

# SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE

KURT VONNEGUT

# LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

GUIDE WRITTEN BY MARY ELLEN SNODGRASS

## SYNOPSIS

Beginning with a first-person explanation of the real-life situation that led to the writing of *Slaughterhouse Five* and particularly the reason for its subtitle, *The Children's Crusade*, Vonnegut tells the story of Billy Pilgrim, a fictional persona who views the firebombing of Dresden, Germany, on February 13, 1945. The result of surviving the incineration of 135,000 people is disorientation and a life of restructuring self and time for both Billy and the author.

Born in 1922, Billy, the tall, weak son of an Illium, New York barber, grows up insecure. During his last year in optometry school, he suffers a nervous breakdown. His attempt to focus his life is interrupted by the draft, training at a South Carolina military base, the accidental death of his father in a hunting accident, and immediate shipment overseas to Luxembourg, where Billy becomes separated from his outfit during the Battle of the Bulge.

An unarmed chaplain's assistant, Billy, the butt of his three companions' macho humor, barely struggles to survive the December cold. On the third day of wandering with nothing to eat but snow, Billy, at the center of his life-span, first experiences time travel, moving both to the past and the future. The experiences of his early childhood suggest that there is little in the past to comfort him.

His group, led by gung-ho Roland Weary, is captured and transported in sealed boxcars to a German prison camp. Incarcerated aboard a cramped car, Billy sleeps standing up beside a ventilator, where he serves as dumper for helmets filled with excrement. The nightmare ends when the American POW's join a spiffy English unit in the heart of a warren of prison units, most filled with starving Russians. Billy's mind snaps during a stage production of *Cinderella*. Drugged with morphine, he rests in a hospital bed guarded by a middle-aged prisoner, Edgar Derby. Through time travel, Billy is acutely aware that Derby will die ignominiously within thirty days when German rescue units shoot him for looting.

Billy, who has lived the life of a misfit, reaches the height of alienation because he wears a prison-issue fur-collar coat which is much too small for him and ridiculously effete. To round out his costume, he trades low-cut shoes for silver boots and wraps himself in a curtain. Ridiculed on all sides, he goes about his work at a makeshift Dresden prison which once served as a slaughterhouse. Following the American firebombing of the city, Billy and the other American prisoners plus four guards are virtually alone in the melted ruins, which resemble the landscape of the moon.

After his return to civilian life at the end of the war, he faces rehabilitation at a VA hospital in Lake Placid before he can

make himself finish his education, marry Valencia Merble, and go into the practice of optometry. During his hospital stay, Eliot Rosewater, a fellow veteran and patient, introduces him to the science fiction of Kilgore Trout, which becomes a mainstay in Billy's existence. Despite the wealth that he accrues from association with his rich father-in-law, Lionel, Billy continues to wander in time, unable to love his overweight wife, his tyrannical daughter Barbara, or his son Robert, who evolves into a Vietnam War hero.

Kidnapped on Barbara's wedding day, Billy flies to Tralfamadore on an alien spaceship and resides in the geodesic cell of a zoo in the comforts of an American setting. The aliens watch his every move, particularly after they provide him with a mate, buxom Montana Wildhack, who, before her kidnapping, enjoyed the pampered life of a movie starlet. Satisfied with his new philosophy of time and purpose, Billy looks forward to time trips to Tralfamadore, where Montana gives birth to their child.

During the remainder of his earthly existence, Billy copes with an unsettling series of mishaps. Following a plane crash in the Vermont mountains, he undergoes emergency brain surgery. Valencia, hurrying to the hospital, wrecks her car and dies of carbon monoxide poisoning. Barbara, overcome with grief and the burden of dealing with her elusive father, tries to imprison him in his own home, because he is not stable enough to work. Billy escapes, travels to the Royalton Hotel in New York, and reveals on a late-night radio talk show his kidnapping and timetraveling.

Because time does not threaten Billy, he lives blissfully in the knowledge that what has been will always be. Looking to the future, he relives his execution by Paul Lazzaro, a crazed car thief and fellow POW who developed an implausible grudge against Billy during their transportation aboard the prison car in Luxembourg. Just as he promised, Lazzaro bides his time and shoots 45-year-old Billy, who is delivering an address on time travel in a Chicago ball park 22 years after the war.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (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 America's first-rate fantasists and futurists. Son of an architect, husband of a photographer, and father to 6 children (three adopted), Vonnegut, a native of Indianapolis, was educated at Cornell, the Carnegie Institute of Technology, and the University of Chicago, from which he obtained an M.A. in 1971.

