailed aboard the *Lady Slipper*.
- _____ 8. becomes ill from eating albatross meat and leaves a reception.
- _____ 9. dies while planning to destroy the world.
- _____ 10. terrified a young child by playing cat's cradle.
- _____ 11. dated Emily before Felix met her.
- _____ 12. sews strips into an American flag.
- _____ 13. was the half angel to Bokonon's half pirate.
- _____ 14. was known as Agent X-9.
- _____ 15. plans to marry San Lorenzo's next president.

Part II: Quotation identification (20 points)

Beside each quotation place the name of the speaker (a) and the person being addressed (b).

- _____ 1a. He was supposed to be our commencement speaker . . . He didn't show up.
- _____ 1b.

- _____ 2a. I think everybody would agree that these are cheerful times.
- _____ 2b.

- _____ 3a. Hello, Mom.
- _____ 3b.

- _____ 4a. My soul insists that I mourn not a man but a child.
- _____ 4b.

- _____ 5a. You scientists *think* too much.
- _____ 5b.

CAT'S CRADLE

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline an answer to complete each statement below.

1. John considers himself (the best candidate for president, a Jonah, the biographer of Felix Hoenikker, the discoverer of Bokomonism.)
2. (Angela, Nestor's daughter, Emily, the wife of the hobby shop owner) treats Felix as one of the children.
3. The (elevator operator, secretary at General Forge and Foundry, taxi driver, Marine general) barged into the cafeteria and started talking about mud.
4. Ice-nine is (a military secret, found only on the crater of Mount McCabe, harmless to touch, crystalline.)
5. Aboard the plane, John (accepts Glinka as a Hoosier Mom, reads Philip's book, courts Mona, observes a canvas toppling from Newt's cave.)
6. It is obvious that the two painters (expect Papa to die of cancer, are painting a mosaic of Mona, practice Bokomonism, are really erecting a hook outside the castle.)
7. The job of president of San Lorenzo (is not open to outsiders, involves management of the island's hotel and jungle hospital, once fell to a reclusive theologian, pays \$100,000 a year.)
8. To settle the problem of two contorted bodies, Frank proposes (a funeral pyre, using tweezers, burial in the crater, calling in the six fighter pilots.)
9. Angela complains that the foundry (cheated her father of his Nobel Prize, paid only \$45 bonus, forced Felix to study toys and turtles, delayed the Manhattan Project.)
10. Immediately after Papa tumbles from the lifeboat, (tornadoes appear, the planes bomb images of villains, the Crosbys hold hands and fall into the crack, Minton yells "American!", John and Mona retire to the rock womb.)

Part II: Identification (20 points)

Identify the speaker or source of each line below.

- _____ 1. Don't be a fool! Close this book at once!
- _____ 2. Never index your own book.
- _____ 3. He loved ten-cent stores.
- _____ 4. She said his mind was tuned to the biggest music there was, the music of the stars.
- _____ 5. We put him in the oven . . . It was the only thing to do.
- _____ 6. The time for the final sentence has come.
- _____ 7. Go home!
- _____ 8. A man who wants all of somebody's love. That's very bad.
- _____ 9. Hello, fellow anthropoids and lily pads and paddlewheels . . . Yes, yes!
- _____ 10. I think, therefore I am, therefore I am photographable.

CATS CRADLE

Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in the place name which completes each of these statements.

1. At the anteroom of Papa's suite at the _____, Dr. Vox Humana waits to attend to the dictator's spiritual needs.
2. On the _____, John spends part of the time talking to Newt, Angela, and the Crosbys.
3. During the six months in the _____ under the waterfall, John completes a book.
4. The stony corpses lie heaped in the mountaintop _____.
5. Johnson's Cris-Craft foundered on the shores of _____.
6. The capital of the island was named _____ in honor of the Latin American rebel.
7. Felix dies in a wicker chair at his cottage at _____.
8. In his youth, Frank spent long hours working at _____ and having an affair with the owner's wife.
9. While visiting the Christmas party at General Forge and Foundry, John follows Miss Faust to Dr. Hoenikker's _____.
10. John searches _____, New York, for information about the Hoenikker family.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Select two to answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how the world ends.
2. Discuss Frank's evolution from troubled teenager to island official.
3. Analyze the outlook of Bokonomism.

CAT'S CRADLE

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Test

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. expedition | 9. excrement |
| 2. pessimistic | 10. speculation |
| 3. platinum | 11. absurdity |
| 4. spaniel | 12. inclined |
| 5. Nuclear | 13. nihilism |
| 6. twanging | 14. nihilist |
| 7. implications | 15. mission |
| 8. debauch | |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Newt | 9. Papa |
| 2. Frank | 10. Hoenikker |
| 3. Angela | 11. Asa |
| 4. John | 12. Hazel |
| 5. Papa | 13. McCabe |
| 6. Hoenikker | 14. Frank |
| 7. Bokonon | 15. Mona |
| 8. John | |

Part II: Quotation Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1a. Sandra | 4a. Minton |
| 1b. John | 4b. crowd |
| 2a. Julian Castle | 5a. Francine Pefko |
| 2b. Angela | 5b. Asa Breed |
| 3a. John | |
| 3b. Hazel | |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. F |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

1. a Jonah
2. Angela
3. Marine general
4. crystalline
5. reads Philip's book
6. practice Bokononism
7. pays \$100,000 a year
8. a funeral pyre
9. paid only \$45 bonus
10. tornadoes appear

Part II: Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. <i>The Book of Bokonon</i> | 6. Bokonon |
| 2. Claire | 7. Papa |
| 3. Naomi | 8. Mona |
| 4. Marvin | 9. Lyman Knowles |
| 5. Frank | 10. Philip |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 1. Castle | 6. Bolivar |
| 2. plane | 7. Cape Cod |
| 3. cave | 8. Jack's Hobby Shop |
| 4. crater | 9. laboratory |
| 5. San Lorenzo | 10. Ilium |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

TEACHER'S NOTES



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