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Beginning his writing career as a police reporter, for the Chicago City News Bureau in 1947, Vonnegut, a decorated veteran of World War II, worked in public relations for General Electric before launching a free-lance career in 1950. His published novels, short stories, plays, and essays include *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), *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969), *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* (1970), *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), and *Wampeters, Foma and Granfaloon: Opinions* (1974).

### CRITIC'S CORNER

Best known for short sentences, digressions, and general rebellion against the conventions of novel-writing, it is not surprising that Vonnegut maintains a following of young readers. His emphasis on incoherence and the sinister forces of a mechanized world marks him as a humanist, an explorer of the world's oldest questions.

Receiving his first critical notoriety in 1963, Vonnegut earns kudos for his mix of sci-fi, humor, fantasy, satire, and humanism. Despite his success, Leslie Fiedler comments that Vonnegut suffered the permanent mark of invisibility for the first thirteen years of his career. Reaching the status of "cult figure" with the publication of *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut achieved wholeness in *Slaughterhouse Five*, which is based on Vonnegut's survival of the firebombing of Dresden, Germany, on February 13, 1945.

Comparing the apocalyptic event to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Vonnegut writes: "Those were vile people in both of those cities, as is well known. The world is better off without them. And Lot's wife, of course, was told not to look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she looked back, and I love her for that, because it was so human. So she was turned to a pillar of salt. So it goes."

Like Lot's wife, Vonnegut declares that he, too, is through with looking back. Robert Scholes, who rejects Vonnegut's rejection of the book, calls the novel a "book we need to read, and to reread." In the period of depression that followed *Slaughterhouse Five*, Vonnegut 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 honorary degrees from Hobart and William Smith Colleges in 1974. *Slaughterhouse Five* received satisfactory reviews in its film version, released by Universal Studios in 1972. 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 navigate through a fragmented time structure and realign events

2. To evaluate the author's purpose in writing the book
3. To characterize the effects of war on human beings
4. To analyze the causes of alienation and loneliness
5. To account for the importance of science fiction as a philosophical mainstay of society
6. To assess the author's style and tone as a vehicle for fiction
7. To discuss whether the book expresses despair or hope for the human race
8. To fit *Slaughterhouse Five* within the canon of science fiction

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To characterize Billy's relationships with family, friends, enemies, and aliens
2. To note the contrast in Billy's attitude before and after the kidnapping
3. To analyze the importance of the repeated phrase "so it goes"
4. To discuss symbols, such as the manufactured syrup, candles made from human fat, optometry, Valencia's diamond, Billy's coat and boots, *Cinderella*, and Kilgore Trout's fiction
5. To account for Billy's retreat into mental illness
6. To contrast Dresden before and after the firebombing
7. To explain the importance of Bertram Rumfoord and Howard Campbell as characters
8. To note Billy's initial innocence and eventual transformation
9. To express Vonnegut's personal involvement in the narrative

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning each has in this novel. Page numbers are provided so that you can re-read the passage from which the item is taken.

1. The end, where all the lines stopped, was a beetfield on the Elbe, outside of Halle. (p. 5)  
(After the firebombing of Dresden, which lies along both sides of the Elbe River on the southeastern border of East Germany, nineteen miles from Czechoslovakia, the massed group of "Englishmen, Americans, Dutchmen, Belgians, Frenchmen, Canadians, South Africans, New Zealanders, (and) Australians" is released from Russian custody in the spring of 1945 outside Halle, a city near Leipzig.)
2. *Eheu, fugaces labuntur anni.* (p. 11)

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(While reminiscing about how he contacts his "old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare," Vonnegut quotes the opening line of Horace's fourteenth ode, "Alas [Postumus, Postumus] the fleeting years slip by." Note that the passage of time is a major theme in the works of Vonnegut as well as the poems of Horace.)

3. When Goethe as a young student visited the city, he still found sad ruins: "Von der Kuppel . . . gethan!" (p. 18) (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, giant among German poets and colleague of many of Europe's writers during the Romantic Era, comments about Dresden: "From the dome of the women's church, I saw painfully the ruins all around the church and throughout the beautiful city. It looked like the ruins were planted in between by design. A lot needs to be said about the gifted architect who built the dome and church with such beauty, and made it bomb-resistant as well. The well-known great sacristy pointed to all sides of the ruins and said, "My enemies did this.")

4. It had thirty-nine keys and two stops—*vox humana* and *vox celeste*. (p. 31)  
(In his duties as chaplain's assistant, Billy Pilgrim plays a tiny portable organ. Whereas most pipe organs have many ranks of stops or knobs which enable the organist to alter the sound and imitate varying combinations of orchestral instruments, this organ has only two stops. One imitates the human voice, the other imitates a heavenly voice.)

5. It was the true account of the death before an American firing squad of Private Eddie D. Slovik, 36896415, the only American soldier to be shot for cowardice since the Civil War. So it goes. (p. 45)

(The execution of Eddie Slovik has become a rallying cry for anti-war activism. Born in Detroit in 1920, Slovik, a "dead-end kid" born with crippled legs, bounced in and out of courts and reform school before being drafted. Lost in France two days after D-Day, he joined a Canadian unit before finally turning himself in to American authorities.

Even though 40,000 people deserted during World War II, only 49 were actually sentenced to death and only one of those was actually shot by firing squad—Eddie Slovik. On January 31, 1945, the military high command chose to make an example of one errant soldier, who died in St. Marie Mines, France. Today, he is the subject of books, screenplays, and movies.)

6. Outside were Golgotha sounds of strong men digging holes for upright timbers in hard, hard ground. (p. 137)  
(Billy, awakening at the prison camp from his morphine-induced sleep, hears sounds that remind him of Golgotha, literally "the skull," the hill on which Christ was crucified. Golgotha is more familiarly known as Calvary.)

7. He was enchanted by the architecture of the city. Merry amoretti wove garlands above windows. Roguish fauns and naked nymphs peeked down at Billy from festooned cornices. Stone monkeys frisked among scrolls and seashells and bamboo. (p. 150)

(Leading the parade through Dresden, Billy, ridiculous in his minuscule overcoat with split back and burst shoulder seams and his silver boots, gazes in rapture at the delicacy and beauty of Dresden. The city, lacking military importance but widely known for its china figurines and its musical and artistic taste, represents the beauty of which pre-war Germany was capable. In contrast to the ugliness of the Luftwaffe and the barbed wire of prison yards, Dresden's buildings sport cupids, mythological fauns and nymphs, and monkeys—all symbols of sprightliness, infatuation, and lust.)

8. They called themselves "The Febs," which was an acronym for "Four-eyed Bastards." (p. 155)

(The close-knit optometric society makes fun of its own predilection for wearing glasses. Later, at Billy's eighteenth wedding anniversary, Kilgore Trout attends the party at which all the other guests are "associated with optometry in some way." Trout—representative of the outcast artist—is the only guest not wearing glasses.

The symbolism suggests that Trout, without the aid of enhanced vision, is better able to interpret human weaknesses than men with extensive scientific training. Embittered by his lack of readership, Trout, "circulation man for the *Illum Gazette*," is startled to find a lone fan—Billy Pilgrim, who shops for his books in a sleazy bookstore where Trout's work is used as a cover for pornographic materials housed in the back of the store.)

9. It might be well to remember Buchenwald and Coventry, too. (p. 187)

(In an effort to justify Allied destruction of 135,000 people in Dresden, "Ira C. Eaker, Lieutenant General, U.S.A.F., retired" points to German destructiveness, notably the human extermination facilities at Buchenwald which was built to eradicate Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, criminals, cripples, retardates, and other persons considered unfit for Hitler's "master race." Also, Eaker notes that England suffered losses from the German bombing of Coventry. The bombed-out shell of Coventry Cathedral still stands alongside a modern replacement.

In his rejoinder to Eaker, Air Marshal Saundy assesses the destruction from an amoral point of view: "Those who approved [the bombing of Dresden] were neither wicked nor cruel, though it may well be that they were too remote from the harsh realities of war to understand fully the appalling destructive power of air bombardment in the spring of 1945.")

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10. Two days after that, Billy was turned over to the Americans, who shipped him home on a very slow freighter called the *Lucretia A. Mott*. Lucretia A. Mott was a famous American suffragette. (p. 198)

*(Born in 1793, Lucretia Coffin attended a Quaker school, married James Mott, and devoted her life to the abolition of slavery and the establishment of women's rights. An object of ridicule by the popular press, Mott led women to the London world anti-slavery convention, but her delegation was refused recognition. She allied herself with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and in 1848 launched a feminist movement. Mott later used her home as a safe house for runaway slaves.)*

### 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 in the novel.

#### Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. Discuss Billy's relationship with his parents.

*(Billy associates both of his parents with terror and insecurity. He recalls the fear of drowning after Mr. Pilgrim tosses him into the YMCA pool. Also, he recalls the misery of a family trip out West, where he stood on the rim of Grand Canyon and wet his pants when his mother touched him. Likewise, he remembers the yawning blackness of Carlsbad Caverns where the guide turns out the lights so that tourists can experience total darkness. His father holds up his radium dial watch, which exudes a ghostly glow in the gloom.)*

*Billy's mother, even though she means well, terrorizes the boy early in life by hanging an anatomically realistic crucifix over his bed. Later, as Billy recovers from the war at the veteran's hospital at Lake Placid in 1948, he hides from his mother under the blankets. "He always covered his head when his mother came to see him in the mental ward—always got much sicker until she went away."*

*The conversation that Mrs. Pilgrim has with Eliot Rosewater suggests why he associates her with harm. Mrs. Pilgrim brags that Billy is "engaged to a very rich girl" whose "father owns the optometry school where Billy was going." Billy first realizes his mental plight when he hears himself proposing to Valencia Merble, an act obviously not of his choosing. He pays for his rise in social status by allying himself with a distasteful woman and siring two children he feels little love for.)*

2. Describe Bertram Rumfoord's reaction to Billy.

*(In a small private hospital after a Boston brain surgeon repairs the damage caused by the plane crash, Billy rooms with a "Harvard history professor named Bertram Copeland Rumfoord" who*

*resembles Teddy Roosevelt. Even though the two men are separated by screens, Billy's mumbling annoys the seventy-year-old man, who sends his fifth wife, 23-year-old Lily, for research material. As Rumfoord works on his "one-volume history of the United States Army Air Corps in World War Two," he draws on information from Truman's announcement of the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima.)*

*Lily, who prepares to tax her 103 I.Q. by reading aloud for Rumfoord, whispers that Billy's mutterings terrify her. Rumfoord roars: "He bores the hell out of me! . . . All he does in his sleep is quit and surrender and apologize and ask to be left alone." When the readings turn to the destruction of Dresden, Billy's mind remains attuned to the topic. Rumfoord, who suspects that Billy is brain-damaged asks, "Why don't they let him die?"*

*As the Rumfoords discuss Dresden, Billy interjects an intelligent remark: "I was there." Rumfoord insists that Billy suffers from echolalia. Billy, who attempts "to prove to a willfully deaf and blind enemy that he was interesting to hear and see," finally makes his point after lights are out for the night. Later, Rumfoord justifies the bombing. Billy, by now completely involved in the Tralfamadorian philosophy of inevitability, murmurs, "It was all right.")*

3. Explain how Billy divulges his connection with Tralfamadore.

*(After escaping from his prison-like home, where a practical nurse observes his every move, Billy drives to New York, checks into the Royalton Hotel, and enjoys watching people on the sidewalk below. He restlessly paces Times Square, peruses a seedy bookstore, and locates a book by Kilgore Trout.)*

*Back on the street, Billy happens upon a radio station next to his hotel. He goes up to the studio and waits his turn at the microphone. After critics have their opportunity to discuss the death of the novel, Billy speaks gently about "flying saucers and Montana Wildhack and so on." "Gently expelled from the studio during a commercial," he returns to his room and goes to sleep.)*

4. Describe Billy at the time of his capture.

*(Billy, as Vonnegut describes him, "was preposterous—six feet and three inches tall, with a chest and shoulder like a box of kitchen matches." With no helmet, overcoat, weapon, or boots, he is unlikely to survive a walk through the December snows of Luxembourg, much less elude enemy patrols. Having lost a heel from his street shoes, which he wore to his father's funeral, Billy bobs along at a ridiculous gait.)*

*Billy wears a "thin field jacket, a shirt and trousers of scratchy wool, and long underwear that was soaked with sweat." Oddly, he is the only man of the four survivors who sports a beard—a "random, bristly beard, and some of the bristles were white,*

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even though Billy was only twenty-one years old." To add to the optical illusion of age, Billy is balding. His face, burned crimson by the weather, adds to his overall resemblance to a "filthy flamingo.")

5. Describe Dresden after its destruction.

(Appropriately, Billy, a time-traveler, calls the burnt-out landscape "the moon." After the quartet sings "That Old Gang of Mine" and stirs the painful repressed memories, Billy weeps. He remembers "shimmeringly" the sounds like a giant's footsteps above the meat locker. Accompanied by four guards and a "few dressed carcasses," the prisoners wait out the bombing which reduces the city to "one big flame.")

At noon the next day, the men venture forth under a smoky black sky. "The sun was an angry little pinhead." Dresden, its organic substances altered to charcoal, is covered with hot stones. The four guards, resembling a barbershop quartet, survey the devastation of their homeland. The people caught in the bombing lie about like "little logs."

Since the shelters are either burned or melted and no food or water remains to sustain them, the 100 prisoners and their four guards pick their way across the moon-like landscape, escaping bullets from a mop-up detail of American fighter planes. On the outskirts of town, the group locates an inn that is open for business, but lacking customers. The prisoners spend the night in the stable.)

### Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. Why does Vonnegut consider war a "children's crusade"?

(From the beginning, Vonnegut connects his story with the Children's Crusade, a misbegotten historical event during which children, believing they are going to fight for the Holy Land, are recruited for slavery. In Vonnegut's view, the use of very young, innocent soldiers as represented by Billy Pilgrim, is a reprehensible act. Indeed, all the needless waste of human life and resources leads to nothing but more of the same.)

In some respects, the "children's crusade" motif suggests his own personal coming to knowledge of an event that occurred years ago and still haunts him with its gruesome reality. To deal with it as a writer, he blends the horror of 135,000 deaths with the philosophy of an alien planet, Tralfamadore, where time exists as a single unit—past merged with present and future.

On the day of his death, Billy Pilgrim, Vonnegut's fictional persona, is still the trusting, childlike "everyman," bravely facing death that he has experienced many times in his time-travels. He looks out on the audience that listens to his message and awaits the bullet of a madman. An offshoot of the perverted vengeance of war, Billy's death is any

death. As he characterizes it, "so it goes"—for all humanity.)

7. Discuss the meaning of "so it goes."

(From a humanistic point of view, the phrase "so it goes" becomes the author's benediction to all who live or have lived or will live. As Vonnegut points out, from the Christian perspective, the death of Christ suggests that only those "well connected" should be spared suffering. From Vonnegut's perspective, suffering is the connecting factor that equalizes all humanity. Like the son of God, each human faces a crucifix, which Vonnegut caustically describes as the product of Christ's father's carpentry shop.)

Vonnegut's steady repetition of the phrase suggests a restatement of Amen, which translates "so be it." To partake of human experience is to embrace death as an inevitable conclusion, whatever the circumstances that make it a reality. Humankind, living in the natural environment, keeps up the grand charade of politics as usual, tyrannizing and maiming and incinerating each other at a steady rate. Almost as though their superior intelligence lifts them above the morass, the birds aloft can only shake their heads and query "Poo-tee-weet"?)

8. Explain how Vonnegut rounds out his personal involvement in the narrative.

(In Chapter Ten, Vonnegut returns as an active participant in the story. Interspersed in the horror of bodies incinerated in the rubble of Dresden, he comments on his own violent times, in which Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King are gunned down and the "Government gives me a count of corpses created by military science in Vietnam.")

At this point Vonnegut inserts his own reaction to Billy Pilgrim's odyssey: "If what Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadoreans is true, that we will all live forever, no matter how dead we may sometimes seem to be, I am not overjoyed. Still—if I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I'm grateful that so many of those moments are nice."

He ties this thought to the opening scenes, in which he and Bernard O'Hare fly back to Dresden. Aboard Hungarian Airlines, he enjoys "rye bread and salami and butter and cheese and white wine" and imagines how it would feel to bomb "villages and cities and towns" below. Bernard hands him an almanac with facts concerning the birth and death rates for the world. "'I suppose they will all want dignity,' I said. 'I suppose,' said O'Hare.")

### Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. Explain what Vonnegut does to the standard narrative to produce *Slaughterhouse Five*.

(Beginning with an autobiographical tie to the events which spawn the novel, Vonnegut draws the reader into his personal world, his personal hell, that keeps

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him awake long after his family sleeps and draws him toward the escapism of alcohol and late-night telephone calls. Having won the reader's sympathy for his burden, the author abandons his real face and puts on the mask of Billy Pilgrim, the voice which speaks the story of Dresden.

Vonnegut refuses to follow the unities or express a normal narration. To heighten the reader's understanding of his "pilgrim," the author reveals the source of solace that Vonnegut proposes for all—the re-invention of self through science fiction. Billy, who receives the deus ex machina of time-travel while sloggng through snow in enemy territory, develops his awareness of a fourth dimension, where action is inevitable and some memories are worth reliving. Comforted by an Eastern mysticism that suggests Nirvana, Billy learns to live with his dull earthly life while tripping to Tralfamadore, where fate has delivered a more appealing mate.

Ironically, life in an alien zoo is bearable. Even though little outlanders that look like plumber's friends surround his geodesic home, Billy can reflect on the pain of his life—both in peacetime and in war—and reintegrate his badly shattered psyche. At the breast of his new mate lies hope for the future—a child conceived in near-perfect harmony.)

10. At the same time that Vonnegut decries violence, how does he satirize the misery of domesticity?

(Even though war is the focus of the novel, no human experience escapes Vonnegut's dissection. Billy's "success" as an optometrist comes at a price. Even before the wedding, Billy feels the disintegration of his mind as he anticipates life with Valencia Merble, candy bar-eating daughter of wealthy Lionel Merble, Billy's future father-in-law. To stave off the inevitable, Billy hides under the covers of his hospital bed and rejects the person he blames for his miserable state—good old mom, an ordinary woman who can hardly be classed as a villain.)

Ironically, at the end of life as a family man, when Billy escapes the vigilance of the practical nurse and wanders the streets of New York, it is talk that he craves—the release of communication. Like the real-life Vonnegut, he looks forward to the bedding down of responsibility so that he can rattle around on his own and locate someone to share his discoveries with. For Billy, who has never connected with family or friends, strangers are his best bet.)

### Questions 11 and 12 Creative Level

11. Write a letter to Kurt Vonnegut and ask why he has no villains in his novel. Compose a plausible reply.
12. Analyze Kurt Vonnegut's choice of five names of characters or places. For example, explain why his hero is called Billy Pilgrim, why his hometown is Illium, or why the veteran's hospital is at Lake Placid.

## STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Write a theme contrasting the purpose and results of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with the firebombing of Dresden. Account for the readiness of the government to discuss one event but not the other.
2. Make a list of literary, musical, biblical, and historical allusions, such as President Truman, Johann Sabastian Bach, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, "Away in a Manger," the Gospels, Mutt and Jeff, Ilium, V-1's and V-2's, and limericks. Tie each to the narrative by explaining its meaning and significance.
3. Make an oral evaluation of Kurt Vonnegut's narrative techniques, especially as they compare to his description of Tralfamadorian novels in Chapter Five. Explain why Vonnegut's early experiences as a news reporter may have had some effect on his literary style.
4. Research public awareness of the events of wars in recent times. Include in your evaluation World Wars I and II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Add comments about public response to Truman's approval of the use of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. Discuss humanitarian efforts to halt the use of chemical warfare, napalm, Agent Orange, and nuclear arms.
5. Compare the anti-war sentiments of Kurt Vonnegut and Erich Maria Remarque, author of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, or Stephen Crane, author of *The Red Badge of Courage*.
6. Write a report on the nature and purpose of the International Red Cross. Contrast its use in wartime with its regular activities during natural disasters. Include information about how the agency helps resettle refugees.
7. View a videotape of *Slaughterhouse Five*. Discuss some alterations in plot, such as the addition of the firetruck and Edgar Derby's figurine. Explain whether the screen version maintains the outlook and tone of the original version.
8. Write a poetic analysis of Thomas Hardy's "The Man He Killed" from the point of view of Kurt Vonnegut.
9. Compose an extended definition of both verbal and dramatic irony. Give examples of each from the novel, such as the incarceration of POW's in a slaughterhouse and Billy's discovery of a diamond ring in his ludicrous coat.
10. Lead a debate about whether or not Vonnegut intends *Slaughterhouse Five* as an uplifting or depressing view of human nature.

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### TEACHING NOTES

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### VOCABULARY TEST

Complete each quotation with a word from the list that follows.

1. Billy and the Maori dug into the \_\_\_\_\_, unpromising gravel of the moon.
2. They look like \_\_\_\_\_, like white people pretending to be black for the laughs they could get.
3. He was the central clown in an unconscious \_\_\_\_\_ of that famous oil painting, "The Spirit of '76."
4. As the Americans were waiting to move on, an \_\_\_\_\_ broke out in their rear-most rank.
5. They were \_\_\_\_\_ with machine-gun belts, smoked cigars and guzzled booze.
6. All those prosperous, solid men out there would discover now that they had elected a ludicrous \_\_\_\_\_.
7. There was no recommendation for \_\_\_\_\_ in the case and none is here recommended.
8. Weary laid the spikes along Billy's cheek, \_\_\_\_\_ the cheek with savagely affectionate restraint.
9. It was lined with crimson plush, and nestled in that passionate plush were an \_\_\_\_\_ aluminum cross and a Bible.
10. When the three fools found the \_\_\_\_\_ kitchen, whose main job was to make lunch for workers in the slaughterhouse, everybody had gone home but one woman who had been waiting for them patiently.
11. The boys were \_\_\_\_\_ by a man in a full beard.
12. As Trout \_\_\_\_\_ slung the bag from his shoulder, Billy Pilgrim approached him.
13. He looked so peculiar that several people commented on it \_\_\_\_\_ when the song was done.
14. "Once the Russians are defeated," he went on, "you will be \_\_\_\_\_ through Switzerland."
15. History in her solemn page informs us that the crusaders were but ignorant and savage men, that their motives were those of \_\_\_\_\_ unmitigated . . . .

altercation    anodized    bigotry    clemency    communal    festooned    golliwogs  
harangued    inert    lugubriously    repatriated    roweled    solicitously    travesty    waif



## SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Match each quotation with the name of a speaker. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I wish you and your family also as to your friend Merry Christmas and a happy New Year and I hope that we'll meet again in a world of peace and freedom in the taxi cab if the accident will.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. And war will look just wonderful, so we'll have a lot more of them. And they'll be fought by babies like the babies upstairs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I think you guys are going to have to come up with a lot of wonderful *new* lies, or people just aren't going to want to go on living.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. You know—we've had to imagine the war here, and we have imagined that it was being fought by aging men like ourselves. We had forgotten that wars were fought by babies.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I look at you sometimes . . . and I get a funny feeling that you're just full of secrets.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Father, Father, Father—what *are* we going to do with you?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. His name was Roland Weary. He died in my arms.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Farewell, hello, farewell, hello.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. People would be surprised if they knew how much in this world was due to prayers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. White is for the race that pioneered the continent, drained the swamps and cleared the forest and built the roads and bridges.

- |                  |                             |                            |
|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| A. Mary O'Hare   | E. Paul Lazzaro             | H. Billy's mother          |
| B. Barbara       | F. English infantry colonel | I. Howard W. Campbell, Jr. |
| C. Valencia      | G. Gerhard Muller           | J. Eliot Rosewater         |
| D. Billy Pilgrim |                             |                            |

#### Part II: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. accuses Billy of suffering from echolalia.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. threatens Billy with a three-sided knife.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. never learns to play the guitar, but joins the Green Berets.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. bangs the ice tray to indicate her dislike for Vonnegut.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. weeps when he hears a barbershop quartet singing about "That Old Gang of Mine."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. rejects Howard Campbell's anti-Americanism.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. sends for the oil-burner repairman.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. terrifies Billy at the edge of the Grand Canyon.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. knows when Billy is time-traveling.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. mistakenly directs Edgar and Billy to the girls' dressing room.

- |                       |                     |                   |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| A. Roland Weary       | E. Billy Pilgrim    | H. Edgar Derby    |
| B. Barbara            | F. Robert Pilgrim   | I. Mary O'Hare    |
| C. Werner Gluck       | G. Montana Wildhack | J. Billy's father |
| D. Professor Rumfoord |                     |                   |

## SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE

### Part III: True/False (30 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. At Slaughterhouse Five, Billy's main job is supervising a crew that shovels out bodies of incinerated Germans.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Montana is displeased with the canopy, which gives them privacy and encourages Billy to take advantage of her.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Alone on the lawn with a bottle of flat champagne, Billy is taken by surprise when a spaceship lands.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Billy's behavior becomes so bizarre after his return from the hospital that he is incapable of working in his optometry office.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Lionel is killed in a hunting accident; his body is recovered by ski instructors from Sugarbush Mountain, Vermont.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Billy adopts the comment "so it goes" from the Tralfamadorians.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Bernard offers few memories to help the author write his war novel.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Harrison Starr's comment about anti-war books suggests that stopping war is like stopping a glacier.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Because of the seriousness of his injuries, Billy is unable to attend Valencia's funeral.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Edgar Derby pins a paper target to his own chest as a joke on the firing squad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Paul Lazzaro is bitter at Billy because Paul is the only member of the Three Musketeers to survive the war.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. In a field in Luxembourg, Billy plays on a portable organ hymns he learned in childhood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. The Tralfamadorians keep secret from Billy the way that the world ends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Rumfoord eventually listens to Billy's insistent remarks about the bombing of Dresden.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. The English prisoners are sickened by the smell and behavior of American prisoners of war.

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

In a paragraph, discuss the significance of the following passages.

- 1. *Everything* is all right, and everybody has to do exactly what he does.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. He had never had an old gang, old sweethearts and pals, but he missed one anyway . . . .
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3. It was Fate, of course, which had costumed him—Fate, and a feeble will to survive.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4. Like so many Americans, she was trying to construct a life that made sense from things she found in gift shops.

## SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Identifying Places (20 points)

Match each description below with a place from the list that follows.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Billy foresees a plane crashing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The Three Musketeers are captured.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Billy and the other prisoners sleep in a barn.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The airport is fogged in and Bernard's plane continues on to Frankfurt.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The author studies anthropology.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Kilgore Trout encourages paper carriers to compete.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Edgar locates a teapot.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Montana Wildhack breastfeeds her baby.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Billy is ejected from a late-night talk show.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Billy dies in a baseball park while addressing a capacity audience.

- |                 |                                |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| A. Luxembourg   | F. Sugarbush Mountain, Vermont |
| B. Dresden      | G. Chicago                     |
| C. New York     | H. inn outside Dresden         |
| D. Boston       | I. Ilium                       |
| E. Tralfamadore | J. Chicago                     |

#### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to each of the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided at left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. For whom is the syrup enriched with vitamins?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Who taught Contemporary Problems in Western Civilization?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Where does Billy come close to drowning?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What does Billy's father do for a living?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Whom does the Blue Fairy Godmother catch stealing cigarettes?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Where does the train from South Carolina take Billy?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What prisoner dies in the officer's car of the train?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What is the standard Tralfamadorian greeting?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. From where do the aliens get furniture for the geodesic dome?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Who believes that Kilgore Trout should be President of the World?

## SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE

### Part III: Fill-in (30 points)

Supply a word or phrase from the list below to complete each of the following statements.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I've visited thirty-one inhabited planets in the universe, and I have studied reports on one hundred more. Only on Earth is there any talk of \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The best outline I ever made, or anyway the prettiest one, was on the back of a \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. We had been privates in the war, \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. "I tell you what," I said, "I'll call it ' \_\_\_\_\_.'" She was my friend after that.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. It was a present he was about to give his wife, a white satin box containing a . . . \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. It turned out that the person who had written this letter was Eliot Rosewater, Billy's friend in the \_\_\_\_\_ near Lake Placid.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. With regard to the whereabouts of Kilgore Trout: he actually lived in \_\_\_\_\_, Billy's hometown, friendless and despised.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Billy Pilgrim would later share a hospital room with Rumfoord's uncle, Professor Bertram Copeland Rumfoord of Harvard, official Historian of \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. He was \_\_\_\_\_, an American who had become a Nazi.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. He had somehow eaten, and now he was watching \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. It was a \_\_\_\_\_ through which all new prisoners had to pass.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. The \_\_\_\_\_ was like a salt cracker, perforated down its middle so that a strong man could snap it in two with his bare hands.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Her father owns the \_\_\_\_\_ where Billy was going.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. So they were trying to re-invent themselves and their universe. \_\_\_\_\_ was a big help.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Billy found himself paired as a digger with a \_\_\_\_\_, who had been captured at Tobruk.

Cinderella    cocktail ring    delousing station    free will    Howard W. Campbell, Jr.    Ilium  
infantry scouts    Maori    optometry school    roll of wallpaper    science fiction    tag  
The Children's Crusade    the U.S. Air Force    veteran's hospital

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

1. Describe episodes in which Billy withdraws from reality.
2. Explain why Billy's comrades turn against him.
3. Contrast Billy's relationships with Valencia and Montana.
4. Explain why Vonnegut quotes a verse from "Away in a Manger" as an epigraph.

## SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE

### VOCABULARY TEST ANSWER KEY

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. inert       | 9. anodized      |
| 2. golliwogs   | 10. communal     |
| 3. travesty    | 11. harangued    |
| 4. altercation | 12. lugubriously |
| 5. festooned   | 13. solicitously |
| 6. waif        | 14. repatriated  |
| 7. clemency    | 15. bigotry      |
| 8. roweled     |                  |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A ANSWER KEY

#### Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. B  |
| 2. A | 7. E  |
| 3. J | 8. D  |
| 4. F | 9. H  |
| 5. C | 10. I |

#### Part II: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. H  |
| 2. A | 7. B  |
| 3. F | 8. J  |
| 4. I | 9. G  |
| 5. E | 10. C |

#### Part III: True/False (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T  | 11. F |
| 2. F | 7. T  | 12. F |
| 3. F | 8. T  | 13. F |
| 4. T | 9. T  | 14. T |
| 5. F | 10. F | 15. T |

#### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B ANSWER KEY

#### Part I: Identifying Places (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. I  |
| 2. A | 7. B  |
| 3. H | 8. E  |
| 4. D | 9. C  |
| 5. G | 10. J |

#### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- |                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. pregnant women | 6. his father's funeral |
| 2. Edgar Derby    | 7. Wild Bob             |
| 3. YMCA pool      | 8. Farewell, hello      |
| 4. barber         | 9. Sears Roebuck        |
| 5. Paul Lazzaro   | 10. Eliot Rosewater     |

#### Part III: Fill-in (30 points)

- |                           |                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. free will              | 9. Howard W. Campbell, Jr. |
| 2. roll of wallpaper      |                            |
| 3. infantry scouts        | 10. <i>Cinderella</i>      |
| 4. The Children's Crusade | 11. delousing station      |
| 5. cocktail ring          | 12. tag                    |
| 6. veteran's hospital     | 13. optometry school       |
| 7. Ilium                  | 14. science fiction        |
| 8. the U. S. Air Force    | 15. Maori                  |

#### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

**SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE**

**TEACHING NOTES**

**SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE**

**TEACHING NOTES**



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